

## The Missional Church and Missional Life

Howard A. Snyder

### INTRODUCTION

The heart of our life together as a Christian academic community is *mission*. The Tyndale Seminary *Academic Calendar* says that at Tyndale “theological education is grounded in a missional understanding of the Church.” President Stiller in the *Calendar* says, “Our mission is . . . to educate and equip Christians to serve the world with passion for Jesus Christ.” This same missional perspective permeates the whole institution.

How can this commitment become incarnated in the life of our community with increasing depth? I would like to lift up four large themes that I find especially helpful in exploring that question:

The Mission of God (*missio Dei*)

The Trinity

The Mission of Jesus

The Visible Body of Christ

These themes are all closely interrelated. They all carry implications for institutional and personal life and witness. I will discuss each theme briefly and suggest one or two implications of each for our life together.

### I. THE MISSION OF GOD

“Mission of God” or *missio Dei* theology has become sufficiently familiar over the past few decades that I don’t need to elaborate it here. I will however show why I think it is important.

*Mission of God* means this: God the Father sends the Son into the world in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring salvation in all its dimensions, including ultimately the reconciliation of all things, the kingdom of God in its fullness. The church’s mission derives from this action of the Triune God. It is to embody and proclaim the “good news of the kingdom”—of salvation through Jesus Christ.

#### Biblical Basis

Key dimensions of the mission of God, and thus of the church’s mission, are revealed throughout Scripture. Here is an instructive example from Deuteronomy 8.

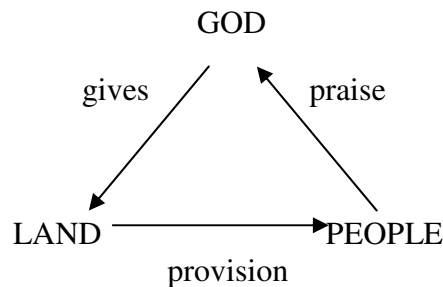
Moses says to Israel in Deuteronomy 8:10, “When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you” (TNIV).

This simple statement is very profound. In the first chapters of Deuteronomy, God reveals to Israel what it means to be the people of God as they enter the promised land. Moses instructs Israel, reminding them of all he had taught and all that had been revealed at Sinai and through the desert wanderings. Moses is about to depart, and he carefully

reinforces the revealed truth about who God is, and what it means to be God's people in God's land.

In this one small verse are the seeds of the biblical understanding of holistic or comprehensive mission.

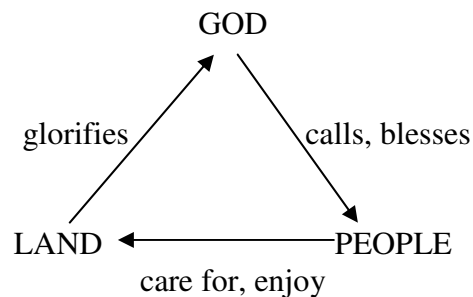
Note the structure of the verse. It speaks of three realities: God, the people, and the land. And it shows what the proper relationship is between these realities:



The story in Deuteronomy, and in fact throughout the Old Testament, is the story of God, people, and the earth. It is the story of God's action through a chosen people to restore harmony to creation by being a blessing to all earth's peoples (Gen. 12:3). This is the larger narrative that lies behind Deuteronomy 8:10.

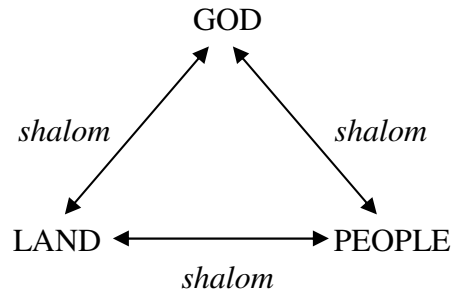
This verse, then, speaks of God, the land, and God's people and specifies the *relationship* that God intends between these three realities. Three actions are indicated: (1) God *gives the land* to the people; (2) the land *provides food* for the people; and (3) the people are to *praise* or worship the Lord. These actions form a perfect triangle, the relationship that God intends between himself, his people, and his land. God gives the land, the land sustains the people, and the people are to praise God in response. In this verse, then, the arrows move from God to the land, then to the people, then back to God, completing the holistic relationship.

In other biblical passages, the arrows point in the opposite directions. God forms and blesses his people; the people are to enjoy and faithfully care for the land (Lev. 25 and many other passages); and the land shows forth the glory of God (Psalm 19:1 and many other passages). Here the relationships may be pictured as follows:



This is the picture of the God-intended relationship between himself, his people, and the land. In Hebrew, "land" and "earth" are the same word, so what is actually described here is the God-intended relationship between God, humankind, and the created order. This is the relationship, the *shalom*, which God intends but which has been disrupted by sin. In the Old Testament, we learn that through Israel God has begun a plan to restore

creation to God’s original intent. God intends *shalom*, a harmonious, reconciled interrelationship between himself, his people, and the land. God’s intent, then, may be pictured as follows:



In the biblical narrative, God creates “the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1), God creates humans and places them on earth, and God plants a garden for the enjoyment and sustenance of the human community. This is a perfect picture of *shalom*, of the proper mutual relationship between God, humanity, and the earth.

