

UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIAN MISSION

Participation in Suffering and Glory

SCOTT W. SUNQUIST


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17 18 19 20 21 22 23 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



This book is dedicated
with great respect
to my strong and gentle
pilgrim companion
on this missionary journey,
without whom this book
would not have been produced:
Nancy.

οὐχὶ ταῦτα ἔδει παθεῖν τὸν χριστὸν
καὶ εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ;
Was it not necessary that the Messiah
should *suffer* these things and then
enter into his *glory*?

Luke 24:26

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Preface

Christian mission is as personal as a missionary's daughter dying of malaria, and it is as cosmic as the restoration of all things. In between the two—expressed in the two—is suffering and glory. God's plan is incomprehensible unless we enter into discussion of both God's glory and the way of suffering. The great saints of the past knew this, Scripture reveals this, and the life of our Savior illustrates this basic truth of the *missio Dei*, the mission of God.

I have come to this conclusion through academic study, but also through personal experience and the testimony of some great missionaries and lesser-known saints of the past. There was a time when an introductory book of theology, social science, or history had to claim objectivity and neutrality. Today we know better. Objectivity is elusive, and we have learned something about the personal nature of knowledge. This volume makes no claim to be objective, but it does seek to give a clear understanding of Christian mission from a participant-observer position. My particular influences have come from my missionary work with my family (in East Asia), travels (mostly in Asia and Africa), scholarship, and teaching. I have been very fortunate to have worked the past twenty-five years in ecumenical contexts writing global (intercultural and ecumenical) history. This life of mission and scholarship has led me to produce a book that may seem to the reader more a description of missional Christian existence than an introduction to missiology.

The reader will find that this volume is held together by a cord of three strands: history, theology, and ecclesiology. It has become my conviction that the history and globalization of Christianity since the sixteenth-century reforms must be understood before pursuing the study of missiology. The work of the Jesuits in Asia and Latin America in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the work of the Moravians and German Lutherans in the eighteenth century are foundational for contemporary missiology. Their work in identifying with people in mission, in studying local contexts, and in taking

risks of personal identity are still germane to mission work today. Thus, I spend a great deal of time on Christian history (not just “mission history”)—mostly on the period from the sixteenth century on.

A historical study of Christian mission, however, must not stand alone. After looking at the historical contexts, it is necessary to think theologically and biblically about missiology. Missiology must be firmly rooted in a trinitarian understanding of God from which emerge various structures (means of accomplishing mission) and practices. However, even though I look at the theology of mission in a classical fashion (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), I am quite aware that our knowledge of God and of God’s mission is revealed contextually in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ reveals God and God’s desire for the nations to us.

Finally, missiology must become the work of the church in each age, to each place. This volume, then, is not an inductive piece where we simply look over the evidence of Scripture and then say, “See, that is what Christian mission is and that is what it does.” All such “inductive” works are slightly deceived, because we bring questions and experiences to our reading of history and of Scripture. Through both my life and my study, I have come to the following conclusion, which shall serve as the thesis of this book: *Mission is from the heart of God, to each context, and it is carried out in suffering in this world for God’s eternal glory.*

This may seem a little unconventional or eccentric for an introductory volume on mission, and yet there are basic concepts here that I believe are of central importance in the understanding of and integral participation in Christian mission. Firstly, we note that mission is from God’s heart—grounded in God’s love. Secondly, mission is to particular contexts—it is contextual or incarnational. Thirdly, mission has a temporal reality—it participates in the suffering of God. And, finally, it has an eternal dimension—reflecting God’s character, God’s glory.

In a rather remarkable piece of writing, one of the earliest Protestant mission theorists, Jonathan Edwards,¹ made the following comments about God’s mission in his *Dissertation Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*.

The emanation or communication of the divine fullness, consisting in the knowledge of God, love to God, and joy in God, has relation indeed both to God and the creature: but it has relation to God as its fountain, as it is an emanation from God; and as the communication itself, or thing communicated, is something divine, something of God, something of his internal fullness; as the water in the stream is something of the fountain; and as the beams are of the sun. And again, they have relation to God as they have respect to him as their object: for

1. See, for example, Ronald E. Davies, *Jonathan Edwards and His Influence on the Development of the Missionary Movement from Britain* (Cambridge: Currents in World Christianity Project, 1996).

the knowledge communicated is the knowledge of God; and so God is the object of the knowledge: and the love communicated, is the love of God; so God is the object of that love: and the happiness communicated, is joy in God; and so he is the object of the joy communicated. In the creature's knowing, esteeming, loving, rejoicing in, and praising God, the glory of God is both exhibited and acknowledged; his fullness is received and returned. Here is both an *emanation* and *remanation*. The refulgence shines upon and into the creature, and is reflected back to the luminary. The beams of glory come from God and are something of God, and are refunded back again to their original. So that the whole is *of* God, and *in* God, and *to* God; and God is the beginning, middle and end in this affair.²

Missiology, then, is viewed through the twin lenses of the human and the divine, the temporal and the infinite. There is an incarnational trajectory to this volume that will be revealed from chapter to chapter. We are participating with the Triune God who is always sending out to reconcile and redeem. If any consensus has developed about mission during the past century, it is that Christian mission is rooted in the mission of God (*missio Dei*) rather than in a particular task (planting churches) or a particular goal (making converts). Unfortunately, the concept of *missio Dei* has been a plastic one for many missiologists, taking the shape of almost any confessional family and being molded around most any theological system or contextual need. In this volume, we will assume that God's mission is the basic concern in studying Christian mission, but we will define the concept of *missio Dei* based on historical, biblical, and theological material. *Missio Dei* must be understood as a foundational concept that launches the church from the place of worship and fellowship into the frontiers of God's reign. Living such a life, participating with God in such a movement, is costly and painful, and yet, in the end, it is glorious.

A word needs to be said about suffering. Writing in an age described as postcolonial, but from the United States—a country recognized by many scholars today as an empire more than a nation-state—it may seem strange to raise the issue of suffering. The West has worked hard in the past centuries to avoid or placate all suffering. Modern science and technology is based on the commonly accepted goal of relieving suffering and making life, from cradle to grave, easier. Science is even in the secular business of being the healer and conqueror of death. A truly contextual missiology, one might suggest, should emphasize victory and conquest, not suffering. In contrast to our culture, however, we believe that *God* is the one who heals and conquers death. We also see, however, that God does not heal all illnesses, and we believe that God enters into our suffering and endures our death and alienation. Suffering is inescapable as a central element in God's redemption. It is one of the central concepts in this volume for two reasons.

2. Jonathan Edwards, *Ethical Writings: The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 8:435.

Firstly, having started out in life fairly well-protected from suffering, I was exposed to human suffering during our sojourn in Asia. The masses of people sleeping alongside the road in the metropolis of Madras (Chennai), the pictures of thousands suffering from disease and unhealthy water during the annual monsoon floods in Bangladesh, and the millions of people living in squalor—drinking from the same river they bathe in—in Jakarta began to open my eyes to the reality of suffering. Then there came news reports from Christian leaders in Indonesia, Vietnam, Laos, India, and other countries of persecution from Muslim mobs, Communist governments, or Hindu fundamentalists. And then I began to work through the research for writing volume 2 of *History of the World Christian Movement*. The overwhelming and sustaining image that I came away with is of the massive suffering of Christians as Christianity has developed in each new region. Suffering is very much a part of Christian existence, as well as human existence in general. On top of all of this “observation” of human suffering came my own experience of suffering. I suppose we will all suffer the loss of friends, family, and/or fortune at some point, but sudden, tragic loss leaves scars and redirects thoughts and life decisions. Thus suffering has become a part of my thought and my life as I study and participate in God’s mission.

Secondly, I have learned of suffering in my biblical study. A few years ago, I spent a year in 1 Peter. I read through the text many times in English and then worked through it verse by verse in Greek; my Greek only slightly improved, but my understanding of the book got much better. I can still remember the impact the first chapter had on me. We are chosen pilgrims, wandering around with something of far greater value than gold: “an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade . . . kept in heaven for you. . . . In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials” (1 Pet. 1:4, 6). What struck me then, and what has stayed with me, is the permanence of the inheritance (also called salvation) and the fading memory of suffering. The argument is clinched in 1:10–11:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

The sufferings of Jesus Christ and the glory that would follow—this was the key that the prophets looked for, and this is the identity of the Messiah that stays with us today. As people who participate in Christ’s salvation, we also are called through suffering (which is temporary) to that which is glorious (and eternal).

What follows has been shaped by others, both saints in our age and saints in the history of the church, but I have put it together in the form you now see. I trust that you will suffer through it . . . to the glory of God.

Introduction

What you are about to read is an introductory book on missiology: the study of Christian mission. Unlike biology (the study of living things) or even Christology (the study of the person and work of Christ), the study of missiology as an academic discipline has developed fairly recently. Many students of theology, and even more church members, know more about the meaning of psychology or necrology, than of missiology. There is some confusion as to whether missiology is basically a practical science that helps missionaries prepare for their work, whether it is a historical science that reveals a different dimension of church history, or whether it is a theological discipline that broadens or realigns theological studies.¹ Mission, like liturgy, pastoral care, or preaching, is rooted in right thinking about the task, but it must also involve a practice. Although there are practical outcomes and specific practices that will be encouraged or discouraged, what the individual, church, or society actually does is rooted in what they think about God, humanity, the church, and the world. Therefore, as an introduction, this book is primarily concerned with right thinking about Christian mission, right thinking about the church, and pointing toward faithful practices.

This is a theological inquiry rooted in an understanding of God that is informed by most other areas of theological studies: biblical studies, hermeneutics,

1. See Francis Anekwe Oborji, *Concepts of Mission: The Evolution of Contemporary Missiology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), especially chap. 2, “Mission and the Growth of Missiology in Theological Education” (41–56). Also see the bibliography for a range of approaches to the study of Christian mission. Stanley H. Skreslet provides a helpful overview of the issues involved in the study of missiology in “Who Studies Christian Mission and Why?” in *Comprehending Mission: The Questions, Methods, Themes, Problems, and Prospects of Missiology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), 1–20. In general, evangelical missiology books focus more on motivation, biblical foundations, and practice, whereas ecumenical studies focus more on theory, theology, and history.

history, practical theology, ecclesiology, and ethics. Other supportive areas such as cultural anthropology, sociology of religion, history of religions, and psychology feed into the study, but part of the argument of this book is that missiology must resist being taken captive by the social sciences.² Missiology is first concerned with thinking correctly about the Triune God—the God who by his very nature is a sending God—rather than with particular practices or programs. In fact, until fairly recently in Christian history, the word “mission” (sending) was used in theological discourse of the Trinity, not of missionary practices. The Father sending the Son and the Father and Son sending the Holy Spirit was a “mission” discussion. It was not until late in the sixteenth century that the early Jesuits first used the word *missio* to speak of Christian people being sent to non-Christian people.³ It has been commonly accepted since the late eighteenth century that “mission” primarily refers to the church’s task to carry out the will of the Father in the world. Again, my point is that such work must be grounded in right thinking. Good practice flows out of good thinking in context. Although this is not a book on the history of missiology, it is important to look briefly at the discipline’s history in order to understand the approach this book will take.

