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The Mission of the Spirit and the Mission of the Church: Towards a Trinitarian Missiology

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I Introduction

In this paper I investigate the inter-relation between the post-Pentecost mission of the Spirit and the mission of the church. The ultimate goals of the church's mission are the first three petitions of the Lord's prayer; the hal-
lowing of God's Triune name, the com-
ing of his kingdom, and his will being
done on earth as in heaven.¹ This
includes evangelism, healing, feeding
the poor, transforming unjust political

and socio-economic structures, the
stewardship of creation, relief and
development work. In short, the
church's mission is world transforma-
tion which is itself stupendous and
therefore '...presupposes the anoint-
ing and empowerment of the Spirit... A
powerless church can hardly consider
it.'²

The mission of the Spirit is to be the
agent of the Father's summing up of all
things in Christ, '...to bring history to
completion and fulfilment in Christ'.³

1 Johannes Verkuyl, 'The Kingdom of God as the Goal of the Missio Dei', *International Review of Mission* 68 no. 270 (April 1979: 168-175), 169.

2 Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1996), 147. Ion Bria similarly says, 'Only by the Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the mission of the church possible...' Compiled & Edited by Ion Bria, *Go Forth In Peace: Orthodox Perspectives on Mission* (WCC Mission Series; Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986), 11

3 Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 194.

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Although this description is necessarily broad and general, it includes the specific work of regeneration, sanctification, conviction of sin, endowment of gifts, empowerment, instruction and other facets of the Spirit's work.

From these descriptions it is clear one cannot describe the missions of church or Spirit in isolation; they are mutually referential. This is unsurprising given that in the New Testament the work of the Holy Spirit is primarily described through two foci: the church and eschatology.⁴ So, the church is central to the mission of the Spirit, and likewise, the Holy Spirit is 'The chief actor in the historic mission of the Christian church... He is the director of the whole enterprise. The mission consists of the things that he is doing in the world.'⁵ Before proceeding to examine the inter-relation between the missions of the Spirit and the church, it is necessary to consider briefly their theological context.

The missions of Spirit and church belong to the theological nexus in which christology, pneumatology, missiology and ecclesiology are all inextricably related. Clearly the mission of the Spirit is incomprehensible apart from the mission of the Son. H. B. Swete says, 'Without the mission of the Spirit the mission of the Son would have been fruitless; without the mission of the Son the Spirit could not

have been sent.'⁶ The missions of the Son and Spirit constitute the outward works of God *ad extra*, which are undivided but not indistinguishable.

Hence, I contend that it is appropriate to speak of the mission of the Spirit. The mission of the Holy Spirit is not a *replacement* of the mission of Christ as the Eastern Orthodox conceive it.⁷ Nor is the mission of the Spirit merely a function of Christ's ongoing mission, thus subjecting pneumatology to christology. Neither is the Spirit's mission merely a continuation of Christ's historical mission, although in certain ways the Spirit does continue Jesus' work, such as teaching truth to the disciples (Jn. 16:12-14).

Rather, with David Coffey and the Eastern Orthodox '...there is a proper mission of the Holy Spirit',⁸ but since the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus (Acts 16:7; Philp. 1:19) there is an inextricable, deep, mysterious and extraordinarily close relationship between the on-going mission of Christ and the post-Pentecost mission of the Spirit, as there was between the work of the Spirit in the life of the incarnate

4 Wesley Carr, 'Towards a Contemporary Theology of the Holy Spirit', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 28 (1975: 501-516).

5 John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission* (London: SCM Press, 1972), 3.

6 *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* (1910 repr. ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1964), p. 206, quoted in Gordon Fee, *Paul, the Spirit and the People of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 85.

7 C.f. John 14. David M. Coffey explains that '...the Eastern Orthodox position is that there is a proper mission of the Holy Spirit, that it began at Pentecost, and that in a real sense it replaced the mission of Christ, which ended at that point'. 'A Proper Mission of the Holy Spirit', *Theological Studies* 47 (1986: 227-250), 227.

8 Coffey, 'A Proper Mission', 227, emphasis original.

Son. The work of Son and Spirit are perichoretically related because their work substantially constitutes the one *missio trinitatis Dei* and because the Triune Persons are constituted in and by their perichoretic mutual relations.⁹

Fiddes says that 'we associate some functions in a particular, but non-exclusive way with particular persons... because we find one movement in God takes the 'leading edge' in a particular context'.¹⁰ In this age of mission between the time of Christ's incarnation and his *parousia* it is the Holy Spirit who takes this 'leading edge' among the Triune Persons for it is he who is the chief agent implementing and accomplishing God's mission, though not without nor apart from Son or Father. Therefore as we discuss the inter-relation between the *missio Dei* and the *missio ecclesiae* it is appropriate to speak particularly of the inter-relation between the missions of *Spirit* and church, for as Newbigin rightly says, 'It is he who is, properly speaking, the missionary'.¹¹

9 I affirm this with Gunton and Pannenberg, and against Moltmann who argues that the being of God is constituted by the monarchy of the Father. Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 39. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology Vol. 1* trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 325. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 165.

10 Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2000), 103. By 'movements in God' Fiddes means the Triune Persons.

11 Lesslie Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine For Today's Mission* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 40.

The mission of the church, like the mission of the Spirit, makes sense only in light of the historical and ongoing mission of the Son, who trained and commissioned the disciples, poured out the Holy Spirit upon them, and continues to draw people to himself through the church. As Blauw says, 'The Church's work of mission is bound both to Easter and to Pentecost. The Easter message can be brought to the nations only by the reality of Pentecost'.¹² It is the inter-relation between the *missio ecclesiae* and Pentecost that is the focus of this article.