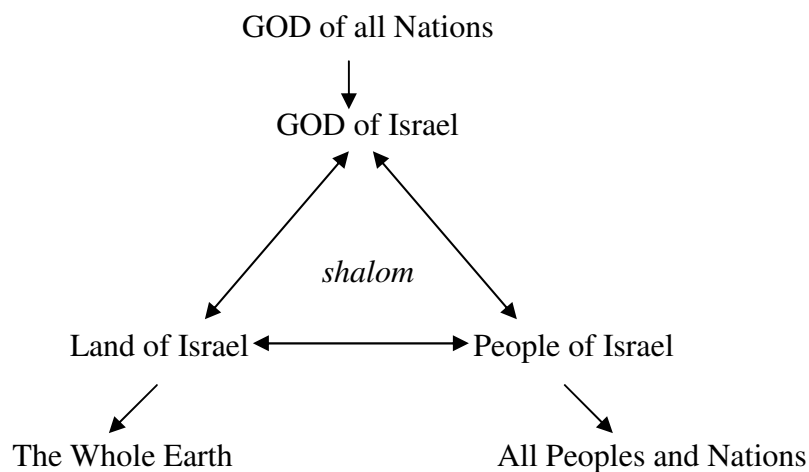
The story of the Bible is thus the story of God’s perfect intent, then of the disruption caused by human rebellion, and finally of God’s way of restoring the harmonious relationships that have been disrupted and diseased by sin.

How does God undertake to restore his broken world? We see in the Old Testament that God forms a special redemptive people and gives them a special land—the promised land. God is concerned, however, not just about his chosen people, Israel, but with all the nations of the earth.<sup>1</sup> Israel is chosen in order to show forth the truth of God and thus be a blessing to all the nations. God tells Israel, “If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:5–6). Israel is to be God’s priestly people among the nations, a contrast society to show who God is and what God intends. The mission of Israel, then, involves not only Israel’s relationship with God but also her relationship with the earth and all its peoples. God is not just the God of Israel; he is the God of all the nations, of the whole earth.

---

<sup>1</sup> A key theme in the Old Testament is “the nations” and God’s plan to bless all nations and include them in his redemptive plan.

The larger Old Testament picture, then, looks like this:



As the plan of salvation unfolds in the Old Testament, we learn four essential things:

1. The Lord God is God of all peoples, not just of Israel.
2. God’s plan includes the whole earth, not just the land of Israel.
3. God’s plan includes all nations and peoples, not just the Hebrews.
4. God has chosen Israel in order to bring *shalom* to the whole creation.

In the Old Testament we see how comprehensive God’s plan is. And yet we do not see the fulfillment of this plan. Israel’s prophets promised however that God would in time send a special servant-king, the Messiah, who would actually accomplish God’s salvation plan. Through the Messiah, God would himself bring perfect *shalom*, as pictured so beautifully in Isaiah 11 and many other passages. The first covenant would be superseded by a New Covenant through which sin would be atoned for, God’s Spirit poured out, God’s law written on human hearts, and God’s purposes finally fulfilled. God’s kingdom of justice and *shalom* would come in fullness. This was prefigured already in Abraham’s encounter with Melchizedek (“King of righteousness”), who was “king of Salem” (a form of *shalom*) (Gen. 14:18–20).

What do we find then in the New Testament? God’s plan is stated in many ways. Paul says that through Jesus Christ God is reconciling the world (*kosmos*) to himself (2 Cor. 5:19). God has a plan or “economy” (*oikonomia*) “to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” (Eph. 1:10 NIV). The Lord Jesus Christ has been given the power “to bring everything under his control” (Phil. 3:21).

Clearly God’s plan of salvation as pictured in the New Testament is continuous with the Old Testament revelation. In the Old Testament, we see that God’s concern for all peoples and the whole earth. So also in the New Testament: God is concerned with all peoples and with the whole earth.

This continuity needs emphasizing because of the tendency in much Christian theology to over-spiritualize God’s plan of salvation. What we find in the New Testament is not a divine rescue from the earth, but rather the reconciliation of heaven and earth—of

“all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven”; things both “visible and invisible.” God is “making peace through [Jesus’] blood, shed on the cross” (Col. 1:16-21). God’s plan in both the Old and New Testaments is to bring *shalom* to the whole creation. In this sense Christians are still “being saved,” because ultimately experiences *shalom* in its fullness until the whole creation enjoys *shalom*.