History of the Concept and the Study of Christian Mission

Many disciplines that we commonly accept as standard fare today are actually very new to the social sciences and to tertiary education. The academic disciplines of sociology, economics, and anthropology are less than 150 years old. In fact, it took about half a century for those three disciplines to become distinct. In the wake (or we might say the exhaust) of the industrial revolution, scholars began to study the worsening conditions of cities and realized that they were using new approaches involving the study of human activity *in communities*. One of the great proponents of these rising studies was a scholar who became something of a patron saint for sociology: Charles Darwin. These new social scientists (in the mid- to late nineteenth century) were working under the evolutionary and progressive assumptions that all societies would move forward to a higher level of existence (eugenics), and it was therefore the ethical imperative of scholars to help each society to move “up” (social Darwinism). At best, this was expressed as the social gospel; at worst it was

2. The captivity of missiology to the social sciences is not determined by one’s theology. Conservative, fundamentalist, Pentecostal, and liberal theologians are equally prone to such captivity. When missiology turns into sociological studies of what “works,” then we have turned away from proper missiological centeredness on the knowledge of God and the *missio Dei* as revealed in the life of Jesus Christ.

3. From David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 1.

“the white man’s burden” to help lesser peoples. Only in the early twentieth century did the social sciences begin to take on clearer definition. Today they are firmly entrenched in our liberal arts curriculum. It is hard to imagine an “educated” college graduate in the twenty-first century who has not spent at least some time in the well-established disciplines of sociology and economics.

Missiology also began to develop as a field of study in the nineteenth century; however, mission studies had little institutional support until the latter part of the twentieth century.⁴ Both disciplines were initiated by the movement of people: the social sciences by urbanization (the movement of people to cities), and mission studies by the movement of missionaries around the world. Careful critical reflection upon mission did not really develop until *after* the modern missionary movement began (nineteenth century).⁵

There had, however, been some earlier attempts to promote missional reflection—in the shadow of the Crusades and of ongoing Muslim presence in southern and eastern Europe.⁶ In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, there were three important theological figures who began to engage in missiological thinking: St. Raymond of Pennyfort, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Raymond Lull.⁷ Raymond of Pennyfort (1175–1275) had a special concern to confront the “infidels,” not through war, but through preaching (he was true to his Dominican order: the order of preachers). Concerned that a way should be found for Muslims and Jews to convert and be baptized, he requested the greatest scholar of the age, Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), to write a handbook to encourage their conversion. Thomas’s smaller summa, the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, is a type of systematic theology with the Jewish or Muslim neighbor in mind. In fact, it provides us with a rather complex summary of mid-thirteenth-century knowledge. Still, in the back of his mind was the need to explain Christian thought to non-Christians. It was a scholastic,

4. For a comprehensive history of the study of mission, missions, or missiology, see Johannes Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 18–88; David Bosch speaks about paradigm shifts in the understanding and practice of mission rather than in the academic study of mission (*Transforming Mission*, chaps. 5–10); see also Olav Myklebust, *The Study of Missions in Theological Education*, 2 vols. (Oslo: Hovedkommissjon Forlaget Land og Kirke, 1955–57). Roman Catholic perspectives on this history are given by Karl Müller, *Mission Theology: An Introduction* (Nettetal: Steyer Verlag-Wort und Werk, 1987), 30–50; and Oborji, *Concepts of Mission*, 41–50.

5. There is one major earlier exception to this. According to Jan A. B. Jongeneel (*Philosophy, Science, and the Theology of Mission in the 19th and 20th Centuries* [Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997], 2:19), it was Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676), founder of Utrecht University, who first did systematic Protestant reflection on Christian mission.

6. In chap. 1 we will look at the earlier missiological reflection and strategies. Here we look at the earliest reflections and then the development of the discipline of missiology.

7. We could easily add Dominic de Guzman (St. Dominic) and Francis Bernidone (St. Francis), since both were motivated to preach and serve in ways that would extend the church across boundaries. However, neither developed a “missiology” that was different from other religious orders in the middle ages.

Christendom apologetic with a missiological heart and mind behind it: the earliest missiology undertaken.

Raymond Lull (Raimundo Lulio, 1232–1315), one of the first missiologists, was a practitioner, a theoretician, and a strategist. Lull, like his namesake from Pennyfort, was a Spaniard who had an interest in reaching out to Muslims. His concern was to “conquer” the “Mohammedans”—through prayer rather than violence. To this end, he argued for missionaries to be trained not only in Scripture and theology, but also in languages such as Arabic, Hebrew, and “Chaldean.” Lull made three trips to North Africa, and on the third trip he was stoned by an angry Muslim mob in Tunisia. He eventually died from his wounds on his home island of Majorca.⁸ Lull had developed a whole strategy of evangelism, apologetics, and language study for the sake of a more proper engagement of the Roman Catholic Church with Islam. As is often the case with mission in the church, Lull’s ideas and concerns were marginalized by the church in his time; militant models overwhelmed his missional model. Until the time of the Jesuits in the late sixteenth century, there was no one else who took such a missional approach to the church and to theology.

The modern practice and reflection upon mission begins with the Jesuits⁹ in the late sixteenth century, and continues with discussions among the orders and then the arrival of the first Protestants in India, the Caribbean, and Africa in the eighteenth century. The contemporary academic study of missiology, as we know it now in seminaries and Christian colleges, is mostly the result of reflection upon the work of this modern mission movement.¹⁰

The first series of mission lectures that we know of were those given by Johann Friedrich Flatt (1759–1821) in 1800 at the University in Tübingen. As with most early lectures on mission subjects, these intersected the fields of practical theology, ethics, and biblical study. It seems there was no follow-up. In 1832 we read of J. T. L. Danz of Jena, a church historian, writing about the “study of missions” as if it were becoming a discipline, but in fact the “study” was slow in coming. It was another thirty-two years (1864) before a clear plea for the study of missiology was made, this time by Karl Graul (1814–64), the director of the Leipzig Mission. By this time, mission study was slowly becoming a concern of both mission societies and universities. In words that could almost be used today, Graul said, “This discipline must gradually come to the point where she holds her head up high; she has a right to ask for a place in the house of the most royal of all science, namely,

8. Majorca (Mallorca) is an island off the east coast of Spain that was ruled by various Muslim rulers until 1229, when it was annexed to Aragon.

9. This is not exactly true, for the earliest Augustinians, Franciscans, and Dominicans in the Americas and in Africa were thinking about their task and translating Scriptures, prayers, and catechisms in the early sixteenth century. See chap. 2 for more discussion of their work.

10. For further study of history of mission studies, see Jongeneel’s *Philosophy, Science, and the Theology of Mission*.

theology.”¹¹ Unfortunately, whether because of the rising secularization of Western education, or the embarrassment of symbiotic empire and missionary enterprises, the discipline never reached a point where “she [could] hold her head up high.” Even today, when those of us who are teachers of missiology introduce ourselves as such, we cringe, hoping that we don’t have to explain exactly what this means.

The first major move forward for mission education in Europe was the establishment of a chair in “Evangelistic Theology” at New College, Edinburgh, in 1867. The first occupant was the person who proposed establishing the chair, the famous Scottish missionary to India Alexander Duff. This chair is often cited as the first professorship in missions in all of Christendom,¹² so the title of the chair teaches us something about the understanding of the discipline at that time. Evangelism was seen as the core of Christian mission and missionary work, and mission was studied as a theological discipline. (At other times, however, mission has been studied as a practical discipline, or as a historical discipline.) By the time this first chair was abolished, mission study was much more accepted in Western Europe. Ironically, this chair in mission, or evangelistic theology, was abolished the year before an epoch-making missionary conference was held in the very same buildings: the 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference.

While in Europe mission studies were becoming more established late in the nineteenth century, in North America another Presbyterian seminary was pioneering in the area of mission studies. Princeton Theological Seminary established a chair in “Pastoral Theology and Missionary Instruction” in 1836, at about the time the first Presbyterian Mission Board was being established (Synod of Pittsburgh, PA, 1837). Again, the title of the chair is telling: the Princeton Presbyterians identified mission studies with pastoral theology, and considered it a practical rather than theological discipline. Unfortunately, the establishment of this chair reflected a temporary commitment to mission studies rather than a change in theological awareness (the chair ceased to exist in 1839).

More significant for the discipline than the establishment of these academic chairs were individuals and their scholarship. Gustav Warneck (1834–1910) is universally recognized as the pioneer missiologist. A professor and a prodigious writer from Halle University, Warneck founded the *Allgemeine Missions Zeitschrift*, the first missionary periodical for the “scientific study of mission,” in 1874 and published the first survey of Protestant missions in 1901 (*Abriss einer Geschichte der protestantischen Missionen von der Reformation bis auf die Gegenwart: ein Beitrag zur neueren Kirchengeschichte*). These publications

11. As quoted from Oborji, *Concepts of Mission*, 44.

12. Olav G. Myklebust, *The Study of Missions in Theological Education* (Oslo: Egede Institute, 1955), 187.

began the study of mission history and, at the same time, began the division in theological discipline between mission history and church history. This was an advantage for the study of mission in some ways, but the artificial dichotomy it created also did much to isolate missiology from the rest of the theological curriculum. Comprehensive global Christian histories, histories that did not divide mission from the rest of the church, were not undertaken until the beginning of the twenty-first century.¹³ In most educational institutions there are still two types of history being taught (or, in many cases, one type being neglected). Warneck also published the first textbook on the study of missiology (*Evangelische Missionslehre*, in 5 volumes, 1892–1905). Following his lead, Josef Schmidlin (1876–1944), also a German, pioneered Roman Catholic missiology. Schmidlin died in one of Hitler’s concentration camps in 1944, and Warneck died almost at the very time of the Edinburgh Missionary Conference in 1910.

With these two major figures, missiological studies expanded in North America and Europe. A chair in mission studies was established at the Roman Catholic faculty in Münster in 1910, at Rome’s Gregorian University in 1923, and at Urban University in 1933. Other Roman Catholic schools followed, but in both Roman Catholic and Protestant schools missiology did not become a standard part of the theological curriculum, as other new practical disciplines (homiletics, pastoral counseling, pastoral care, etc.) or theological disciplines (ecclesiology, contextual theology). “Mission was something completely on the periphery (and this was most noticeable in Protestantism) and did not evoke any theological interest worth mentioning.”¹⁴ Even without a clear place within the wider theological discipline, mission studies prospered during the twentieth century due to the growth of missions and missionary engagement, and also because of the developing ecumenical movement. As we will see in the next chapter, the International Missionary Council produced or provoked much of the richest missiological reflection of the first six decades of the twentieth century. Some of the greatest theologians of the age (Barth, Brunner, Bonhoeffer, Visser’t Hooft, Blauw, Hoekendijk, and Newbigin) were involved in its discussions and publications. Mission societies for the academic study of mission were also developed: the Fellowship of Professors of Mission of the Atlantic Seaboard (1917), the International Association of Mission Studies (1966/1972), the Association of Professors of Missions (1952),¹⁵ the Association of Evangelical Professors of Missions (1965), the Association of Evangelical Professors of Missions (1968, later renamed the Evangelical Missiological Society in 1990), the American Society of Missiology (1972), and the International Association

13. One of the first would be Dale Irvin and Scott Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement*, 2 vols. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001–12).

14. Oborji, *Concepts of Mission*, 46.

15. Prior to the 1960s, “missions” (with an “s”) was the term used to describe God’s mission. The change to contemporary parlance took place in the 1960s and 1970s.

of Catholic Missiologists (2000). Many other societies were organized to promote, organize, or strategize for world mission, but those mentioned above were primarily established for the study of Christian mission.

Mission, Missions, Missionary, Missiology, Missional: What Is in a Word?

