

MISSIO DEI
AND THE
MEANS OF GRACE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis brings together the two fields of missiology and Wesleyan studies, in order to develop a theology of participation in the *missio Dei* from the perspective of whole-life discipleship.

Barth's re-articulation of mission as an activity of God and the subsequent emergence of the *missio Dei* concept has shifted missiological thinking from an anthropocentric view of mission to the understanding that the church and persons are participants in the *missio Dei*. This thesis argues for the *missio Dei* to be defined as the grace of the triune God moving in, through, and with the world, that all might be drawn into the life-transforming embrace of divine love.

The thesis argues that all narratives are held in tension within one grand narrative, the Bible. No person is in existence outside of this grand narrative. This is not a statement of fact but a confession of faith. The statement of fact is that the biblical grand narrative, the story of the triune God's creation, redemption and sanctification, claims the status of being applicable to all persons and narratives.

The thesis argues for defining grace as the presence, pardon, and power of God that moves in, through, and with the world. Jesus Christ is the meritorious means while the Holy Spirit is the efficacious means making possible the participation of all persons in the *missio Dei*. The central argument of the thesis, then, is that one participates in the *missio Dei* by participating in the means of grace, or the spiritual disciplines of piety and mercy.

There are two original contributions. First, a Wesleyan perspective of grace and the means of grace inform the development of a theology of participation in the *missio Dei* that overcomes the repetitive articulations of mission as simply being human action or divine action. Second, through the means of grace, Christian disciples participate in the *missio Dei* as those transformed by God's love and those through whom that love embraces and transforms the world. Twenty-first century missiology is illumined as the *missio Dei* concept is articulated as fully divine yet inseparable from human activity through the Wesleyan notion of co-operant grace, thereby positing the understanding that ecclesiology is informed through attention to disciplined discipleship.

An implication of this argument for contemporary mission is that it is applicable for all persons, all ages, and all ecclesial expressions of the Christian church as participation in the *missio Dei* through the means of grace is understood to be a holistic way of life where spiritual formation is understood as inseparable from justice ministries.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE *MISSIO DEI* AND THE MEANS OF GRACE

Until recently ‘mission’ was commonly associated with the activity of the church or, more specifically, with persons travelling to foreign lands, generally portrayed as taking the gospel from Western developed countries to the uncivilized. In the last century this notion has slowly undergone some major changes and has all but disappeared. ‘Mission’ has become popularized as one of the prominent watchwords of the twenty-first century as many claim a ‘mission statement’. The Christian church has joined in as they print their ‘mission’ on the front and rear covers of worship bulletins or have it strategically located on the home page of their website.

This thesis affirms the claim that for Christians there is only one mission, and that is the *missio Dei*. In the Christian academy of the third millennium few would disagree that mission begins and ends with God. Many missiologists and theologians have been writing about the concept following Barth’s re-emphasis on the *actio Dei* and Hartenstein’s coinage of the term *missio Dei*. Arguably, no such theological concept has generated such widespread attention and scholarly treatment since the ‘introduction’ of Trinitarian theology in the third and fourth centuries. It is perhaps apropos that the Trinity is at the centre of the *missio Dei* concept.

A problem has arisen with the claim that there is only one mission, the *missio Dei*. The Christian church has, for several centuries, understood itself to be the ‘author’ or ‘authority’ for mission, with all the various ways in which it has been and is defined. A theological conundrum ensued. How might the Christian academy and the various forms of local church be part of God’s mission without defaulting to anthropocentrism, believing that they have a mission or are the authority for mission?

Much research, writing, and dialogue has transpired since the mid twentieth century surrounding the *missio Dei*. As an interdisciplinary concept, all Christian fields became part of the conversation, even if only from a critical vantage, as missiology, in conjunction with the *missio Dei* concept, implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, is often articulated as the culminating field for Christian theory and practice.

The research context of this thesis is at the interface of the fields of missiology and Wesleyan studies. In the first half of the twentieth century, following Barth's re-articulation of mission as an activity of God and the subsequent emergence of the *missio Dei*, an implicit and sometimes explicit implication ensued: missiology is a field of study which intentionally incorporates all Christian fields. The *missio Dei* purports that God is the source for all Christian thought and practice; all Christian fields and doctrines are understood to interface with one another and be an integral part of missiology, including but not limited to biblical studies, practical theology, systematic theology, contextual theology, Christology, soteriology, eschatology, and ecclesiology. The specific area of focus for this thesis in missiology has been the development of the *missio Dei* concept through the interface of the biblical grand narrative and Trinitarian theology and how they might contribute to a theology of participation.

There is the tendency in missiology for those engaging the biblical grand narrative and Trinitarian theology, through the *missio Dei* lens, to overlook each other's respective fields, which contributes to 'mission' being expressed as either human action or divine action. Inherent in the primary issue are the sub-issues of mission articulated as beginning with Great Commission: God's activity being 'mission', and church or personal activity being 'missions'; and mission emphasized only as the sending of church and persons intent upon evangelization and social justice. The intent is to offer a solution that overcomes an inherent deficiency in the *missio Dei* concept.

Consideration for overcoming the disconnect between the biblical grand narrative and Trinitarian theology can go many ways. Almost exclusive attentions to overcome disconnect and the inherent deficiencies for participation in the *missio Dei* have been articulated through emphases on ecclesiology. This thesis chooses Wesleyan theology. The area of Wesleyan studies that lends itself to overcoming the problems surrounding the *missio Dei* concept comprises the Wesleyan perspectives of grace and the means of grace. By applying a lens of 'participation' – language that enhances the understanding of the relationship between the Trinity and those made in the image of God – Wesleyan studies interface with missiology and offers a solution for overcoming the dilemmas.

The thesis assumes the understanding that all manners of thinking and fields are shaped by the biblical grand narrative which serves as the source for revealing the nature of the relationship between God and God's creation. This is not a statement of fact but a confession of faith. The statement of fact is that the biblical grand narrative, the story of the triune God's creation, redemption and sanctification, claims the status of being applicable for all persons and narratives. Arguably, the heart of the *missio Dei* is Trinitarian theology that maintains the inseparability of the immanent and economic God. The articulation of the inseparability of the nature of God from the activity of God serves as the basis for articulating a theology of participation in the *missio Dei*. A Wesleyan lens of co-operant grace maintains God as the source while asserting the inseparability of human–divine action in the *missio Dei*. This claim does not purport that the triune God is in need of anything or anyone, but has acted out of the essence of God's nature, that is, holy love.

The thesis proposes for defining grace as the presence, pardon, and power of God that moves in, through, and with the world. Jesus Christ is the meritorious means while the Holy Spirit is the efficacious means making possible the participation of all persons in the *missio Dei*.

The central argument of the thesis, then, is that one participates in the *missio Dei* by participating in the means of grace, or the spiritual disciplines of piety and mercy. Through the means of grace, Christian disciples participate in the *missio Dei* as those transformed by God's love and those through whom that love embraces and transforms the world.

The original contribution is that a Wesleyan perspective of grace and the means of grace inform the development of a theology of participation in the *missio Dei* that overcomes the repetitive articulations of mission as simply being human action or divine action. Twenty-first century missiology is illumined as the *missio Dei* concept is articulated as fully divine yet inseparable from human activity through the Wesleyan notion of co-operant grace, thereby positing the understanding that ecclesiology is informed through attention to disciplined discipleship.

This argument is developed over three sections in the thesis: Section 1, 'The *Missio Dei* and Participation', comprises five chapters which focus upon the biblical grand narrative, Trinitarian theology, and the concept of participation in the relationship between God and those made in the image of God; Section 2,

‘Wesleyan Theology of Grace and Participation’, has three chapters that develop how Wesleyan perspectives of grace and the means of grace might serve to overcome the problems raised in Section 1; Section 3, ‘*Missio Dei* and the Means of Grace’, also has three chapters, which highlight three modern ‘missiological’ movements, Wesleyan perspectives on the *missio Dei*, and the interface of missiology and Wesleyan theology through the *missio Dei* and the means of grace.

Chapter 1 traces the derivation and development of the *missio Dei* concept, noting the influence of the concept in beginning a paradigmatic shift in missiological thinking. Chapter 2 highlights biblical scholars who intersect the fields of biblical studies, missiology, and the *missio Dei* concept. The predominant claim is that the Bible is a grand narrative which is the revelation of the relationship between God and those created in the image of God. It is noted that most scholarship has been attentive to how God relates to persons but gives little attention to how persons and the church are to relate with God.

In part, this might be attributed to deficient emphasis upon Trinitarian doctrine, which is the focus of Chapter 3, ‘The Trinity and the *Missio Dei*’. Karl Rahner’s axiom that the immanent God is the economic God and vice versa is recognized as being central to Trinitarian theology and the *missio Dei* concept. The Trinity is the essence of communion, relation without remainder, who creates out of love, not need. The language of ‘participation’ is introduced as an expression adding an enhanced understanding of the relationship between God and humanity.

Chapter 4 builds upon the intersection of the biblical grand narrative with Trinitarian theology through the concept of participation. Participation in the *missio Dei* is noted through various lenses: an ontological perspective; an onto-epistemological perspective; a perspective that embraces the concept of participation as missions; and perspectives that advocate emphases on evangelization, social justice, and/or the integration of both.

Chapter 5, ‘Towards a Theology of Participation in the *Missio Dei*’, concludes Section 1 as it illumines key elements and inherent deficiencies of the *missio Dei*. Chapter 5 concludes by proposing that a Wesleyan theology of grace and the means of grace lend themselves to the development of a theology of participation in the *missio Dei* that can overcome the repetitive articulations of mission as simply human action or divine action.

Section 2 begins with Chapter 6, ‘God and Grace’. A Wesleyan understanding contends that grace is the presence, pardon, and power of the Trinity. Grace is imputed and imparted, immanent and economic. The prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace of God is what makes it possible for persons and the church to be participants in the *missio Dei*. A Wesleyan perspective of divine grace may be articulated, through a missiological lens, as God’s participation and be understood as the solution to repair the dis-communion of holy relationships.

Chapter 7 argues that a Wesleyan understanding of the means of grace may be articulated, through a missiological lens, as both personal and the church’s participation. Wesley identified the means of grace as activities directed towards God and activities directed towards others, that is, works of piety and works of mercy. This thesis claims that participation in the means of grace forms the basis for what Wesley meant for a person and the church to wait properly upon the Lord, and frames the character of how one was to be in relation with God and with others.

Chapter 8 begins to frame participation in the *missio Dei* through the means of grace, as it argues the nature of divine grace is uncreated and inseparable from God. Human participation in the means of grace is to be a way of life – a life of personal and social holiness made possible through the Holy Spirit.

Section 3 begins with Chapter 9, which surveys three movements in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries offering perspectives for a theology of participation in the *missio Dei*. The modern movements are Church Growth, Gospel and Our Culture and Missional Church, and Emerging Church and Emergent Conversation. While each movement embraces the *missio Dei* and makes positive contributions to the field of missiology, all carry forward the inherited deficiency of an anthropocentric approach. Each movement’s primary focus is the shaping or reformation of ecclesiology in the context of the *missio Dei*.

In Chapter 10, Wesleyan scholars engaging the *missio Dei* also contribute valuable insights to missiology through engagement with Wesleyan resources and the concepts of evangelization and social justice. However, as their focus is upon ecclesiology, they inadvertently perpetuate the inherited anthropocentric approach to the *missio Dei* while actually trying to avoid it. This thesis argues that only as Wesleyan resources are freed by removing ecclesiological emphases and moving to

discipleship can they be the solution to framing a theology of participation in the *missio Dei* that embraces both divine and human activity through co-operant grace.

The final chapter, Chapter 11, '*Missio Dei* and the Means of Grace', asserts that the triune God is unchanging and the meritorious and efficacious means for personal and communal participation in the means of grace. Therefore, there is only one mission, the *missio Dei*. The *missio Dei* is the relationship between God and persons and the condition thereof that all might be embraced in the transforming love of God and neighbour. Persons and the church participate in the *missio Dei* through participation in the means of grace. This thesis asserts that *missio Dei* in the twenty-first century is renewed through a Wesleyan-missiological image that participation in the means of grace may be viewed as a rhythm of discipleship that emphasizes persons and the church growing in their faith of Jesus Christ, sharing through the hope of Jesus Christ, and serving with the love of Jesus Christ.

SECTION 1
THE *MISSIO DEI*
AND
PARTICIPATION

Introduction

Much has been written about the *missio Dei* from within the missiological fields of Trinitarian theology, biblical theology, and ecclesiology. Scholars agree that the *missio Dei* begins with the triune God. Most scholars advocate the primacy of the biblical grand narrative as the source. With the coinage of the *missio Dei* as a specific concept, however, almost all scholarly attention has myopically been centred on the activity of God. How persons and the church are to participate remains largely undeveloped due to deficiencies in connecting Trinitarian theology, the biblical grand narrative, and a theology of human participation. A systematic development of a theology of participation in the *missio Dei* must begin in the triune God as revealed in the biblical grand narrative that claims the status of being applicable for all persons. The Trinity is at the centre of the *missio Dei* concept. God participates in God's creation and the concept of participation enhances the understanding of relationship between God and person.

Chapter 1. Derivation and Development of the *Missio Dei* Concept

1.1. Introduction

The term *missio Dei* is commonly used in missiological circles and there is an overall assumption that when it is used the concept is understood.¹ The *missio Dei* term is frequently used by scholars when writing about mission and missiology, projecting the assumption that the concepts are synonymous. This is not the case although perhaps the *missio Dei* will subsume popular concepts of mission in the church and the academic articulations of missiology in the history of Christian thought and practice through a developed systematic theology of participation.

During the early nineteenth century, mission was recognized as a field within theology and by the twentieth century succeeded in becoming a science in its own right, identified as missiology. Following Barth's articulation in the 1930s that mission begins with the activity of God, Hartenstein soon thereafter coined the term the *missio Dei*.² The term was new but the concept was not. The concept's presence dates from the beginning of the biblical narrative or, as scholars engaging Trinitarian doctrine demonstrate, the *missio Dei* begins in that which is without beginning or end – the triune God. The *missio Dei* quickly gained widespread attention and criticism by theologians and missiologists, indicating the need for a more thorough scholarly treatment. Although the *missio Dei* is often used and is generally accepted by the academy, few have given proper attention or systematic development to its practical expression in the life of the church or the person. A renewed interest in Trinitarian thinking in the latter half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century is, arguably, an indirect result of the nature and assimilation of the *missio Dei* and the general acceptance that all mission begins with the triune God.

There are several themes that have evolved with the concept of the *missio Dei*, but the predominant one is a Trinitarian understanding and approach to mission. In theory, no scholar claims that the authority of and for mission exists outside God.

¹ Use of italics throughout this thesis is employed in two settings: for Latin terms (e.g. *missio Dei*, *actio Dei*, and *imago Dei*) and when quoting other sources and authors who have employed the use of italics.

² K. Barth, *Theologische Fragen und Antworten* (Zollikon: Evangelischer Verlag, 1957), pp104-105. Translated from German by Domenico Nigrelli.