Seeing the continuity between the Old and New Testaments helps prevent a reduced or distorted understanding of salvation, and thus of the *missio Dei* and the mission of the church. Moving from the Old Testament to the New we discover this: In the New Covenant, God’s plan is both *internalized* and *universalized*. The inward thrust is intensified while the outward scope is expanded and made clearer. This internalization and universalization are of course promised repeatedly in the Old Testament. In the New Testament we see the fuller, deeper meaning of what is promised in the Old Covenant.

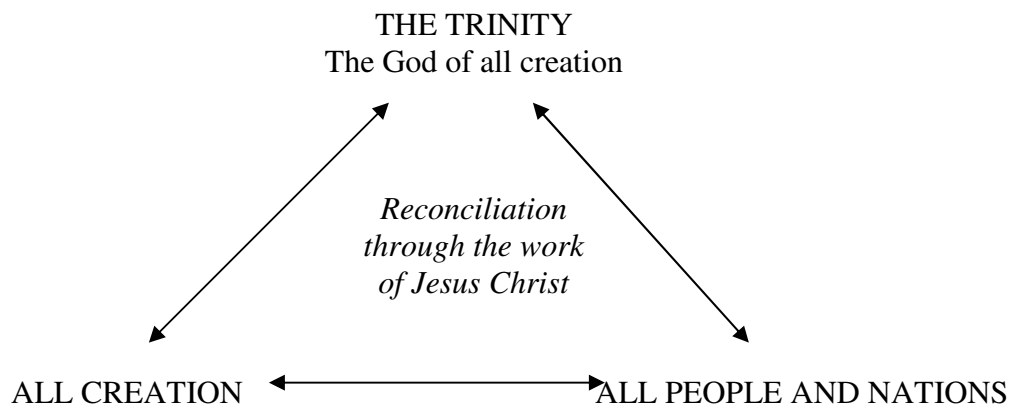
To be more precise, in the New Testament, God’s salvation plan is

- (1) internalized but not merely spiritualized;
- (2) universalized but not merely symbolized;
- (3) partially but not yet fully realized; and
- (4) clarified as to its final intent.

The climax is in Revelation 21 and 22 where we read of the Holy City descending to earth—not of souls going up to heaven. “God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God” (Rev. 21:4). Here is God’s plan finally realized, and it is a plan “for the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:2).

Scripture consistently views salvation as an immense divine plan for the redemption of all creation, “the restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21). The plan of redemption is as broad as the scope of creation and the depth of sin, for “where sin abounded, grace [has] much more [abounded]” (Rom. 5:20 KJV).

The comprehensive plan of salvation as revealed in the Bible, then, may be pictured as follows:



Scripture shows us, then, that the holistic mission of God is to bring comprehensive reconciliation to the whole creation. This is the *missio Dei* which God is accomplishing through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. From this holistic *missio Dei*, the church then derives its mission.

### **Implication for Missional Living: Transcendent Mission**

The major implication for our life together is that *we find our life and vocation within the mission of God*. We live with a transcendent mission that does not belong to us. We are not our own; we were “bought at a price” (1 Cor. 6:19-20)—and the same applies to God’s mission within which each of us, all of us together, and the whole institution find their meaning.

This is holistic, because it involves not just our professional vocation but every aspect of our lives. Since God’s mission involves “the land” as well as all peoples, it includes how we treat the land and its other creatures as well as how we treat people.

To know God’s mission is to be called to live under and live out that mission. We have been given a comprehensive stewardship of all that we are and all we “own” or have power over—personal relationships, time, money, and the whole physical creation.

This priority of God’s mission is operationally important in determining curriculum priorities and course content, in making institutional decisions, and in discerning the best use of one another’s gifts. The overarching question is: Does this decision enhance our mission? Is it *consistent* with our mission as determined by the mission of God?

## **II. THE TRINITY**

As with “mission of God,” the doctrine of the Trinity and its implications for church and mission have received much fruitful reflection over the past half-century or so. I will not summarize that here, but I begin with two comments. First, the important point is not to emphasize the doctrine of the Trinity *per se*, but to actually *be* Trinitarian in our whole theology, worldview, and understanding of the church. Second, it is crucial that Trinitarian reflection remain carefully grounded in Scripture as a safeguard against mere speculation. This is true of all doctrines, of course, but especially here. Since the Bible does not use the term “Trinity” or teach the doctrine explicitly, we are duty-bound to keep our Trinitarian reflections closely connected with what Scripture does reveal about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We do well also to remember that we are speaking of a multidimensional mystery that far exceeds our understanding.

What does the fact of the Triune or Tri-Personal nature of God suggest about the nature and mission of the church, and of our lives? Let us look at the ecclesiological and missional implications of our affirmation of the Tri-Personal existence of God.