Most companies in the twentieth century have a mission, a purpose, a method, and a goal for making products and providing services. McDonald's mission, for example, is "to be our customers' favorite place and way to eat." Contemporary culture has co-opted the word "mission," which was originally used of the Trinity and then of God's mission to the world. I want to be clear about word usage from the beginning, so I offer a few brief definitions. "Mission" is the overarching term describing God's mission in the world (the *missio Dei*), or Christian mission in general. Thus, when I use "mission" (in the singular), I am talking about the *missio Dei*, the mission of God to bring about redemption of the world, or human participation in this mission. In the plural—"missions"—I am generally talking about particular mission societies or organizations. Consistency is lacking in this distinction, for there are many lay people and some mission authors who talk about teaching or studying "missions," when what they are really studying is the larger topic of the mission of God. I will be consistent in this volume, speaking of missions only when I am talking about organizations or institutions that carry out God's mission.

The third term may seem obvious, but it has engendered some controversy in the last four decades. A "missionary" is, quite simply, one who is sent. Theologically speaking, the missionary is sent by God (John 20:21), but practically and ecclesiologicaly, a missionary is sent by a church or an ecclesiastical body. When a missionary is sent by one of thousands of missions, there is still the need for a local church to be the primary sending body, since mission is the work of the church—the church universal, through a local, particular church. The controversy over the term "missionary" in past decades comes from the assumed imperialistic or paternalistic baggage that is associated with it. In an effort to achieve distance from older missionary models, other terms have been suggested and tried, but none of the alternatives caught on, since to change a biblical term¹⁶ requires the ecumenical church to harmoniously affirm the new vocabulary. "Fraternal workers" was tried for a while but, as concern for women's rights grew, this gender-exclusive term was dropped. Next the term "mission co-workers" was tried, but it was rather clumsy, and

16. "Missionary" is a biblical term because it is simply the Latin word *missio* (to "send") used to translate the Greek word for "apostle" (*apostello*), meaning "sent one." The apostles were sent ones, and so the clear connection of disciples of Jesus Christ being sent ones is lost if we drop the usage of "missionary."

most non-Western church leaders simplified it to missionary anyway. Thus “missionary” is still the universally accepted term, even for those who are engaged missionally as tent-makers. A missionary is an apostle, one who is sent from the heart of God to proclaim the present and coming Kingdom of God to all the nations of the earth.

The fourth term, “missiology,” is simply the study of God’s mission. This study (which is the subject of this book) involves using the following academic disciplines: the social sciences (especially sociology and cultural anthropology), theology, biblical interpretation, Christian history, study of religions, and practical theology. Depending upon the institution and the missiologist, the study of missiology may be more of a practical science, a historical science, or a theological and philosophical study. I will call upon all of these disciplines in this volume, but my predisposition is to comprehend missiology as more of a theological concern, rooted in careful biblical and historical work. Practical applications are so varied that to focus on approaches, methods, or specific practices is much too limiting (too culturally specific). Thus, we begin with what is commonly accepted by theologians and missiologists today throughout the world: we study missiology as the *missio Dei*, or the mission of God.¹⁷ This expression became a major theme in missiological discussions after World War II and put missiological study in a whole new theological universe. Missiological discussion now begins not with what the church should do, or what a missionary must believe (or do), but with what God has done and what God is doing. Our role, as we participate with God in his mission to his creation, is to respond in obedience, gratitude, and joy. This is obviously a much broader and inclusive definition of mission; it is also a much deeper, even mysterious, missiological understanding. We begin with the deep work of God in confronting the powers and conquering death and evil, and we follow through with his work of reconciliation, peace, and even glorification. Mission is not only about planting churches; it is a much more profound and, we might say, more foundational work. Missiology is, then, a major dimension of theological study. It is a study that moves toward an understanding of God; it is a study of God’s nature and activity in sending to his creation prophets, priests, kings, and even his own Son to bring about and then announce the redemption of his world.

The fifth and final term is the newest of our terms. In fact, the adjectival form of mission, “missional,” was coined in the 1990s in an effort to recover the missionary nature of every local church. The recovery of the local church’s missionary vocation came as a result of theological discussions in

17. An excellent survey of the use of the term *missio Dei* is found in the PhD dissertation of John Flett, “God Is a Missionary God: *Missio Dei*, Karl Barth, and the Doctrine of the Trinity” (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2007). It was revised and published as *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

the ecumenical movement beginning with the 1938 Tambaram (Madras) International Missionary Council (IMC) meeting. This opened up a discussion that continued through the rest of the century on what it means, theologically and practically, for the church—for any and every local church—to participate in God’s mission.

The decline of Christianity in the West and the advent of Asian religions in the cities of the West revealed the need for local churches to assume their missional nature once again. When most of the surrounding culture was Christian, or at least tolerant of Christian values and holidays, it was easy for Western churches to forget the missional nature of the church. It was George Hunsberger and the “Gospel in Our Context” movement who, through publications, workshops, and conferences, raised the issue and gave meaning to the new adjectival use of mission. Today, there is much confusion over what it means to be a “missional church,” but I use it here to mean the responsibility of each and every church to participate in God’s mission in all its fullness.

Theology Starts with Mission

Missiological reflection is both the context of all theology and the first movement in theological reflection. This understanding of theology as coming out of the reflection of the faith on the frontiers of faith is commonly accepted today. The earliest Christian theological reflections are found in the New Testament. Luke’s two-part volume was written while on a missionary journey. Paul’s letter to the Romans was written to prepare the way for his missionary visit to Rome, as he passed through on his way to Spain. He wrote theology as a church planter, “on a mission.” In fact, each of the New Testament writings comes out of the missionary engagement of the church with the world. Therefore, it is necessary to have a missional hermeneutic for reading the Bible—but especially for reading the New Testament.¹⁸ The New Testament writings were reflections on missiological praxis.

18. C. J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 2006). Part 1, “The Bible and Mission,” provides a missional hermeneutic for reading the Bible. See also the pioneering article by James V. Brownson, “Speaking the Truth

Missiology Applied to the West

It was J. E. Lesslie Newbigin, English Presbyterian missionary to India, who developed missional thought for the Western church. His writings, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, influenced the thinking of Western missiologists and church leaders who were no longer thinking theoretically about churches in the West having a missional responsibility. Newbigin identified that the West had become a mission field.

The Martyrdom of Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna

This work of the apostolic fathers was written from one church (Smyrna) to another church (Philomelium) as an encouragement—describing how their bishop gave a faithful “testimony” (witness, or *martyria*) in his life and his death. He himself was the missionary encounter between faith and non-faith, and his story then became a testimony to others. When we read both of his martyrdom and then his letter to the Christians at Philippi, we realize that Polycarp was a type of missionary bishop, concerned with the spread of the faith and the integrity of the church.

As we move out of the earliest period of Christian writings and into the second and third centuries, we discover that these writings also come out of the context of a missionary engagement. Most of the major Christian writings of this period are apologetic in nature, either addressed to people in authority defending the Christian belief and cause or written to strengthen the Christian community in its witness to the broader culture. Origen’s famous response to Celsus’s attacks on Christianity (*Contra Celsum*) is quite typical of the period; theological awareness, reflection, and writing are based in the missionary encounter. This has always been the case, and it is still the case today.¹⁹ “Mission is the mother

of theology,” as well as the mother of the New Testament texts.²⁰ Neither the second- and third-century writers, nor the New Testament writers, were systematic theologians sitting in ivy-covered citadels contemplating the character and will of God. They were persecuted, hurried, and harried apostles (read “missionaries”) challenging the religious, political, and social structures of their time—proclaiming a Kingdom that was above all kingdoms and authorities of this world. It was this mission that birthed biblical and theological reflection.

Some Definitions of Mission

How do we define mission? As David Bosch once said during an informal discussion in Princeton, “Christian mission is the church crossing frontiers. There must be some crossing of barriers—whether they be linguistic, economic, cultural, or religious—and there must be some communication of the message

in Love: Elements of a Missional Hermeneutic,” *International Review of Missions* 83 (July 1994): 479–504.

19. For further discussion of the missiological dimension of theology, see Andrew Kirk’s chapter “What Is Theology? And Theology of Mission?” in his book *What Is Mission? Theological Explorations* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), chap. 1. See also Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 489–98, for a discussion of “mission as theology.”

20. Martin Kähler, *Schriften zur Christologie und Mission* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1908), 190, translation from Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 16.

of Christ.”²¹ Like Bosch, we have already noted that mission involves both sending and the crossing of boundaries of faith or belief, but can we be more specific? Missiologists in recent years have given greater definition to mission, drawing on theological reflection, biblical studies, and the church’s engagement in mission. Before offering my own definition, then, it will be helpful to lay out some of the definitions that are currently being used by major missiologists.

David Bosch begins his magnum opus, *Transforming Mission*, with a three-page interim definition. He begins this section by saying that Christian faith is intrinsically missionary, and if it is not, “it denies its very *raison d’être*.”²² He explains further that mission will always remain indefinable and that the most we can hope for is to formulate some *approximations* of what mission is all about.

Bosch puts forward his own series of approximations on mission before his in-depth biblical, historical, and theological study of the *missio Dei*. At the end of his book, he says much more directly:

In our mission, we proclaim the incarnate, crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ, present among us in the Spirit and taking us into his future as “captives in triumphal procession.” . . . Mission is quite simply, the participation of Christians in the liberating mission of Jesus, wagering on a future that verifiable experience seems to belie. It is the good news of God’s love, incarnated in the witness of a community, for the sake of the world.²³

Andrew Kirk, in his book *What Is Mission?*, begins with a definition not of mission but of a related concept, theology of mission:

The theology of mission is a disciplined study which deals with questions that arise when people of faith seek to understand and fulfill God’s purposes in the world, as these are demonstrated in the ministry of Jesus Christ. It is a critical reflection on attitudes and actions adopted by Christians in pursuit of the missionary mandate. Its task is to validate, correct, and establish on better foundations the entire practice of mission.²⁴

What is important in both of these definitions is the understanding that there is a content or a theological understanding that is communicated in Christian mission. In later chapters, Kirk unfolds the meaning of Christian mission as announcing the good news; transforming cultures; providing justice for the poor; promoting encounter, dialogue, and witness among the religions of the world; building peace in a world of violence; and caring for the environment. Moreover, all this is to be done in partnership. Regarding mission to

21. In a discussion with faculty and PhD students in the history department at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1986.

22. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 8–11.

23. *Ibid.*, 518.

24. Kirk, *What Is Mission?*, 21.

Bosch Defines Mission

Missiologist David Bosch draws up a list of eleven approximations for understanding mission:^a

1. Mission involves the dynamic relationship between God and the world.
2. Mission cannot be directed by biblically immutable and objective laws of mission.
3. The entire Christian existence is missionary.
4. The church is missionary by its very nature.
5. There is no dichotomy between foreign and national missions.
6. Mission is grounded in the gospel itself.
7. The missionary task is “as coherent, broad, and deep as the need and exigencies of human life.”
8. Mission involves the whole church bringing the whole gospel to the whole world.
9. Mission is both God’s “yes” to the world and at the same time it is God’s “no.”
10. Mission includes the essential dimension of evangelism, but it is not synonymous with evangelism.
11. The church is a sign and sacrament for the world, pointing (as the first fruits) to the coming Kingdom.

a. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 8–11.

political life, the church’s mission is three-fold: prophetic task, servant task, and evangelistic task.