II The Mission of the Spirit in Church History

As is clear from *Acts of the Apostles*, the mission of the Holy Spirit births and thus *constitutes* the church. Jesus' community of disciples can be understood as the proto-church but they do not become the church until their reception of the Spirit on Pentecost, for it is by the Spirit that they were baptised into one body, the church.¹³ The Spirit, this 'go-between God',¹⁴ descended on Jesus' disciples in the upper room and incorporated them into the sonship of Jesus, so that they might share in the Son's relation to the Father and cry out 'Abba, Father'. This incorporation is necessarily communal, '...for the Spirit brings together humanity into

12 Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church: A Survey of the Biblical Theology of Mission* (Guildford & London: Lutterworth Press, 1962), 89.

13 Cf. 1 Corinthians 12:13.

14 Cf. Taylor's *The Go-Between God*.

the *unity* of Christ.’¹⁵

In this adopted sonship the church looks to the Father, and in doing so looks to the world to which the Father sent his Son and Spirit. Therefore, in the same sending of the Spirit he directs this *koinonia* outwards, mirroring, however dimly, the divine Triune *koinonia* which is open to the world. Historically, the Spirit not only constitutes the church in Christ but also leads and inspires her in her mission.¹⁶

It is the work of the Holy Spirit that leads to the missionary outreach of the church. The Spirit filled the apostles who then boldly spoke the word of God (Acts 4: 31), led Philip to explain the gospel to the high-standing Ethiopian official (Acts 8:29), prompted Peter to go to the Gentile Cornelius without hesitation (Acts 11:12), and set apart Paul and Barnabas and thus instigated the first intentional missionary journey (Acts 13:2). The Spirit continues to lead the church in her mission.

Consider the words of J. Roswell Flower, the first general secretary of the Assemblies of God. Emphasising the missionary nature of the Holy Spirit he says, ‘When the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts, the missionary spirit comes in with it; they are insepa-

able.’¹⁷ It is the Holy Spirit who initiates and inspires the mission of the church.

Andrew Lord speaks of the ‘need for an authentic Christian spirituality to undergird all our attempts at mission’. He continues, ‘Without spirituality our mission will be dry and lacking the presence and power of the Holy Spirit—we may try hard, but achieve little.’¹⁸ That the Holy Spirit animates the church’s mission with himself, the breath of life, is a historical fact and needs to continually be the church’s living experience.

1. The Spirit Goes Ahead of the Church

In *Acts*, and in the history of missions, we see that the Spirit’s mission activity is not confined to the boundaries of the church, for the church reaches only as far as those who confess Jesus as Lord and who worship by word and sacraments. By contrast, the Holy Spirit was poured out on *all* flesh which must at least mean that he is omnipresent. Furthermore, since God desires all to be saved, it is reasonable to believe that in his omnipresence the Spirit is redemptively active in all people everywhere.

The Spirit is active in all peoples testifying about Jesus (Jn. 15:26), convicting the world of sin, righteousness

15 Khaled Anatolios, ‘The Immediately Triune God: A Patristic Response to Schleiermacher’, *Pro Ecclesia* Vol. X No. 2 (Spring 2001: 159-178), 176, emphasis original.

16 Cf. McIntyre’s comment that ‘...it was the Holy Spirit who was responsible for the birth, survival, growth and development of the early Church, through his inspiration of, and involvement with, the disciples’. John McIntyre, *The Shape of Pneumatology: Studies in the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 53.

17 Quoted in Allan Anderson, *Spreading Fires: The Missionary Nature of Early Pentecostalism* (London: SCM Press and Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2007), 65.

18 Andrew M. Lord, ‘Mission Eschatology: A Framework for Mission in the Spirit’, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 11 (1997: 111-123), 119.

and judgement (Jn. 16:8-11), thereby preparing peoples to receive the gospel. It is a truism to say that the church's missionaries do not take God to a people, but the omnipresent God is already at work in all people and he brings missionaries to those in whom he is already at work. It has been the experience of countless missionaries that God has been at work in non-Christian peoples and cultures, preparing them for the reception of the gospel often centuries before missionaries arrive.¹⁹

The Holy Spirit goes ahead of the church '...preparing men's hearts in ways that no man could have planned, so that the Church has all that it can do [*sic.*] to follow after to make open and visible what the Spirit has already begun in secret before any churchmen knew of it'.²⁰ The Spirit does not work alone but carries out the will of the Father who sent him, and the Son through whom he was sent, for the purposes of uniting people by faith to Jesus. Indeed, the *opera trinitatis ad extra* are hypostatically distinguishable, perichoretically united and perfectly mutual.

The global nature of the Spirit's mission is to be contrasted with the geographical limitation of the church's mission, which is not a fault but simply

an aspect of its creaturely finitude. This ecclesial limitation has been exploited by some scholars in order to drive a wedge between pneumatology and ecclesiology and suggest that the Spirit can reach people without the church engaging in mission. This is often further combined with an abandonment of the claim to the uniqueness of Christ, *en route* to religious pluralism, by arguing that the Holy Spirit is salvifically working within non-Christian religions and therefore evangelistic work amongst people of other faiths is inappropriate and unnecessary.