The key point here is that the church is, and is called to be, a *Trinitarian community*. This affirmation can be sustained from many angles, but we find its most profound basis in Jesus’ words in John 17:

My prayer is not for [these disciples] alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me (John 17:20-23).

The church is the “I in them and you in me” community, the community of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

## Trinitarian Community

The Trinitarian existence of the church grounds the Christian community in Reality, the most fundamental of realities: God as source of life and being, Creator, providential Sustainer, and New-Creation-Bringer.

The doctrine of the Trinity teaches us about ecclesiology and mission. Because the church is Trinitarian—based on what God the Father has done and will do through Christ by the power of the Spirit—the church is at the same time *incarnational* and *eschatological*.

Four aspects of this Trinitarian emphasis help us grasp the missionary character of the church, viewed organically:

1. *The church is fundamentally a community gathered around Jesus.* Given the reality of the Trinity, the church is essentially social and relational, bound together by mutual love and self-giving interdependence because of Jesus.

Granted, the church often is not perceived in this way and frequently does not visibly embody this essential truth. That does not undercut the truth of the fact, for the Bible constantly emphasizes that we are to *live into* and *live out* this reality. As Paul puts it, we are “to live a life worthy of the calling [we] have received” (Eph. 4:1).

The church is fundamentally a community of disciples, a missional community whose life, being, and mission are grounded in the Trinity and thus in the mission of God.

2. *The church is a Trinitarian worshipping community.* The church in its worship, and often most explicitly in its hymns, worships the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Further, the Trinity forms the basis of the church’s mission as the community responds to the call of the Trinity to participate in the *missio Dei*, the mission of God. In worship the community draws near to God and comes to understand the Father’s creative love and care for all God has made, the Son’s self-giving in becoming a servant for our salvation, and the Spirit’s call and push to go into the world “as the Father” has sent the Son (John 5:26, 15:9, 20:21). Genuine worship impels into mission.

Incidentally, the theological richness of the church’s great Trinitarian hymns is one reason why vital churches need the church’s historic hymnody as well as contemporary praise songs (and why contemporary songwriters should reflect more on the Trinity and the mission of God).

The call to worship God the Trinity reminds us that the church has a mission *to* God as well as a mission *from* God to the world. There is a reciprocal back-and-forth action here that is grounded in the classic doctrine of *perichoresis* (literally, “dancing together” or “dancing around”—mutual inter-sharing of characteristics). We give ourselves to God (our mission to God) and he gives himself back to us with an overflow of love that impels us out of ourselves and into mission. This seems, in part, to be the point of John 17: “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. . . . I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (Jn. 17:18, 23).

Worship and mission, then, are interrelated. Mission in Trinitarian perspective is never one-way. We do not simply go out in mission because the Trinity sends us. Rather, mission is reciprocal. In response to God’s grace, we carry out our mission to God and

thus are “carried” into mission in the world by the Holy Spirit who in fact goes ahead of us. This happens not in a way that overwhelms us and turns us into zombies or robots. Rather, the Spirit empowers us to will to do God’s will (John 7:17; Phil. 2:13; Gal. 5:23).<sup>2</sup>

The church is Trinitarian. Its worship and its mission are grounded in the Trinity. And in Trinitarian perspective, the church’s mission includes its mission to God, to one another, and to the world. It includes in fact the church’s mission to the whole of creation, for God is the Lord of, and active in, all creation, and as we know the healing of all is part of the mission of God (Rom. 8:19-21).

3. *The Trinitarian community is sent especially to the poor.* Though “being in very nature God,” Christ “made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant” (Phil. 2:6-7) in carrying out his mission. This is literally a demonstration of the “wisdom of God.” For God

chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption (1 Cor. 1:27-30).

God’s special concern for the poor, and Jesus’ explicit mission to the poor, are grounded in the Trinity—not in sociology or politics. That is why the theme of the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the alien appears so frequently in Scripture.

The Trinity is unbounded self-giving love each to the other, always seeking the best for the other and receiving back love in return. Since the church’s mission grows out of the overflow of this love, it is a mission to all people and the whole creation.

Amazingly, however, in the Incarnation Jesus Christ becomes the suffering Trinity, and thus the Father and the Spirit have particular compassion for him in his sufferings. This is mirrored in God’s concern then for the poor and the oppressed generally and for the “groaning” of creation. Thus this concern is mirrored also in the mission of the church—and often has been when the church has been at its best.

*God loves everyone, but especially those who suffer.* It is as simple as that—and as profound. The mutual love of the Trinity impels God, and therefore the church, to incarnate the gospel among the poor. Thus Jesus can say, in words that echo the mystery of the Trinity, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18). Because of this, John Wesley said, the poor have a “peculiar right to have the gospel preached unto them.”<sup>3</sup> The church’s preference for ministry to the poor is grounded in the Trinity, especially as demonstrated by Jesus Christ.