However, theoretical expression and proposed practice often disclose a hierarchy that indicates otherwise, or at the very least, a distinct focus upon what is understood to be prioritized in the *missio Dei*. There is a continued struggle within missiological scholarship as they seek to prioritize the kingdom of God, the church, and the ‘world’ over or against each other. As a result, definitions that lead to the systematic development of what it means to participate in the *missio Dei* have not been forthcoming as scholars remain focused upon Trinitarian doctrine, biblical emphases, ecclesial superiority, or broadly painted practical implications for the church.

This chapter traces the derivation of the *missio Dei* concept and highlights key voices in the development of the term and concept. Definitions of the *missio Dei* are noted, as well as those who voiced opposition to the concept. This chapter acknowledges the propensity for the *missio Dei* to subsume all Christian thought and practice.

1.2. The *Missio Dei* Terminology

‘Following the Willingen Conference in 1952 and two decades of widespread usage of the term *missio Dei*, Dr. H.H. Rosin of the Department of Missiology at Interuniversity Institute undertook the task of writing ‘*MISSIO DEI: an examination of the origin, contents and functions of the term in protestant missiological discussion*. The term ‘*missio Dei*’ which was introduced by Hartenstein in his ‘*Theologische Besinnung*’ about the international missionary conference in Willingen (1952), was coined by him, and intended to place mission within the widest possible framework of the “Heilsgeschichte” (salvation history) and God’s plan of salvation.’³ *The Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* states that the term *missio Dei* is ‘Latin for “the sending of God,” in the sense of “being sent,” a phrase used in Protestant missiological discussion especially since the 1950s, often in the English form “the mission of God”.’⁴ It is an expression that is widely used in many missiological and ecumenical circles and is not limited to

³ H.H. Rosin, *Missio Dei: An Examination of the Origin, Content, and Function of the Term in Protestant Missiological Discussion* (Leiden: Interuniversity Institute, 1972), p. 23.

⁴ A.S. Moreau, H. A. Netland, C. E. Van Engen & D. Burnett, *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (Carlisle: Paternoster; Baker Books, 2000), p. 631.

Protestant scholarship exclusively. Rosin, after identifying where the term *missio Dei* most and least often occurs in various languages and texts states, ‘This does not however in any way imply that where the term is lacking, the intended concept must also be absent.’⁵ Prior to Hartenstein’s coinage and the usage of the term *missio Dei*, the concept is argued to be evident in scripture and Augustinian theology. Rosin concludes his examination of the term with this statement,

For this after all indicates an action, which does not point indiscriminately to all kinds of happenings in the world, but only to one incomprehensible event, namely that God, the creator of all things, submerged himself in his own world as a stranger, as a displaced person, an outcast, in solidarity with other outcasts and strangers, who in this world pursues a very special, hidden road in order to liberate it.⁶

Since Rosin’s assertion, much effort and attention has been given by scholars to elucidate the ‘incomprehensible event’, largely in Trinitarian theology and the field of missiology. D. Bosch, C. Wright, N. T. Wright, R. Bauckham, and J. Verkuyl, to name a few, support Rosin’s findings that the focus and impetus of the concept is the activity of God. In the wake of Barth’s challenge early in the twentieth century that theologians and the church alike have been wrongly identifying mission from an anthropocentric vantage, it is natural that almost exclusive attention and research has myopically been centred on the activity of God.

The concept of *missio Dei* is, undeniably, comprehensive when understood in the light of a God, who, being the creative force that brought all that we know and understand into existence, purposefully participates in and with that creation to fulfil a purpose. Though it is arguable that the inner nature of God is, ultimately, beyond complete human comprehension, God’s purpose is comprehensible and made known through God’s particular and universal activity in the world. Arguably, Rahner is recognized as the foremost scholar in articulating the immanent and economic nature and activity of the triune God. More recently, Flett has re-emphasized the

⁵ Rosin, *Missio Dei*, p. 3.

⁶ Rosin, *Missio Dei*, p. 34.

inseparability of the immanent and economic God, using the language of ‘being’ and ‘activity’.

Rosin’s overall contribution was the affirming recognition that the term itself, for missiology, denotes a new starting point for discussion that, arguably, had long been overlooked – God. Simple yet powerful is the newly accepted launching point for all missiological discussion. The starting point for talking about mission, the mission of God, or the *missio Dei* does not begin with the ecclesia or the *missio humanitatis* as Thangaraj later argued.⁷ The *missio Dei* does not begin with the church, a person, or a context. The *missio Dei* begins with the triune God. The *missio Dei* is made manifest through the activity of the triune God in which the church and persons participate. For centuries, Catholic and Protestant practice in ‘missional activities’ was supported by the theory that mission is simply an activity of the church moving into the world and was not understood or articulated as first being an activity of God. The twentieth century witnessed a shift in missiological theory from mission belonging to the church to being an activity of the triune God that is intended for all and invites all to participate.

1.3. Developing the *Missio Dei*

Bosch was a significant contributor to missiology during the twentieth century for his work in paradigmatic thinking and understanding in the history of mission. He writes, ‘After the First World War missiologists began to take note of recent developments in biblical and systematic theology. In a paper read at the Brandenburg Missionary Conference in 1932, Karl Barth ([1932] 1957) became one of the first theologians to articulate mission as an activity of God himself.’⁸ Barth is widely recognized for giving birth to the *missio Dei* concept, and he was the first in the twentieth century to speak of mission as the activity of God. Barth’s emphasis was, firstly, a focus upon what God was doing and, secondly, through the activity of God, what the church was doing. Speaking of the *missio*, Barth states,

⁷ Chapter 2, Section 2.3 ‘Opposition to the Biblical Grand Narrative’.

⁸ D. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), p. 389.

Must not even the most faithful missionary, the most convinced friend of missions, have reason to reflect that the term *missio* was in the ancient Church an expression of the Trinity – namely the expression of the divine sending forth of self, the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit to the world? Can we indeed claim that we can do it any other way?⁹

Barth's reference to the ancient church and the illumination of the Divine sending the Divine is identified in the post-biblical writings of Augustine who also articulated mission as an activity of the triune God. Consider Augustine's understanding of a key element in the *missio Dei*:

Behold the purpose for which the Son of God has been sent, or rather behold what it means for the Son of God to be sent. Whatever things have been done in time for the sake of producing the faith, whereby we are cleansed for the contemplation of the truth, in things that had a beginning, have been brought forth from eternity and are referred back to eternity, and have been either testimonies of this mission or are the mission itself of the Son of God.¹⁰

Poitras notes, 'The potential relevance of Augustine's theology for mission today becomes evident when we notice how a descendant of his concept of the *missio Dei* has become commonplace in recent mission thought.'¹¹

Vicedom, influenced by Barth, Hartenstein, and the Willingen Conference, became a key voice and proponent of the *missio Dei* concept. Vicedom contributes to the concept of *missio* (being sent) as he identifies God's unique and divine power to be both sender and sendee. 'If we want to do justice to the biblical conception, the *missio Dei* must be understood also as an attributive genitive. God becomes not only the sender but simultaneously the One who is sent.'¹²

⁹ K. Barth, *Theologische Fragen und Antworten* (Zollikon: Evangelischer Verlag, 1957), pp114-115. Translated from German by Domenico Nigrelli.

¹⁰ Augustine, *The Trinity* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), p. 162.

¹¹ E.W. Poitras, 'St. Augustine and the *Missio Dei*: A Reflection on Mission at the Close of the Twentieth Century', *Mission Studies* 2/32 (1999), p. 29.

¹² G.F. Vicedom, *The Mission of God: An Introduction to a Theology of Mission* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1965), p. 7.

It is argued by Glasser and C. Wright, to name only two, that ‘sent’ language within the context of the Trinity is not a concept that began in the twentieth century or with Augustine. A good starting point for a conversation about the *missio Dei* begins with the Bible. One reads and hears about the sending of God in scripture. Jesus said to them, ‘Peace to you! As the Father has sent me, I also send you’ (John 20:21). The use of scripture, in this particular case, serves only to illustrate the validity of the Bible as a starting point, a legitimate source of authority for scholarship concerning missiology, for conversations about the *missio Dei* and the concept of ‘sending’ and being ‘sent’.

1.4. Defining the *Missio Dei*

Arguably, few have given a succinct definition of the *missio Dei*. Bosch and Verkuyl are exceptions, while Castro writes of God’s mission as ‘purpose’. It is necessary to include definitions of mission and missiology alongside definitions of the *missio Dei* for two reasons: first, they illustrate how the concept of the *missio Dei* has influenced missiologists in their thinking during the latter half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century; second, by emphasizing the ‘sending’ nature of God and the condition of being ‘sent’ for the church and persons, they illuminate the need for further development in how the activity of God and the activity of persons and the church are to be understood. This gap may be framed in the context of a question, ‘What does it mean to participate in the *missio Dei*?’

Bosch states that the *missio Dei* is ‘God’s self-revelation as the One who loves the world, God’s involvement in and with the world, the nature and activity of God, which embraces both the church and the world, and in which the church is privileged to participate.’¹³ In Bosch’s definition of the *missio Dei*, God is the focus. It is God who chooses to be active in the world and it is through God’s activity of embracing love that the church and world learn of God’s immanence through God’s economy and, subsequently, are privileged to participate. Bosch does not elaborate on how the church participates, only that it is privileged to participate.

¹³ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*. p. 10.

Verkuyl defines God's mission as God being 'actively engaged in the reestablishment of His liberating dominion over the cosmos and all humankind.'¹⁴ In seeking to develop this definition, Verkuyl asks, 'What is the ultimate goal of the *missio Dei*? The answer is easy to find; in both the Old Testament and the New, God by both his words and deeds claims that he is intent on bringing the kingdom of God to expression and restoring his liberating domain of authority.'¹⁵ Verkuyl elaborates on the purpose of the kingdom. 'The kingdom does not only address the spiritual and moral needs of a person, but his material, physical, social, cultural and political needs as well.'¹⁶ Verkuyl's understanding of the *missio Dei*, like Bosch's, focuses upon God being the centre of God's mission, but he adds that God's intent is the development of God's kingdom. He states this explicitly when he defines missiology. Verkuyl writes, 'Missiology is the study of the salvation activities of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit throughout the world geared to bringing the kingdom of God into existence.'¹⁷ Once again, the activity of the triune God is emphasized but not the activities of persons or the church.

Similarly, Castro suggests that 'the purpose of God...to gather the whole creation under the Lordship of Christ Jesus in whom, by the power of the Holy Spirit, all are brought into communion with God.'¹⁸ In this perspective, the *missio Dei* concept is found to be focused upon God and God's activity, and through that activity, persons are drawn into communion with God. God's purpose includes the activity of persons and the church:

Mission is the fundamental reality of our Christian life. We are Christians because we have been called by God to work with him in the fulfilment of his purposes for humanity as a whole. Our life in

¹⁴ J. Verkuyl, 'The Biblical Notion of Kingdom: Test of Validity for Theology of Religion' in C. Van Engen, D.S. Gilliland, & P. Pierson (eds.), *The Good News of the Kingdom* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), p. 72.

¹⁵ J. Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), p. 197.

¹⁶ Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology*, p. 211.

¹⁷ Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology*, p. 5.

¹⁸ E. Castro, 'Themes in Theology of Mission Arising out of San Antonio Canberra' in C. Van Engen, D.S. Gilliland & P. Pierson (eds.), *The Good News of the Kingdom: Mission Theology for the Third Millennium* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999) p. 133.

this world is life in mission. Life has a purpose only to the extent that it has a missionary dimension.¹⁹

Kirk argues that ‘mission is quite simply, though profoundly, what the Christian community is sent to do, beginning right where it is located (“you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem...and to the ends of the earth”, Acts 1:8)’.²⁰ An emphasis upon being ‘sent’, the activity of the triune God, and the building of the kingdom of God come to the forefront when surveying the *missio Dei* concept in the field of missiology. This same understanding is found articulated in how scholars have defined mission and missiology. Newbigin, in defining mission, speaks of God’s mission by identifying, broadly, the activity of those that participate in the nature of God and God’s kingdom. Newbigin states,

Mission is the proclamation of the kingdom, the presence of the kingdom, and the provenience of the kingdom. By proclaiming the reign of God over all things the church acts out its faith that the Father of Jesus is indeed ruler of all. The church, by inviting all humankind to share in the mystery of the presence of the kingdom hidden in its life through its union with the crucified and risen life of Jesus, acts out the love of Jesus which took him to the cross. By obediently following where the Spirit leads, often in ways neither planned, known, nor understood, the church acts out the hope which is given by the presence of the Spirit who is the living foretaste of the kingdom.²¹

God invites all into the kingdom through the Son. The church, when it is obedient in following the Holy Spirit, has the opportunity to participate in the life of the Trinity, emulating and sharing the love of Christ, announcing the reign of the King, inviting

¹⁹ E. Castro, ‘Liberation, Development, and Evangelism: Must We Choose in Mission?’, *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* (July, 1978), p. 87.

²⁰ J.A. Kirk, *What Is Mission?: Theological Explorations* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1999), p. 24.

²¹ L. Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), p. 72.

others into the kingdom. A common perception that runs consistently throughout the missiological field in the *missio Dei* concept is the understanding that the God of all creation is active and present in the world. The question still requiring a missiological extrapolation is, ‘How are the person and the church understood to be participants in the activity of God as it is articulated within the *missio Dei* concept?’

C. Wright is dissatisfied with solely emphasizing the root word of mission, ‘*mitto*’, to send, when speaking of God’s mission. It does not give due consideration to other emphases illumined as part of the grand narrative or God’s grand purpose. This thesis is in agreement that the popular understanding in which the term mission has been and is often used, ‘solely in relation to human endeavours of various kinds,’²² is equally as limited in articulating the *missio Dei* as it solely being the activity of God. C. Wright defines mission as, ‘Fundamentally, our mission (if it is biblically informed and validated) means our committed participation as God’s people, at God’s invitation and command, in God’s own mission within the history of God’s world for the redemption of God’s creation.’²³

The definition of missiology proposed in *Missiology: An Ecumenical Introduction* reflects Newbigin’s understanding of church involvement but incorporates the personal emphasis.

Missiology is a branch of theology in the sense that it is bound up with a faith perspective...and in this undertaking we are dealing with the ultimate frame of reference for the ‘movement of Christianity’...with Mission being understood as, the dynamic relationship between God and the world: God *sends* himself, his Son, and his church. Those who become actively involved in the vision of his redemptive will understand themselves as *sent* individuals or groups ... Therefore, to let the theological character of the discipline come out in our definition of Missiology, we have to speak of – in addition to ‘the study of the movement of Christianity’ – the exposition of the mission of God, of the ‘sentness’ of the church in

²² C.J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), p. 22.

²³ Wright, *The Mission of God*, pp. 22–23.

the observed process of change, development, contextualization, influence, and assimilation.²⁴

Varying definitions and emphases by scholars serve to illuminate the blending of conceptual elements of the *missio Dei*, mission, and missiology. Scholars are integrating Christian theology with a renewed interest in Trinitarian theology in the field of missiology. This demonstrates Bosch's argument that there is a paradigm shift in how mission and missiology are understood. In part, this is the result of the *missio Dei* concept being embraced in the academy while at the same time undergoing examination and questioning. There is the need for greater clarification, however, in how this new articulation of relationship between God and the world, the *missio Dei*, embraces the activity of both God and the church.

