

The Church
as
Missio Dei

By

Bryan James Franzen

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Introduction

September 6, 2006

Dear Reader:

At San Francisco Theological Seminary, SFTS, every Student was given the opportunity to have an emphasis within a specialized area of study. Having done a great deal of work with different types of mission as a youth and young adult, and with my fascination for different cultures and sociological settings, the emphasis in World Christianity seemed natural. Along with the extra classes and extracurricular studies came the expectation of a topical thesis, this was the birth of my thesis, *The Church as Missio Dei*. However, upon its completion I agreed that I would not let it hang out there never to be seen again, but to revisit it periodically to see how these perspectives change from within the church structure. I have to say there are areas that I went to far and there are areas I probably did not go far enough. However, I feel that this is a good start in furthering the discussion of congregational missiology.

Thus, the purpose of my giving this to you is to be a start to a larger discussion for this class. My hope is that you will take the time to read and think about what I have written and correspond with me through our class. I feel that this is important because theology can not find the word of God when done in a box. I also think that as a congregation with

strong feelings about mission, maybe we can put together a text or recourse for other congregations and their pursuits of being in mission with God.

Now for my disclaimer. . .

Please remember that I wrote this my last year of seminary. This means that there are things within the paper that I don't know if I necessarily agree with still. It is also written slightly different than I write now. This is due to time a experience. I do feel strongly that in a class covering a topic that I feel so strongly about you need to know my background and passion. Plus, I felt it very important to give you the original copy because it gives us a place to start from, me included.

Hopefully, by the end of the class with the help from all of us I will be able to update this work and make it a cooperate witness from our congregation.

Thanks,

Bryan

The Local Church and Missio Dei

My interest and call to become a minister is deeply planted in the experiences of my youth, and the confirmation of my call from my various communities. However, I have struggled in college, and also in seminary, over how mission can be part of my life and how I can be part of the local church as a pastor of a congregation. Thus, I have set out on a journey of discovery trying to bring these elements together to see how we can be part of the Global mission of God while still being the local Church. Granted, this journey started when I was a child and has evolved throughout my life. This paper marks where I see mission in relation to the local church today.

By the end of this paper, I will have introduced a mission model for the church, both the local church and the universal church. I realize that this is a very difficult way of viewing the church for many people because they have made mission and church into two very different categories. Many see mission as an action of the church and the church, whether it is local or universal, as the vehicle that allows mission to happen. In this paper, I will turn this point of view around. I will look at how God calls the church into His mission, and how we bring with us our various gifts to become a community of believers.

To see how the church is part of God's mission, I will show my growth in understanding mission. I do this because understanding mission as something which we share with God comes from a more mature understanding of my faith. Thus, this is important in helping us to see that mission is not something that we do on our own part, but is something which God calls us to do with Him. I will then look to a contemporary

understanding of mission, exploring God's activity in mission as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. After gaining an understanding of God's mission, I will then look to our call to be part of God's mission. I will then describe what those mission communities look like. I will also look at how viewing the church as a mission community might impact the mission crisis of the church today. As a mission community, involved in the world, I will explore what it means to be the local church in mission with God, and, consequently, part of Global Mission the universal church.

I see this paper as laying a foundation for a new reformation and a call for a new reformation. When the reformers left the Roman Catholic Church, it was because the church was so wrapped up in being the church that they lost sight of God. Images had replaced the word, and the images did not always portray a correct or proper understanding of God. The point of the reformation was simple. The reformers believed that the church had lost sight of God. In our twenty-first century understanding of the church, we tend to see the church in light of its people, political correctness, social issues (as long as they are popular ones), and being individuals. There are churches that will not even mention God due to the offence that some take toward the name of God. This paper goes back to the tradition John Calvin, Martin Luther, John Knox, and Ulrich Zwingli because it will call the church to center itself around God rather than itself and realize that it is part of *Missio Dei*.

My growth in understanding what it means to be in mission with God.

I like to think of my growth in understanding the church as part of Missio Dei as a reformation inside me. I think back to a time when I was 16, and on a "Go-and-Serve" trip to Colorado. We were on our way to a reservation in an area that was drastically financially depressed - a far cry from the suburban setting of my home church. The "Go-and-Serve's," in which I participated, placed within us an understanding that mission is something that we do -- isolated and removed from our daily life. The experiences gave us the feeling that mission was something that happens outside of the sphere of our lives, and that mission had a beginning and an end and was a choice that we made. On our way to Colorado, we stopped at the church of one of the former pastors of our congregation to spend the night and go to church in the morning. That morning, the pastor asked for a couple of people to speak about the trip and what it meant. I was one of the two who "volunteered" (that is, after we were told we were going to do it). I stood in front of the church and I began to speak about what I, then, thought to be mission. I remember that when I spoke before them, I talked about all that we were going to do that week and what we had done on the previous trips to help the people where we were going.