This creates a further dichotomy between pneumatology and christology which is highly problematic because the two cannot be separated since there is no separation *within* God. D. T. Niles' statement, 'Jesus Christ is the content of the Gospel...[and] The Holy Spirit is the missionary of the Gospel'²¹ ought to be affirmed whilst also affirming that Christ proclaims himself through the Spirit. Christology and pneumatology are inseparable. When proponents of this pluralistic view seek biblical support they frequently appeal to the story of Cornelius, for according to S. Wesley Ariarajah, this story shows that '...there is no need to channel God to people; God has direct access...'²²

¹⁹ Don Richardson documents many examples in his popular book *Eternity In Their Hearts* revised ed. (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1984).

²⁰ Lesslie Newbigin, *Unfaith and Other Faiths* (unpublished address delivered to the 12th Annual Assembly of the Division of Foreign Missions, NCCCUSA, 1962), <www.newbigin.net> accessed 17 Sept 2010, pages not numbered.

²¹ D. T. Niles, *Upon The Earth: The Mission of God and the Missionary Enterprise of the Churches* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1962), 67.

²² *The Bible and People of Other Faiths* (Geneva: WCC, 1985), 17, quoted in Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK, 1989), 167.

2. The Spirit's Free Election of the Church

God's omnipresence entails his direct access to all people, but the method God chooses to use to reveal himself is not by direct access but through the church by means of election. According to Newbigin the central theme of the biblical story is election: 'God's choosing (election) of a people to be his own people, by whom He purposes to save the world'.²³ Thus election must be understood as missionary in character.

Under the new covenant the elect people are those *in Christ*, the church, and we see that throughout the New Testament God's mission of summing up all people in Christ advances by means of election, including in the story of Cornelius. In Acts 10:3-6 the Holy Spirit indeed speaks to non-Christian Cornelius through an angel in a vision, without ecclesial mediation, as Ariarajah has said. However, the Holy Spirit does not reveal the gospel to Cornelius but rather instructs him to send for Peter who will tell Cornelius what to do. The Spirit is free and sovereign and goes ahead of the church, '...but it is (if one may put it so) the *church* that he goes ahead of'.²⁴ Peter arrived and as he explains the gospel of Jesus Christ 'the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word'.²⁵

As Carr has said, along with eschatology the New Testament most often

associates the Holy Spirit's work with the church. Ariarajah rightly wants to give priority to *God's* activity in mission, but the Bible makes clear that this does not preclude but includes the church's mission. As Bosch helpfully puts it, 'The Christian mission is always christological and pneumatological, but the New Testament knows of no christology or pneumatology which is not ecclesial'.²⁶

In Christ God has irrevocably bound himself to his covenant people, the church, as Paul's metaphor of the church as Christ's body illustrates (1 Cor. 12). Newbigin makes clear that '...this work of the Spirit is not in any sense an alternative way to God apart from the church; it is the preparation for the coming of the Church, which means that the Church must be ever ready to follow where the Spirit leads'.²⁷

The New Testament teaches that the sovereign Holy Spirit, who moves as he wills, wills to act salvifically *through* the church's witness. Prior to the church's arrival, the Holy Spirit's work amongst an unreached people is one of *praeparatio evangelica*, whereas the church's unique task is to communicate the gospel. Hence Newbigin says, 'To use this story to suggest that the missionary journey is unnecessary or even improper is to distort it beyond recognition. It is indeed true, gloriously true, that God goes ahead of his church. But it is also true that he calls

23 Lesslie Newbigin, 'Why Study the Old Testament?' *National Christian Council Review* Vol. 74 (1954: 71-76), 75.

24 Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine*, 80, emphasis added.

25 Acts 10:44.

26 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1991), 385.

27 Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine*, 53-54.

the Church to follow.²⁸

On this basis I disagree with scholars such as John McIntyre who suggest that *Acts of the Apostles* might just as easily be called *Acts of the Holy Spirit*.²⁹ His main point, that the Holy Spirit is utterly central to *Acts of the Apostles*, is entirely valid. Nevertheless, I believe that *Acts of the Apostles* is correctly entitled because God has uniquely charged the church to proclaim the gospel, a proclamation which is ineffective without the sovereign work of the Spirit. There can therefore be no separating of the Spirit from the church, but nor can there be a blurring of their distinctive missions. Neither can there be '...a severing of the Spirit from Jesus Christ...', suggesting that the Spirit's direct access is in itself redemptive apart from faith in Christ as explained by the church.

This is simply because 'If the Spirit relates created beings to God—thus making them holy, in the sense of finally acceptable to God—he achieves this through the Son, the mediator of creation, for there is no other way.'³⁰ Missiology has good reason to insist that Christ, the Spirit, the church, and mission belong together.

The Lordship of the Holy Spirit over the church and her mission includes not only creating her and directing her mission, but also the work of human regeneration, which is uniquely a work of the Spirit. The church cannot convert people because they must be born of the Spirit.³¹ Regeneration depends upon God's self-revelation and God's chosen instrument for this work is the witness of the church, but the presence of the latter does not guarantee the former.

Barth explains, 'In His revelation God controls His property, elevating our words to their proper use, giving Himself to be their proper object, and therefore giving them truth.'³² Describing this divine self-revelation which is regeneration, Barth says '...God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, especially in revelation, is God Himself to the extent that He can not only come to man but also be in man, and thus open up man and make him capable and ready for Himself, and thus achieve His revelation in him.'³³

Given the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in regeneration it is curious to note that in the story of Cornelius, which I take as indicative of the whole

28 Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 168. There are a plethora of extra-biblical accounts of God revealing himself to those beyond the church's bounds, such as Bilquis Sheikh's popular *I Dared To Call Him Father: The True Story of a Women's Encounter With God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 1980). Interestingly, in that story the author was directed to find local Christ-followers, as was Cornelius.