1.5. Opposition to the *Missio Dei* Concept

Although the term *missio Dei* is often used throughout missiological circles – and where the term is not used, the concept is present – not all agree upon the usefulness of the term. Hoedemaker in 'The People of God and the Ends of the Earth' believes that the *missio Dei* concept, as addressed through a lens that intersects mission and ecumenicism, does mark a new paradigm in missiological dialogue but fails in that it is too open in all directions to be of significant value. It is only when enumeration is given to questions surrounding salvation history and 'concrete human history', church and Israel, and the kingdom of God and humanity that the concept will be of value.²⁵ These are, certainly in part if not holistically, areas that Glasser and C. Wright elucidate in *Announcing the Kingdom* and *The Mission of God*, respectively. The *missio Dei* concept, when articulated through a biblical grand narrative lens, places the church in a post-Messianic historical perspective that has the unique responsibility to be 'sent' to all the nations, including those in which the church resides.

²⁴ F.J. Verstraelen, A. Camps, L.A. Hoedemaker & M.R. Spindler (eds), *Missiology: An Ecumenical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), pp. 3–4.

²⁵ L.A. Hoedemaker, 'The People of God and the Ends of the Earth' in F.J. Verstraelen, A. Camps, L.A. Hoedemaker & M.R. Spindler (eds.), *Missiology: An Ecumenical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), p. 165.

Missio, the concept of being sent, as understood by Hoedemaker, loses impetus when the importance is placed upon being ‘participants’ in the world-relatedness of God.²⁶ He argues, ‘it [*missio*] could become the designation of a generalized relationship between God and humanity that makes specific mission work virtually superfluous.’²⁷ This statement serves to illuminate the need for a clearly articulated theology of participation for the *missio Dei* concept.

The relationship between God and humanity is understood to be both particular and universal. It is particular in the sense that one, a person, accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. No person can do that for another. It is universal in the sense that the relationship offered to a person through Jesus Christ is the same type of relationship offered to all persons. Therefore, the belief that one is ‘sent’ by God to participate in ‘specific mission work’, or particular work, to serve a universal end, one that Glasser, A. Lord, and others would say was the kingdom of God, can hardly be anything but superfluous unless one is willing to make the argument that God is in some way superfluous.

The priority in the *missio Dei* is the relationship between God and those made in the image of God: a relationship that is nurtured through grace, God’s participation in the world that God created. Rather than *missio* being indicative of a ‘generalized relationship’ with God, it is actually quite specific in that the emphasis is placed upon the one who is sending.

If the *missio Dei* is articulated as the reconciling, restoring, and renewing of all unto God’s self, and this is possible through God’s grace and humanity’s participation in that grace, then specificity is placed upon the relationship. If it is understood, as this thesis later argues, that persons and the church participate in the *missio Dei* through participation in the means of grace, then even the means serve to emphasize a giving God, a God who relates to persons through universal and specific means.

²⁶ Hoedemaker, ‘The People of God and the Ends of the Earth’, p. 166.

²⁷ Hoedemaker, ‘The People of God and the Ends of the Earth’, p. 166.

1.6. The Inclusivity of the *Missio Dei*

The quagmire of disunity amongst the many expressions of Christianity occurs when the authority of the *missio Dei* is usurped by ecclesial polity or doctrine claiming authority for mission. However, if mission is understood as originating with and in God, then all ecclesial bodies are part of the *missio Dei*. The intent of this thesis is not to determine who is ‘right’ in relation to another or to ‘prove’ one doctrinal stance to be more valid than another. The intent is to offer a theology of participation in the *missio Dei* that has the potential to embrace all those communities and persons of faith claiming to be followers of Jesus Christ.

The commonality amongst those who call themselves Christians is the triune God: the Three–One that is accepted throughout the universal church and whose activity and character is revealed through the most widely accepted source of authority for Christians, the Bible. If the *missio Dei* is to reconcile, restore, and renew all into God’s holy love with the Trinity and with others then the focus is not on one’s activity, or the activity of the ecclesia, or the need to be ‘right’ over being ‘faithful’, but is on the source of all-perfect love – the triune God.

The *missio Dei* is expressed as relationship. Through God’s redeeming activity in and with the world, persons and the church become participants in the *missio Dei*. To be part of the *missio Dei* is to be in relationship with God and the world. The witness of God’s mission carried out in the life of the church is observed in the economy of the church carried out in the world.

Some missiologists articulate economy in the form of contextualization. Verstraelen helps to illustrate the point.

It is not longer possible to formulate an overall perspective on “mission” naively from one perspective, and certainly not from a Western perspective. It will only be possible to formulate such an understanding of “mission” on the basis of theological reflection on the unity that arises in, behind, and above contextual diversity. This unity will then have to be defined “missionarily”: It will have to be defined on the basis of an understanding of the journey of Christianity in the world as a journey with a starting point

(Jerusalem) and a point of reference (the kingdom of God). And it will have to be defined in terms of the “real presence” of that starting point and the focus on the common point of reference becoming visible in all the (contextual) ramifications of the journey.²⁸

The journey of Christianity, arguably, could be understood as having begun in Jerusalem or, as Glasser would argue, holistically and still using the kingdom of God framework, it began with God and creation, as the whole Bible announces the kingdom of God. The point is that mission can be and often is articulated contextually. The *missio Dei* is carried out in context. Contexts change. God, as the Bible argues, is unchanging. Therefore, the unity in, behind, and above context is God.

Niebuhr, a lifelong advocate of and contributor to ecumenicism, recognized that the power, unity, and embracing love of God are to be found by understanding mission to be inseparable from the Trinity. He states,

the doctrine of the Trinity...has great importance for an ecumenical theology as a formulation of the Church's whole faith in God in distinction from the partial faiths and partial formulations of parts of the Church and of the individuals in the Church...A doctrine of the Trinity, so formulated, will never please any one part of the Church but it will be an ecumenical doctrine providing not for the exclusion of heretics but for their inclusion, in the body on which they are actually dependent.²⁹

It can be argued that the *missio Dei* concept is especially for and inclusive of heretics. To affirm this one must look behind a dominant theme of ‘sending’ and being ‘sent’ of the *missio Dei* and ask, ‘To what end?’

²⁸ F.J. Verstraelen, ‘Introduction: Part II World, Mission, and Church’ in F.J. Verstraelen, A. Camps, L.A. Hoedemaker & M.R. Spindler (eds.), *Missiology: An Ecumenical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), p. 120.

²⁹ H.R. Niebuhr, ‘The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Unity of the Church’, *Theology Today*, 3/8 (1946), p. 372.

1.7. Conclusion

Over the last sixty years, the *missio Dei* concept has influenced the fields of missiology, Trinitarian studies, and theology. But like any paradigm shift from a popular understanding, the *missio Dei* concept must undergo rigorous examination and systematic developments if it is to be fully unwrapped and engaged, and is to find its due place in the history of Christian thought, or, more significantly, shape the future practice of generations of Christians.

With the introduction of the *missio Dei* term and the general embrace of the concept, theologians and missiologists have often been polarized. One group, often identified as ‘ecumenicals’, emphasized the God-World-Church theory. The other group, often identified as ‘evangelicals’, retained an emphasis upon articulating the church as being the primary agent in the *missio Dei* concept.

Richebacher notes that, ‘This polarization process cannot be laid at the door of the *missio Dei* interpretation itself, especially not in the terms of its original definition. On the other hand, it must be noted that, in the very general form it has had until now, it has done nothing to prevent the polarization process.’³⁰ This example reflects an overarching embrace of the *missio Dei* term but also serves to demonstrate the ongoing need for scholarly treatment of the concept. Most scholars, with one exception being Hoedemaker, are in agreement that the place to begin is with Trinitarian theology. This thesis is in agreement that Trinitarian theology, rooted in the biblical grand narrative, is the place to begin. The argument presented here is that the area of greatest need for attention and development is a theology of participation grounded in Trinitarian theology for the church and persons.

Despite the polemical divide between the ecumenicals and the evangelicals, wherever they choose to ground their claims, or in light of the overwhelming support and synthesis of opinion that the Trinity is the place to begin, the term is not going simply to fade into the archives of missiological and theological history. Either way, scholarship recognizes that the church erroneously held the conviction and propagated the claim that it was the source and understood to be the subject of ‘mission’.

³⁰ W. Richebacher, ‘*Missio Dei*: The Basis of Mission Theology or a Wrong Path’, *International Review of Mission*, 92/367 (2003), p. 594.

But the knee-jerk reaction that has ensued is a myopic focus upon the activity of God and the emphasis upon *mitto*. Though many recognize and use the language of cooperation, and even participation, the myopia has remained on God, thereby limiting the development of a holistic theology of participation. From a Western European perspective, but not unlike the majority of missiologists, Engelsviken states, ‘it is into the world and into world history that God sends, and to participate in God’s mission is to enter into cooperation with God in the world and in this history.’³¹ The Trinity is identified as the beginning of ‘mission’ and the source from which one is deemed to be ‘sent’. Equally significant in the development towards a theology of participation in the *missio Dei* is due consideration of that which determines, for most Christians, the source or authority that frames Trinitarian doctrine – the Bible.

The Christian academy is pouring forth works centred on the life of the Trinity and the Trinity’s life in action as a result of new articulations of the movement of God as the *missio Dei*. But the Christian community, both popular culture and the academy, is seeking an articulation, from a Christian perspective, that embraces the practice of evangelism, social justice, and worship in the context of how God is moving in and with and through the world.

There are two key issues and two key problems being carried forward:

- *Missio Dei* is central to understanding mission and missiology.
- Authority for mission and missiology, in the *missio Dei*, belongs to and begins with the triune God as revealed in scripture.
- In the development of the *missio Dei*, almost exclusive attention, myopia, has been on the activity of God, neglecting the activity of persons and the church.
- The activity of God is primarily identified as ‘sending’, *missio*, thereby inadvertently eclipsing attention on developing answers to the question, ‘In what way or how are the church and persons understood to be participants in the *missio Dei*?’

³¹ T. Engelsviken, ‘*Missio Dei*: The Understanding and Misunderstanding of a Theological Concept in European Churches and Missiology’, *International Review of Mission*, 92/367 (2003), p. 489.

Chapter 2. The Biblical Grand Narrative

2.1. Introduction

For Christians, a systematic development of a theology of participation in the *missio Dei* necessitates a beginning and end for understanding their relationship with the triune God. Biblical scholars engaging the *missio Dei* do not identify the beginning with the historical birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ but with the triune God and the Bible, the grand narrative that tells how the world and everything in it was created. The narrative continues with how all humanity fell from “right” relationship with their Creator–Father, and how the Redeemer–Son made it possible for all to be restored in right relationship with the Father, in the Son, through the Spirit–Sanctifier.³²

All Christians’ personal, communal, and eternal narratives are held in tension within this one grand narrative, the Bible. Further, no one, no past, present, or future persons are in existence outside of this grand narrative. The biblical grand narrative tells the story of a triune God who has created, redeemed, and sanctified with intent and purpose: it is the grand narrative of the *missio Dei*.

The mid twentieth century paradigm shift in missiological thinking challenged missiologists and Christians to begin to articulate the activities that had previously been understood as being the mission of the church or persons and to assert that there is only one ‘mission’, the *missio Dei*. There are many visions, ways, and ministries in which to participate in the *missio Dei*, but there is only one triune God, hence there is only one mission.

From a biblical perspective, there are a number of approaches or starting points in launching a survey of the concept of the *missio Dei*. Scholars have begun from contextual and ecclesiastical vantages, as well as beginning with the derivation of the term, its conceptual origin, within missiology. For centuries, the Bible has been and is considered by most Christians – though not all – to be the essential and primary narrative of God’s activity with and in the world and the authority for faith

³² The intent in this chapter is to illumine key scholars who have intersected biblical studies and missiology, while noting the influence upon the *missio Dei* and vice-versa. Undoubtedly, their work has benefited from narrative theologians like G.W. Stroup, M. Goldberg, G. Loughlin, H.W. Frei, and G. Fackre.

in life. Lodahl notes, ‘Christian theologians generally agree on this, however; no matter how complicated the job of telling God’s story might get, we have a common starting point in the Bible. The Scriptures, then, provide the primary source for theology, or thinking about God’.³³ This chapter looks at the work of scholars who have intersected the *missio Dei* concept with the biblical grand narrative to illumine their understanding of what it means to participate in the *missio Dei*.

While some missionaries and missiologists have relied upon one or even several selected texts from the Bible to articulate their mission theology, C. Wright and Glasser, amongst others, argue that the Bible is the grand narrative; it announces the kingdom of God, it is the story of God and the relationship between God and creation. The proposal is that accepting such an argument establishes a framework from which all other discussion relating to the *missio Dei* may be developed.

2.2. The Bible as a Grand Narrative

Christians tell a faith story of a triune God who is both universal and particular: a living God whose reign encompasses the whole of creation, and a God whose reign governs each person, community, and nation. All Christian narratives, ultimately, begin and end with the activity of God. The Bible, Christians confess in faith, inspired by the triune God and written by humans (and subject to humanity’s imperfect interpretations) is a grand narrative that claims authority over all other narratives.

Bauckham states, ‘A metanarrative is an attempt to grasp the meaning and destiny of human history as a whole by telling a single story about it; to encompass, as it were, all the immense diversity of human stories in a single, overall story which integrates them into a single meaning.’³⁴ The Bible is a grand narrative, as articulated by scholars in the fields of biblical studies and missiology, of the economic God: a history that records God’s activity of a creating, redeeming, and sanctifying movement in, with, and through humanity from beginning to end.

³³ M. Lodahl, *The Story of God: Wesleyan Theology & Biblical Narrative* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1994), p. 16.

³⁴ R. Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), p. 4.

Glasser and C. Wright are biblical scholars and missiologists. Wright's intent is furthering the holistic understanding of ethics, the Old Testament, and Christian mission. Glasser's primary emphasis has been the advancement in understanding the kingdom of God concept within the grand narrative of the Bible.³⁵ While Glasser articulates the *missio Dei* concept through a kingdom theological lens, Wright articulates his through a covenantal theological lens.

Both Glasser and Wright make the case for establishing a missional hermeneutic of the Bible based on a *missio Dei* theology. Wright states, 'Mission is what the Bible is all about; we could as meaningfully talk about the missional basis of the Bible as of the biblical basis for mission.'³⁶ If God is understood as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of humanity and the cosmos, then the Bible, as argued by scholars like Wright and Glasser, points specifically to a purposeful or missional God. The Bible reveals God as moving throughout history with the intentional purpose of reconciling all humanity in relationship with God's self. From 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth' (Genesis 1:1) to 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen' (Revelation 22:21), the grand narrative unfolds.

Wright succinctly states:

This has often been presented as a four-point narrative: *creation, fall, redemption, and future hope*. This whole worldview is predicated on teleological monotheism: that is, the affirmation that there is one God at work in the universe and in human history, and that this God has a goal, a purpose, a mission that will ultimately be accomplished by the power of God's Word and for the glory of God's name. This is the mission of the biblical God.³⁷

Similarly, Glasser writes, 'the whole Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, is a missionary book, the revelation of God's purpose and action in mission in human

³⁵ Both Glasser and C. Wright draw together the biblical grand narrative with the *missio Dei*.