Throughout Jr. High and High School, I participated in "missions." These "missions" were focused on actions and work. Yet, in my heart, I felt as if mission was not about the "work" that we had done; rather, mission was about the people that we met and what God

was teaching us through our interactions with them. When I would leave these "missions" there were times when I felt guilty because I did not do all of the work -- building and painting -- that I could have done because I spent too much time listening and talking to the people for whom I was "there to help."

I then came to one of the most remarkable experiences of my life. The church in which I was raised sent me to a Dakota reservation in South Dakota. They did not give me much of a job description. I had graduated from high school about a month prior to when they sent me to the reservation in Sisseton, South Dakota. It was there I had my first "real" mission experiences, though I had been on many "mission" trips before. The Church had sent me with a young woman, an expense account, and vague list of what I was to do. During my time there I was introduced to a man whose name was Sid Byrd. Sid was an old retired Dakota/Lakota minister. Sid was Dakota by nationality and Lakota by upbringing. He was the pastor of the Pine Ridge Reservation during the revolts at Wounded Knee in the early seventies and gave shelter to those young men who were revolting against the government. Through this act, Sid was celebrated by his community but shamed by some in the church. As I look back on his teachings, I realized that as Sid talked about his ministry, he always referred to his actions in light of those with whom he was in ministry with. Thus, witnessing to me the work of God in their lives. By Sid witnessing to me, we had the opportunity to reconcile our communities and, in that, mission was done. Furthermore, as Sid witnessed to me, I took what he said and was able to witness what was going on in that community better than I could before. Granted it took me a few years to realize this, but it was that experience which allowed me to feel what it was

to truly be in mission with God.

Through my growth in understanding mission, I realize that focusing mission on the action and substance does not give us the fullest picture of what it means to be in mission with God. It is not unusual for people to view mission as actions and substance, rather than a relationship with God. Donald K. McKim in the Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms looks at the root of mission, Latin *Missio*, which is, to send, and gives this definition for mission: "All that is done by the church and by Christians to serve God. More specifically, the term may be used to denote direct activities or tasks undertaken by the church for a particular purpose."¹ On the surface this seems to be a more than adequate answer to what is mission. Unfortunately, that definition is inadequate. It places mission in the hands of people. Mission is an act of God. I have come to realize that mission is not something which we chose to do, or create a model which can be seen as correct in every case; rather, mission is the act of God and God calls us into his mission, kicking and screaming at times, so that we may be in mission with God. Now that I am have graduated from Seminary, I am beginning to understand both of the noted "Go-and-Serve" trips as well as my precious time with Sid much better. I really see both were times of reconciliation, yet they were done in such a different way. Just as Paul addressed the Corinthians, "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like

¹McKim, Donald K. Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 175

a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.²" Paul said this in relation to faith pointing to the fact that as one's faith grows it is wrong to go back to unmatured faith. In the same sense, I cannot go back to an understanding of mission revolving around people. I know better than that. Granted, when I was young, I could get away with thinking that mission was more about people and myself than it was about God and God's involvement in this world. Now I realize that mission is not something which we chose to do; rather, it is an action which started before we were part of this world and will continue once we are gone from it. As I look to a definition, I do so from the realization that mission is not action; rather, it is a state that we are in with God. I also have come to the realization that because mission belongs to God and is something which we participate in with God, it can take on many forms.

²1 Corinthians 13:11

God's Mission

Though mission can take many forms, the basis for our understanding of mission is that of *Missio Dei*, a Latin phrase which means mission of God. The concepts behind this understanding can be traced back through Barth, to Calvin, Paul, and the Hebrew Testament. The understanding of *Missio Dei* became a very popular way of looking at mission in the mid-twentieth century. Mission revolves around our understanding of the Triune God, especially as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. "Mission is, primarily and ultimately, the work of the Triune God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, for the sake of the world, a ministry in which the church is privileged to participate."³ God created this world because of God's love for it. Thus, mission is the work of God that began out of God's love for this world. Moreover, because of God's love for this world, God continues to be active in this world. As people of God, we are able to see God's continuing mission that started at creation and continued through God's reconciling and sanctifying acts.

God's Mission of Creation

God is active in this world through creating and recreating life. Whether that is a new tree when the old one had rotted away or a baby, God is active in creation. The actions of God's mission in this world started with God's involvement at the moment of creation. God created this world out of nothing. Whether one is referring to the biblical

³Bosh, David. *Transforming Mission*. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 393.

accounts of creation or the "Big Bang" theory - both point to the supernatural force that was present at the time of creation. Unfortunately, many restrict creation to the two creation accounts in Genesis - making creation a one-time event with a beginning and an end. This is unfortunate because we know that God has continually been creating and recreation this world. There are many accounts like Noah and the flood or even the famine stories where God is active in recreation. First, God created from nothing, then He recreated from everything. And, all this time, God did so with a loving focus on this world through God's mission. Creation is not confined to a time and space, nor is God's mission. And, all is truly in God's hands.