29 McIntyre, *The Shape of Pneumatology*, 53-55.

30 Gunton, *The Promise*, xxviii.

31 For the purposes of this article I use regeneration and conversion synonymously, for with Emil Brunner, I believe they are different aspects of the same happening. *Dogmatics Vol.3: The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith and the Consummation* (trans. Olive Wyon, London: Lutterworth Press, 1952), 281.

32 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. and trans. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, 13 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957-75), III/1, 230.

33 Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/1*, 450.

New Testament witness, the Spirit chose *not* to communicate the gospel because that is the church's role. (This is not to take away from the historic significance of Cornelius' reception of the Spirit, which needed apostolic verification, that God had granted to the Gentiles repentance that leads to life [Acts 11:18].) It appears that, ordinarily speaking, in his sovereignty the Spirit will not save without the witness of the church, and yet the church's witness alone does not and cannot convert people.

There is an interdependency between the missions of Spirit and church, not by necessity, but by the design and purpose of God. This undermines Andrew Kirk's comment that 'if God's mission is largely tied to the Church then God's freedom is seriously compromised.'³⁴ Kirk is right, unless of course we believe that God in his freedom does choose to make the church central to the *missio Dei*. The Holy Spirit is Lord over the church's mission in that he is the agent of revelation and regeneration. This lordship resembles the lordship of Jesus, unusual, unexpected, and overturning our human notions of lordship, but it is still a lordship nonetheless.³⁵

Describing the church's relationship to the Holy Spirit Barth says, 'There does not belong to it the power of the sending and outpouring and operation of the Holy Spirit. It does not 'possess' him. It cannot create or control him. He is promised to it. It can

only receive Him and then be obedient to Him.'³⁶ The relationship is thoroughly asymmetrical since the Holy Spirit is both the Lord and the giver of life over, in and through the church's mission.

III The Delegation of Evangelistic Mission to the Church as Risk

The Holy Spirit's lordship over the *missio ecclesiae* includes delegating to the church the specific task of evangelism—the communication of the gospel. In his wisdom God desires to make the completion of his mission partially dependent upon ecclesial cooperation. In God's providence and wisdom he has limited himself by freely choosing to depend upon ecclesial cooperation to accomplish his mission.

John Sanders, who explores the nature of divine risk-taking vis-à-vis the doctrine of providence says, 'According to Paul, God has chosen to be somewhat dependent upon us [the church] to accomplish the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-20), for God desires collaboration in this task.'³⁷ Nevertheless, any talk of divine dependence requires careful elaboration.

First, the notion of divine dependence is not completely novel, for in the incarnation the Son was dependent upon the empowering Holy Spirit and, humanly, upon Mary and Joseph in the same way that all infants depend on

³⁴ J. Andrew Kirk, *What Is Mission? Theological Explorations* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1999), 206.

³⁵ Cf. Mark 10:42-45.

³⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/2*, 655.

³⁷ John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1998), 125.

their parents. Even in the ontological Trinity dependence, in at least some sense, is not alien to God, for each Triune Person depends upon the other two for his being since God is constituted in and by his intra-trinitarian perichoretic relations.

Second, God's dependence upon the church is freely chosen and wholly gracious, for God does not need anything. Third, this dependence is partial and not total. Fourth, there is a strong argument made by some scholars such as Terence Fretheim that dependence is an intrinsic aspect of divine providence due to the kind of world God freely created. For example, in Genesis 2:5 and 2:15 Fretheim sees that '...the presence of a human being to till (*'bd*) the ground is considered indispensable for the development of the creation.'³⁸

Fifth, however God's dependence upon the church is to be conceived it can never be a total sharing of authority, for the biblical Creator-creature distinction always remains.³⁹ Fiddes puts it well: 'God who does not need dependence freely desires to be dependent on us for the completeness of fellowship, for the joy of the dance.'⁴⁰

Having thus qualified God's dependence upon the church it is nevertheless true that *any* concept of such a dependence is extremely humbling for the church, a theme we shall return to

shortly. The question remains, *how* dependent is God upon the church? If the church fails in her evangelistic mission, does that entail the failure of God's mission?

The enormity of divine risk is dependent upon one's views of predestination, providence and divine foreknowledge with which it is directly related, but a full discussion that those subjects deserve is beyond the scope of this paper. That this risk has been actualised and is not merely a theoretical possibility is readily apparent. Notwithstanding the presence of ancient Christian communities, the majority of people in Africa, India, east and south-east Asia and the South Pacific have had access to the gospel only in the last three hundred years, some seventeen hundred years after the inauguration of the new creation through Christ's resurrection.

Offering a suggestion as to why God might risk making his mission somewhat dependent upon the church, Sanders states, 'God's project is to develop people who love and trust him in response to his love...'⁴¹ The mission of the Spirit includes a reconciled human fellowship, and the church is both a means to God's desired end and part of that end itself, a foretaste and first-fruits of God's mission. In God's wisdom he has made what might be interpreted as the foolish decision to risk making his mission partially dependent upon the church, but this decision is made by the God who said, 'My power is made perfect in weakness'.⁴²

38 Terence E. Fretheim, 'Divine Dependence Upon the Human: An Old Testament Perspective', *Ex Auditu* 13 (1997: 1-13), 5.