³⁶ Wright, *The Mission of God*, p. 29.

³⁷ Wright, *The Mission of God*, p. 64.

history.’³⁸ Both Wright and Glasser argue that the Bible tells of a mission: a mission that does not belong to a person, an institution, or even the church, but finds its home in the nature of the living God. Rather than simply offering selected texts from the Old or New Testaments to articulate their mission theology, Glasser and Wright demonstrate their understanding and argument that the whole of the Bible is to be understood as the grand narrative of God’s mission.

Three other biblical scholars whose work intersects biblical studies and the *missio Dei* with the biblical grand narrative in this chapter are W. Brueggemann, N.T. Wright, and R. Bauckham. Bauckham emphasizes God’s movement from the particular to the universal, using a kingdom theological lens.³⁹ T. Wright focuses upon human longings, justice and renewal, and following Jesus in his book *Simply Christian*. Brueggemann, through an evangelistic-proclamation lens, also articulates a tri-fold approach by emphasizing God’s victory, announcing the victory, and appropriating the victory in *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism: Living a Three-Storied Life*. Each scholar, both explicitly or implicitly, embraces the biblical grand narrative and articulates an understanding of what it means to participate in the *missio Dei*.

2.3. Opposition to the Biblical Grand Narrative

It must be noted that there are missiologists who do not find value in starting with the Bible, as well as those who prefer not to use the term *missio Dei* when forming a theology of mission. Thangaraj proposes that the development of a theology of Christian mission should not begin with the Bible or the *missio Dei* term or concept. His book *The Common Task: A Theology of Christian Mission* was written before Glasser’s and C. Wright’s works on the biblical grand narrative and the *missio Dei* concept. Their scholarship and holistic approach answer Thangaraj’s and other theologians’ concern that when one begins with the Bible – and the history of mission has shown this to be true – there is a tendency to use a particular verse or even multiple selected texts from the Bible as the basis for developing the theology of mission. Consequently, when the Bible is understood to be a grand narrative and

³⁸ A. F. Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God's Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), p. 17.

³⁹ Future reference to N.T. Wright will be noted as ‘T. Wright’.

that there is a missional basis for the Bible, the Bible is a good starting point, as the *missio Dei* is the tapestry, the grand narrative that is comprised of all the various narratives, or threads.

Thangaraj argues, ‘The Bible is not a single book with a single understanding of what the mission of the church is.’⁴⁰ However, the Bible in its breadth, depth, and scope does articulate the *missio Dei*. When one grasps the magnitude of the *missio Dei* concept, that ‘mission’ is grounded in the triune God, then the church is understood to be part of the *missio Dei*. Subsequently, there is reason to celebrate the diversity of gifts and talents that each faith community has been given, and rejoice, as they are able to participate in multiple ways in the *missio Dei*. That being said, the argument will be made that there are characteristics, based upon an articulation of the means of grace, which are applicable to all Christian faith communities or the universal church.

Thangaraj argues for the inclusion of dialogue from and with other non-Christian faith bodies in seeking to develop a theology of Christian mission. Certainly, the missiological conversation has been ever widening over the last century. Over the one hundred years from Edinburgh 1910 to the Edinburgh 2010 conference there has been an expanding scope of representation from the Christian faith communities around the world, with an exceptional increase from the two-thirds world or the ‘global south’. This is to be commended, celebrated even, but there is no correlation to be drawn from or support given to the belief that just because more representatives from multiple Christian communities is good, then it must be better to include Muslims, Hindus, Taoists, or others. The ‘local narratives’ of today that Thangaraj argues serve as the basis for a new starting point will become the ‘local narratives’ of history tomorrow, and the conversation must begin afresh.

No missiologist, or very few, would argue against the need for continual renewal within the church. Scripture reveals a triune God that is understood as the same yesterday, today, and evermore. It also reveals that humanity is not. Therefore, based on supporting evidence from twentieth and twenty-first century missiological scholarship, it is logical to develop a Christian theology of mission by starting with

⁴⁰ M. T. Thangaraj, *The Common Task: A Theology of Christian Mission* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), p. 34.

the premise that the triune God is the one in whom and from whom mission originates. The Bible is the book comprised of many ‘local narratives’ that explicitly and implicitly tells a story of God’s intention for reconciliation, restoration, and the renewal of humanity.

Not only is Thangaraj suggesting not using the Bible, but he also discards the *missio Dei* concept. ‘While it is possible to conceive of God in such inclusive terms, the concept of God has not always functioned that way in human history. Since the known beginnings of human history, a sizable part of humanity has understood and lived out its existence without any reference to the idea of “God”.’⁴¹ Thangaraj argues that if you rule out the Bible and the concept of the *missio Dei*, a good starting point would be the ‘*missio humanitatis*’, the mission of humanity, which is inclusive of all humanity.

Although Thangaraj acknowledges that there is not a consensus of what it means to be human, he believes the *missio humanitatis* will serve as a starting point for developing a theology of Christian mission because of three reasons: it is a ‘conversation’, ‘mission’ is a very popular word now in many spheres of society, and the world is becoming ever more ‘historically conscious’. In other words, people have ‘an intense and intentional awareness that human beings are fundamentally historical creatures who, although they create their own historical traditions and cultural expression, are significantly shaped and oriented by the same history and culture.’⁴² Three affirmations that he uses to support his three reasons are: humans are self-conscious beings, historical beings, and ecological beings.⁴³ His argument for not starting with the Bible or the concept of the *missio Dei* loses validity when he states:

As theologians are fond of saying, the proper business of theology is to talk about God. In this sense, all theology is God-talk. So a theological discussion of mission demands that our talk about mission be “presided over” and directed by our vision and

⁴¹ Thangaraj, *The Common Task*, p. 40.

⁴² Thangaraj, *The Common Task*, pp. 42–43.

⁴³ Thangaraj, *The Common Task*, pp. 43–44.

understanding of God. In other words, *missio humanitatis* will have to be redefined or qualified by the *missio Dei*.⁴⁴

The *missio Dei*, for Thangaraj, is articulated as the triune God goes forth as one, and at the same time goes forth towards everyone.⁴⁵ In other words, to have a conversation about the mission of humanity it is first necessary to have a conversation about, and be informed by, the *missio Dei*. What becomes apparent through Thangaraj's argument is the necessity for any conversation within an ecumenical circle to begin with a firm understanding or starting point that is reflective of what a theology of Christian mission should resemble. In his own work Thangaraj eventually validates that all theological conversations are to be held within the context and understanding of the *missio Dei*.

2.4. Glasser and a Kingdom of God Perspective

In speaking of the *missio Dei*, Glasser states, '... the goal of *missio Dei* is to incorporate people into the Kingdom of God and to involve them in his mission. Because the Father is the Sender, Jesus Christ the One who is sent, and the Holy Spirit is the Revealer, it follows that non-involvement in mission on the part of the church is to be deplored.'⁴⁶ As the whole Bible is a revelation of God's mission, and God's mission is to bring people into God's kingdom then the Bible is all about the kingdom of God. Through the lens of Kingdom theology, Glasser articulates a linear thematic approach that begins in Genesis and ends in Revelation to emphasize that the whole Bible tells the story of God's mission, thereby establishing that the continuity and interdependence of the Old and New Testaments is paramount for understanding the *missio Dei*.

Glasser claims, 'God's right to reign and rule over all of creation and over all the peoples of the world must be unequivocally understood. This brings together the message of the Old and the New Testament narratives because the Kingdom of God is one of the central, overarching themes in the Bible.'⁴⁷ He has identified seven

⁴⁴ Thangaraj, *The Common Task*, pp. 61–62.

⁴⁵ Thangaraj, *The Common Task*, p. 63.

⁴⁶ Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom*, p. 245.

⁴⁷ Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom*, p. 20.

axioms that are central in linking God's mission and Kingdom in the Old and New Testaments and are essential to establishing his missional hermeneutic of the Bible. His first axiom is:

God is sovereign in his kingship. God's rule over individuals and nations is always righteous and just. The absolute reign of God over the Kingdom he created and the human beings who care for one another and for the created world depicts both the divine ideal and will as well as the painful truth of the Old Testament. A secularizing and rebellious Kingdom people thwarted God's rule. The demand for an earthly king and the behaviour of the people under the rule of the earthbound kings set the stage for the new covenant when Jesus would walk amongst humans and would declare a new covenant in his blood.⁴⁸

In this first axiom, Glasser identifies God as Creator and Jesus as Redeemer and articulates God's authority over and in persons' and nations' lives, emphasizing two dimensions of the 'Kingdom' concept. God's nature, as King, is to use authority in a just and righteous manner. When tracing the scriptural texts and history of the Old Testament, it becomes apparent just how far people and nations went to thwart God's rule and how far a sovereign God, who is always just and righteous, will go to ensure the *missio Dei* is fulfilled. Jesus Christ ushered in a new covenant, not an abandonment of the old rule, but a fulfilment of the rule in a new way. Throughout the Bible scripture has revealed a God who offers persons the truth that no power is greater than that of the One who is Creator, the One who has the ability and the compassion to offer a broken world God's self in Jesus Christ. It is scripture that repeatedly tells the story, through various people and situations, that there is nothing greater than God. No military might or natural disaster or nation or celebrity or rich or poor stands outside the reign of God. Neither during biblical times nor now do all recognize or accept the reign of God. Yet, once again, scripture claims 'One day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord' (Romans 14:1).

⁴⁸ Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom*, p. 23.

Glasser's second axiom states, 'God's sovereign rule demands personal commitment. Those who would acknowledge God to be their God must personally commit themselves to him and to his righteousness.'⁴⁹ From the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation the grand narrative clearly articulates the character of a God who 'calls' and 'sends' people, from Adam and Eve to Abraham and those who are disciples of Jesus Christ. With the acceptance of God's call and claim upon one's life there is the expected response of being committed to God's righteousness and being 'sent'. To talk about commitment is to talk about relationship. To talk about the *missio Dei* is to talk about the relationship between the triune God and persons. The Bible's narrative tells how humanity came into existence and that persons are made in God's image. From a missiological perspective, grounded in Trinitarian theology, one's first commitment, relationship, is with God. Through God's grace and righteousness in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, persons are able to live within a faith-based relationship with the triune God and all of creation.

In the third axiom, 'God's subjects must constitute a "servant" community. God is not concerned solely with individuals but with families, peoples, and nations.'⁵⁰ From within Sinaitic legislation to the Suffering Servant to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, God is amongst God's people calling, inviting, showing, leading, and empowering them to share in God's *shalom*. It is Jesus who recapitulates the vocation of Israel. It is Jesus who teaches that peace is not the absence of outer conflict but the inner assurance that one is never alone, nor forsaken – God is with you. To be in God's presence is to see and know the needs of others and to respond with the righteousness of God.

The righteousness of God is exemplified and fulfilled in Jesus Christ, or, as Glasser has written in his fourth axiom:

The Old Testament community of the King becomes the New Testament body of Christ. The people of God, as custodians of the keys to the Kingdom, will share a new togetherness as members of

⁴⁹ Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom*, p. 24.

⁵⁰ Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom*, p. 25.

the New Testament church. They possess a common life within the context of individual participation in Jesus Christ.⁵¹

The church functions in and through the life of Christ. Prayer, Bible study, worship, united confession, and reaching out in love and compassion to the world are marks of the body of Christ. God's grace equips the hearts and minds of the body in unity with God's mission for the restoration and reconciliation of the world with the triune God.

The fifth axiom states:

God's people are called to mission. God's sovereign rule will ultimately bring light to his lordship over all peoples. It is in the blessings promised to the nations through Abraham (Gen 12:3) that the future begins. Where Israel failed, the church is given the mandate to "fill up ... what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church" (Col. 1:24).⁵²

Every day is an opportunity to participate in the restorative and reconciling work of Jesus Christ. God's cry through Micah to 'act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with God' (6:8) is a prophetic voice to the Hebrew people: one not fulfilled through the nation Israel, but transferred to the church through Jesus Christ who says that he is 'the way, the truth and the life' (John 14:6a). It is a task for the people of God to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ through word and deed. Beginning with the triune God, Christ's followers, equipped with God-given gifts and talents, under the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit, participate in the *missio Dei* in many various ways.

Every Christian, every day, is to be prepared to be challenged and endure suffering, as Glasser notes in the sixth axiom:

⁵¹ Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom*, p. 25.

⁵² Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom*, p. 26.

God's sovereign rule will be relentlessly resisted and opposed by his people, by the nations that do not know him, and by the "unseen" powers. Meanwhile, as the church carries out its mission to the nations, conflict will continue because the performance of mission will involve suffering.⁵³

Although one prays, reads the Bible, and is in fellowship with other Christians it does not mean that there will not be hardship from many sources, especially from those identified as the 'principalities and powers'. 'Satan is at the centre of all biblical references to the powers. He has various names (e.g. the devil, Beelzebub, Belial), various representations (e.g. serpent, dragon, lion), and is variously described as to his activity (e.g. accuser, tempter, destroyer, adversary, enemy) ... the "signs" of his kingdom are sin, sickness, disease, and death (Rom 5:12; 2 Cor 12:7).'⁵⁴ Jesus Christ stressed the importance of taking up one's cross daily and following him, as the Bible claims, for there is no strength or power greater than that of God and the powers of evil do not stand over the One who reigns over heaven and earth.

To follow Christ is to be moving forwards, not simply in the present, and not backwards, as Glasser notes in the seventh axiom:

The direction of God's sovereign rule is always into the future. God is never totally preoccupied with the present. Again and again his prophets pointed to the coming day of God, when his righteousness would be fully triumphant, when "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Hab. 2:14).⁵⁵

In the Old Testament, the prophets served as guardians of the Kingdom: 'When we think of David as prophet (Acts 2:30) and of the many Psalms in the Psalter ascribed to him, we believe that amongst the many references to the nations (76) is his

⁵³ Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom*, p. 26.

⁵⁴ Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom*, p. 332.

⁵⁵ Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom*, p. 27.

prophetic reminder of the universal dimensions of God's mission.'⁵⁶ It was the prophets who, upon realizing the Israelites' repeated inability to foster a kingdom marked by righteousness and justice, to be a spiritual light to the nations as intended, started to speak of a kingdom not of man but of God.⁵⁷

The people of the Old Testament have come full circle – from their acceptance of a covenantal relationship with God to seeking, through the ages of judges, kings and nation-states, an earthly king, to the place of hearing from the prophets that what and who they seek is only possible through the One in whose image they were made. Even as the Old Testament looked beyond and into the future, so, too, does the New Testament. The people of God look to the second coming of Jesus: for it is God the Alpha who ushered in and God the Omega who will consummate God's mission in human history.

The Bible is an announcement of the kingdom of God, from beginning to end. It tells the story of a missional God, a God who intended for God's creation and those made in God's image to be in relationship with the Trinity, both now and forever. The Bible, in telling a story, evokes the imagery of God as King, who came to this earth, in the flesh, as the Bible asserts, in the form of a child known as Jesus. Jesus took the task from the Hebrew people to embody God's righteousness, embodying a new covenant and inviting those made in God's image to participate in the *missio Dei* as subjects in God's kingdom. 'Kingdom' language challenges all those who hear to acknowledge, or at least contemplate, that there is someone or something that is greater than they are.