In a similar fashion, Francis Anekwe Oborji, a Nigerian Roman Catholic, includes numerous dimensions in his definition of worship. He writes of mission as conversion, church planting, inculturation, dialogue, service of God’s reign, ecumenical dialogue, and contextual theologies. In his conclusion, he focuses upon three themes that are central to a definition of Christian mission: proclamation, evangelization, and contextual theologies. He sees these three elements as working together with the clear goal of Christian mission being “evangelization and church formation.”²⁵

Bevans and Schroeder, in their book *Constants in Context*, also recognize the nexus of concerns that crop up when we try to define mission. As with the above books, much of their volume is written to try to give definition to the concept. However, in the first part of the book they follow the Conciliar and Roman Catholic trajectories from the World Council of Churches (“Conciliar”) and

25. Oborji, *Concepts of Mission*, 210.

from the Second Vatican Council (Roman Catholic), commenting that “mission takes the church beyond itself into history, into culture, into people’s lives, beckoning it constantly to ‘cross frontiers.’”²⁶ They remind the reader that “Christians are themselves called to witness and proclaim the good news to the world: ‘It is unthinkable that a person should accept the Word and give himself to the Kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in his turn.’”²⁷ Regarding the goal of mission, they note that the goal is not the expansion of the church for its own sake, but that people are invited into the church so that they can join a community dedicated to preaching, serving, and witnessing to God’s reign. At the end of their volume, they conclude: “There is one mission: the mission of God that is shared, by God’s grace, by the church. It has two directions, to the church itself (*ad intra*) and to the world (*ad extra*). . . . Mission has a basic three-fold office of word (*kerygma* or proclamation), action (*diakonia* or service), and being (*koinōnia* or *martyria*—community or witness/martyr).”²⁸

Bevans and Schroeder’s constants of Christian mission are questions that anchor theology and practice. There are many other definitions of mission that I could point to, but these four missiologists raise the important themes that we will be tracing in the coming pages.²⁹

Six Constants in Missiology

Bevans and Schroeder put forward six constants in Christian mission that transcend particular cultures, times, and places, so as to anchor the theology and practice of mission. They give these constants as questions:

1. Who is Jesus Christ and what is his meaning?
2. What is the nature of the Christian church?
3. How does the church regard its eschatological future?
4. What is the nature of the salvation it preaches?
5. How does the church value the human?
6. What is the value of human culture as the context in which the gospel is preached?^a

a. Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 34.

What Type of Missiology Is This?

This textbook is a missiology in three parts: a descriptive section (history); a prescriptive or constructive section (theology); and an issues section (contemporary themes). There is an internal logic to this outline. Before discussing

26. Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 8.

27. *Ibid.*, quoting from the Vatican II document *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 24.

28. Definitions in this passage are my own.

29. You will find my working definition of mission at the beginning of part 2.

missiology for today, we have to understand the historic context that has brought us to the place we are today. History reveals some of the divisions we have in missiological thinking, the way ideas have developed over time, and some of the successes and failures we have witnessed in carrying out God's mission. History will help us evaluate the critique of missions and empire, of missionaries creating "rice Christians," and of missionaries "making one more Christian and thus one less Chinese." We will also learn about some of the remarkable work missionaries have accomplished—work that will challenge our thinking about God's mission and our responsibility today.

Modern missiology really began with the Jesuits (Roman Catholic) in the sixteenth century and then with the Moravians (Protestant) in the eighteenth century. In both cases, modern missionary practice and thinking began at the fringes, not at the center, of Christendom. Questions that these pioneers raised are still relevant today. Does this mean that we denigrate the sacrificial work of earlier missionary encounters? Not at all. In fact, we will see the value of these earlier encounters in the constructive section in part 2 of this book.

Chapter 1 covers the earliest monastic missionary movement, as a foundation for the modern period. Chapters 2 and 3 examine the early modern mission (Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox) from the time of Xavier (1506–52) up to the middle of the nineteenth century. In the early nineteenth century, Protestant missions was just catching up to Roman Catholic missions; Protestants were still in a formative stage. After the middle of the nineteenth century, Roman Catholic missions were redeveloping after a near collapse in the shadow of the French Revolution, and Protestant missions were moving from the fringes to the center. I use the end of the Second Opium War in China (1842) as a cutoff point between early modern missiology and the period of history in which the missionary movement peaked.

Chapter 4 covers the zenith of the modern missionary movement, from 1842 to 1948. During this period, mission budgets were major financial outlays for churches in Europe and North America, mission was a dominant global concern, and the missionary force continued to grow, even through two world wars. The final history section, chapter 5, covers a turbulent period of Christian history that I refer to as the waning and reconception of Christian mission. The Western missionary force began to decline and missionary thought dissipated beginning in the 1960s. The year 1961 is an important marker, because it was the year of the integration of the International Missionary Council into the World Council of Churches, it was the year that the first Pentecostal churches joined the WCC, and it was also the year before the Second Vatican Council opened (1962–65)—in which Roman Catholic understanding of ecclesiology developed in new ways that greatly influenced both ecumenical relations and missionary work. This was also the beginning of the decline of Western mainline missions. Missionary work in the 1850s has more in common with missionary work in the 1950s than missionary work in the 1950s does with that of the 1970s.

I have called the period from the 1960s to the end of the twentieth century the “worldwide reversal” of Christianity. Chapter 5 also explores the postcolonial missiologies that developed in the last half of the twentieth century. This is the first chapter where the major players are global and ecumenical. Of the four streams of Christianity—Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Spiritual—it is the last that begins to assert itself above all others. The Spiritual churches include Pentecostal churches, but are mostly made up of churches that spring up through inspiration of the Holy Spirit: indigenous churches, unregistered churches, Muslim background churches, unbaptized believers, and culture Christians. Spiritual churches are defined by their authority coming from the Holy Spirit more than from a particular tradition. This final historical chapter (chap. 5) sets the stage for part 2 of this volume.

Part 2 is the constructive section, in which I develop a trinitarian model of missiology. Taking into account the last half of a millennium of missiological practice and thinking, and working with biblical texts, patristic texts, and contemporary trinitarian theology, I develop a missiology that is trinitarian, catholic, and evangelical. This is a tall order, but it is based upon some primary biblical concerns. First is the concern for unity. I take very seriously Jesus’s high priestly prayer in John 17 and that his major concerns are twofold regarding the glory of God: that God’s glory be revealed to all the world, and that the followers of Jesus be united in this mission of glory-revealing. This being the case, I will develop a theology of mission that is the following: trinitarian, meaning that it is rooted in the original meaning of *missio* in theological discussion (the sending nature of God); catholic, meaning that it includes all of the church; and evangelical, meaning that it is centered in the good news revealed in the life of Jesus Christ. This discussion takes up the heart of this volume, chapters 6 (the sending Father), 7 (the suffering and sacrificing Son), and 8 (presence, participation, and power of the Holy Spirit).

Finally, part 3 of this volume covers contemporary themes, or issues that are central to living out such a trinitarian theology of mission today. In chapter 9, I discuss the nature of the church and the practice of Christian life in the local church. There is much discussion and confusion about what the church is today, which is caused in part by confrontations with postmodern culture, as well as the growth of Christianity in persecuted regions. These two issues, plus the rapid decline of Christianity in the “Christian West,” have caused a rethinking of what the local church should be. I look at the local church as a place of community, worship, and mission. These are the constituent parts that make up the church, and they must be seen together as the expression of the Kingdom of God. In chapter 10, I look at the nature of the church as a witnessing community. “Witness” is a good word to sum up the missional presence of any Christian community, but what does it mean? In this chapter, I try to recover a holistic sense of witness and give examples of holistic witness as a catalyst to further thinking.

Chapter 11 focuses on a major concern of mission for the twenty-first century: mission and the city. Humankind has always formed communities that have expanded into towns and cities. We read of cities—both good (Jerusalem and the New Jerusalem) and evil (Babylon)—in the Bible. There are even books in the Bible named for cities: Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, and of course Romans. However, in the twenty-first century, cities have grown to such enormous size and complexity that missionary thinking must specifically look at what it means to be a missionary presence in these new megacities.

Chapter 12 discusses another major theme in missiological thinking today: global partnership. Here I respond to the global occurrence of Christian communities in most regions of the world. Partnerships of all types are developing between churches, missions, leaders, and governing bodies throughout the world. How is this faithful participation in God’s mission, and what are the concerns that need to be addressed? Finally, in chapter 13, I look at mission and spirituality, remembering the earliest missionary work that grew out of spiritual vitality and spiritual discipline (monastic). This is a chapter that is, I believe, unique among books on mission. Many of the earliest missionary writings came out of deep spiritual experiences, and many of these writings became spiritual “best sellers.” Christian mission is a matter of the heart as well as the head, a matter of devotion as well as decision. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of both the Jesuit missions and the Spiritual Exercises is a reminder that the warp of spirituality and the woof of mission make up one fabric.

The three parts of this book are approached with nine guiding contextual concerns. Twenty years from now, these concerns may be different, meaning that this theology of mission would look different as well. It is the very nature of theology—especially of missiology—that it both comes out of specific contexts and speaks to specific contexts. Thus, there is a place for an ecumenical missiology, but there is also a place for local missiologies that speak to specific contexts and situations. A missiology for China today would raise different issues than a missiology for Iceland or Peru. Still, an ecumenical missiology such as this one is needed to see the overall *missio Dei* as being one: “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:4–6). In the following section I identify the major contextual concerns that have guided this volume.

Nine Contextual Concerns

1. Theology must be *ecumenically informed* (globally and from many church confessional families). As I mentioned above, it is just not acceptable for churches, denominations, missions, or individuals to move forward in mission

as if they are the only ones faithful in mission. It takes great humility to work with others, but theologically it is absolutely necessary that we work to express our missiology as one. To this end, this volume is part of a growing body of missiological literature dedicated to listening to others and to Scripture, and to speaking words that will bring Christians together in this great global, and even cosmic, work of the church.

2. This study is based upon the assumption that *all Christian mission is inadequate*, but that all Christian mission has its own significance. Therefore, a theology of mission must be big enough to include various strands of Christianity that express the *missio Dei*. However, a missiology must also be focused enough to be distinguished from the Rotary or local Garden Club. I try to say some things very clearly and boldly, but also to give proper latitude to the breadth of God's work in the world. In our world of both Christian divisions and Christian persecution, it is necessary to embrace clarity and charity.

3. My work is built with the conscious realization of *three twenty-first-century characteristics of Christianity*. Firstly, Christianity is mostly non-Western. Any mission text or mission conference that was held before the 1980s was dealing with a different context, in which most of the church, and most of the missionaries, came from the North Atlantic. This is not true today. With each day, the percentage of Western Christians and Western Christian missionaries is declining. Secondly, Christianity is growing outside the older boundaries of Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox churches. The shift to spiritual and indigenous forms of Christianity occurred throughout the twentieth century, but shifted most dramatically after World War II, with the rise of decolonialization. This makes discussion about missions and churches much more difficult. Newer associations have developed, newer churches and groupings of churches have emerged, redrawing the ecclesial and missions maps. In the 1950s we could talk about the documents of the World Council of Churches and know that they represented much of the Protestant mission thinking in the world. This is no longer the case.

Thirdly, global Christianity in the twenty-first century is much less “modern”—meaning organized, rational, and pyramid-like in organization. Spiritual churches are, by their very nature, led by the Spirit, and the Spirit, like the wind (John 3), is neither predictable nor organized (as we would understand order). The Protestant church in China is a good example of what we are talking about. The very organized church in China (China Christian Council) is becoming increasingly marginalized, and the mass movement of Christianity toward unregistered churches is the main story. However, it is very hard to get statistics on unregistered churches, and it is even more difficult to discover their “order” or organization. Christianity is much more of a movement than an institution in the twenty-first century, although it is always both. In short, Christianity today is more pneumatic than in recent centuries. Some of this will come out in chapter 5, on the contemporary context of mission, but it needs

to be stated upfront that the postmodern world, a world that is “flatter”³⁰ and more globalized than ever before, is our context for missionary engagement.