39 Andrew E. Hill, 'A Response to Terrence Fretheim's "Divine Dependence Upon the Human"', *Ex Auditu* 13 (1997: 14-16), 15. Fiddes, *Participating in God*, 108.

40 Fiddes, *Participating in God*, 108.

41 Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 124.

42 2 Cor. 12:9.

Still, God's risk is real, but it would be irresponsible and unacceptable to suggest that the risk is total. Sanders believes that God's risk is a relative and not an absolute risk, and the final outcome of God's mission is never in question.⁴³ Similarly, I contend that although the church's mission is marked by failure as well as success, it will nonetheless, by the enabling of the Spirit, certainly complete it.

God committed part of the work of salvation to the church and this confidence is not misplaced because, although human, flawed and fallible, the church is far more than simply this. God is confident that the church's mission will succeed because the church is animated by the Holy Spirit, and God can completely trust the work of the Spirit in and through the church. In Matthew 16:17-18 Jesus says that he will build his church on the rock, and that rock is the Father's work of revealing the Son by the Spirit, for as Jesus said to Peter 'flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven'.⁴⁴

43 Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 229. Gregory A. Boyd, who also espouses this view of providence, explains in greater detail how the risk-taking God can be assured of attaining his overall mission, in 'Chapter 5—Love & War: Risk and the Sovereignty of God', *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001), 145-177.

44 Matthew 16:17. In this passage Jesus attributes this revelation to the Father, but elsewhere revelation is clearly depicted as a work of the Spirit (John 3:4-8 & 1 Corinthians 12:3). This simply underlines the truth to which the trinitarian rule *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa* bears witness.

Jesus' confidence is supremely on the work of the Spirit in and through the church, and that is why Blauw says God does not delegate the mission to the church. He continues, 'Nothing is left to men, not even to the apostles; *that*, however, is why everything *can* be delegated to the Church...', because 'The Holy Spirit guarantees the power of life in the Church, the presence of God in the world, and the publicizing of the Gospel'.⁴⁵

God has committed an essential role to the church within his mission, but it is simultaneously true that this delegation is encompassed and underwritten by the mission of the Spirit. When Jesus commissioned his disciples to be witnesses to the ends of the earth he instructed them to wait in Jerusalem because he had also delegated his ongoing mission to the Spirit who creates, builds, inspires, sanctifies, leads and is Lord over the church.

In this as in so many other ways, the missions of Spirit and church are intertwined. So, God took a significant risk in partially delegating mission to the church, to which the blunders in church history bear witness, but this delegation and this risk were not absolute because he also entrusted his mission to the Holy Spirit on whom he could absolutely depend.⁴⁶

The Holy Spirit is the continuity between the saving work of Jesus and

45 Blauw, *The Missionary Nature*, 90, emphasis original.

46 Studying the ground between these two points would be a fascinating and worthwhile enterprise which I believe would show how the missions of Spirit and church are different and distinct from one another.

the missionary work of the church. Re-conceiving traditional Roman Catholic terminology of the church as *Christus prolongatus*, the continuation of the incarnation,⁴⁷ Clark Pinnock avers 'The church is an extension not so much of the incarnation as of the anointing of Jesus'.⁴⁸ Pinnock suggests that the delegation of Christ's mission to the church coincides with and derives from the transferral of Christ's anointing to the church, and this seems to have strong exegetical support from both Luke (Luke 24:46-49 and Acts 1:4-5, 8) and John (20:21-23). He says,

At Pentecost the church received the Spirit and became the historical continuation of Jesus' anointing as the Christ... He transferred the Spirit to them so that his actions could continue through their agency. The bearer of the Spirit now baptises others with the Spirit, that there might be a continuation of his testimony in word and deed and a continuation of his prophetic and charismatic ministry.⁴⁹

This ought to be conceived christocentrically, for the transferral of the anointing from Jesus to the church is in fact the church's participation by the Spirit in Jesus the Christ, the anointed one. Indeed, transferral language is slightly misleading for the church's reception of the Spirit is not separate

from Christ's reception of the Spirit. Rather, the church is anointed by the Spirit for mission by participating in the Spirit-filled and anointed vicarious humanity of Christ.⁵⁰

Having examined the inter-relation between the missions of the Holy Spirit and the church, in what way does the Spirit's inspiration of the *missio ecclesiae* actually shape and form that mission?

IV Pneumatological Mission— The Church's Mission as Shaped by the Spirit

The church's mission is both christological and pneumatological and so the *missio ecclesiae* is defined by both the person of the Son and the person of the Spirit. It is commonly recognised that the church's mission is to be understood as in the way of Christ, and excellent work has been published on the incarnational nature of mission.⁵¹ I aim to supplement this necessary insight by exploring the suggestion that the *missio ecclesiae* is also to be understood as in the way of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit is literally the life of the church, or in Schleiermacher's words

47 As suggested by the evangelical missiologist Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2010), 87.

48 Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 114.

49 Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 118.

50 Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), 148.

51 For example, Lesslie Newbigin, *Mission In Christ's Way: Bible Studies* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1987) and Darrell L. Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity International Press, 1999); "Incarnation and the Church's Evangelistic Mission", *International Review of Mission* Vol. 83 No. 330 (1994: 417-428).