For Christians, the King is God. Recognizably, the term and concept are not popular with all, especially for those who have been dominated or abused, and have suffered injustices under human forms of 'kingship'. Glasser's seven axioms emphasize the sovereignty of God, personal commitment and serving others. Further, there is an inseparability in the kingdom of God that embraces the Old Testament 'community' with the New Testament 'body' through Jesus Christ. God's rule, as Glasser argues, although always moving towards the future will always meet resistance. Glasser does not answer how one is to be a 'servant' except that the New Testament body is to 'fill up what is lacking'. Hence he does not answer what it

⁵⁶ Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom*, p. 111.

⁵⁷ Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom*, p. 112.

means to participate in God's mission. This does not negate the importance of Glasser's axioms. They serve to express clearly the continuity of God's movement as revealed in the biblical grand narrative, and in this sense, exhibit God's activity in the world.

2.5. C. Wright and a Covenantal Perspective

C. Wright, similarly to Glasser, while embracing a kingdom of God perspective, intersects the *missio Dei* and the grand narrative using a covenantal lens. Wright proposes that:

When we grasp that the whole Bible constitutes the coherent revelation of the mission of God, when we see this is the key that unlocks the driving purposefulness of the whole grand narrative, then we find our worldview impacted by this vision ... this is the story that tells us where we have come from, how we got to be here, who we are, why the world is in the mess it is, how it can be (and has) changed, and where we are ultimately going. And the whole story is predicated on the reality of this God and the mission of this God. He is the originator of this story, the teller of this story, the prime actor in the story, the planner and guide of the story's plot, the meaning of the story and its ultimate completion. He is its beginning, end and centre. It is the story of the mission of God, of this God and no other.⁵⁸

Within the grand narrative, God's nature, character, and mission are revealed. To say there is a missional basis for the Bible is to acknowledge God as Creator who is greater than all our collective thoughts; as Redeemer whose activity is greater than all of humanity's collective endeavours; and as Sanctifier whose inspiration surpasses all human will. 'Fundamentally, our mission (if it is biblically informed and validated) means our committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's own mission within the history of God's world

⁵⁸ Wright, *The Mission of God*, p. 533.

for the redemption of God's creation.'⁵⁹ Wright emphasizes both personal and communal commitment, frames the commitment as 'our mission', and yet holds that in the context of God's own mission. Wright clearly expresses that authority for all missional activities done by persons is of God. He argues, 'So all our missional efforts to make God known must be set within the prior framework of God's own will to be known ... We are neither the initiators of the mission of making God known to the nations nor does it lie in our power to decide how the task will be fully accomplished or when it may be deemed to be complete.'⁶⁰

Persons and the church are to be in covenant with the life and mission of God. By God's very nature, 'the God revealed in Scriptures is personal, purposeful, and goal-oriented.'⁶¹ Therefore, the *missio Dei* concept is rightly understood as originating in God but is inclusive of God's people. God's invitation to participate in God's life is to share in the responsibility of God's mission.

If YHWH alone is the one true living God who made himself known in Israel and who wills to be known to the ends of the earth, then our mission can contemplate no lesser goal. If Jesus of Nazareth is the one who embodies the identity and mission of YHWH, the one to whom the Lord God has given all authority in heaven and earth, the one to whom every knee will bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord, then the Christ-centred heartbeat and witness of all our mission is non-negotiable.⁶²

Wright connects Old Testament covenantal theology and ethics with Christian mission. 'Arguably God's covenant with Abraham is the single most important biblical tradition within a biblical theology of mission and missional hermeneutic of the Bible.'⁶³ The covenant that God establishes with Abraham, continued in Israel, and fulfilled in Jesus Christ, is indicative and inclusive of his understanding of the covenantal ethical imperative that all disciples of Jesus follow. 'The Messiah was the promised one who would embody in his own person the identity and mission of

⁵⁹ Wright, *The Mission of God*, p. 23.

⁶⁰ Wright, *The Mission of God*, p. 129.

⁶¹ Wright, *The Mission of God*, p. 63.

⁶² Wright, *The Mission of God*, pp. 71–72.

⁶³ Wright, *The Mission of God*, p. 189.

Israel, as their representative, King, Leader, and Saviour. Through the Messiah as his anointed agent, YHWH, the God of Israel, would bring about all that he intended for Israel.⁶⁴ God's intention for Israel was fulfilled and expressed in the life of Jesus, offering all redemption, restoration, renewal and the opportunity to participate in the *missio Dei*.

The triune God invites readers, in part, through the Bible, into the grand narrative, to see, hear, and experience the story of a God who creates humanity with a purpose in mind, to be in a relationship with God's self. This relationship is marked as a covenant, a solemn agreement in which God and humanity are bound together. The mechanisms of the covenant, as contained in the scriptures, changed over the course of time until, according to the scripture, Jesus inaugurated the 'new covenant', fulfilling all the 'old covenants', covenants that were marred by human inequities. Thereby, the new covenant in Jesus, as foretold by the prophets, invites Christians, those who follow Jesus as their King, Lord, and Saviour, to covenant with God by participating in the *missio Dei*, to be a light and a blessing to the nations by proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ.

Wright binds the Old Testament and New Testament, the grand narrative, through covenant. Any action on behalf of persons or the covenant community is framed through the action of God. Wright focuses on developing the connective links of a covenant language in the Old Testament with the New Testament. In doing so, he does not give much attention to identifying or explicating what the covenantal action of the New Testament church is to be or how it is to be lived out. Greater attention to Trinitarian theology, especially the work of the Holy Spirit in emphasizing covenant between God and God's people, is needed if Wright's covenantal approach is to frame a theology of participation in the *missio Dei* for twenty-first century missiology.

2.6. Bauckham and a Universal and Particular Perspective

Bauckham argues for a missional hermeneutic in reading the Bible, based on understanding that the Bible tells the story of how 'God, God's people and God's world are related to each other primarily in a narrative that mediates constantly the

⁶⁴ Wright, *The Mission of God*, p. 31.

particular and universal.⁶⁵ This narrative, ‘the Christian metanarrative, the story the Bible tells, with (amongst other characteristics) its special understanding of the relationship between the particular and the universal, could be seen as an alternative to such various secular narratives, such as the idea of progress and Marxism.’⁶⁶ He recognizes that there have been many to claim a grand narrative: some are religious in nature and others are not, but postmodernism rejects all, either implicitly or explicitly. ‘In place of such universal pretensions, postmodernism opts for particularity, diversity, localism, relativism.’⁶⁷ He argues that the Christian narrative, unlike modern secular narratives, is different.

Bauckham argues there are several points that separate the biblical grand narrative from others. First, the biblical grand narrative is not to be confused with the secular modern metanarratives purporting ‘a totalling theory which aims to subsume all events, all perspectives and all forms of knowledge in a comprehensive rational explanation.’⁶⁸ Second, the biblical grand narrative tells the story of the *missio Dei*: a mission that comes before and after our participation in it.⁶⁹ Also, Bauckham argues that the Bible does not have a carefully scripted single story line: ‘it invites our trust in God rather than the mastery or calculation of history.’⁷⁰ The Bible does tell an overall encompassing story about a universal God who works in and through particulars: One who intentionally allows room for and invites diversity.

Girding Bauckham’s argument is his emphasis upon a movement from the particular to the universal. The sum of the whole, not yet fully realized or humanly and totally comprehensible is made up of many particulars, of which God and God’s creation are participants.

The Bible is a kind of project aimed at the kingdom of God, that is, towards the achievement of God’s purposes for good in the whole of God’s creation. This is a universal direction that takes the particular with the utmost seriousness. Christian communities or individuals are always setting off from the particular as both the Bible and our own

⁶⁵ Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, p. 13.

⁶⁶ Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, p. 88.

⁶⁷ Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, p. 88.

⁶⁸ Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, p. 90.

⁶⁹ Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, p. 91.

⁷⁰ Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, p. 92.

situation defines it and following the biblical direction towards the universal that is to be found not apart from but within other particulars. This is mission.⁷¹

The Bible as a project that purposes the kingdom of God emphasizes singularity and context. God's purpose always begins with singling out, whether it was Abraham, the nation Israel, King David, or Zion.⁷² 'God's purpose in each of these singular choices was universal: that the blessing of Abraham might overflow to all the families of the earth, that God's self-revelation to Israel might make God known to all the nations, that from Zion his rule might extend to the ends of the earth.'⁷³ Jesus, too, was singled out and was particular to a time and place, yet his purpose was universal.

The Bible does not simply tell the story of Jesus Christ but shares many particular Jesus' stories in historicity. All of these stories combined demonstrate a universal story: a claim that Jesus Christ's story is for everyone. 'God never singles out some for their own sake alone, but always for others.'⁷⁴ If one accepts that Jesus is the Son of God, a person of the Trinity, then even God's self is to be understood as moving from the particular to the universal.

Bauckham's emphasis on the universal and particular action of God and, subsequently, the particular action of persons or communities of faith towards the universal, God, highlights the understanding that in accepting the Bible as grand narrative, one begins with a confession of faith. The biblical grand narrative does subsume all narratives, not from a perspective of being 'rational' but from one of trust: trust that the triune God is and does, as revealed through the biblical grand narrative.

Bauckham gives an overarching view for a theology of participation based on the action of God. His emphasis on the universal and particular frames an approach for personal and community action but offers little as to specific activities of engagement, for the person or the church. What needs to be addressed for a

⁷¹ Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, p. 11.

⁷² Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, p. 46.

⁷³ Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, p. 46.

⁷⁴ Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, p. 49.

developed theology of participation are the particular transforming activities that the person or the church engages to be a witness to the universal, the triune God.

2.7. Brueggemann and a Sub-Narrative Perspective

Brueggemann challenges readers and the church in his book *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism: Living in a Three-Storied Universe* to understand the Bible as a grand narrative that is comprised of three sub-narratives: the narrative of God's hidden victory over evil, death, and that which is representative of such; the narrative of the announcement of that victory; and the narrative of appropriation by those who hear and accept the announcement.⁷⁵

At base, biblical faith is the assertion that God has overcome all that threatens to cheapen, enslave, or fragment our common life. Because the power of death is so resilient, this triumph of God is endlessly reiterated, re-enacted, and replicated in new formats and venues. As a result of that always new victory, we are left to do our most imaginative proclamation and our most courageous appropriation.⁷⁶

Another way of constructing the analysis is to say, 'these three stories are the *promise* made to the ancestors, the *deliverance* from slavery, and the gift of the *land*.'⁷⁷ The focus for Brueggemann is evangelism in the modern world, but the lens through which he constructs his argument is a grand narrative. His argument is neither an apologetic nor a contextualization, rather, it is presented as a model for the way evangelism, which is sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, is to be understood, incorporated into the Christian life, and carried out in the world. 'The stories themselves are the vehicles whereby all things are made new.'⁷⁸ Brueggemann identifies his target audience, those who are made new, as the outsiders, jaded insiders, and the children-becoming-adults.⁷⁹ Their stories become

⁷⁵ W. Brueggemann, *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism: Living in a Three-Storied Universe* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), pp. 37–43.

⁷⁶ Brueggemann, *Biblical Perspectives*, pp. 129–130.

⁷⁷ Brueggemann, *Biblical Perspectives*, p. 9.

⁷⁸ Brueggemann, *Biblical Perspectives*, p. 11.

⁷⁹ Brueggemann, *Biblical Perspectives*, p. 130.

part of the grand narrative that is told by the many sub-narratives of and in the Bible and that, Brueggemann contends, is vital to the retelling of their new lives, new lives through an old story: a story of victory, proclamation, and appropriation.

The Bible, unabashedly and unequivocally, for Brueggemann, is the place to begin a conversation about evangelism: hence, what it means to participate in the *missio Dei*. Once again, there is a generalization of what it means to participate in the *missio Dei* – in this case, it means to immerse oneself in the narrative of the Bible, to recognize and accept that the story is ‘our story’ and in each telling of this story we are retelling our life story – a life marked by victory, announcement, and appropriation.

Brueggemann emphasizes the interconnectedness of one’s personal story or the communal story with the biblical grand narrative. This is the starting point for the articulation of the theology of participation in the *missio Dei*. His attention to the triune God’s activity in the world is also helpful. The missing link is the impetus that binds God’s action with a person’s action. The confession of faith that God’s action has overcome all that is evil is a new beginning. The third sub-narrative, the appropriation of God’s victory, that is, people living lives of proclamation, must be developed. How does, or is, one to proclaim?

2.8. N.T. Wright and a Christological Perspective

T. Wright argues that the Bible ‘is a story, a grand epic narrative that runs from the garden, where Adam and Eve look after the animals, to the city which is the Bride of the Lamb, out of which the water of life flows to refresh the world.’⁸⁰ The Bible is understood from a missional hermeneutic perspective with a Christological centre. He asserts that humanity’s cries for justice, spirituality, relationships, and beauty are answered in Jesus and in one’s obedience in reflecting the image of God, the one in whose image humans are made. He states, ‘Christianity is all about the belief that the living God, in fulfilment of his promises and as the climax of the story of Israel, has accomplished all this – the finding, the saving, the giving of new life – in Jesus’.⁸¹ For Wright, to participate in the *missio Dei* is, first,

⁸⁰ N.T. Wright, *Simply Christian* (London: SPCK, 2006), p. 159.

⁸¹ Wright, *Simply Christian*, p. 79.

to recognize and accept the Bible as a grand narrative that tells the story of a fallen humanity's longings for justice, relationships, spirituality, and beauty, knowing that the promises made in the Old Testament are fulfilled through Jesus in the New Testament. Second, all who accept this in faith to be truth are called to reflect the image of God through Jesus and in so doing they 'become more truly human'.⁸² Supportive of C. Wright's bold statement that there is a missional basis for the Bible, T. Wright states, 'the Bible is there to enable God's people to be equipped to do God's work in God's world, not to give them an excuse to sit back smugly, knowing they possess all God's truth.'⁸³

In light of T. Wright's understanding, it must be noted that, like other scholars, he makes little distinction between 'Christians' and the 'church', and often interchanges the terms when addressing functions or roles in the *missio Dei*. This is understood to be a normal assumption amongst theologians and others, that the church is comprised of persons identifying themselves as Christians; and Christians, by definition, constitute the church. Though there is little disagreement about this, what become matters of controversy are doctrinal assertions and ecclesial expression. Many books have been written about what it means to be the church, all of which, it could be argued, play an important role in the *missio Dei*. This thesis simply asserts that church is the community of believers, that is, Christians, 'which the Spirit has brought into existence for the healing of the nations.'⁸⁴

Not unlike Bosch's understanding of the church's participation, but unpacked, as contained in his definition of the *missio Dei*, T. Wright declares, 'we are called to be part of God's new creation, called to be agents of that new creation here and now. We are called to model and display that new creation in symphonies and family life, in restorative justice and poetry, in holiness and service to the poor, in politics and painting.'⁸⁵

T. Wright has an emphasis that stands apart from C. Wright, Brueggemann, Bauckham, and Glasser when he states, 'good liturgy can be, and should be, a sign and means of grace, an occasion of humility (accepting that someone else has said,

⁸² Wright, *Simply Christian*, p. 79.