. . .in one word; as often as we call God the Creator of heaven and earth, let us remember that the distribution of all the things which He created are in His hand and power, but that we are His sons (and daughters), whom He has undertaken to nourish and bring up in allegiance to Him, that we may expect the substance of all good from him alone, and have full hope that He will never suffer us to be in want of things necessary to salvation, so as to leave us dependent on some other source; that in everything we desire we may address our prayers to Him, and, in every benefit we receive, acknowledge His hand, and give Him thanks; that thus allured by His great goodness and beneficence, we may study with our whole heart to love and serve Him.⁴

⁴Calvin, John. Institutes of the Christian Religion. trans. Ford Lewis Bates, Edited by John T. McNeill. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), I.14.12.

Calvin captures how we are related to God's mission through creation. He is pointing to the fact that we have a relationship with God. Because God has modeled His love toward us we model that love back to God. God, in creation, gave people different gifts that are to be used to propagate God's mission. Thus, there are those of us who are called to act in this world creating and recreating life, whether that is the farmer or the mother, the architect, or the community planner, we are vessels of God's creation. Thus, we are called into co-creation with God.

Redeeming and Reconciling Mission

The "God with us" has nothing to do with chance. As a redemptive happening it means the revelation and confirmation of the most primitive relationship between God and man, that which was freely determined in eternity by God Himself before there was any created being.⁵

Creation is ascribed to God, the Father. Redemption and reconciliation is ascribed to Christ, the Son. However, we know that both persons are active in creation and redemption. As Barth points out, that redemption is the basis for our relationship with God. Christ's parable of the prodigal son explains this relationship best. When the boys were young men, the father split their wealth equally. The one son stayed and the other left. The one who left was able to live the glamorous life living high; whereas, the son who stayed worked hard every day for his father. When the son who had left returned groveling for the

⁵ Barth, Karl. Church Dogmatics. Edited by Helmut Gollwitzer. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 151.

most menial of jobs, the father called for the all of the fruits of the field and all that was good and showered the boy in them. As the other son who stayed questioned the father as to why he was doing this, the father said, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found."⁶

Our relationship with God is like those two boys. This story really is not about the prodigal son, but it was about the prodigal sons. Both boys were foolish and wastefully extravagant with their lives. Thus, both boys were in need of redemption and reconciliation with the father. The one who stayed was in need of redemption because he had worked so hard that he forgot what it meant to be a family and the son was in need of redemption for all that he had done. The father reconciled with both, showing his love for the son who had gone and promising his wealth to the son who stayed. As we look at this story as it relates to mission and the church, we see that God is the father figure and we are God's children. At times, we take God's Grace a live a foolish life knowing that we will find salvation in the end, other times we work and try so hard to be good Christians we forget about God. Because of this, we are always in a reconciling relationship with God.

⁶ Luke 15:32

As we work toward reconciliation with God, we try and do what is good and proper in God's eyes. "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"⁷ Thus, the basis for how we approach mission and reconciliation with God is to help seek justice for the whole of this world.

We find ourselves reaching out to communities that are in need where people are dying because they do not have the basics of life, such as food and clean water. As part of justice, we are also called to be educators - teaching people about God. In teaching people about our God. We are called to teach people so that they may come and have a relationship with God, too. Thus, we are called into the mission of God by propagating the faith letting people know of God's actions in this world.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.⁸

We are called to name God's actions in this world, helping people to see that it is God who is responsible for our lives and letting them know that God has not abandoned this world even though we rejected our Lord on the Cross. In this call, we are also called to share the

⁷Micah 6:8

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good news found in the Bible with all, making sure that there are people in every nation in this world who know and believe. Granted, this is not the same as forcing people to believe, which would be proselytism. Proselytism, is not mission because it does not allow for reconciliation. It does not allow for reconciliation because its focus is on converting the person rather than introducing them to God and allowing that person to reconcile themselves with God. The greatest misunderstanding in the Great Commission is that it is a call to make all people disciples of Christ. This is not true; it is a call to make sure that there are disciples in all the nations so that all may hear and understand the message of God. Through their own time, they too can be reconciled with God.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made himself to be sin that knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.⁹

We are called to bring together people or groups of people who are divided or alienated. It has been exemplified by Christ, as seen in 2 Corinthians 5:16-21. Thus, we are called to be the "ambassadors" of the message of reconciliation and we are called to be pro-active in acts of reconciliation whether that is toward God or toward other people. We participate

⁹2 Corinthians 5:19-20

in the mission of God, his acts of creation and reconciliation by being sent by the spirit. Isaiah 61:1-2 is an example of the spirit working through man to participate in the mission of God.

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;¹⁰

In fact, this is repeated by Jesus in Luke 4:18. As we become reconciled with others and with God, we begin recognizing that this world and everything in the world are part of God's mission. Through our reconciliation, we realize that it is God who allows us to participate in God's mission - whether that is through creation, spreading his word, and/or spreading his love through reaching out toward others. When we have realized that mission is God's and we are called out to be part of it, we are then called to take time to celebrate and worship the Lord. We worship our Lord as part of mission because worship is a reconciling act. Worship is our desire to ascribe worth to God and to reconcile our own denial or estrangement from God. Thus, worship may very well be the most important part of mission, praising God for God's continual works in this world.