'the common Spirit of the Church',⁵² so it is no accident that aspects of the Spirit's character 'rub off' on the church, for the Spirit imprints his personal nature upon the church. In other words, as the church walks by the Spirit and is led by the Spirit she bears the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5: 16-23) which reflects the person of the Spirit. The work of the Spirit is by no means restricted to the work of the church, but the church's work must be pervaded by the Spirit for it to be of any consequence.

The task of the church in her mission is not to imitate the work of the Spirit but to sensitively obey and keep in step with him. Drawing on William Hill, Tan notes that three distinctive traits that mark the Holy Spirit's identity and work are interiority, anonymity and community formation.⁵³ Mission in the way of the Spirit means that missiology needs to be pneumatological as well as christological. Consequently, Tan explains that 'The basic posture of the Spirit-filled church and pneumatically empowered missionary must be one of humility, anonymity and

other-centredness'.⁵⁴ What does it mean to say that the church in her mission ought to be humble, anonymous and other-centred?

1. Humility

The missionary church remains humble as she recognises that her successes are in fact the work of the Spirit. When churches are successfully established and grow, when the sick and emotionally scarred are healed, when the poor are fed and empowered, when the illiterate are educated, when those afflicted by evil are delivered and protected, when injustices are set to right, then the church can humbly celebrate her own contribution to these successes which rightly belong to the Holy Spirit.

The church is humble as she recognises her place in the *missio Dei*, to be Christ's ambassadors through which God reconciles people back to himself. She did not earn this right, for she was saved by grace in order to do the good works that God had prepared for her beforehand (Eph. 2:8-10). As the church goes about her mission she is aware, sometimes painfully, that she is '...the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing...' (2 Cor. 2:15-16)

It is humbling for the church to realise she is the aroma of Christ, charged with preaching the gospel in a world of sin and death, knowing that as she witnesses to the gospel it is only the work of the Spirit which can actu-

52 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, English translation of the 2nd German edition ed. H. R. Mackintosh & J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), 738. McIntyre suggests this, saying that the Spirit's work in the early church is so all-pervasive '...that he might be said to stamp his character upon the Church...', *The Shape of Pneumatology*, 57.

53 Seng-Kong Tan, 'A Trinitarian Ontology of Missions', *International Review of Mission* Vol. 93 No. 369 (April 2004: 279-296), 290. Cf. William J. Hill, *The Three-Personed God: The Trinity as a Mystery of Salvation* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982).

54 Tan, 'A Trinitarian Ontology', 290.

ally bring life that conquers sins and death. The church remains humble in her mission by living according to the truth that she can do nothing apart from Jesus, and yet *through Jesus* the she can do all things by his strength (John 15:5; Phil. 4:13).

2. Anonymity

Jesus' ministry stood in the long line of Hebrew prophets and like them he called people back to God, his Father, but unlike these prophets Jesus also called people to himself.⁵⁵ Unlike Jesus, the Holy Spirit never draws attention to himself but always leads people to Jesus and through Jesus to the Father. T. F. Torrance explains that 'The Holy Spirit does not manifest himself or focus attention upon himself, for it is his mission from the Father to declare the Son and focus attention upon him'.⁵⁶ Elsewhere Torrance states, 'The Spirit does not utter himself but utters the Word... He does not show his own Face, but shows us the Father in the Face of the Son'.⁵⁷

The Spirit is self-effacing and thus anonymous in that his working brings attention not to himself but to God the Son and God the Father, which also helps explain the neglect of pneumatology in theological history. The church in her mission ought also to have these characteristics of pointing away from herself toward Jesus and the Father.

This ought to be especially true of

church movements that strongly emphasise the Holy Spirit such as Pentecostalism, and according to Anderson this is precisely what we find.

Most Pentecostals throughout the world have a decidedly Christocentric emphasis in their proclamation and witness. The Spirit bears witness to the presence of Christ in the life of the missionary and the message proclaimed by the power of the Spirit is of the crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ who sends gifts of ministry to humanity.⁵⁸

Thus Pentecostal pneumatocentrism leads directly to christocentrism as the self-effacing Spirit does his work in and through the church. As the church goes about her life and mission she should forever be drawing attention to the One who alone is worthy of all praise. In her works of love and service the church does not seek to be honoured or recognised (Matt. 6:1f), and to that extent anonymity should characterise her mission.⁵⁹

Although the church's anonymity is important it also needs to be qualified. Jesus said, 'You are the light of the world... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven' (Matt. 5:14-16). Her motive for her good deeds must be love of God and neighbour, and as she goes about her

55 Cf. Matthew 11:28; John 14:6.

56 Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine*, 63.

57 Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 252.

58 Anderson, *Spreading Fires*, 67.

59 Despite the common usage of the word anonymous there are no intended parallels with Rahner's concept of the 'anonymous Christian.' Cf. Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations Vol. 5: Later Writings* trans. Cornelius Ernst (Baltimore, Helicon Press, 1966).

good deeds, she is not to hide them but rather to let others see them in order that God whom she serves may be glorified.

For example, the Salvation Army are widely recognised and respected for their humanitarian work, and surely this reputation glorifies God. To this extent the church's mission ought *not* to be completely anonymous, that is, unidentified, nameless and secret, otherwise God will not be glorified from the church's good deeds.

To summarise, Tan is correct in saying that anonymity should characterise the church's mission in that she should seek for her God to be made known rather than herself, but in this process she too will be rightly noticed as his ambassadors, and this too will bring glory to the Father.