⁸³ Wright, *Simply Christian*, p. 157.

⁸⁴ H.J. Olson (ed.), *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2004* (Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 2004), p. 43.

⁸⁵ Wright, *Simply Christian*, p. 202.

better than I can, what I deeply want to express) and gratitude.⁸⁶ T. Wright's use of the means of grace is the key element not contained in the work of other biblical scholars who have intersected the *missio Dei* concept with the biblical grand narrative in order to articulate their understanding of what it means to participate in the *missio Dei*. To carry that concept forward, to say that the Bible as the grand narrative which tells the story of the *missio Dei* is a means of grace, offers credibility to the proposal that Wesleyan theology has resources that can make a contribution to the question of how one actually engages, from a spiritual dimension, in the *missio Dei*, and that is in and through the participation of the means of grace.

To reflect the image of God through Jesus, or as T. Wright would say 'to become more truly human'⁸⁷ is to be in worship of God, to be in prayer with God, to read the scripture, to be part of the grand epic narrative by actually living out what is written in the story through proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Saviour of all.

T. Wright centres the *missio Dei* and the biblical grand narrative in Christology. This serves as a reminder of C. Wright's emphasis on Jesus being the hermeneutic in God's covenant with God's people. It is a reminder of Brueggemann's faithful appropriation of God's victory only through Christ. It is also a reminder that the triune God uses the particular for a universal end. When T. Wright acknowledges and expresses the biblical grand narrative as a means of grace, he is framing a missing link needed for the development of a holistic theology of participation. What remains to be developed is a theology of grace that constructively holds in tension the action of God with the action of persons while upholding the biblical grand narrative to be a means: one of many means that God's transforming love moves in, through, and with the world.

2.9. Conclusion

The Bible, when viewed through a grand narrative lens, as expressed by scholars who intersect biblical studies with the *missio Dei*, tells a story of:

⁸⁶ Wright, *Simply Christian*, p. 142 note; reading scripture, like praying and sharing the sacraments, is one of the means by which the life of heaven and the life of earth interlock ... reference to the means of grace.

⁸⁷ Wright, *Simply Christian*, p. 79.

- a God of all creation, a God for all people, a God who works in and through a particular place, time, situation, or person for a universal purpose
- a covenantal God, a God who binds God's self into agreement with humanity as demonstrated in the lives and local narratives of biblical characters like Abraham or Moses, or even of Jesus himself
- a Kingdom governed and ruled over by a King who claims to be Lord and Saviour, offering all a personal relationship with Jesus through the Spirit
- a victory, an announcement, and an appropriation – a story of one's life as contained in a bigger story, the only story, arguably, that fulfils every human longing
- a God whose character, nature, and mission are best understood through God's sending of Jesus of Nazareth.

Each of the scholars claims the Bible to be a grand narrative and each also argues that God, as the One witnessed to in the biblical grand narrative, is the beginning of, the source for, and the authority of all Christian mission. Each scholar argues for a holistic interpretation and application of the Bible based on the lens that they apply to the grand narrative.

The scholars have stressed the importance of the grand narrative as a response to, and in tension with: a renewed interest in Trinitarianism; those who have previously and still argue for mission being myopically viewed as an activity and under the authority of the church; and those articulating that Christian mission begins with the Great Commission thereby eclipsing the universal and particular activity of God as revealed in the Old Testament.

By defining the grand narrative through the concept of the kingdom of God, Glasser explicitly identifies the relationship between God and humanity. Humanity is understood to be under the reign of the King. God as King creates, legislates, justifies, and sanctifies. The world is God's and everyone is under God's reign. God's reign is not grounded in compulsion but invitation. God as the King is understood to be Creator and Judge throughout the Old Testament. In this perspective, like C. Wright's emphasis upon the covenant, participation in the *missio*

Dei is implied through obedience. When one obeys God, then one is participating in God's mission. Obedience was marked through 'right' belief, behaviour, and relationships. With God's physical entrance into the world, in the person of Jesus Christ, the King is understood to be the Redeemer who offers justice through God's own action with the crucifixion. The similarity between C. Wright's articulations of the offer of a new covenant is expressed by Glasser as Jesus inaugurating and ushering in a new Kingdom.

Both perspectives indicate action on the part of God that calls for a response from humanity which no scholar, except for T. Wright, develops explicitly or specifically. Little attention has been given to what the human activity is to be that constitutes participation. In general, C. Wright and Glasser, as well as Bauckham and even Brueggemann, do not spend any significant time articulating how Christians are to participate in the *missio Dei*, whether that participation is understood to be covenantal, kingdom building, witnessing, or proclamation through appropriation.

Wright expressed his understanding of God's mission in a covenantal, monotheistic framework. God covenants with God's creation through Abraham, the nation Israel, and the Messiah. The ethical imperative expressed through covenant in the Old Testament is fulfilled through the new covenant of Jesus, the Messiah, in the New Testament. Noticeably absent from C. Wright's *The Mission of God*, however, is any significant emphasis upon the Holy Spirit. In part, this might be a reflection of his emphasis and the dynamic of the human–divine interaction, the understanding of a 'teleological monotheism' that he purports.

For both Glasser and C. Wright, the emphasis has been placed upon how God relates to God's creation. Who God is to humanity is explained in great detail through the use of kingdom and covenant perspectives. There is little room for speculation as to where Glasser and C. Wright place all authority for mission – in the work of God. In this sense there is a similarity that can be drawn between Glasser's emphasis upon a monotheistic God within the Old Testament and C. Wright's emphasis upon a 'teleological monotheism' that is apparent throughout his work in *The Mission of God*. When Glasser states, '... of God's own life we know

nothing. Scripture focuses solely on his relationship to his creation,⁸⁸ he indicates an emphasis upon authority within the relationship and denotes a one-directional approach that does not give due consideration to the human perspective of how to participate in the *missio Dei*. God and God's sovereignty become the primary focal point. This is in keeping with other scholarship working with the concepts of the biblical grand narrative and the *missio Dei*, but what is shown to be lacking is the viewpoint from the other direction: humanity's relationship with God from a scriptural perspective. The one direction being represented is how God relates to humanity without giving due consideration to how humanity relates to God: how humanity is to participate in being the Kingdom or covenantal community in the *missio Dei*.

Within Bauckham's work with the universal and particular, one quickly grasps the similarity to C. Wright's emphasis upon covenant or Glasser's emphasis upon the Kingdom. At the same time, the use of the terms universal and particular to describe the activity of God in the *missio Dei* contrasts the language of 'King' and 'Kingdom' and, arguably, breaks down potential language barriers from ages past and earthly kingdoms that reflect an air of dominance or even subjugation. In a postmodern context, Bauckham's choice of terms is more culturally relevant or acceptable while offering a keener insight into the relationship of the persons of the Trinity: a relationship demonstrating unity in diversity rather than a hierarchal understanding, as the Trinity is understood to be moving from both a universal to a particular and a particular to a universal within the biblical grand narrative. Once again, little or no attention has been explicitly given to how the person or the church is to participate in the *missio Dei* and be a 'Christian Witness in a Postmodern World.'⁸⁹ Like Glasser and C. Wright, Bauckham's emphasis upon the universal and particular within the biblical grand narrative articulates the activity of God. However, this only represents one-directional movement rather than developing a bi-directional movement: a holistic theology of participation that holds in tension both human and God activities.

Brueggemann's contribution is distinct from the others, as he articulates, in so many words, that every Christian's story is to be interwoven with the biblical

⁸⁸ Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom*, p. 348.

⁸⁹ From Bauckham's title *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World*.

grand narrative: a story of God's victory, announcement, and appropriation. He clearly conveys the message that no present human condition is outside the boundaries of being addressed by the victory of God as told in the Bible, and the task or responsibility of the Christian is the appropriation – that is, demonstrating that one's story of victory and proclamation is inseparable from the Bible's story. What is not clearly identifiable is how that is to transpire. Not unlike the others, more attention is needed as to how one is to participate in the *missio Dei* through appropriation.

Each scholar has expressed the importance of a narrative approach in the *missio Dei* concept in the postmodern age. The common strand that unites each of these scholars within the same framework that stands out above all other emphases is the overarching theme of 'relationship'. Each speaks to the relationship between God and God's creation but viewed through various grand narrative lenses. Glasser speaks to the divine authority between a King and his subjects. C. Wright speaks to a divine agreement between God and humanity. Bauckham speaks to a divine movement from the universal to the particular and vice versa. Brueggemann speaks to the divine historical narrative between God's story and persons' stories. T. Wright speaks to the divine centre of God and humanity through the story of Jesus.

All perspectives indicate action on the part of God that calls for a response from humanity. This is an area that scholars leave relatively undeveloped: an inattention to the actions of persons or the church. In part, this thesis asserts, from a historical perspective, that this is the case because relatively little time has passed since the paradigm shift was made in missiological thinking from an anthropocentric understanding of mission to mission beginning, belonging, and ending with God. Each respective Christian field will continue to undergo 'conditions of being renewed' within the *missio Dei* context.

In general, C. Wright and Glasser, as well as Bauckham and even Brueggemann, do not spend any significant time articulating how Christians participate in the *missio Dei*, whether that participation is understood to be covenantal, kingdom building, witnessing, or proclamation through appropriation.

For each of these scholars, mission begins with God. The *missio Dei* is implicitly about God's activity in the relationship between God and persons. The Bible, as a grand narrative, explicitly identifies this Trinitarian activity and still

serves as the primary source for Christians. Although each scholar contributes a valuable lens through which to view God's activity within the biblical grand narrative, none, with the exception of T. Wright, have addressed the movement or activity of persons within the *missio Dei* as constitutive of mission. Another way of saying this is that the character of God relating to persons has been the primary focus. It can be argued that the development of a holistic theology of participation has been left to the 'practitioners'.

Glasser speaks to the kingdom of God, C. Wright identifies the Godly covenant, Bauckham stresses the 'God for all' using the particular person or nation to person, and Brueggemann illumines God's victory and identifies personal responsibility through proclamation and appropriation. But what does the character of the relationship from the direction of person to God, or person with person, look like? If it is to be framed within the *missio Dei* theology, then more attention must first be given to how scholars have specifically worked with Trinitarian doctrine. By identifying the intersections between Trinitarian doctrine and the *missio Dei*, the focus may turn to the broad areas of participation.

The *missio Dei* and the biblical grand narrative do not begin with either the church or a context or a theme. Arguably, *missio Dei* and the biblical grand narrative offer the broadest scope that encompasses all parts: theoretical and practical, physical and spiritual, emotional and mental. All movement begins and will end with the triune God: so claims the biblical grand narrative.

From a Christian missiological vantage, there is insufficient scholarship in relation to the *missio Dei* as instances of participation: on the nature of being a subject in the Kingdom; the nature of being obedient as contained in covenant relationship; the nature of being like Christ; the nature of being appropriators of the victory through proclamation; and nature of being 'particular' as witness to the 'universal' God.

There is a missional basis for the Bible, that it illumines the biblical grand narrative within a *missio Dei* missiology.⁹⁰ The Bible is the grand narrative of the *missio Dei*: a mission that is inseparable from the triune God.

All Christian theology and missiology, including all dialogue starting from within a particular context, returns to and begins with the biblical grand narrative.

⁹⁰ Wright, *The Mission of God*, p. 29.

Once again, this statement is an affirmation of a confession of faith in the Bible's claim of authority.

The particular emphases of each scholar denote attention to 'relationship': the relationship between God and those made in God's image. The biblical grand narrative is understood to be the primary revelation of this relationship for all persons. However, most have concentrated on how God relates to persons. Further attention to Trinitarian theology and how it constructively holds together God's action and human action is needed. In moving towards a Christian theology of participation in the *missio Dei*, this thesis claims the understanding that one begins with confession in the triune God.

Chapter 3. The Trinity and the *Missio Dei*

3.1. Introduction

Trinitarian doctrine is at the centre of the *missio Dei* concept. The intent in this chapter is not to presume that new insights will be added to an already well-researched, soundly articulated field from multiple theological and ecclesiastical scholarly vantages. Rather, this chapter will articulate, from a missiological perspective, the key theological questions that Trinitarian scholars have evoked but have either insufficiently answered, or inadvertently left unanswered. In the context of this thesis, Trinitarian theology and the biblical grand narrative become a theological key for connecting the *missio Dei* with a theology of participation. The missiological intent is to elucidate the interconnectedness between the triune God, the Trinity's mission in the world, and the participation of persons and the church in the relationship.

This thesis is in agreement with the assertion that 'Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are related in such a way that the work of one is the work of all', and at the same recognizes that the church and persons come to the Father through the Son in the Spirit.⁹¹ The intent is a deep engagement with the one God as three Divine persons, the immanence of God.⁹² All the work of God, the economy of God, done in the world is done by all three Divine persons.⁹³ The communion, the relatedness between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the basis for the *missio Dei* that seeks to embrace all in the holy love of the triune God. The *missio Dei* is about what God

⁹¹ The Report of the BCC Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today, *The Forgotten Trinity* (London: The British Council of Churches, 1989), p. 14.

⁹² Specifically, the intent in this chapter and throughout the thesis is the avoidance towards any semblance of association with Trinitarian heresy of tri-theism, modalism, or subordinationism. The key then remains in maintaining the simple perichoretic confession of faith.

⁹³ This thesis assumes an orthodox doctrine of the Trinity that confesses faith in one God, subsisting in three distinct persons, each equal in divinity and attributes – God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The importance of this perspective is essential to avoiding the tendency toward a practical unitarianism as was previously illuminated through engagement with Thangaraj's emphasis upon the *missio humanitatis*. This thesis purports a Cappadocian understanding that asserts all of God's activity, that is economy, is reflected in that of the Father through the Son in the Spirit. Arguably, Gunton illustrates this well when he states, in 'One Mediator...The Man Jesus Christ: Reconciliation, Mediation and Life in Community' *Pro Ecclesia*, 11/2 (2002), p. 147 'the Son and the Spirit are God himself in action: that is to say, they mediate God the Father's action in the world, both in creation and in what we call redemption. Thus, the first great battle against heresy was essentially about mediation: the mediation of God's action in and toward the world, and consequently of our action in it also, for, as we have seen, the two are inextricably bound up with one another.'

the Father does for us in God the Son on one hand and on the other what God the Father does in us through God the Spirit – drawing us into that saving relationship.

Rahner argues, ‘... if it is true that we can really grasp the content of the doctrine of the Trinity only by going back to the history of salvation and of grace, to our experience of Jesus and of the Spirit of God, who operates in us, because in them we really already possess the Trinity itself as such, then there should never be a treatise on the Trinity in which the doctrine of the “missions” is at best only appended as a relatively unimportant and additional scholion.’⁹⁴ From a missiological perspective all theology is rooted in a doctrine of mission and all mission is rooted in the Trinity.