I think Bonhoeffer says it best in his poem Christian and Pagans written in July 1944.

All people go to God in need
For help and calm and food they plead
That sickness, guilt
and death may cease,
All Christians and Pagans, pray for peace.

¹⁰Isaiah 61:1-2

But some turn to God in God's need and dread, A God poor, despised without roof or bread. By sin's harm weakened and by death distressed, Christians stand steadfast by their God oppressed.

God goes to all in their need and dread, Their souls' loving grace and their bodies' bread. By the crucified Lord who for them was slain Both Christians and pagan God's pardon gain.¹¹

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote this from his cell in the concentration camp. This poem, for me, is one of the most moving testaments given by Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer is pointing here to the fact that when we come down to it, we are all in need of reconciliation with God. We will all turn to God for reconciliation, both Christians and non-Christians and we will find our reconciliation with God. Thus, we are called by God to act toward reconciliation with God in this world.

Witness is a reconciling act that is central to God's Mission.

Witness moves from one unity to another - from that of the members of the Body of Christ in the one Spirit to the greater unity in which all things in heaven and earth will come together under the one Head who is Christ (Eph. 1:10). Essentially, it is a work of reconciliation, of people with God, and with one another. To take part in Christian witness also deepens the unity that already exists among Christians. Witness tends always to extend the

¹¹ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. A Testament to Freedom. edited by Geoffrey B. Kelley and F. Burton Nelson. (San Francisco: Harper), 515.

fellowship of the Spirit, creating new community.¹²

Witness helps all to realize that God is at work within this world. Thus, we are exposed to what is holy and given the charge to seek out how God's mission is active in this world. By witnessing the work of God, we are reconciling with God. When we witness God's mission we build relationships and fellowships. These fellowships are needed so that we are able to share our faith. Through sharing our faith with others, we are reconciling with others and reconciling with God. Thus, the acts of reconciliation, whether it is repentance, seeking justice, or witnessing to the work of the Lord - all these lead to how God's sanctification can be found in the mission of God.

Sustaining and Sanctifying Mission

Sanctification is attributed to the third person of the trinity - the Holy Spirit. As with both creation and redemption, we know that all three persons of God are present in all these forms of mission. Sanctification is the often forgotten piece of mission in the protestant tradition. Because we become sanctified through our justification we often discuss justification that is closely tied with redemption and reconciliation and happens solely based on God's grace.

¹² Scherer, James A. and Bevens, Stephen B. *New Directions in Mission and Evangelism* 1 "Conciliar Ecumenical Statement, Christian Witness -- Common Witness," (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1980)

Sanctification is the fulfillment of the divine purpose enunciated in the words. "Ye shall be holy: for I am holy." and again, "I, the Lord, who sanctify you am holy." The fulfillment is the work of God the Holy Spirit. He is the "seal" whereby the faithful are sealed as God's possession until the day of redemption. Hitherto, they had been kept inward under the law, enclosed as it were in a prison (Gal. 3.23), but now they are enclosed "in Christ," sealed with the seal of God, which is the Holy Spirit.¹³

If God's mission of creation calls for our participation in creation and realization of the gifts which God holds for us, then reconciliation is our call to be working towards justice and helping people to reconcile. Sanctification, on the other hand, one might call, "the spiritual side of mission." Sanctification is what brings mission together and makes it a holy act of God.

¹³ Bonhoeffer, Detrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. (New York: Macmillian, 1963), 312

"Sanctification," according to almost any definition, is the continuation of that process of spiritual education and transformation, by which a human personality becomes a willing organ of the spirit of Christ. Those who believe in the social gospel can share in any methods for the cultivation of the spiritual life, if only they have an ethical outcome. The social gospel takes up the message of the Hebrew prophets, that ritual and emotional religion is harmful unless it results in righteousness. Sanctification is through increased fellowship with God and man. But fellowship is impossible without an exchange of service. Here we come back to our previous proposition that the Kingdom of God is the commonwealth of co-operative service and that the most common form of sinful selfishness is the effort to escape from labor. Sanctification, therefore, cannot be attained in an unproductive life, unless it is unproductive through necessity. In the long run, the only true way to gain moral insight, self-discipline, humility, love, and a consciousness of coherence and dependence, is to take our place among those who serve one another by useful labor. Parasitism blinds; work reveals.¹⁴

Through, spirituality and understanding the spirit we come to an understanding of God's sanctifying mission as growth holiness and the spirit within that person. Because we are unable to sanctify, because God does that through God's Grace, we participate in God's

¹⁴ Raushenbush, Walter. *A Theology for the Social Gospel*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 103.

mission of sanctification by witness to how the spirit is at work in our lives as well as the lives of the communities in which we are involved.

Called out of the world, the community is generally called into it.¹⁵

One of my favorite passages in the Bible is Psalm 133.