---

<sup>2</sup> The divine *perichoresis* of the Trinity thus is reflected in, and carried over into, the life of the church. An especially helpful discussion is Colin E. Gurton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, rev. ed. (Edinburgh, UK: T. & T. Clark, 1997), chapter four, “The Community: The Trinity and the Being of the Church.”

<sup>3</sup> Sermon, “Salvation by Faith,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 1, *Sermons I*, ed. Albert Outler (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1982), 128.



4. *The church's whole ministry is grounded in the Trinity.* Ministry of all stripes—ordained or unordained, paid or unpaid, local or global—is rooted in the Trinitarian mystery. The roots of authentic ministry are found in Spirit-empowered community, not in organizational hierarchy.

The Trinity is the opposite of hierarchy.<sup>4</sup> The church's ministry, including its leadership, is non-hierarchical. The deep theological grounding of this is the Trinity itself, not some philosophical egalitarianism. The Trinity, and the very nature of the material creation God has made, show us that we should conceive of the church and its ministry in organic, relational terms, not primarily in institutional or hierarchical ones. The church is not so much a rational organization or a religious machine as it is a complex organism. The Trinitarian nature of the church is built into the church's very DNA.

This is not an argument against institutional or administrative structures. It does however provide some guidance for structuring an organization. For most of human (not just Western) culture, hierarchy is the assumed, unevaluated, default model for organizations. The assumption needs to be questioned, however, in light of the Trinity—to say nothing of Jesus' example and explicit teaching.

The nature of the church is determined by the nature of God as revealed to us in Jesus Christ and in Scripture. The church is essentially a community in mission and in movement. It *is* because of who God is as Trinity and how he is manifesting himself in the world.

Clearly the mission of God (*missio Dei*) and the reality of the Trinity converge and point in the same direction. The mission of God reflects the Trinity in Godself (to the degree that has been revealed to us) and as we learn about God's nature through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup>

### **Implication for Missional Living: Interdependent Community**

One of the most challenging, and potentially creative, questions that can be asked of an institution is: How can we actually structure our life so that it reflects the ways the Trinitarian God has revealed himself? How can we incarnate organic, mutually relational and mutually submissive modes of being as we determine structures, roles, responsibilities, and accountability?

The major implication of God-as-Trinity is that we are called to live in *interdependent community*. The key principle here is “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:21)—a statement that distills what Jesus taught and modeled.

---

<sup>4</sup>Some theologians have tried to reconcile the Trinity and hierarchy, especially in the Western tradition. In fact, the two have been conceptually wed—with the result that hierarchy (grounded in pre-Christian Greek philosophical categories) has often won out over Trinity! This is one of the underlying, often unconscious factors that make it difficult to conceive of ministry and leadership in biblical terms.

<sup>5</sup>Behind this affirmation is the discussion regarding the “immanent” and “economic” Trinity. I personally agree with Karl Rahner's formulation, “The economic Trinity *is* the immanent Trinity” (the  $E=MC^2$  of Trinitarian theology, the Higher Theory of Relativity), though that affirmation is as much a logical deduction and statement of faith as of revealed truth—i.e., that the Triune God is essence what the Trinity is revealed to be in Jesus Christ.

All areas of Christian living are to be marked by interdependent community—the family, the church, and thus also the Christian academic institution. This is a principle that lies behind and transcends the structures and role differentiation that are necessary in a college or seminary. A certain tension exists here, and a key test of the authenticity of our discipleship is whether we maintain the functional centrality of this mutual interdependence or allow it to be compromised by our institutional structures and relationships.

For our life together at Tyndale, where we have the delight and challenge of great diversity, this means working hard to see things from others' points of view. It means respecting, honoring, and learning from the diversities of cultures and gifts of the whole institution—faculty, students, staff, and administrators. This, then, actually builds and nurtures community.

### III. THE MISSION OF JESUS

Jesus says much more about his own mission than I, at least, had noted until recent years. For decades I have been impressed with Jesus' Jubilee proclamation in Luke 4 and with statements of Jesus' mission such as "The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10). Recently however I've been fascinated by the many times Jesus refers to his mission or "work," especially in the Gospel of John.

I find it ironic that (at least in my experience) the church tends to explore the dimensions of the church's mission more than it does of Jesus' own mission—especially since the church's mission derives from Jesus' mission and the mission of God.

Remarkably, in the Gospel of John Jesus speaks over thirty times of being "sent." By my count, Jesus' use of the words "sent me" occurs 33 times in John in phrases like "The Father who sent me," "the will of him who sent me," or "the one who sent me." We notice here immediately that Jesus emphasizes that his mission derives from the Father's mission or will. He speaks more of the Father's agency than of his own—"I am sent" more than "I have come," for instance—though he does use phrases like "I came" or "I have come" about a dozen times, e.g., "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10) and "I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness" (John 12:46).