3. Other-Centredness

Hill said that the third distinctive trait of the Spirit's work is community formation which Tan said corresponds to the church's mission being other-centred. I believe both elements are captured in Taylor's description of the Holy Spirit as the 'go-between God'. This description draws on deep wells within the western theological tradition; specifically it is a development of Augustine's notion of the Spirit as the *vinculum caritatis*, the bond of love. Gunton describes the Spirit as the '...one whose distinctive function is to bring persons into relationship while maintaining their otherness, their particular and unique freedom'.⁶⁰

Tom Smail elaborates on this uniquely pneumatological role, describing the Holy Spirit as '...the Spirit of *perichoresis*, the person who eternally established and maintains the fellowship (*koinonia*) in which two become one without losing their twoness. Put in less formal terms, the Spirit is the Spirit of love'.⁶¹ Gunton and Smail are describing the Spirit's work within the Triune God as well as in the economy of salvation; indeed the latter corresponds to and is rooted in the former.

As the church is birthed by the Spirit and caught up in his mission, so the Spirit's 'go-between' nature and work both encompasses and incorporates the church and impresses itself upon her. Accordingly, the church is Christ's ambassador to the world, going-between God and the world which he loves. This is the priestly mediatorial role of the church as a whole (1 Pet. 2:9), which derives from him who is its High Priest.

This 'go-between' role includes the work not only of ambassadors for reconciliation with God, but also for human reconciliation between estranged parties, whatever the cause of the estrangement. This can be in peace-making,⁶² or can take the form of advocacy on behalf of the oppressed, the poor, the neglected and the disadvantaged. In this 'go-between' role the

⁶¹ Tom Smail, 'Trinitarian Atonement', *Stimulus* Vol. 15 Issue 2 (May 2007: 43-48), 48.

⁶² See, for example, the work of Christian Peace-Maker teams (<http://www.cpt.org/>) or the work of Rev. Canon Andrew White, commonly known as the Vicar of Baghdad, for the Foundation for Relief and Reconciliation in the Middle East.

⁶⁰ Gunton, *The Promise*, 133, emphasis original.

missionary church is other-centred as the focus is both on her Lord whom she serves and those to whom she is sent. Therefore, loving God and loving her neighbour should be the focus and characteristic of the church in mission.

V The Inter-Relation of the Missions of Spirit and Church

Numerous connections between the Spirit and the church's mission can be articulated. Blauw states that 'The close connection between [the Church's] call to mission and Holy Spirit cannot be exaggerated'.⁶³ We see this in accounts of the giving of the Spirit described in John 20:21-23 and Acts 2, which are both for the purpose of mission. The two missions are related in that both are sent from the Father through the Son. Acts 2:33 teaches that the Father sends the Spirit to Jesus, whom he receives and then pours out on the disciples. In John 20:21-23 Jesus sends the disciples as the Father sent him and with their sending Jesus breathes the Spirit onto them.

The missions of Spirit and church are profoundly related to each other and constitute part of the one mission of the Triune God. The unity of these missions can also be seen in that at Pentecost, the new-born church is caught up into the mission of the Spirit which coincides with the on-going mission of Christ. There is continuity in the Spirit's mission in Jesus and then in the church but the character of the

Spirit's presence in each is somewhat dissimilar. As Hong explains,

In biblical terminology, Jesus was given the Spirit 'without measure' (John 3:34); in the church, the Spirit operates 'according to the measure of faith' (Rom. 12:3). In the terminology of later tradition, Jesus was endowed with the Spirit 'by nature'; the church is endowed with the Spirit 'by grace'.⁶⁴

Newbigin was therefore right in saying that one cannot understand the church's mission, and I would add the Spirit's mission, apart from the doctrine of the Triune God.⁶⁵

The mission of the Spirit *creates* the church as he unites people to Jesus to share in his Sonship, thus forming a redeemed and adopted community. The church and her mission are also a central component in the Spirit's mission, for she is God's elect people through whom he will save the world. The church herself is part of the Spirit's mission of uniting people to Jesus, because as Cyprian and Calvin have affirmed, you cannot have God as Father without having the church as Mother.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Young-Gi Hong, 'Church and Mission: A Pentecostal Perspective', *International Review of Mission* 90 no. 358 (Jl 2001: 289-308), 306.

⁶⁵ Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine*, 82. See also my 'Newbigin's Trinitarian Missiology: The Doctrine of the Trinity as Good News for Western Culture' with *International Review of Mission* 99.1 Issue 390 (April 2010: 69-85).

⁶⁶ Drawing on Cyprian, *On the Unity of the Church*, 6, cited in John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* trans. & indexed Ford Lewis Battles & ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), IV.I.1, 1012.

⁶³ Blauw, *The Missionary Nature*, 89.

The Holy Spirit is the chief actor in the church's mission; he is the primary missionary. Newbigin says, 'We are not sent into battle by a commander who stays behind.'⁶⁷ The Spirit acts in and through the church's mission. Jesus' words in John 15:26-27 suggest that the witness of Spirit and church occur *alongside* one another, for the Spirit will bear witness to Jesus (v.26) and the church will also bear witness to Jesus (v.27). The Spirit also works alongside the church as she experiences opposition.