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is to dwell as one people all together.
As if good oil on the head descended on to the beard, the beard of Aaron
descending on to his clothes. As if the dew of Hermon descended on to
mountains of Zion, there our Lord commanded the blessing life for
evermore.¹⁶

Psalm 133 is one of the fifteen songs of accents. As a song of accent, it is a pilgrim
song probably used as a part of worship during the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The
communal aspect of this poem is lifted up as a holy event, one that helps us to understand
what it means to be blessed, "to dwell as one people all together." The passage lifts up the
beauty that comes as a result of the dwelling together "As if good oil on the head
descended onto the beard, the beard of Aaron descending onto his clothes. As if the dew

¹⁵ **Barth, Karl. Church Dogmatics vol. IV. "The Doctrine of Reconciliation"**
Trans. G. W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1962.), IV. 3.72.2

¹⁶ My translation of psalm 133 from *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. (Stuttgart:
Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1990)

of Hermon descended onto mountains of Zion." Then the writer shares what the blessing is, "life, filled with spiritual joy and earthly bliss, for evermore." The repetition of the simile goes to strengthen how good it is for people to be in unity. The oil is not the typical oil but it is the special oil that is used for ordination and holy events. The Dew is the blessed people making their way to Jerusalem. The importance of this passage is that it gives us the charge to live in unity, reinforcing why we live in unity - because there is nothing more beautiful, and it tells us the reward of unity - life forevermore.

It is my favorite because it calls us into community and makes a suggestion that when we are in that community, we may be able to experience perfection, Christians may suggest that the poem points to the reality that in community we are able to experience a bit of heaven on earth. Because I see community as important, I use this short psalm often. I use this psalm to illustrate my desire for people to come together and to live in love and harmony and exemplify what a beautiful experience that might be.

When I use this psalm in teachings and sermons, I often point to my own desire to reconcile with those in the churches who are easy to write off and our call to accept all people, whether they come through the doors of the Church or not. In reality when I used this poem in teachings and sermons, it was more on Bonhoeffer's book, Life Together, than Psalm 133. Because of this, I sensed in the psalm a Christian, Bonhoeffer inspired, understanding of Christianity and what it meant to be the people of God. Now that I have been through seminary my concern for being the people of God has changed to how we participate in the mission of God.

It is the community first, and in the life of the men (and women) called to it

and gathered in it that salvation, reconciliation, the covenant, the justification of man (people) before God and his (their) sanctification for Him, can and should be expressed de facto, that the peace should be experienced, tasted and felt as an event. As it exists for the world neither it nor its members who belong to it and also exist for the world can or will go away empty.¹⁷

Thus, community becomes a place for the people of God to come together and share the ways in which God is at work in their lives. This, too, is an important part of our participation in the mission of God because it is where we witness to each other. We also come together because as individuals we are incomplete. Being incomplete we need others to complete us and help us do the things that we are unable to do alone.

A community model for a mission community removes the understanding of rugged individualism that is so prominent in our society. This type of individualism taught in the society in which I was brought up, serves only to propagate the self over and above the community. This type of individualism can never be used to serve the Lord because the focus is never on the Lord, rather the focus will lie on the individual. In other words, it is the man or woman who gets to the top of their professions doing whatever it takes to get there. Or, the person who refuses to work, even though they are able to do so.

A mission community can also not be that of Communitarians. To the same degree as rugged individualism, a strict communitarian would also be unable participate in God's

¹⁷ Barth, Karl. Church Dogmatics vol. IV. "The Doctrine of Reconciliation" Trans. G. W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1962.), 764.

mission because the individual gifts which everyone brings are lost to the communal needs. Though the Jim Jones cult was rare, it points to how people lost their identities and their gifts in order to be one group with one belief. Though they were under the impression that they were a mission community, they lost sight of God because the leader, who was the only one allowed to think freely, replaced God. Thus, God was made to be an oppressor rather than a loving parent who reaches out with love to this world as a parent to a child.

In his letters to the people of Corinth and to the Romans, Paul gives us a nice model of the one body with many parts. Showing us that people bring with them various gifts that, when brought together, compliment themselves, thus showing that there is but one mission and that is the mission of God. We come to that mission both on our own and in our community. In other words, we approach mission differently based on our upbringing in the faith, the gifts, and the insights that God has given to us. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.¹⁸ Paul is pointing out, here, in Romans 12:4-5 that there is but one body, one community made up of individuals which come together to make up the body of Christ. Today, we might change the wording from Paul's "body" to the people of God or the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. With the understanding that we are part of the body, many see a hierarchy. In the communion model suggested by Psalm 133, there is no hierarchy. Thus, we can see this communion as the people of God who come together with their various gifts to be in community with

each other focused on God. As people with various gifts, we approach this mission differently depending on our gifts.