An argument would or could be made that this is a postmodern response, indicative of a culture that is hypersensitive to individuality. That may be the case, but in each and every Christian’s life there comes a time when the person, albeit within a communal context, accepts the grace offered by God to become a follower of Jesus Christ, with all that might mean, and then must seek to keep in step with the Spirit. Relevant to the research question posed in this thesis, ‘How does one participate in the *missio Dei*?’, consideration is given to the need for a greater clarity of purpose, both for the church and the individual: one that must genuinely hold a creative and focused intention of what it means to participate in the life of the triune God, the *missio Dei*, in light of how the triune God participates in the world.

3.2. Rahner on the Immanent and Economic Trinity

Rahner argues ‘The “economic” Trinity is the “immanent” Trinity and the “immanent” Trinity is the “economic” Trinity.’⁹⁵ The God that we seek to know in truth is the God we have experienced in salvation history and through biblical expressions. Rahner postulates that the triune God who remains true within himself is the triune God whose love we have experienced in history and will experience in the future. There are things about God that we can never fully comprehend in this lifetime, yet what we do understand about God in this lifetime is because of how God relates to us through self-communication.

⁹⁴ K. Rahner, *The Trinity* (London: Burns & Oates, 1970), p. 40.

⁹⁵ Rahner, *The Trinity*, p. 22.

Though his argument was instrumental in theological circles in adding to and creating a renewed interest in scholarship working with the doctrine of the Trinity, it was developed one-dimensionally, as his argument was centred on how God relates to us. In part, this may be attributed to Rahner's intention to remain within the Roman Catholic dogmatic, his emphasis upon divine initiative, and his logic of grace. Whatever the case, it still serves as an excellent launching point in this argument, as this thesis will carry his work one step further and say that not only does God relate to us through self-communication but we relate to God and others through the grace of the triune God.

Rahner's thesis that the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity (and vice versa) is largely united around the concept of self-communication. He holds forth the understanding that

...each one of the three divine persons communicates himself to man in gratuitous grace in his own personal particularity and diversity.
....should a divine person communicate himself otherwise than in and through his relations to the other person, so as to have his own relation to the justified (and the other way around), this would presuppose that each single divine person, even as such, as mentally distinct from the one and same essence, would be something absolute, and not merely relative. We would no longer be speaking of the Trinity. In other words: these three self-communications are the self-communication of the one God in the three relative ways in which God subsists.⁹⁶

More specifically, Rahner states, 'Jesus is not simply God in general, but the Son. The second divine person, God's Logos, is man, and only he is man. Hence, there is at least *one* "mission," *one* presence in the world, *one* reality of salvation history that is not merely appropriated to some divine person, but which is proper to him...there has occurred in salvation history something which can be predicated only of one divine person.'⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Rahner, *The Trinity*, p. 35.

⁹⁷ Rahner, *The Trinity*, p. 23.

The key point in highlighting Rahner's emphasis on self-communication, which he identifies as being significantly noted in the Incarnation, is not to allow this argument to get side-tracked by Moltmann's challenge or charge, though unfounded, of modalism, but to note the significance of the concept that as the three divine Persons are in relation to one another, it is in this constancy of self-communicated communion, fellowship, and participation that the Trinity, three divine Persons of one substance, are absolute. The assumption is that the Trinity is absolute, humanity is not, the Trinity is missional, the mission includes humanity, and humanity participates in and through the Trinity.

Rahner introduces the theme of obedience as he develops the context of self-communication when he states, 'if God wishes to step freely outside of himself, he must create man...he must then create a spiritual-person being, the only one who possesses the "obediential potency" for the reception of the self-communication.'⁹⁸ Rahner does not explain what he means by his use of the term 'obediential potency'. Evidently, this is a common characteristic in Rahner's writing. Coffey identifies this tendency of Rahner's when he states, 'As with so many of his original technical terms, he evidently presumed that its meaning would be instantly clear to his readers'⁹⁹ – this being said in relation to Rahner's use of the term 'supernatural existential'. It is not that the term 'obediential potency' is without validity; rather, that time spent in defining what he meant by the term would have added validity to his thesis and developed a two-dimensional approach to his argument. His argument, therefore, remains one-dimensional from a missiological perspective as he articulates how God relates to humanity, via self-communication, but merely alludes to how humanity relates to God, via obediential potency. Furthermore, Rahner's articulation of what he calls God's double fourfold self-communication – Origin–Future, History–Transcendence, Invitation–Acceptance, and Knowledge–Love – does not constitute a sufficient defence or explanation of how we relate to God from a missiological vantage.

Obedience is critical in developing a theology of participation in the *missio Dei*. This is understood in the action of Christ as he submitted himself unto his Father and the cross. This does not reflect subordination, but rather an acceptance of

⁹⁸ Rahner, *The Trinity*, p. 90.

⁹⁹ D. Coffey, 'The Whole Rahner on the Supernatural Existential', *Theological Studies*, 65/1 (2004), p. 95.

the triune God's mission in the world and for the world to reconcile humanity into the life of the Trinity. Therefore, 'no adequate distinction can be made between the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of the economy of salvation.'¹⁰⁰

Also, if the economic Trinity is salvation history, our experience of it, and its biblical expression, then 'the one God communicates himself in absolute self-utterance and as an absolute donation of love.'¹⁰¹ Hence, submission denotes a participatory acceptance of an overall mission. This line of thinking becomes significant, as this thesis claims a theology of participation in the *missio Dei* through participation in the means of grace which, arguably, is only possible through participation in the triune God.

Rahner's axiom that the immanent God is the economic God is central to this thesis. The biblical grand narrative is filled with numerous examples of self-communication and it is even argued by biblical scholars like C. Wright, Glasser, and Bauckham that the Bible in its entirety is an expression of divine self-communication: all of which is necessary for arguing that God is in relation with God's creation. However, a question remains: 'If the three divine Persons of the Trinity are absolute, from which the *missio Dei* is birthed, and they reveal themselves to the world through self-communication, how is the world, in salvation history, to relate properly to the absolute triune God?'

3.3. Cunningham on Practices and Virtues

What Rahner has argued to be divine self-communications of the economic Trinity in salvation history, which gives humanity an understanding of the inner nature and character of the immanent Trinity, Cunningham has described as the 'practices' and 'virtues' of the Trinity. Cunningham develops his concept of practices as the way in which the Trinity 'participates' within the Godhead and in the world. Cunningham develops his concept of participation through careful and critical deconstruction and reconstruction of the themes of relationality and fellowship.

¹⁰⁰ Rahner, *The Trinity*, p. 24.

¹⁰¹ Rahner, *The Trinity*, p.36.

Cunningham is correct in noting that the process of discussing the practices and virtues is circular, as could be argued about the concept of the economic being the immanent Trinity. ‘Particular practices help to form us in the Trinitarian virtues; thus, the discussion of virtues was already also a discussion of practices....but, on the other hand, the virtues direct us towards specific forms of practice as well.’¹⁰² That does not in any way reduce the validity of the argument or lessen God but serves to illumine imperfect humanity’s limited understanding of a triune God who will remain, apart from of all theory and practice, a mysterious participant in the world through divine grace.

This thesis agrees with Cunningham that ‘contemporary Trinitarian theology should aim to render the doctrine less abstract, more intelligible, and more relevant to the Christian life,’¹⁰³ and he has made strides in helping to bring this about as he articulates and defends the language of participation. He offers insight into what he describes as ‘a neglect of the concrete narratives of the Christian faith’¹⁰⁴ and suggests ‘these narratives [biblical] need to be read, not according to the supposedly context-independent assumptions of rationalism, but in the context of Christian participation in concrete practices of worship, education, and discipleship.’¹⁰⁵ However, this part of his argument is never developed, nor is what could be interpreted and understood as the results of worship, education, and discipleship, that is, peacemaking, pluralizing, and persuading, that Cunningham recognizes as marks of participation.

An understanding as to why this happens is twofold. Cunningham misses identifying and developing the connective link (doctrine of grace) between the Trinity and the concrete practices. Rather than articulating a missiological thesis that is applicable to all Christians, he forays into specific current cultural issues surrounding gender, politics, and the nation state, and he states that ‘it is here, I think, that we have the most to gain by re-envisioning Trinitarian theology as practice.’¹⁰⁶ When the Trinity is understood as being the author and perfecter of Christian mission, whose *telos* is entering into and full participation in the life of the

¹⁰² D.S. Cunningham, *These Three are One* (Malden, MA: Oxford Blackwell Publishers, 1998), p. 233.

¹⁰³ Cunningham, *These Three*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁴ Cunningham, *These Three*, p. 24.

¹⁰⁵ Cunningham, *These Three*, p. 25.

¹⁰⁶ Cunningham, *These Three*, p. 45.

Trinity in the present age and for all eternity, it is only through God's grace that humanity is willing and able to participate in 'concrete practices'. Subsequently, proper relationships, or more specifically, proper participation in the lives of others, in the areas of gender, politics, and nation states, are possible. Cunningham has not built a foundation that is grounded in a Trinitarian missiology, one that is able to defend peacemaking, pluralizing, and persuading as the concrete practices of the Trinity and, hence, the concrete practices for the Christian individual or the church.

Cunningham falls prey to his own argument as can be detected in his thoughts about being 'concrete':

And this is why, for all their valuable comments about practical consequences of Trinitarian doctrine, very few writers in the contemporary conversation have actually provided a specific account of precisely what we ought to do differently in order to "enact" or "perform" the Christian doctrine of God. Too often, writers merely offer some general recommendations of both diversity and unity, phrased so abstractly that the partisans of almost any social, political, or ecclesial position could probably understand themselves as favoring it.¹⁰⁷

There appears to be a contradiction in his own very excellent point concerning participation – 'I am interested in those instances in which we take part, not in something, but in someone – an *other*'¹⁰⁸ – when he talked about 'enacting' or 'performing' the Christian doctrine of God as, arguably, one does not enact or perform the Trinity but one participates in the life of the Trinity.

Cunningham states '...God is relation without remainder ... thus, the Three are *mutually constitutive* of one another....Three *participate* in one another in a profound way, undermining any attempt to understand them independently of one another.'¹⁰⁹ Even as the persons of the Trinity are to be understood as inseparable, 'the notion of a pure, isolated "individual" is a highly disputable human construction...so we too are called to live lives of mutual participation, in which our

¹⁰⁷ Cunningham, *These Three*, p. 42.

¹⁰⁸ Cunningham, *These Three*, p. 166.

¹⁰⁹ Cunningham, *These Three*, p. 165.

relationships are not just something that we “have,” but are what constitute us as human beings.’¹¹⁰

In this broad sense, Cunningham makes an argument for using the language of participation over relation, or more specifically, a language of participation that further defines relationality. However, without specifically developing a definition of participation in the context of Trinitarian theology, it can be argued that the same can be said of participation that Cunningham said of relationships – ‘In our own lives, relationships are often trivialized; we often enter into them, and leave them, without much consideration.’¹¹¹ The language of participation enhances the language of relation. ‘The standard definition of *participate* is “to take part in”; this usually refers to an activity in which we are joined by others...At first glance, then, *participation* would seem to suggest bringing human beings (or the Three) together for the purpose of performing some activity...’¹¹² It is here, in the simple expression of participation, that this thesis claims the activity is a life in the Trinity.

It is through God’s participation in humanity that humanity ‘is taken up into the divine life and, by grace, brought into a communion that we would otherwise be incapable of achieving.’¹¹³ Cunningham occasionally mentions grace and identifies peacemaking, pluralizing, and persuading as participation but does not connect divine grace explicitly with making it possible for persons to participate in the life of the Trinity, or to denote the condition of the relationship between person and God or person with person. While giving some attention to the significance of grace in the understanding of virtue and participation of the Trinity, Cunningham fails to identify or develop the doctrine of grace as being inseparable and intrinsic in the relationship. The developed emphasis on grace is the missing link for a theology of participation: God’s participation in the world is God’s grace. Subsequently, this thesis later argues that, through the means of grace, persons are able to participate in both something and someone: that is, the means of grace and the triune God. The questions remain: ‘How does humanity participate in the life of the Trinity?’ and

¹¹⁰ Cunningham, *These Three*, p. 169.

¹¹¹ Cunningham, *These Three*, p. 190.

¹¹² Cunningham, *These Three*, p. 166

¹¹³ Cunningham, *These Three*, p. 173.

‘What are the concrete practices of a Trinitarian theology that call for participation on behalf of the recipient of God’s grace?’

3.4. Cantalamessa on Active Contemplation

Cantalamessa, in *Contemplating the Trinity*, proposes that the way to experience unity, happiness, simplicity, beauty, communion, and eternity in the Christian life begins with contemplation of, that is, being attentive to, the Trinity. However, ‘there is something that is more blessed that we can do with regard to the Trinity than contemplate and imitate it: we can enter into it!’¹¹⁴ Contemplation, in this sense, for Cantalamessa, becomes active as one engages in activities that draw one into the life of the Trinity and onward in a life of holiness.

For Cantalamessa engagement in prayer ‘is the presupposition and indispensable means of all progress on the path to holiness’ in which disciples are called to participate.¹¹⁵ Although Cantalamessa offers little in the way of what it means to participate in the mission of God via the Trinity, he does give an excellent description of the immanent Trinity. ‘But here is the wonderful news: the three divine Persons love each other with an infinite love, and they allow us to enter into their love and make us participants in it.’¹¹⁶ Cantalamessa supports the view, though intangibly, that we are to participate in the life of Trinity, in the divine circle of love. Love, understood through this Trinitarian lens, is infinite. As the triune God of love, Immanuel, is with us then we are with the triune God. He develops the notion very well that the Trinity is the starting point and the culminating point, but gives insufficient evidence of the means by which we can fully participate in this life of Trinitarian love. Two crucial means of grace that Cantalamessa does identify are prayer and communion.

Cantalamessa states, ‘there is no spirituality without discipline...we need to practice a discipline of communion....Our fundamental task with regard to communion is not, then, to add something to it, but to remove the obstacles that

¹¹⁴ R. Cantalamessa, *Contemplating the Trinity* (Ijamsville, MD: Word Among Us Press, 2007), p. 19.

¹¹⁵ Cantalamessa, *Contemplating*, p. 43.

¹¹⁶ Cantalamessa, *Contemplating*, p. 104.

impede the free movement of the Spirit in the organism of the church.’¹¹⁷ He rightly notes the need for discipline but inadvertently implies that humanity is responsible for removing the obstacles from our lives.¹¹⁸ The emphasis and argument to be made here should be on the participation in the means of grace, and the justifying grace offered through Christ that sin no longer reigns in one’s life even though it might remain. The invitation to a life in the Trinity comes through grace, the removal of the reign of sin comes through grace, and one’s ability to grow in the divine and holy love of the Trinity comes through grace. Discipline, therefore, is one’s affirmative response to God’s grace to participate in those activities, in which prayer and communion are included, where God’s grace abounds.

Cantalamessa criticizes theologians who give myopic emphasis to the doctrine of the cross without giving due consideration to the doctrine of the resurrection. He contends that it is through the resurrection that we know joy and experience happiness and celebrate the promise of eternal life. It is not possible, if Christian faith is to mean anything, to have one, either the cross or the resurrection, without the other. Unfortunately, Cantalamessa argues, scholars spend too much time with the suffering Christ of the cross and insufficient time with the celebration of the resurrection, which leads to a disproportionate view of Trinitarian participation or relationality within the world. This leaves one with the question, ‘If contemplating the Trinity is active, what are other ways, in conjunction with prayer and the Eucharist, of participating in the life of the Trinity?’