What is Jesus' mission, as reported in the Gospel of John? Conflating Jesus' many statements (but omitting Jesus' important prayer in John 17) yields this summary:

My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working. The Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.

The works that the Father has given me to finish testify that the Father has sent me. I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.

I stand with the Father, who sent me. What I have heard from him I tell the world. I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. What I say is just what the Father has told me to say.

I have come from God and am returning to God. I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. The words I say to you I

do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.

As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.

Three other very prominent terms in John relating to Jesus' mission are "will," "work," and "works." A dozen or so times Jesus speaks of the "work" or "works" of God that he was sent to accomplish, and several times of doing the Father's "will."

Elsewhere in the Gospels Jesus of course says many other things about his mission. Most importantly, he ties his mission to the kingdom of God—preaching the kingdom, telling his disciples they should seek first God's kingdom, and praying, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is heaven" (Mt. 6:10). Key to fulfilling that goal is making disciples among all nations.

The Apostle Paul and other New Testament writers (as well as Old Testament prophets) elaborate the scope of Jesus' mission, tying it in with God's larger *economy* or plan "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (Eph. 1:10 NIV), as noted earlier.

In short, the Father sent Jesus Christ into the world to "finish the work" the Father gave him to do (John 4:34; cf. 5:36, 17:4). For Jesus, "finishing the work" meant his sacrificial death on the cross (see "It is finished" in John 19:30) and the eventual total triumph of the kingdom of God (see "It is done!" in Rev. 21:6). The church lives now between that first and second "It is finished." We celebrate "the finished work of Christ," but at present we can speak also of the unfinished work of Christ—else why would we pray, "May your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as in heaven"?

Jesus' mission, of course, is accomplished through the presence and agency of the Holy Spirit. It is Trinitarian. Jesus speaks in John of the role the Holy Spirit will play, and many other Scriptures reveal the essential role of the Holy Spirit in bringing Jesus' mission to completion in the church and in all creation (e.g., Acts 1:8, Romans 8).

What does Jesus' description of his own mission tell us about the mission of the church, and of our own shared mission?

These implications, at least, are clear:

1. *Our mission is not our own. It is Jesus' mission, and the mission of the Trinity.* Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21). He said his disciples would do the "work" and "works" that Jesus did.

Jesus was concerned above all to do the will and works of him who sent him, not his own will. So it is with us. This reinforces what I said earlier about transcendent mission.

2. *Our ultimate mission as disciples invited to participate in God's mission is nothing less than the kingdom of God, the reconciliation and restoration of "all things."* It is that grand and comprehensive. Our task as disciples and Christian communities, of course, is to discern our specific and strategic part in that larger mission of God. The church as a discerning, discipling missional community is essential here.

The point however is that we must never lose sight of the big picture, the larger mission within which we find our particular mission.

3. *The power for us to accomplish our mission comes from God—from Jesus and the power of his resurrection and from the filling, empowering, and guidance of the Holy Spirit.* The power for mission is life in the Trinity through Christian community. This is what Jesus prays for in John 17.

### **Implication for Missional Living: Servant Leadership**

To be a faculty or staff person in an educational institution is a form of leadership. Leadership is essential to the fulfilling of God’s mission. But equally essential is that we are called to be leaders in the *way* Jesus was, manifesting his spirit and character.

I am aware of the limitations (and criticisms) of “servant leader” and “servanthood.” Christian leadership certainly is *more than* servanthood. But it is not less. Philippians 2 tells us not only about Jesus but defines our own leadership.

As faculty, we are called both to teach and to model servant leadership—whether in the classroom, informal times with students, or in our peer interactions and decisions.

## **IV. THE VISIBLE BODY OF CHRIST**

The mission of God, the reality and mystery of the Trinity, and Jesus’ own mission all converge, finally, in the reality of the church as the visible Body of Christ. In theological terms, missiology, Christology, and eschatology all shape our ecclesiology.

Because of Jesus’ mission and the work of the Holy Spirit, the church is most fundamentally a missional community. It exists not for itself but for the one who forms and sends the church into the world to do Jesus’ works and to fulfill its role in God’s larger economy for the reconciliation of all creation.

The church is genetically missionary because it is the community of Jesus Christ, God’s great missionary. It is the Body of Christ, sharing its Head’s DNA. The church is the community called into existence by the mission of God. All ecclesiology should be viewed from this angle—rather than primarily from the perspective of the traditional structures of cultural Christianity inherited from two millennia of Christendom.

### **The Meaning of Evangelism**

Given the comprehensive biblical vision of salvation, how are we to understand evangelism? What does the Bible teach us?