Thus diversities are acknowledged but stripped of their divisive power by being subordinated to the interpretive norm of "faith." Each person is to his or her own gift in recognition of its source and in a manner appropriate to its function for the whole; the gift itself has created the responsibility and supplies the norm for the right use.¹⁹

In this quote, Paul Meyer is pointing to a great reality for mission today. We realize that it is important to be in mission with others because if we are not in mission with others we are not building up the body of Christ. Yet, being in mission together is hard. If one is from a dominant culture, they may force their culture where it is not appropriate, or if one was from a less dominant culture they may, unwillingly, have to surrender parts of their culture. This, as a missionary tactic, is still being used today. I might label it "proselytism," though the term also implies forced conversion.

Understanding mission as a community event is central. It is hard to think of mission being done by oneself. The reality is that even when we are by ourselves participating in the mission of God, we have a community praying for us and people with whom we are working who are learning and teaching us.

¹⁸ Romans 12:4-5

¹⁹ Meyer, Paul W. Harper's Bible Commentary Series. "Romans" edited by James L. Mayes et. al. (San Francisco: Harper, 1988), 1162.

The Church's commission, upon which its freedom is founded, consists in delivering the message of the free grace of God to all people in Christ's stead, and, therefore, in the ministry of his own Word and work through sermon and sacrament. We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church in human arrogance could place the Word and work of the Lord in the service of any arbitrarily chosen desires, purposes, and plans.²⁰

The Barmen Declaration, where this quote originates, points to the reality of both situations, when the church avoids community and when it does not allow individual thought and exploration. The message given to us in this quote by Karl Barth is that in mission we are called to realize that we cannot put human limitations on the mission of God therefore all we know is that we participate in the mission of God with God and with others.

²⁰Book of Confessions: Study Edition (Louisville: Geneva, 1999), 8.26-27.

Models of Communion in Mission²¹

As the body of Christ, we all tend to approach mission in very different ways. To go into every different way and model would not only take up the rest of this paper, but would be a series of books on its own. As Christians, there is only one way for us to participate in mission and that is through the church. We are incomplete as individuals and need the church to help complete us - even though the church, as an entity unto itself, is incomplete unless it is part of the universal church. Therefore, it is more than appropriate to use models of the church to give us a starting point for how we go about mission. Since the models of Church are vastly different, I will simplify them to the four different categories of Church: Institution, Mystical Communion and Sacrament, Herald, and Servant that Avery Dulles uses in his book.

Institution

Dulles points to three assets of an institutional Church. First is the tradition. He highlights the importance of the traditions of the church. This would include the doctrines, sacramental understandings, the government structure and how it is that they can be traced back to Christ. He also points to the historical connection, how we are connected with the past and the past with us looking to the future. The third asset that he points to is

²¹ **Models of Communion in Mission is based on: Dulles, Avery. Models of the Church. (New York: Doubleday, 1987)**

the sense of corporateness that comes with the institutional model. The example of the institutional model Dulles points to is the Roman Catholic Church.

As a mission community, this model would focus on the corporate aspects of mission. It would highly rely on the traditions and doctrines of the groups that are in mission. It would also connect the mission to the past missions of that group and look forward to new missions with people who are currently in mission communities. An institutional mission will also bring with it the power, money, and support of the large institution of which it is a part. An example of the institutional mission might be the Southern Baptist Board of Missions, or the Presbyterian young adult mission volunteers, places where the missions are created and propagated by the church. Granted, I am not saying that this is an inherently wrong way of thinking about mission. I merely use these models to show that there are examples that are more institutional in nature, than others. A powerful example of an institutional church is the new Presbyterian Youth Connection. The premise is to teach youth about the Presbyterian connectionality.

Unfortunately, the institutional model has its problems. It discounts the smaller communities and often finds it is stuck in its tradition, unable to look at what is going on in the world today. It would be the church interested more in church growth than it would be in social justice. The institutional model also has the problem of being more wrapped up in being the institution than having a heart for the people for whom it was created.

Mystical Communion and Sacrament

This model of the Church is one that would, hopefully, bring people to the divine

communion. Thus, this is a spiritually driven model for the church. It looks to how the body of Christ is connected with the people of God through the Holy Spirit. It is also a model that transcends sociology. In other words, the mystical communion community exists regardless of the world around us. It is the body of Christ perpetrated through the Holy Spirit to create a communion with the divine.

It suggests that the church actually becomes a model for grace and a sign of the work of Christ in this world. Thus, one might be able to find salvation through the church. Though Dulles comes short, he does suggest that the church becomes a model of an outward sign of God's inward grace. Seeing the church as sacrament also places Christ's real presence within the church.

By far, the mission communion model highlights the understanding of *Missio Dei* that in mission we gain a special relationship with God. It places an emphasis on the relationships within the community as well as the relationship with God. This model also allows for a layer of mystery, noticing that it does not have all the answers. In mission, this is important for it is that mystery which allows us the possibility to accept the way in which God may be working differently among different people.

This model, too, is subject to its own excesses. The amount of mystery and diversity can run into the creation of a sense of dualism. The amount of mystery can also cause a church to dwell so far in that mystery that they, too, lose sight of God. In mission, this model could also cause problems. Since it is based on the community, it could create itself to be an exclusive community, one that is so wrapped up in its own communion that it fails to see how God is at work outside of that community.