As the church goes about her mission of advancing God's kingdom in what C. S. Lewis calls 'Enemy-occupied territory...' ⁶⁸ opposition is inevitable. Greg Boyd goes as far as saying, 'The New Testament tells "good people" to expect bad things!' ⁶⁹ So, when the church is arrested for carrying out her mission, as is still all too common in many parts of the world, Jesus says, 'When they bring you to trial and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say; but say whatever is given you at that time, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.'⁷⁰

In addition to describing the missions of Spirit and church as *alongside* one another it is perhaps more accurate to say, with D. T. Niles, '...the mis-

sion of the Church is a mission *within* the mission of the Holy Spirit'.⁷¹ The Spirit constitutes the church in Christ and oversees her mission. Therefore, the Spirit's mission is not coextensive with the church's mission but broader in range and scope.

Johannes Verkuyl rightly suggests that non-ecclesial human activity, '...as long as it counters any type of evil and is purposefully performed in ways that help and heal, is connected either knowingly or unknowingly with the *missio Dei* in the world'.⁷² This should be affirmed whilst simultaneously upholding the centrality of the church to the Spirit's mission in order to avoid the unhealthy speculations that dogged the 1960s and 1970s that God is more at work in the world than in the church.⁷³

Lastly, the missions of Spirit and church have the same overarching purpose; they are instruments of the Father's summing up all things in Christ. This summing up in Christ includes evangelism toward those outside Christ, and movements toward church unity for those already in Christ. Newbigin says, 'Mission and unity are two sides of the same reality, or rather two ways of describing the same action of the living Lord who wills that all should be drawn to Himself.'⁷⁴

67 Newbigin, *Mission In Christ's Way*, 29.

68 C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: Fount Paperbacks, Harper Collins, 1997), 37.

69 Gregory A. Boyd, *God At War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1997), 283.

70 Mark 13:11. Lesslie Newbigin develops this in *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* revised ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 61.

71 Niles, *Upon The Earth*, 70, emphasis added.

72 Johannes Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction* trans. & ed. Dale Cooper (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1978), 4.

73 This theological tendency has been caricatured by the saying *intra ecclesiam nulla salus*.

74 Lesslie Newbigin, 'The Missionary Dimension of the Ecumenical Movement', *Ecumenical Review* 14 (1962: 207-215), 208-9.

In its mission the church is '...invited to participate in an activity of God which is the central meaning of creation itself. We are invited to become, through the presence of the Holy Spirit, participants in the Son's loving obedience to the Father.'⁷⁵ The two missions can be understood only within the framework of God's trinitarian redemptive activity, aspects of the one mission of the Triune God.

VI Practical Implications

What, then, briefly, are some of the practical implications of understanding this inter-relation between the missions of the Spirit and the church?

First, since the Holy Spirit is the primary missionary, the church mission consists in following his lead. As the story of Cornelius and Peter clearly teaches, the Spirit goes ahead of the church and calls the church to follow. Newbigin explains that

Because the Spirit himself is sovereign over the mission, the church can only be the attentive servant. In sober truth the Spirit is himself the witness who goes before the church in its missionary journey. The church's witness is secondary and derivative. The church is witness insofar as it follows obediently where the Spirit leads.⁷⁶

In her mission the church needs to rely upon the leading of the Spirit in her missional praxis. The Spirit is also Lord over the church-in-mission as he directs it. The Spirit opens certain

doors, like Paul's vision of the man from Macedonia (Acts 16:9), and closes others, such as the Spirit forbidding Paul to enter Asia (Acts 16:6). According to Newbigin, and Roland Allen, this confidence in the Holy Spirit is *the key* to the apostolic missionary method and the spontaneous expansion of the church.⁷⁷

Second, God's decision to entrust the communication of the gospel to the church has several practical consequences, two of which will be mentioned. It should lead to the prioritising of evangelism as one of the church's most important activities. This should be extended to include working towards proclaiming the gospel to unreached people groups worldwide.

The Spirit's partial dependence upon the church for gospel proclamation further underscores the urgency of worldwide evangelisation. As God's chosen representative the church's being needs to bear witness to the gospel she proclaims with integrity and authenticity in order to substantiate the truth of her message. This means, for example, that as God's reconciling people the church needs to work towards healing the disunity and schism within her communion. Newbigin said, 'His [Christ's] reconciling work is one, and we cannot be His ambassadors reconciling the world to God, if we have not ourselves been will-

⁷⁵ Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine*, 83.

⁷⁶ Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 61.

⁷⁷ Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine*, 71. Cf. Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods—St. Paul's or Ours: A Study of the Church in the Four Provinces* (London: Robert Scott, 1912); *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church: And the Causes That Hinder It* (London: World Dominion Press, 1927).

ing to be reconciled to one another.⁷⁸

Third, mission in the way of the Spirit reminds the missionary church that her character needs to increasingly bear the fruit of the Spirit. It also reminds the missionary church of her humble and go-between nature, thus complementing helpful insights concerning the incarnational nature of the church's mission.

Finally, that God would so summon and commission the church to such an important role within the *missio Dei* creates within the church an extraordinary sense of humility, privilege, and excitement. Furthermore, the fact that the Spirit has freely made himself par-

tially *dependent* upon the church for gospel proclamation causes the church to humbly recognise the eternal significance of her missionary responsibility. It also leads her to depend upon the empowering, quickening and enabling of the Spirit to fulfil her designated mission.

This makes both the missions of Spirit and church inter-dependent, though not equally or in the same way, for the Holy Spirit remains Lord over his church. Thus the church can be confident that the weight of God's mission does not rest on her shoulders and that the Holy Spirit will complete God's mission. So, in astonishment and joy, the church realises that she has been invited to genuinely contribute to God's mission, to participate in the central meaning of creation itself, the summing up of all things in Christ.

78 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (London: SCM Press, 1953), 18.

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