In the New Testament, the term “evangelism” specifically refers to the good news of the kingdom of God. “To evangelize” literally means to proclaim the good news of God’s reign. Jesus came “proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness” (Mt. 9:35). In Luke 4:43, Jesus says that his central purpose was to “proclaim the good news of [literally, “evangelize concerning”] the kingdom of God.” Again in Luke 8:1, Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of God is described as “evangelizing.” We read in Acts 8:12 that Philip “evangelized about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.”<sup>6</sup>

In its broadest and most basic sense, then, evangelism means announcing and embodying the Reign of God. It addresses itself particularly to personal faith; to the

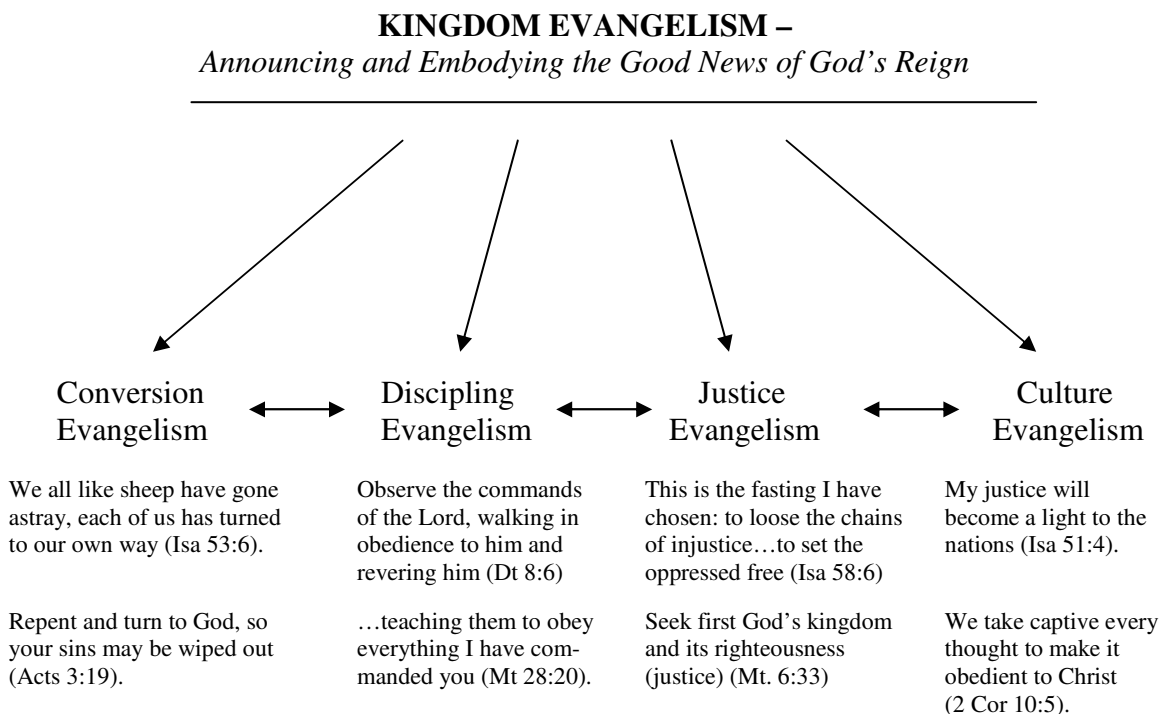
---

<sup>6</sup> See also Mt. 4:23, 24:14; Luke 16:16. A study of the New Testament use of “evangelize” in its various forms shows conclusively that evangelism concerns the full message of the kingdom of God.

decision of the heart in response to God’s call to follow Jesus Christ, to be born again and be his disciples. It is concerned with justification and regeneration as well as discipleship and sanctification. Think of the *circumference* of evangelism as all that is included in the Good News of the Kingdom of God, but the *center* of the circle is the appeal to “turn and be converted” (see Mark 4:17).

Consistently in the New Testament, evangelism is connected with the proclamation of the kingdom of God and the demonstration of the reality of that kingdom. In the Bible, evangelism is not limited to what might be called conversion evangelism—winning converts to Jesus Christ. Biblically speaking, evangelism covers much more than this, because it concerns the comprehensive message of God’s reign.

What, then, does evangelism really mean, biblically speaking? If evangelism means announcing and embodying God’s reign so that God’s will truly is done on earth, then evangelism may be pictured in this way:



In this view, evangelism is all about the kingdom of God. This is what we find in the New Testament. Evangelism means making Jesus Christ and his kingdom known through the church, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Consider these four dimensions of evangelism:

*Conversion evangelism* is proclaiming and showing by our lives that Jesus Christ is Savior and Lord—the one who came into the world to save sinners. The mission of the church is to lift up Jesus Christ so that people may be convicted of their sins, repent and believe in him, and receive the abundant life he offers.