As a model for mission, a sacramental understanding would point to how God participates in mission through the mission itself, and the mission, itself, becomes sacramental. Thus, it is an activity of Christ and Christ is actually present within the mission. A sacramental community would focus on the grace which God gives through the sacraments. Therefore, a sacramentally emphasized mission might be less on Biblical or doctrinal issues and more focused on the common witness of those in the community. This, too, could be its downfall. As a mission centered around a sacramental understanding it could create faith without foundation. Faith without foundation is always subject to being blown away when times get tough.

Herald

The focus of the church as Herald is that the Church has received an official message from God and is told then to pass it on. The heralds' focus is on the proper word to be preached. Whereas the institutional model might disseminate the word from doctrine or tradition, the herald is focused on preaching the proper word. For those who would follow the herald approach, the proper word comes from the historical Jesus and the original version (or the closest which we can come) of the Bible.

A model of mission based in the herald model would focus on spreading mission through word. It would focus on learning the native language and translating the Bible into that language both in written form and in the form of sermons. Granted, this form of understanding mission has drawbacks. As mission, it places so much of an emphasis on the word that it may not be able to meet people where they are. This type of mission also

could place the word over social justice and focus so much on the word that it loses sight of how God is active in the word.

Servant

Avery Dulles points to this model as the "pastoral" model. Thus, a church that follows this model would pursue social justice. In other words, it would call for peace, an end to poverty and racism, and reconciliation with God and others. This understanding was most popular in the sixties and seventies, though with many it is still popular today. In most of the theological statements of the sixties, there was a definite social justice undertone. The servant model is especially found within the protestant works.

In a mission community the servant model is based on the idea that the one who does the work benefits the least from having that work done. However, there is a catch. The one who is doing the work gains a better understanding and relationship with God, thus, allowing those involved to reconcile with God. Unfortunately, this model too has its problems as well. Just like my original understandings about mission, it could place more of an emphasis on action than on relationship and reconciliation. It also becomes a problem because people could lose their identity and their call within the work which they are doing.

While every church follows, to some extent, all of these models, churches tend to highlight one or two. The church in which I grew up would tend to see mission as herald and servant, the church that I am in now would probably highlight mission as servant and mystical communion. I say that the church in which I grew up followed the herald and

servant model primarily because its focus in mission was how many people worked and what we did to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. When one would come back from a mission trip, rarely did anyone start with the relationships that they had made or the role that the worship had to do with their experiences, the reports almost always started with what they had done and how that spread the word of God. I know that, with every group mission trip in that church, they included elements of the Mystical Communion and Presbyterian structure, but rarely would people focus on those actions in relation to mission.

The Church that I now am now a member of embraces the mystical communion and servant models with more of a relational aspect. And, this is probably the way I have always approached mission, despite the church environment. Last year in my internship, I brought a group of people from my church, which is in Central Illinois, to the church where I was interning at in Chinatown in Oakland. It was amazing to see how the participants interacted in the mission and how the leaders felt about the work that was being done. They came for two purposes and that was clear after the first day. Their purposes were to build relationships and to find a way to serve the Lord.

I could probably give an example of every type of church model and mission understanding, but that would be futile. The important thing to note is that these models by their own inception, are insufficient. However, they help us in our understanding of how we approach mission and also help us to realize when we build a model of mission which excesses on one model and do not count for the others, we create an unbalanced model for mission. Fortunately, no matter what model we use, all of the models work toward the

mission of God, toward God's creation, re-creation, and reconciliation.

The Church of Christ could not perform its mission without some stable organizational features. It could not unite men of many nations into a well-knit community of conviction, commitment, and hope, and could not minister effectively to the needs of mankind, unless it had responsible officers and properly approved procedures.²²

On the same note, the church could not perform mission without a sense of community, the spirit, preaching or spreading the word, and work of the Lord. Like the statement given by Paul about being the body of Christ, this, too, helps us to realize that we need to work in mission with other denominations and other traditions witnessing and working toward the mission of God.

If we were to approach mission in only one way, we would alienate the rest of God's mission. We would not be participating in reconciliation, and we would not be working in a manner open to seeing how God may be at work in the particular societies. This is important so that we may not force others to accept our way of worship over theirs. As

²² Dulles, Avery. *Models of the Church*. (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 34-35.

I have said before, I gravitate toward looking at my participation in mission as Mystical Communion and Servant. Thus, as I leave seminary, and find my place within the church, I will look for those who gravitate toward the other models. I will do so, in order that they may remind me not to forget those other aspects of the church, and that they, too, need to be part of our participation in the mission of God.