4. I write with an awareness that the major issues of missiology today have to do with *religious encounters, political presence, and ongoing human-induced tragedies* (starvation, disease, violence, etc.). These are the practical and real concerns that will always be at our prayer altar as we study the subject matter. In some ways, these issues have always been the context of missionary activity, but with the rise of contemporary communications and global connectedness, we must deal with these issues more directly than ever before. It is very important to hold these issues before us, because the global media does not share the same compassion for the world. Popular media, by its very nature, can only focus upon a few “sensational” and “attractive” areas of suffering. Christian missionary involvement must not be bound to what is popular, popularly known, or even what seems like “viable” mission. All of the suffering world is the concern of the *missio Dei*, and therefore of our missiology.

5. It is important to be clear *who the dialogue partners are* in such a task. There are numerous writers, mission leaders, and theologians with whom I could interact. I have limited myself, however, to a few of the major figures. These include the following: David Bosch, Andrew Kirk, Lesslie Newbigin, Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, Francis A. Oborji, Timothy Tennent, Vinoth Ramachandra, Paul Knitter, Matteo Ricci, Ludwig von Zinzendorf, the Cappadocians, and others from the ancient church (Simeon the New Theologian, Ephrem, Narsai, Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus, and the “solitaries” of *The Philokalia*). It is a mixed group, but it is a good representation of the contemporary, the early modern, and the ancient—of East and West. The mixture of conversation partners is intentional, and is intended to guide us through contemporary discussions while keeping us rooted in the Great Tradition of the church. Loss of the grounding or ballast of tradition may cause us to misrepresent God’s mission and God’s people. While modern contextual theologies are being developed—and are serving the church well—there is at the same time the need to look back and remember the lifeline that we are all part of. There is, at root, one Christianity and one church—as diverse and conflicted as it often appears.

6. I believe that mission is really a *dimension of our spirituality*, not a contrast to it. Bosch’s *Spirituality of the Road*³¹ is a reminder that missional engagement must be understood as a matter of identification with Christ. Whether a church or a person engages in mission and how that mission is done is more a matter of spirituality than anything else. Thus, from the be-

30. See Thomas Friedman’s *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the 21st Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2005).

31. This book is a compilation of lectures Bosch gave to the Mennonite Missionary Study Fellowship in 1978. It was published by Herald in 1979 and reissued in 2001.

ginning, I do not think of mission primarily as a practical science, but more as a spiritual theology. It brings together theological study and personal and corporate piety.

7. In writing this volume, I have some contemporary encounters before me that remind me of *Christianity's uniqueness*. In the West today we are conflicted about uniqueness. We want to affirm each community's right to define its own terms, its own reality. At its best, this is radical communal integrity, but at worst, this is radical communalism. At the same time, we are not comfortable with a community that interprets reality in a way that is not in the "flow" of the increasing hedonism and secularism of the twenty-first century. The West today looks more like Rome in the first centuries of the Common Era than the Christendom of the past thousand years. Our Western world is decaying from within, and its empire is now only a fading glory. It no longer has the order or the goodness to impose its will on the world. In the midst of this conflicted Western context, we affirm the uniqueness of God's redemption. Grace still transforms and conquers evil. This grace, seen in humility and humiliation, is not a power the world recognizes, but it is a powerful grace that transforms the world. At the same time, this uniqueness also reveals that it is God's justice, not ours, that must be proclaimed. We see this uniqueness also in the simple teaching of Christ that one's life is fulfilled when that life is laid down. Other religions and ideologies offer paths, works, exercises, or approaches to god (or paths to "release"). Jesus offers something more powerful—grace—and asks only for surrender.

8. Following Andrew Walls,³² I am guided, especially in the history section (part 1), by the understanding that Christianity is both *incarnational* (Jesus tabernacles among us, and so is at home in all cultures) and a *pilgrim faith* (Christians are not at home; we are pilgrims and refugees). Of all of Walls's many contributions to mission theory and history, this may be his greatest. He sees clearly that two principles are at work in Christianity throughout its history, and from its beginning. The incarnational is an ongoing and purposeful move to be part of a culture; Christianity must be translated into a culture, and the gospel must speak Foochow as well as Spanish, Arabic, and modern Greek. It is this diversity—of the gospel in its many cultural expressions—that Christians must celebrate and that God embraces. At the same time, the pilgrim principle is at work in Christianity. The gospel is (and is only) the gospel of Jesus Christ. It has specific content and meaning, and it comes not to affirm all that is in a local culture, but enters into the culture to lift it up and clean it off. Cultures, societies, and governments always have a love-hate relationship with the gospel of Jesus Christ, since it both affirms and challenges. Affirmation

32. See Andrew Walls's two volumes *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996) and *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002).

and rejection, incarnation and pilgrimage, are always at work in Christianity and are always a stress and a hope within Christian mission.

9. Finally, I affirm, almost as an extension of Walls's two principles, that throughout history *Christianity is centered and intercultural* (two essential elements). As we mentioned before, there is a strong core or deep foundation to Christian mission. And yet, almost paradoxically, there is great flexibility and contextual variety within missiology. The title of Bevans and Schroeder's book, *Constants in Context*, expresses it well. We have a center—the cross—that unites all Christians throughout time and space. And yet, we also have a great variety of cultural expressions and translations. I am aware that these two—centeredness and cultural diversity—must always be before us and must also be both affirmed and critiqued according to trinitarian theology.

The “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church”

Here are the opening words of the “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church” (*Lumen Gentium*) from the Second Vatican Council:

Christ is the Light of nations. Because this is so, this Sacred Synod gathered together in the Holy Spirit eagerly desires, by proclaiming the Gospel to every creature, (1) to bring the light of Christ to all men, a light brightly visible on the countenance of the Church. Since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race, it desires now to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission. This it intends to do following faithfully the teaching of previous councils. The present-day conditions of the world add greater urgency to this work of the Church so that all men, joined more closely today by various social, technical and cultural ties, might also attain fuller unity in Christ.

History, Theology, and Practice

To bring this introduction to a conclusion, I would like to remind the reader that such a work as this, a work that starts from historical awareness, builds a constructive theology that is trinitarian in essence and biblical in awareness, and that ends with practical applications—such a work is at heart an ecclesiology. From start to finish, missiologists have come to the conclusion that missiology is about the church; it is from the church and it must build the church. It was to a young church of frightened Jews in Jerusalem that Jesus first gave the commission that we are now studying. Twenty centuries later, Christians of all backgrounds and confessions continue to push into this reality. The recent use of the term “missional” to modify the noun “church,” is only one indication of this. The missional and emerging church movements are closely linked, through their missional predispositions, to engage the world and specific local cultures with the gospel. Vatican II documents such as *Gaudium et Spes* (“Pastoral Constitution on the Church

in the Modern World”), *Lumen Gentium* (“Dogmatic Constitution on the Church”), and *Ad Gentes* (“Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity”), as well as Pope Paul VI’s Apostolic Letter *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), are all indications that the Roman Catholic Church sees the church as missionary in its very essence.

The church is a sacrament for the world: a sign of our unity with Christ and of the church’s universal mission. Vatican II is clear that the church is not a static institution simply maintaining order and dispensing grace to all who attend. The church has become a tabernacle; God with the nations. Protestants have come to agree. Although it was the towering Protestant theologian Karl Barth who provided much of the missiological reflection and fodder for future theologians, it was Emil Brunner in 1931 who said it most memorably and clearly: “The church exists by mission, just as a fire exists by burning.”³³ Much later, but equally emphatically, Adrian Hastings stated it this way: “The church does not so much *have* a mission—as if the church somehow existed *prior* to its task—rather it *is* mission as such; indeed, as the phrase goes, the church of Christ does not so much have a mission as the mission of Christ has a church.”³⁴

33. Emil Brunner, *The Word in the World* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1931), 11.

34. Quoted in Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 8.

Suffering and Glory in History

The Mission Movement

We begin our study of missiology with history. We do this for three reasons. First, Christianity is one of the few historical or “secular”¹ religions that exists. God created, and with that creation time began. Beginning with God’s revelation to Abraham (a call to a specific family and a specific geographical location), Christian heritage is a clear break with local hierophanic² and cyclical faiths (which I describe below). God, in Christ, entered into this mundane world of sin and grace, of pain and joy, lifting up physical existence and redeeming time-bound life.³ The physical world that moves from moment to moment, the place where time will

1. “Secular” is used for this world (Latin, *saeculum*), or for worldly existence. Christianity has a “this-worldly” concern, as seen most clearly in the incarnation.

2. Scholars of religion use this term to designate nature religions marked by sacred places, times, and seasons. Most of the religions of the ancient Near East were built around such imminence of the sacred. “Hierophanic” is from Greek roots indicating a local appearance or manifestation of the holy or the sacred; it should not be confused with “hierophantic,” which refers to priestly religion.

3. See Scott Sunquist, *Time, Cross, and Glory: Understanding Christian History* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, forthcoming), chap. 1, “Time, Creation, Redemption.”

“sweep [us] all away”⁴—this is the place of God’s redemption and therefore of Christian mission. Mission is through all of time and into all of creation.

In contrast to this view of time and history, most religions of the world, responding to human problems (pain, suffering, aging, death, injustice) find the answer in escape from the physical world. For example, in ancient Greek thought, the spiritual is superior to the physical. The realm of “idea” is superior to the realm of physical human life. Early Gnostic influences in Christianity were rejected again and again because they denigrated time and the physical world. The goal in most religions is to escape the physical world and to exist, even if in a semi-animated state, in the spiritual realm. Hinduism and Buddhism also denigrate the physical world, having as their goal escape from the endless cycle of suffering in this world.⁵ If we can talk about holiness in Buddhism it would be to be “unattached” from this world and its desires. Thus, in most religions, this physical world, with its brokenness, suffering, decay, and death, is nothing but an endless cycle. There is no progress, no moving forward: only escape. Christianity radically critiques this cyclical view of reality. In the incarnation, God has entered time—and he therefore sanctifies historic events. Through the resurrection, he redeems time—by conquering evil in a specific place in a particular time. The incarnation itself is a divine shout of joy regarding this world of time and matter. History is meaningful and carries sacredness within it. The biblical texts tell a story—the story of God in his created world—the story of redemption, in time, moving toward a glorious goal, for all of the nations. As Newbigin expresses it, mission is to the end of time and to the end of the earth.⁶

My second reason for starting with history is that Christian mission, as an expression of the mission of God, is a process that takes place in history and therefore has historical dimensions and implications. Christian mission must respond to historical contexts as it speaks to historical contexts. Christianity roots the individual in a community in a particular context, and it does this by grafting the person into the vine of life. The elevation of the Christian from strictly secular and historical realities, so that the heart and mind are in Christ Jesus (Col. 3), makes it possible for the Christian to have a missional presence that has the power to transform this earthly existence. Complete identification with the secular (this world) means one has no critical distance and therefore no leverage with which to transform this world. Christian mission takes place in the world, it is for the world, but it is from God. Thus, Christian mission is both influenced by the historical and exists for the sake of influencing what is historical. Christian mission is not an otherworldly activity, in the sense that it provides a spiritual dimension that takes us out of, or raises us above, the

4. Psalm 90 reminds us of God’s time and eternity.

5. In Hinduism the goal is *moksha*, or “release,” and in Buddhism it is *nirvana* (*nibbana*), a state of enlightenment where a person is fully liberated and at perfect peace.

6. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 1.

daily grind. This would be more akin to Buddhist meditation or New Age spirituality as personal therapy. Christian mission is *for* the world that we believe God created, God loves, and God continues to redeem. Christians are invited to participate in this historical work of God in his creation.

Third, I begin with history because, quite obviously, we are not originating mission in the twenty-first century. We are participating with a long line of saints and sinners who have been more or less faithful to God in time and space. On one hand, we must recognize the great work of those in the past and find ways to build on this. On the other hand, we must make careful judgments about where our past participation in mission has not been faithful to God's mission. We should always be searching for what has been done and what has been left undone as we step into the path of mission faithfulness. History is our context. Martyrs, apostles, and saints are our instructors. Mission is not merely an abstract theory that we discuss, that academics play with during scholarly conferences. Mission is also not something that we read from the Bible, as if the Bible were a modern set of missionary instructions. This is the mistake of much missionary literature today: the Bible is treated as a twenty-first-century handbook on mission and the Great Tradition of the saints, and the complex issues of the present are ignored.

I want to affirm that mission does not exist apart from the historical reality of Christ's body speaking and acting in the world. What has gone on in the past centuries helps to explain where we are today. My focus in the first part of this book will be with recent history (the past five hundred years!), but I will also give an overview of themes from the first fifteen hundred years. The reason for my greater concern with recent centuries is self-evident: this history most directly influences our present reality. Earlier historical periods are no less important, of course, but many others have written that history at length.⁷ I will move quickly through the earlier periods and then focus on the new mission theology and practice that began with the Jesuits in the sixteenth century. This more recent history reveals the issues, the struggles, and the themes that give context to our contemporary discussions on Christian mission. Two major themes begin in the sixteenth century that reveal why I begin my historical analysis there: globalization of Christianity and the Reformation (beginning in 1482).⁸ European church divisions and globalization

7. For example, Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christian Expansion*, 7 vols. (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1939–45); Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (New York: Penguin, 1986); Dale Irvin and Scott Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement*, 2 vols. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001/2012); Adrian Hastings, *A World History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Justo González, *The Story of Christianity*, 2 vols. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984).

8. This is the date the Portuguese established their first tropical fort at Elmina on the Gold Coast, marking the beginning of their encounter with Africa. A year later, Martin Luther was born.

occurred almost concurrently. Therefore, I begin with the major trends in missionary activity during this period of great creativity in Christian theology, trends that were stimulated by early encounters with modernity and with other religions and cultures. This was a period when cultural and religious intolerance was finding its way toward greater tolerance. It was a period of empire building, rapidly growing technology, and cross-cultural encounters. It was also the period of early secularization and pluralism.⁹ What could be more appropriate for today?

9. David Bosch notes that secularization and pluralism are two of the major issues opposing modern missiology today. See *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 1–4.

1

Ancient and Medieval Mission

Earliest Christianity developed without the privileges of political tolerance, cultural understanding, or translation into the common languages of the age. From the start, the followers of Jesus had a sense of mission and identity with Jesus, but they were a marginal group of Jewish outsiders speaking only Aramaic or Greek. Slowly the heartbeat of Jesus's mission for all nations and languages pulsed in the body of Christ, crossing cultural and imperial barriers in Africa, Asia, and Europe. By the high Middle Ages, the missional impulse had developed communities of Jesus followers from China to Spain and from Scotland to Ethiopia.

Earliest Christianity: Suffering Missional Presence

Christian mission from the earliest centuries after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ was mission from a position of weakness. No kingdoms or princes supported the fledgling religious movement, which was often misunderstood as a sect of Judaism. Christians were ridiculed by the Jews for their insistence that Jesus was the Messiah, and they were criticized by the pagan Romans for being “atheists” (not worshiping the pagan gods or the “genius” of the emperor). We know now that Christianity grew in all levels of society (not just among the poor and disenfranchised), but more among women than among men.¹ Persecution both scattered the believers, sending

1. Rodney Stark has two convincing arguments. First, he argues that there were a large number of women who were attracted to Christianity because of the elevated status that Jesus's

them to establish new communities of Jesus followers, and strengthened the resolve of the believers. Suffering has a way of focusing one's life and thoughts. It must not be forgotten that Christianity was born in suffering and oppression, inspired by a prophet who was identified with suffering (*passio*: to suffer). Small communities spread along trade routes, in port cities, and along the Old Silk Route that stretched from the Mediterranean all the way to old Cathay (China). Very soon followers of Jesus were in Gaul, Spain, Ethiopia, India, and present day Central Asia. There was no one center, no single strategy, but there was a united understanding that the message was about the meaning of Jesus for all people,² and the life of Jesus within his followers. In less than two hundred years the message was being spread in Syriac, Latin, Greek, and Aramaic.³

What kept the early Christians together when there was so little in the way of central structure or dominant authority? Earliest Christianity was *movement* with little *institution*. It was united by a common belief that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and that his teaching and life was to be spread to all people. All people were to be united in worship of Jesus as Lord. Thus, both the call to mission and the call to worship kept Christians united across languages and empires.⁴ Worship was a shared experience that involved common liturgical phrases and structures. The liturgy pointed to the life and work of Jesus and gave structure to basic beliefs about the person of Jesus and the triune nature of God. The early Jesus movement was persecuted and fragmented, but it retained great zeal for mission. Later, when Scriptures were becoming standardized, it was the liturgy that provided the standard for what was authentic Jesus material and what was not. The Bible was a much later standard.

The first major shift took place when these struggling missional and worshiping communities began to garner royal support. When kings and other rulers began to convert, mission theology was turned upside down. Abgar IX (who ruled 179–86), the Christian king of the Roman client kingdom of Osroene (the capital of which was Edessa); Tiridates the Great, the Armenian king (who converted to Christianity in 301); and Constantine the Great (who ruled 306–37) were three of the earliest Christian rulers. All were in western

teachings gave women (chap. 5 in *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996]). Second, he argues that many people of status were in the early movement because cults and new religious movements always attract more from the elite than from the poor. See also Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1970).

2. Often called the “Paschal mystery” (for the suffering, death, resurrection, and glorification of Jesus Christ) remembered in the celebration of the Eucharist.

3. Two hundred years later, Christians in Arabia were developing the Arabic language through Christian writings.

4. It is to be noted that the earliest Christians lived in two empires and many other “enemy” nations. The Roman and Parthian (Persian) empires had a heated border in Syria, where Christianity was growing.

Asia and all ushered in a new age of missionary understanding. Since both Armenia and Osroene were client kingdoms, or bargaining properties for Rome and Persia, it is the later semi-converted Roman emperor Constantine who really set in motion a new understanding of Christian identity, and thus of Christian mission.⁵ Suddenly, under the rule of one emperor, Christianity was transformed from persecuted minority cult to favored faith. This imperial support continued in the West (Europe) even when non-Christian tribes invaded from the north and the east. The story was very different in Asia, where imperial support waned and large intercultural faiths (Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, and later Islam) persecuted Christian communities. Christian mission looks very different when Christianity is a royally favored faith.

In Asia, the revival of the Zoroastrian religion with imperial support in Persia, followed by the rapid spread of Islam in western Asia, meant that Christian liturgical development, theology, and practice occurred in a contentious missional context. While Asian Christians struggled to survive in a hostile anti-Christian context, European Christians, with the support of the empire, developed their understanding of the church for about one thousand years without that type of pressure—without their earlier missional context. With Europe cut off from most of Africa and Asia, the missional story became the long process of converting Western culture, not sending missionaries to other regions of the world. As post-Constantinian Western society became more a part of the church (not necessarily more Christian), its connections to the outside world were cut by the expansion of Arab-Islamic culture. And when Christianity is not able to express itself missionally, to outsiders, it turns in upon itself. As Bosch says so clearly, “The Christian faith . . . is intrinsically missionary. . . . Christianity is missionary by its very nature, or it denies its very *raison d’être*.”⁶

Not only was this long period of ecclesial development in Europe almost devoid of missional context, it was also in a “Christendom” context that involved political and religious cooperation.⁷ Thus mission turned inward, with the support and power of the state, as a movement to keep the church unified and pure. In the big picture of European history, Christian mission—which reaches out with the love of God in Jesus Christ to outsiders—was co-opted. To the east, in Zoroastrian and later Muslim Persia, Christians were further and further marginalized, and they lost the opportunity to witness outside of

5. “Christendom” is the term given to the political and religious cooperation that began with Constantine’s conversion and rule. Arguments for and against Constantine’s conversion as genuine and good are found in Peter J. Leithart’s *Defending Constantine: The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2010).

6. David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 8.

7. There was a missional context in that pagan tribes continued to flood into Europe from Asia. Slowly they were converted, mostly by monastic endeavors.

their community. European Christianity became Christendom; Asian Christianity was a melet community.⁸ Both lost their purpose and promise for the larger society—entrapped by royal intervention in Europe and enclosed by melet structures in Asia.

Monasticism: Spirituality in Mission

In the Eurasian context of Christianity, roughly from the fourth through the fifteenth centuries, Christian mission was kept alive not from the ecclesial center but from the margins.⁹ It was monastic movements of outreach, study, and renewal that continued the church's mission. The rise of monasticism in the fourth century was in part a missional renewal movement: to tear the church away from its early captivity to worldly power and riches. Christians sought to find an appropriate way to continue the basic understanding of the spiritual life. And what was the basic way of understanding the spiritual life in the early church? The life *in Christ* is the life that *imitates Christ*. Both of these elements were foundational from long before the development of monasticism in the fourth through sixth centuries. Christians are, in an ontological sense, “in” Christ Jesus, living the life of Jesus Christ (in community) for the world. But Christians, on a secular level, are also persons who endeavor to imitate Christ: both working out their salvation and knowing that God is at work within them. The earliest noncanonical Christian writings were very clear that the Christian was to imitate Christ in humility, in preaching, and in care for the poor. Representative of this understanding is Ignatius's exhortation to the Ephesians regarding their life as a witness:

Pray continually for the rest of humankind as well, that they may find God, for there is in them hope for repentance. Therefore allow them to be instructed by you, at least by your deeds. In response to their anger, be gentle; in response to their boasts, be humble; in response to their slander, offer prayers; in response to their errors, be steadfast in the faith; in response to their cruelty, be meek; do not be eager to imitate them. Let us show by our forbearance that we are their brothers and sisters, and let us be eager to be imitators of the Lord, to see who can be the more wronged, who the more cheated, who the more rejected, in order that no weed of the devil may be found among you, but that with complete purity and self-control you may abide in Christ Jesus physically and spiritually.¹⁰

8. A melet (or millet) community is a ghetto community allowed to exist among a majority faith (Zoroastrianism and later Islam) but prevented from engaging the larger culture in any form of witness.

9. There were few popes like Gregory the Great, who sent out missionaries to unevangelized tribes in Europe and beyond. See Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

10. Ignatius, *To the Ephesians* 10. Ignatius died, at the latest, in 117.

Ignatius, greatly concerned in this letter for church order and unity, does not neglect the foundational concern of Christian witness through humility, gentleness, suffering, and identification with Jesus Christ. A slightly later writing, the apologetic work *The Epistle to Diognetus*,¹¹ expands on the purpose or genetic makeup of the church. Apologetic writings of the ancient church comprise some of the earliest theological literature: theology in defense of the faith or theology for outsiders, that they might come to faith. Theology develops on the missional edge of the church. *The Epistle to Diognetus* is a memorable and recognizable writing that identifies the missional presence and developing theology of the earliest Christians.