Conversion evangelism is preeminently the work of *the church*, the Christian community, not of just individuals or specialized organizations. As the body of Christ, a faithful church makes Jesus Christ visible in the world. As it shows forth Christ, people

are won to faith in him and become part of the community of believers. The church, then, has a central role in evangelism. Its mission is to proclaim him, show forth the reality of Jesus in its community life, and be the community that then welcomes and nurtures “those . . . being saved” (Acts 2:47).

Many Christians use the term evangelism *only* in the sense of conversion evangelism. But this is too narrow. Evangelism means announcing and embodying the full message of the kingdom.

*Discipling evangelism* means the church making disciples, not just converts or church members. Jesus’ commission is to “make disciples . . . , teaching them to obey everything” that Jesus commanded (Mt. 28:19–20).

The true church is a community of disciples, not just of believers. The church should look like Jesus Christ. It must visibly represent Jesus and his kingdom in the world. But this will not happen unless churches pay careful attention to disciple-building.

The goal of disciple-making is to form a community that looks and acts like Jesus Christ; that shows forth the character of Christ in its social context. The church does this by being a reconciled and reconciling community. It does this most effectively when it gives visible witness to reconciliation between rich and poor, men and women, and people of different racial and ethnic identities.<sup>7</sup>

Discipling evangelism thus includes what some have called “lifestyle evangelism”—the authenticity of Christians’ lives as persons and as community. Jesus spoke of this when he said, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another (John 13:35).

*Justice evangelism* means living out the righteousness and justice of God’s reign within the church’s social context—locally and globally. Here the church takes seriously the biblical mandate to work for justice in all areas of society, with particular concern for the poor and oppressed. Here the church engages key issues of justice in the world—entrenched poverty, destruction of the environment, ethnic and religious violence, oppression of women and children, abortion, and the culture of warfare and militarism. Evangelism that does not include this justice dimension is not really evangelism in the full biblical sense.

*Culture evangelism* means shaping the societies and cultures of the world through the truth of the kingdom of God. It means engaging society in all sectors—in the arts, in economics and education, in science and technology, in media and entertainment, in philosophy and in worldview. This dimension of evangelism calls Christians in all sectors of society to give transforming witness to the truth of the gospel.

The Bible presents a picture of reality—a worldview and worldstory—that is distinctly different from all the world’s philosophies, religions, and ideologies. Scripture reveals God’s truth, demonstrated supremely in Jesus Christ and in his reign. So culture evangelism is essential if societies are going to be transformed to reflect the reality of the kingdom of God.

---

<sup>7</sup> For this reason, Acts 2–5 should not be taken as the primary model for the church, or the full picture of the early church. The multiethnic Antioch church pictured in Acts 11 and 13, for example, gives a fuller picture of the early church than does the Jerusalem church of the first chapters of Acts.

These four dimensions of evangelism are all, of course, closely interrelated. Together they form one picture: the proclamation and living out of the reign of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Holistic mission means combining these four dimensions of evangelism within each local church, and in the church more broadly.

An important aspect of this holistic biblical understanding of evangelism is that it engages *everyone* in the Christian community—every believer and disciple. The priesthood of believers and the diversity of spiritual gifts play a key role here. Within the church, the Spirit gifts believers to be witnesses and evangelists in different ways. First Corinthians 12 thus takes on added meaning. We learn practically that there are “different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work” (1 Cor. 12:4–6 TNIV).

The work of the Holy Spirit is to make Jesus Christ and his kingdom known and visible in the world. Holistic mission recognizes this broader biblical understanding of evangelism, and the essential role of God’s particular gifts and callings that Jesus Christ may be exalted and his kingdom made visible.

### **Implication for Missional Living: Incarnated Witness**

The major implication here for our life together is *incarnated witness*. It means the *visible demonstration* of the reality of the body of Christ wherever we are—locally and globally.

Here a couple of examples:

Since the mission of God concerns God’s care for the earth and the stewardship commission that has been given to all of us, incarnated witness includes creation care—earth stewardship, both personally and institutional. Tyndale is now blessed with a substantial amount of property, including wooded areas and a river. What does the witness of visible creation-care mean in this area? In what ways would God be honored and witness to the kingdom of God extended by using this property as a visible demonstration of the reconciliation and new creation God is bringing? What does our ecological interdependence with the larger Toronto urban area (and beyond; ultimately with the global ecosystem) mean for our kingdom-of-God evangelism?

Another example concerns our personal involvements with the church locally as well as globally. As we (many of us) are globally connected, we need to be locally connected with the community of believers—not only in the Tyndale community, but in local churches.

### **CONCLUSION**

As a Christian academic and missional community, we have been given the exquisite privilege and high honor of participating, as Jesus’ servants, friends, and coworkers, in the mission of the Triune God. We are sent by the Father to be Jesus’ ministers through the work of the Holy Spirit—agents of reconciliation and new creation.