The Church and Mission Today

Mission is something which we can only participate in with God. We are human and unable to know all that is going on. When we are given the task of being in mission with God, we have to be comfortable with the fact that God is in control of the mission, and we are but a part of it. In the society in which I live, people find less and less of a need for the church, and even less of an interest in mission. The disinterest for both comes, probably, from the same place. That place being a one where the church or the mission became so focused on being the Church or the mission that they lost sight of God and that it is through God that both entities existed. In fact, they became like the child whom God asked to steer the world and all that child could think of was how much he got, when he got to eat, and when he got to go home. In the case of the church and that of mission today, many people focus on how many people were in the pews, or how many they had converted, how full they felt from doing good, and how high a place they would have in heaven for the work they had done. Granted, these models of both church and mission are probably more the exception than the rule; however, that is the concept that many people have toward both mission and the church.

As we look at what it means to be in mission with God, our first task is to get the churches focused on reconciliation. We need to get the churches focused on our relationship with God and finding ways that we can reconcile with our God and neighbor. I am afraid that by the time I am the age of the average student at SFTS that the PCUSA will not exist. I am not afraid that the church will not exist, not because of its work in reconciling

with other churches, but because the church is focused more on erroneous ideologies than on God. That, I think, is scary because it furthers us from our participation in the mission of God and does not allow for our reconciliation with him. Ideologies, whether that is conservative or liberal, by their nature come with very firm understandings of correctness and incorrectness. They are ridged and do not allow room for the sprit and room for us to find understanding. We need to get back to allowing a bit of mystery in our lives and in the church. If we come together with all of the answers, there is no room for God. Since there is no room for the Spirit, there is no room for God. Thus, we are not working toward reconciliation, and we are not working toward being in mission with God.

We also have a problem with young people. They are lost. Many in my generation have never heard of God's mission, and even fewer have a concept or even a clue of the church. As a young person, it frightens me that as I look beyond just my denomination to almost every other mainline denomination, to see young adults are being written off with the saying, "They'll come back when they're thirty." Unfortunately, studies suggest that they won't be coming back because most of them did not start in the church. Therefore, they cannot come back to something they were not exposed to as children. The church today is in a scary place, and it seems as if it is making the situation for itself even worse. Now, more than ever, we need to re-explore what it means to be in mission. We need to see how we can become a mission community, to reach out to those in our own communities who have not heard the word or those who just need the church.

Though I have only introduced two problems, there are many problems which place the church in a time of crisis and in need of a new-reformation. The two issues which I

brought up encapsulate the problem, the crisis as it were, that the church is facing. Simple, the church has lost sight of God in its pursuit to be the church. Our church has become institutionalized. It bases itself on the institutional model, following its traditions and doctrine to the exclusion, at times, of the community, God's grace, God's Word, and our service with God. We forget that we are part of God's mission. From the time of creation, through reconciliation and justification, to our continued sanctification, God is the one who is acting, not us. So, where is the hope? The hope is in the truth that God is the one that is in control of the Missio Dei, and not us. And, because God Loves us and reaches out to us, we can receive God's grace.

The peace of God experienced in the community and by its members could only be a false peace if limited to this circle and enjoyed only within it.²³

I have set out on a journey of discovery, trying to bring these elements and models of mission together to see how we can be part of the global mission of God while still being the local Church. Through this paper, I have realized that the theology, the word, the hope, and the grace in this paper are not new. The new reformation which I have called for in this paper is also not new. Viewing mission as *Missio Dei* is not new either, it too goes back to the Bible. The theology and understandings go back to the stories which we find in the Bible. The call by God to be active with God in God's mission goes back to creation itself.

The model for a missional local church is one that responds to the way in which God is working. It is a community which is both mystical and institutional, servant and herald. It brings together the aspects of institutional mission and church by highlighting the importance of the traditions of the church, pointing to the historical connection, and the sense of corporateness that comes with the institutional model. It would also bring aspects of a divine communion, spirit driven, looking at how the body of Christ is connected with the people of God through the Holy Spirit, placing an emphasis on the relationships within the community as well as the relationship with God. It would be an outward sign of God's

²³**Barth, Karl. Church Dogmatics vol. IV. "The Doctrine of Reconciliation" Trans. G. W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1962.), 764.**

inward grace, focusing on the grace that God gives through the sacraments. It would also focus on the proper word being preached, spreading mission through word. All of this would be done pastorally, pursuing social justice, the call for peace, an end poverty and racism, and reconciliation with God and others.

Though this model is really unattainable, the hope is that the missional local church would contain, to some extent, all of the models. With an understanding that we are part of God's mission, we are called to be working toward a reconciling relationship with God. We work toward this relationship because it is in the reconciling relationship that his Grace sanctifies us.

I originally saw this paper as laying a foundation for a new reformation and a call for a new reformation. Now, I see that a reformation has happened, at least for me. Since the beginning of time, God has been active in this world with his mission and has invited and called all the people in this world to be part of that mission. Though our relationship strays from him, we continually reconcile our lives toward God. And, because of God's loving Grace, he sanctifies us through the Holy Spirit that we are able to witness back to others. This is what connects the local church with the global mission. Though the local church may not be able to do mission outside of itself, it is part of God's mission, and, when it is true to what a missional church would be, then it is impacting the global Church.

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