The incarnational principle of Christianity is evident in that Christians eat local food and dress like local people. However, although enculturated, Christians are not captive to any local culture.¹² Christians are a missional presence, pointing to the Kingdom. When this missional presence became normative and popular, many fled to deserts and caves to maintain their sacredness and Christlike detachment from the world (“suffer as strangers”). Continuing the passion of Christ was hard to imagine when society honored Christian bishops and priests.

When the emperor became tolerant and then supportive of the church, to the point of inviting the leaders to his palace in Nicaea, Christian humility and humiliation seemed to slip away. It was difficult to follow the lowly suffering Christ in an age of affluence and comfort. Therefore the taproot of monasticism—asceticism—started as a spiritual recovery. St. Antony in the desert was an Elijah figure in the wilderness, fighting demons and the temptations of demons. Many people cannot see an explicit missionary intent or vision in this. However, even this spirituality was an inspiration to mission, as we will see.

Asceticism Turns Monastic and Missional

The monks of the deserts in Egypt and Syria were an inspiration and catalyst to Christians living in cities. Their theology was a practical theology that inspired many to live as Christ lived, by the grace that Christ made available.¹³ One of those who was greatly inspired by the desert monks was the traveling

11. The earliest known apologetic work, dated late second century (before 200). I discuss the epistle further in chap. 9.

12. A very similar idea is taught by the semi-converted but very important early Asian apologist Bardaisan of Edessa in his *Book of the Laws of Countries*, trans. H. J. W. Drijvers (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1965), 61: “But in whatever place they are and wherever they may find themselves, the local laws cannot force them to give up the law of their Messiah, nor does the Fate of the Guiding Signs force them to do things that are unclean for them.”

13. The early desert writings found in places like the *Philokalia* were theological treatises that we might call practical theology today, for the language about God was directed to the behavior and life of the individual.

Epistle to Diognetus on Christians in Society

For Christians are not distinguished from the rest of humanity by country, language, or custom. For nowhere do they live in cities of their own, nor do they speak some unusual dialect, nor do they practice an eccentric way of life. This teaching of theirs has not been discovered by the thought and reflection of ingenious people, nor do they promote any human doctrine, as some do. But while they lived in both Greek and barbarian cities, as each one's lot was cast, and follow the local customs in dress and food and other aspects of life, at the same time they demonstrate the remarkable and admittedly unusual character of their own citizenship. They live in their own countries, but only as nonresidents; they participate in everything as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners. Every foreign country is their fatherland, and every fatherland is foreign. . . . In a word, what the soul is to the body, Christians are to the world.^a

a. *The Epistle to Diognetus*, in Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers in English* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 295–96.

priest Basil, who later became Bishop of Caesarea. Basil was inspired by their discipline and devotion, but he was troubled by their absolute solitude: “A life passed in solitude is concerned only with the private service of individual needs. This is openly opposed to the law of love which the Apostle fulfilled, who sought not what was profitable to himself, but to many that they might be saved.”¹⁴ Basil knew that the privatized spiritual life was fraught with dangers. “The first [danger] and greatest is that of self-satisfaction. Since the solitary has no one to appraise his conduct, he will think he has achieved the perfection of the precept. Secondly, because he never tests his state of soul by exercise he will not recognize his own deficiencies.” But even greater than these was the concern that, alone, one could not show mercy, charity, or compassion. “Wherein will he give evidence of his compassion, if he has cut himself off from association with other persons. . . . Whom, therefore will you wash? To whom will you minister?”¹⁵

And so, under the guidance of Basil, monasticism began to be transformed from spiritual renewal and a school of personal holiness with limited missional concern to a missional community designed for holiness and service to the other. Monasticism was no longer only about separation from the world. Slowly it began to develop as “separation from” in concert with “involvement in.” Basil moved monastic houses nearer to cities, so the monks and nuns could go outside of their walls and serve the poor and needy. “This kind of life has as

14. From Basil's “Longer Rule, Question 7,” quoted from John W. Coakley and Andrea Sterk, eds., *Readings in World Christian History*, vol. 1, *Earliest Christianity to 1453* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 145.

15. *Ibid.*, 146.

its aim the glory of God according to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, who said: “So let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).¹⁶

The monastic structure, as a structure alongside the local church, became normative in Persia (“Sons and Daughters of the Covenant”), Ethiopia, Egypt, North Africa (St. Augustine lived in a type of monastic house), Italy, Germany, France, Britain, and even China. Some of these houses had more formal and strict rules than others, but all were dedicated to the holy life, for the sake of the church and its mission. As the monastic communities spread, they brought with them education and care for the poor in each new community. In Europe, it was the monastic structure, more than the local church structure, that catechized the invading tribes and illiterate European masses.

Therefore, monasticism was slowly renewed or transformed into a missiological structure as new houses were started in frontier regions. Monasteries preserved the writings of the early church (especially the Scriptures) and they later became the foundational institutions for the rise of modern universities. Monasteries, and the monks and nuns who inhabited them, became a spiritual guidebook for the laity: role models. We see this from the very beginning in Athanasius’s “Life of Anthony” (ca. 360), as well as in the later calendar of saints, most of whom were monks. Although there were different patterns to the spread of monasticism—from the peripatetic monks who wandered around planting churches and monasteries, to the eremitic monks in the wilderness—its missiological purpose, which all branches held in common, became one of the strongest pillars of monastic life.

The monastic movement was the leading partner in the conversion of cultures within Christendom.¹⁷ Every monastery was a missional presence of Christian practice in a largely unconverted countryside (*paganus*, or pagan, means country-dweller, or rustic). The polytheistic mind and life of tribal Europe was slowly evangelized, and the broader culture converted, through the growing monastic presence. Christian practice, as well as architecture, art, and literature developed a European Christian culture. This story has been told often. One of the best-known leaders in the monastic conversion of cultures is St. Patrick (d. 493), the English slave and then missionary to Ireland. Upon his conversion, Patrick returned to his land of enslavement and began a Christian movement that brought about literacy, rule by law, monastic schools, and better treatment for slaves and women. Celtic culture was developed by the conversion and discipleship of large numbers of the Irish in a short period of time. This began a movement out from Ireland whereby monastic houses

16. Anna M. Silvas, ed. and trans., *The Asketikon of St. Basil the Great* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

17. Or what has more recently been called the church’s mandate for “culture making.” See Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008).

Extreme Monasticism

The often misunderstood Symeon the Stylite lived thirty-seven years on top of a pillar. Feeling his private prayer and fasting time increasingly interrupted by people who visited him seeking prayer and advice, he decided to remove himself from the ground and stay atop a pillar where he would not be so easily bothered. But his increased height off the ground seemed to attract both advice-seeking pilgrims and curious onlookers. And so Symeon purportedly took time each afternoon to speak with and even provide instruction to people who came to visit. He was quite literally a signpost of the Kingdom.

were built, texts were copied, and the pagan Celts began to read about Jesus and then bring him to new regions as they wandered. The Celtic missionary movement this initiated spread throughout Ireland, Scotland, parts of England, and to the Low Countries of the Continent. This Celtic monastic movement is one of the clearest examples of how monasticism developed as the main missionary structure even into the age of exploration.

Missionary Monks in Asia

To the east, outside of Europe, the monastic lifestyle flourished even when the empire (Persian) did not become Christian. At times the monastic ideal seemed

a little too austere, but, for the most part, these Sons of the Covenant were the pioneers and the models of godliness.

Similar to the Celtic bands who built small monasteries, translated Scriptures, and moved on, the Persian monks were also a restless lot, moving farther and farther to the east. By the end of the fifth century, in spite of severe persecution under the Sassanid Dynasty, monastic vocation and seminary education thrived. The famous School of the Persians at Nisibis was reported to have over a thousand students living in monastic cells, which were former horse stables. Trained in Bible and exegesis (and virtually nothing else), they wandered along the Silk Road across the rooftop of Asia. In 635, the first Christian monks we know of arrived in China. Alopen and other Persians were granted a place to live near the Chinese emperor and translated their Scriptures into Chinese. Thus the missionary dimensions of monastic faith came to the fore as Persians, speaking and worshiping in Syriac, were translating, with the help of Buddhist monks, the Christian texts for Chinese royalty. As in Europe, the basic method of evangelization was to reach the ruler, with the understanding that the people would follow. This is not the time to go into the long and fascinating story of early mission to China,¹⁸ but for our purposes it is important to know that it was monks who first brought Christian teaching to the Pacific. In fact, the monastery was so important that it is not clear if the

18. See Samuel Hugh Moffett, *History of Christianity in Asia*, vol. 1 (San Francisco: Harper-San Francisco, 1992); and Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China* (New York: Macmillan, 1992).

Persian monks were planting monasteries or churches in China.

The monastic structure for mission was evident even in streams of monasticism that are often thought of as schools for holiness, rather than missionary outposts. The most important writings of the Orthodox tradition are collected in *The Philokalia* (“love of the beautiful”).¹⁹ These writings, many of them by solitaries (Mark the Ascetic and Evagrius the Solitary, among others), constitute a core of Orthodox writings accepted across the world and through the centuries.

Many of the ascetic sites from which these saints were writing were not missionary sites, but the impact of their writings, often focusing on the holy life, have been foundational for missionary existence. One of the great teachers of the Orthodox Church, whose writings are found in *The Philokalia*, is the later saint Symeon the New Theologian (942–1022). He was considered new because he was accepted as a theologian for the Orthodox Church much later than the first two great theologians: the apostle John and Gregory of Nazianzus. Symeon expressed a missional theology that emphasized Christian devotion and discipline as including preaching to the nonbeliever and care for the poor. Such theology could not be lived in isolation from the world. Symeon brought together the “two main lines of authentic Byzantine spirituality: the intellectualism of the school of the Alexandrians [Origen, Clement, Evagrius, Basil, etc.] . . . and the ‘affective’ school of the heart, represented by the writings of Pseudo-Macarius, Diadochos of Photike, John Climacus, Hesychius and Philotheus.”²⁰

For Symeon, the missionary life of the monk is one of ascetic sacrifice, in an attitude of broken and contrite love, for the sake of casting the net of salvation to the whole world. Although monastic theology is not a missionary theology, the structure of the monastery and the life in the monastery became the form and life for the church’s missionary outreach and conversion of tribes and nations.

19. *The Philokalia*, 4 vols., trans. G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kalistos Ware (New York: Faber & Faber, 1979). This work should not be confused with the *Philokalia* of Origen, an anthology of his writings created by Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus.

20. From the introduction by George Maloney to *Symeon the New Theologian: The Discourses* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980).

The Philokalia

This is a four-volume collection of texts written between the fourth and fifteenth centuries by spiritual masters of the Orthodox Christian tradition. The full title in English might be rendered, “The Love of the Beautiful of the Watchful (Attentive) Fathers.” It was first published in 1782 in Greek, then translated into Slavonic, Russian, and finally English. The writings come out of years of contemplation and reflection on the name of Jesus, the passions, and the inner life of the soul. After the Bible, it is regarded as the second most influential book in the recent history of the Orthodox Church and the root of many modern Orthodox spiritual revivals.

Symeon's Missionary Monasticism

We see here, in the following discourse delivered to his monks, how it is that the life of Jesus and the example of the apostles were central to the Eastern monastic tradition.

However great your zeal and many the efforts of your asceticism, they are all in vain and without useful result unless they attain to love in a broken spirit (Ps. 51:9). . . . He [Jesus] willingly endured His life-giving sufferings, in order that He might deliver man, His own creature, from the bonds of hell, and restore him and lead him up to heaven. Moved by love the apostles ran that unceasing race and cast on the whole world the fishhook and net of the word to drag it up from the deep of idolatry and bring it safe into the port of the kingdom of heaven. Moved by love the martyrs shed their blood that they might not lose Christ. Moved by it our God-bearing Fathers and teachers of the world eagerly laid down their own lives for the Catholic and apostolic Church.^a

a. George Maloney, *Symeon the New Theologian: The Discourses* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1980), 45.

Mission and Monks in the Middle Ages

In this cursory survey we have seen a variety of missiological approaches to and through monastic structures, mostly working from a position of weakness rather than power. However, while we acknowledge that the mission of God was carried out through monastic structures, we must also recognize that the monastic structures themselves were not the mission of God. Monastic structures worked with church structures—seeking the full conversion of cultures. As the church became wealthy, monasteries also benefited from wealthy patrons. One of the basic vices (later called cardinal sins) that was of grave concern to the earliest monastic movement—avarice—became the strange bedfellow of large monastic houses. Monastic life often became comfortable and convenient, and so reforming movements (Cluny in the tenth and eleventh centuries, the Cistercians in the twelfth century, and St. Francis in the thirteenth century) sprang up, calling monastic life back to simplicity, purity, and mission. But corrupting forces were strong. In the very century in which Cluniac reforms were taking place, and in the early stages of the Franciscans, monastic corruption took a new turn with the rise of militant monks. The Knights Templar²¹ began soon after the first Crusade (1096–99) as a religious order called to protect pilgrims traveling to the holy sites. Supported by wealthy Europeans, mostly French, these militant monks became quite influential in the church and in European society. They were among the most important warriors in the Crusades, but they also built bridges and

21. First called the “Poor Knights of the Temple of King Solomon,” since their first house was located in Jerusalem at the site of King Solomon’s temple.

roads and were even involved in banking. The Knights Templar were only one of many such militant monastic orders.²² Piety and patronage, mission and militancy, had come together in the twelfth century, corrupting the original purpose of monastic life.

The story is a complex one: Princes worked with bishops and monks to consolidate power and wealth. The hard work and discipline of the monks often brought about prosperity and larger and larger holdings of real estate. With the increasing wealth and power of medieval Christendom, monastic houses and religious orders sometimes became oppressive, and later became tools of secular oppression. The monastic structure, which began as a structure of renewal calling individuals to faithful life in Christ, took on a more missional purpose to serve both the unloved and the unreached. Later, this same structure lent itself to power and, at times, domination. How did this happen? In part it happened as a natural consequence of monastic discipline, and in part it happened through the unholy marriage of prince and prior. Both secular and religious rulers benefited from the alliance. Finally, with the rise of Islam and the consequent insulation of Christian Europe from the rest of the world, missional presence became more and more difficult. With the rise of the Muslim Seljuk Turks in the eleventh century and then the Ottoman Turks in the thirteenth century, Christian missionary expression was limited to worship in Christendom Europe or through the Crusades in west Asia. It became more and more difficult for monastic life to move out into frontier areas. Christian life, even monastic Christian life, turned in upon itself. The religious life in Persia was greatly limited by the Islamic caliphs of the eighth through the fifteenth centuries. In a sense, Persian Christianity lost its vitality—which it derived from missional contact. In contrast, monasteries in Europe often became wealthy establishments and, at other times, became instruments of oppressive political structures. Monks began to support Crusades and accepted bribes for positions of authority. It is a history of power, money, and isolation that should be remembered by the church today. This position of power and privilege continued even as Europe became less isolated in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

One interesting example of this paradox in Christian theology is Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), one of the most winsome and influential leaders of the High Middle Ages. Bernard is known as a great monastic leader (helping to found over 160 monasteries), a honey-mouthed preacher, a great moral leader, a promoter of devotion to Mary, an author of devotional classics such as his work on the Song of Songs, and is remembered as “the spiritual master of the

22. Other militant orders that were founded between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries include Teutonic Knights, Livonian Brothers of the Sword (aka “Christ Knights”), Knights of Saint Mary, etc.

path of love.”²³ Yet, as a church leader in Christendom Europe, he was also a powerful political leader. One of his most famous works, *On Consideration*, was written to Pope Eugenius III, one of his former monks. In this work, Bernard counsels his former student as to how to carry out his duties as pope and how to balance the delicate relationship of church and state. When asked to help with the promotion of the second Crusade to protect the “Christian lands,” Bernard preached and wrote to encourage French nobles, priests, monks, and “the faithful people of Eastern France and Bavaria” to support the Crusade.

The enemies of the Cross have raised blaspheming heads, ravaging with the edge of the sword the land of promise. For they are almost on the point . . . of bursting into the very city of the living God, of the holy places of the spotless Lamb with purple blood. Alas! they rage against the very shrine of the Christian faith with blasphemous mouths, and would enter and trample down the very couch on which, for us, our Life lay down to sleep in death. What are you going to do then, O brave men? What are you doing, O servants of the Cross? Will you give what is holy to the dogs, and cast your pearls before swine?

After exhorting the French to stop fighting against each other, he has a strong rhetorical section imploring the French to do for God what he could do with his angels, but looks for humans to do.

But now, O brave knight, now, O warlike hero, here is a battle you may fight without danger, where it is glory to conquer and gain to die. If you are a prudent merchant, if you are a desirer of this world, behold I show you some great bargains; see that you lose them not. Take the sign of the cross and you shall gain pardon for every sin that you confess with a contrite heart.

The mission of the monks had turned into the military engagement of crusaders. Carrying the cross, the symbol of the suffering, gentle, and compliant Savior, had become an oppressive sign of military conquest: from passion to power and from humility to hubris.

Bernard is not the only spiritual leader of the age to support the Crusades, but he is one of the clearest and most visible. This devout and influential monk supported the Knights Templar and even outlined their Rule. Powerful symbolism is evident in the fact that the first Knights Templar house was built out of the Al Aqsa Mosque, which in turn had been built on the Temple Mount, where it was assumed the Temple of Solomon had been built. Thus, a militant monastic house was on top of a Jewish temple and Muslim mosque. Christian monastic structures and purposes were being remade into the image of the Muslim Turks they resisted.

23. Jean LeClercq in the introduction to *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*, trans. G. R. Evans (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987), 7.

Reform in Monastic Missional Identity

As noted in the introduction, the newer religious orders of the Franciscans and Dominicans did not develop a new missiological understanding or theory, even though they were committed to ministries that crossed boundaries of faith. Dominic founded his Order of Friars Preachers as a way of preparing missionary friars to preach orthodoxy in regions where heterodox doctrines threatened the church. One of his main concerns was the Cathars, a growing Gnostic sect of Christianity that was spreading rapidly in southern France.²⁴ The pope's two approaches to the Cathars (send Crusades to attempt to kill them, and issue a show of pomp and power to attempt to win them) were failures. In contrast, Dominic advocated preaching: "It is not by the display of power and pomp, cavalcades of retainers, and richly-housed palfreys, or by gorgeous apparel, that the heretics win proselytes; it is by zealous preaching, by apostolic humility, by austerity, by seeming, it is true, but by seeming holiness. Zeal must be met by zeal, humility by humility, false sanctity by real sanctity, preaching falsehood by preaching truth."²⁵ The Dominicans (approved in 1216) became an order of preachers to help the church resist heresy through good preaching. At about the same time, St. Francis founded his Order of Friars Minors (founded 1210). The Franciscans embraced the virtues of evangelical poverty while preaching repentance and caring for the most needy. Francis sought to preach to all, possibly even to the Sultan of Egypt during the Crusades. His was a recovery of early monastic missionary identity: humility and suffering. According to tradition, his identification with the passion of Christ was so complete that he developed the stigmata (nail marks) on his own hands.

Out of this same medieval world, another movement was started that remained outside of the official church, but that was driven by many of the same concerns for renewal. Peter Waldo, a wealthy merchant from Lyon, had a sudden conversion to evangelical poverty (not unlike St. Francis) in or around 1175. As a result, he sold most of his goods, found a copy of the Scriptures in French, and began to preach for conversion and against wealth. His movement was not approved by the papacy, so these preachers (both men and women) traveled throughout Europe as "heretics." The significance of this movement is that it was a semi-monastic movement that preached in the vernacular and focused on the Christian life as a life of poverty. They were called the "Poor of Lyon."

These three movements recovered some of the missional intent of Christianity, in that they were speaking to newer contexts, but they did so very much

24. See Mark Gregory Pegg, *A Most Holy War: The Albigensian Crusade and the Battle for Christendom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

25. Quoted from Alexander Clarence Flick, *The Rise of the Medieval Church* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1909), 522.

within older patterns of monastic life and practice. Mission out of weakness was not the normal pattern of the period, but these three movements pointed back to earlier monastic humility and forward to contemporary mission movements in the non-Western world. Unfortunately, in later years, the Franciscans and Dominicans were domesticated and used by political powers, so their ministry, too, became ministry from a platform of power, rather than weakness.²⁶

One of the few pioneers who pushed out of Europe during this period—a prophet figure who pointed ahead to future missiology—is Raymundo Lullus (1232–1315). Lullus was ahead of his time, not only in thinking about *how* to reach Muslims with the Christian message, but also, as I noted in the introduction, in his missionary work from a position of weakness and vulnerability. Although his work was from powerlessness, being a medieval man, he still had access to patrons for his academic work. He wrote in four languages, especially Arabic, at a time when Muslims were still ruling large portions of Spain. Lullus tried to interest popes, kings, and princes in establishing colleges for training missionaries to evangelize the Muslims. As a result of his advocacy, before he died, chairs in Hebrew, Arabic, and Chaldean were established at the universities of Bologna, Oxford, Paris, and Salamanca. Lullus worked with the greatest academic of the time, Thomas Aquinas, convincing him to write a theology for missionary apologetics toward Muslims: *Summa Contra Gentiles* (1259–64). “The [*Summa Contra Gentiles*] is a classic manual for Christian doctrine intended for the use of Christian missionaries in Spain.”²⁷ However, this was not “modern” missions, for it contained two medieval characteristics: dependency upon kings and rulers to support the missionary work and a primary focus toward Jews and Muslims. In a sense, missionary work was still envisioned as extending European cultural forms of Christendom.

Lull, along with the Dominicans and the Franciscans, straddled the medieval and the modern in his work. However, no modern missionary movement came from the noble leadership of lay Franciscans like Lull or Dominican scholars like Thomas Aquinas. The Muslims and Jews in Spain were not converted through a scholastic defense of the truth (Thomas’s approach to apologetics), nor through prayer alone. It was through secular power that the Moors and Jews were expelled and then compelled to sign a treaty in 1492. The Capitulation of 1491,²⁸ or the Treaty of Granada, granted Muslims freedom to live, worship, and carry on business under Christian rulers. The freedom and peace this treaty brought, however, was illusive. As late as 1507, the Cardinal of Granada (the famous Franciscan, Francisco Ximenez de Cisneros,

26. The Dominicans, for example, became very influential through education and were called upon to support the often corrupt and violent work of the Inquisition.

27. From Anton C. Pegis’s notes in the translated volume of *Summa Contra Gentiles* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1955), 17.

28. There were actually two treaties: one of surrender (November 25, 1491) and one of 1492 that gave the Muslims protection and a degree of respect while living under Christian rulers.

1436–1517) was leading troops against Muslim forces, and as late as 1517 he was gathering up and burning copies of the Qur'an. It is out of this context, and with this mind-set, that Roman Catholics began (after the *Reconquista* of Spain) to move out of the Iberian Peninsula, exploring, conquering, and evangelizing far beyond the Crusader states of the Near East. Mission and conquest were intertwined as Europeans moved out from Western Europe in search of spices and Christians.