3.5. Boff on Communion

Boff, a former Roman Catholic Franciscan priest, is one of the mostly widely known and controversial liberation theologians. His challenge to ecclesiological entities and the greater Christian society is to be or live in communion: a communion based on his understanding of the divine communion of the Trinity.

In the beginning is communion...God is communion and therefore Trinity. Only persons can be in communion. It means that one is in

¹¹⁷ Cantalamessa, *Contemplating*, p. 106.

¹¹⁸ Cantalamessa identifies ‘egotism’ as an obstacle. Egotism is sin as it denotes self as being of greater significance than God.

the presence of the others, different from the other but open in radical mutuality. For there to be true communion there must be direct and immediate relationships: eye-to-eye, face-to-face, and heart-to-heart...mutual surrender and reciprocal communion is community.¹¹⁹

For Boff, communion in the Trinity as participation is mutual surrender and giving. He argues, ‘communion means that the three Eternal Ones, Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, are turned towards one another. Each divine Person goes out of self and surrenders to the other two, giving life, love, wisdom, goodness, and everything possessed.’¹²⁰ Boff’s concept of communion is closely aligned with Rahner’s understanding and articulation of the economic Trinity. Boff is attentive in identifying, defining, and valuing the common technical expressions of generation, spiration, nature, person, relations, processions, and missions. These are held in contrast with the biblical expressions of revelation, recognition, communion, life, and love. This work proves invaluable as a tool of inclusivity of what is understood as theoretical with that which is practical. He states, ‘The ultimate meaning of creation is its capacity for being a receptacle of the communication of the three divine Persons. Trinitarian communion is opened out and invites creation, persons, and all creatures to participate in its life of communion.’¹²¹ This assertion underscores his notion of mission. Like Rahner, Cantalamessa, and Cunningham, to a certain extent, Boff acknowledges humanity’s participation in the mission but fails to develop what that participation entails.

Boff contributes to a theology of participation through his articulation that love is central to the nature of Trinity. Although this love is infinite and the perfect example of communion, it is not self-contained; it is made available to all that all might be included in the communion of love. Boff’s ontological approach does not elaborate as to how the triune God avails God’s self unto others, thereby inviting them in, only that this is to be the essence true communion, and hence, true community. Few would disagree that God is the perfect example of communion for humanity and few would argue against mission beginning with God. The question is

¹¹⁹ L. Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), p. 3.

¹²⁰ Boff, *Holy Trinity*, p. 3.

¹²¹ Boff, *Holy Trinity*, p. 115.

posed, ‘How does the communion of God which seeks to embrace others in that perfect love become a reality for the present day and the future perfect?’

3.6. Conclusion

At the heart of Trinitarian doctrine and the *missio Dei* is Rahner’s axiomatic statement that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity. Zizioulas notes, ‘it would be unthinkable to speak of the “one God” before speaking of the God who is “communion”, that is to say, of the Holy Trinity.’¹²² Edgar argues in support of this understanding as he notes:

The doctrine of the Trinity is essential not only in the sense of being important, but also in the sense that it describes the essence, the *inner* life of God who lives uniquely and perfectly as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as well as the *external*, salvific work of God who sent Jesus in the power of the Spirit to redeem the world ... Together they remind us that God has not merely appeared to us in a Trinitarian fashion in order to save the world while actually being internally different. God is Trinitarian in essence. This means that we can have confidence that the God who is revealed to us is the God of salvation and the God of love.¹²³

Rahner’s axiom integrates both being and doing: who one is and what one does. Equally inseparable from one another and the epitome of Rahner’s axiom is the concept of being sent by God. However, neither the inseparability of the concept of the immanent and economic God nor being sent by God is the *telos* of the *missio Dei*. God is always complete unto God’s self. God always remains, mysteriously and in part, transcendent from persons. The relationship between the immanent and economic Trinity is participation. Participation reflects both internal and external movement in the life of the triune God and in creation; this is the heart of the *missio Dei* which constitutes the inseparability of human–divine action.

¹²² J.D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1985), p. 17.

¹²³ B. Edgar, *The Message of the Trinity* (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2004), p. 26.

The biblical grand narrative affirms both the transcendence and the historicity of the Trinity. The ethos of the Rahnerian axiom and the *missio Dei* is the relationship between God and persons. Or, more specifically, the ethos is the condition of that relationship. Claiming the authenticity and authority of the biblical grand narrative, this thesis agrees with Brueggemann's argument that Christians articulate their personal narrative to be held within the grand narrative, as they understand all humanity to be part of creation, the fall, the redemptive action and the sanctifying power of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit unto the Trinity.

Rahner's axiom from a missiological perspective, intent upon the reconciliation, restoration, and renewal of persons with the Trinity, is congruent with Boff's emphasis on communion. In the beginning, before anything was created, there was the communion of the triune God. Zizioulas asserts 'the being of God could be known only through personal relationships and personal love. Being means life, and life means *communion*.'¹²⁴ The triune God, the communion of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit with persons is the *missio Dei*. The nature of the communion is holy love. The grand narrative, as interpreted by Glasser, C. Wright and Bauckham, does not indicate in any way that the triune God needs anything or anyone. However, out of divine love, shared in the communion of the triune God, beyond complete understanding and without limits, persons were created in the *imago Dei* to be in proper relation.

The relationship between Trinitarian theology and the biblical narrative is the economic God. The predominant strand throughout the *missio Dei* scholarship is the emphasis on the Trinity and participation. Three implications can be drawn from the Trinitarian emphasis.

- Authority for the *missio Dei* begins with the Trinity.
- The *missio Dei* is God's movement, that is, participation in creation.
- Because God participates in creation, persons and the church participate in the *missio Dei*.

As the *missio Dei* is held in tension and understood to be inseparable from the Trinity, it is no longer appropriate to argue that the church or the person has a

¹²⁴ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, p. 16.

mission. Newbigin emphasizes, ‘We are not engaged in an enterprise of our choosing or devising. We are 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.’¹²⁵

However, missiologists and theologians struggle to hold in tension human–divine cooperation. God’s participation is primarily emphasized as sending, and human participation is still viewed from the anthropocentric vantage of being an activity of the church.¹²⁶ How does one recognize the authority of a missional God and still talk about the church or persons being in mission? The ethos of the *missio Dei* is predicated on the assumption of a relationship between the triune God and persons: this relationship is better articulated as mutual participation. God participates, therefore, persons participate.

The triune God is the beginning and end of Christian mission. It is the general consensus of missiologists and theologians that the Trinity is the starting point and *telos* of all Christian mission. Vicedom asserts, ‘The mission is work that belongs to God. This is the first implication of the *missio Dei*. God is the Lord, the One who gives the orders, the Owner, the One who takes care of things. He is the protagonist in the mission. When we ascribe the mission to God in this way, then it is withdrawn from human whims.’¹²⁷ Vicedom is one of the earliest of missiological scholars, following Karl Barth’s work with the *actio Dei* concept in the 1930s and the work of the Willingen Conference in 1952, to further develop the *missio Dei* concept by identifying the triune God as the centre of Christian mission – ‘Even the Church is only an instrument in the hands of God. The Church herself is only an outcome of the activity of God who sends and saves. The Conference at Willingen accepted the concept of *missio Dei* to describe this fact.’¹²⁸ The church does not own a mission in and of itself, as it is a consequence of the *missio Dei*, called to participate in the life of the Trinity and in the world. ‘Only as mission has its source

¹²⁵ L. Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today’s Mission* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1988), p. 83.

¹²⁶ The corrective to this thinking is grounded in the distinct action of God the Spirit that enables the church and persons to be in communion with the Father through the Son. Gunton, in ‘The Spirit Moved Over the Face of the Waters: The Holy Spirit and the Created Order’ *Interantional Journal of Systematic Theology* 4/2 (2002), pp. 190-204, recognizes the Spirit as, ‘the power of God’, ‘giver of life’, that which maintains upholds and renews persons and is responsible for forming the distinct community - church.

¹²⁷ Vicedom, *The Mission of God*, p. 5.

¹²⁸ Vicedom, *The Mission*, p. 5.

in and derives its nature and authority from the triune God can it truly generate lasting and enduring motivation and become really Christian, really meaningful. On any other level it remains humanism, no matter how “religionized” or “Christianized” such humanism may be.¹²⁹

Glasser and C. Wright have argued that, holistically, the Bible is part of God’s mission by telling the grand narrative of the dynamic relationship between God, God’s creation, and God’s purpose. Bauckham says,

To speak of the biblical God is to say that God is both universal and particular. The God of the Jewish Scriptures is both the God who made heaven and earth and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; both the God whose loving purpose is at work in all the nations and the God who chose Israel alone and chose to identify himself actually to the other nations as the God of Israel; both the God who fills heaven and earth and the God who dwells in the midst of his own people.¹³⁰

As God is both universal and particular, then the Trinity becomes the lens from whence all other participation in the *missio Dei* is to be understood and expressed.¹³¹ The church and persons are participants in the *missio Dei* as they respond to and participate in God’s grace in their lives.

¹²⁹ G.W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1972), p.25.

¹³⁰ Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, p. 8.

¹³¹ The concept purported here that ties in both the communion of the Trinity and the particularity activity of the Divine persons is reflected nicely in Chapter 4 The Person of *The Forgotten Trinity*, pp. 22, 29. First, ‘The being of God is a *relational* unity: it consists in the fact that it is communion, a being in which the persons give to and receive from each other what they are.’ Second, ‘*Particularity* is at the heart of what is given and received, but, rather than being the denial of social relations, it is in fact its basis, because reciprocity and relationship are present from the outset and not tacked on as an extra.’ Therefore, ‘Our relation to God, accordingly, is to be understood in terms of our relation to Jesus and the Spirit.’ Consequently, the community of believers, ‘The Church is primarily *communion*, i.e. a set of relationships making up a mode of being, exactly as is the case of the Trinitarian God.’ This thesis later develops a theology of participation based on the particular activities of the triune God that make possible persons and the church participation in the *missio Dei* which reflects a dual movement articulated through a Wesleyan lens on works of piety and works of mercy.

Boff and Cantalamessa rightly argue that the triune God is the essence of communion. Cunningham asserts that the Trinity is relation without remainder. Rahner claims God's nature is revealed through God's action: they are inseparable. He has identified this as the Trinity's self-communication. Trinitarian theology is at the centre of the *missio Dei* and is the basis for missiology. Boff, Cantalamessa, Rahner, and Cunningham contribute a key part towards the development of a theology of participation. However, the primary focus of this relationship between God and persons remains on the activity of God.

Arguably, it is proper to articulate communion beginning with the Trinity, and God's self-communication in the world, to the world, and through the world as participation. The concept of participation in the *missio Dei*, whether divine or human participation, needs further elucidation. Biblical studies are short on Trinitarian theology. Trinitarian theology is short on the biblical grand narrative. This thesis claims that the language of participation enhances the understanding that the essence of the *missio Dei* is 'relationship' and draws the two together.

Chapter 4. Participation in the *Missio Dei*

4.1. Introduction

The biblical grand narrative affirms that the triune God did not create and then abandon. God participates in God's creation. In the present, which is neither the beginning nor the end, God is taking an active part in this world. Because God is active in this world, in the Kingdom, in the church, persons are able to participate in the *missio Dei*.

Cunningham uses the term participation to enhance the understanding and language of relationship between God and person. Bellini uses the term participation in an attempt to develop an onto-epistemology that is conjunctive with a theology of mission. Previously, Thangaraj's argument for the *missio humanitatis* was illumined to note the fallacy of beginning any theology of mission outside the *missio Dei*. As Thangaraj eventually recognized, the importance of the *missio humanitatis* is to be framed and grounded in the *missio Dei*. This example highlights the imperative that all talk of mission or missiology must begin with, or will return to, the triune God. All conversation about the Trinity must begin with, or will return to, the biblical grand narrative which narrates the *missio Dei*.

From a systematic, missiological perspective, this is the importance of beginning any discussion or extrapolation of a mission theology or articulation of the concept of participation by defining the *missio Dei*. Second, from a Trinitarian and missiological perspective, the Bible is argued to be a grand narrative that frames all contextual experience.

The challenge in developing a theology of participation in the *missio Dei* is to separate the scholar's tendency to conflate the concept of *missio Dei* and the concept of mission, being sent. As stated earlier, few missiologists have undertaken the task of defining the *missio Dei* and none have systematically developed a theology of participation from a definitive point. The term is often used to demonstrate acquiescence to the paradigm shift in missiological thinking that began in the twentieth century, while 'mission' remains the activity of persons and the church. Although C. Wright and Glasser contribute to missiology by identifying

God as missional, they fail to develop a theology of participation as such from within the *missio Dei* concept.

Consequently, theologians and missiologists often prioritize or emphasize what they identify as the church's mission or the person's mission. One scholar will emphasize bearing the image of Christ while another emphasizes the power of the Holy Spirit, and yet another stresses that the church does not have a mission apart from its life in the Trinity. Daniel notes, 'The history of Christian mission demonstrates decisively that it is easier for Christians to act their way into new thoughts and feelings than to think their way into right actions and feelings.'¹³²

This chapter illumines differing perspectives of participation in the *missio Dei*. Keshishian frames the concept of participation in the *missio Dei* from an ontological perspective while Bellini claims an onto-epistemological view of participation. C. Wright implicitly frames God's participation as mission, singular, and explicitly frames human participation as missions, plural. The Lausanne Covenant and the Micah Declaration documents are used to emphasize the nature of participation from the perspective of personal and church engagement in specific activities as acts of participation.

4.2. Keshishian and an Ontological Perspective

Keshishian posits a definitive perspective on the relationship between the church and God's mission that elucidates an overarching aspect of the *missio Dei* concept.

The church itself has no mission. Its mission is to participate in God's mission. The very being of the church is missionary; the church is, indeed, a missionary event. Therefore, mission is not one of the 'functions' of the church, but the life of the church that goes beyond itself to embrace the whole of humanity and the whole creation. The mission of the church is not expansion of the church, but establishment of the kingdom of God. Unity and mission must be

¹³² W.H. Daniel, *Practicing the Future Perfect: Ministry Practices and Communal Mission in The New Testament* (Bloomington, IN: 1st Books Publishing, 2004), p. v.

understood in the perspective of the kingdom. They are for the kingdom and, as such, they are dynamically interrelated.¹³³

Keshishian, writing from an Eastern Orthodox perspective, combines unity and mission with the fellowship of the triune God. The church is the church only inasmuch as it is a participant in the life of the triune God. Keshishian contends that mission is not a matter of method or strategy; therefore, it must be understood from an ontological perspective as God is the basis for all thought and activity of the church. Keshishian challenges his readers to understand the church in relationship with the triune God as paramount and inseparable, and it is only from this understanding of unity that the church is able to be what it is called to be. Accordingly, Keshishian articulates his understanding of participation when he states:

The interrelatedness of unity and mission is not a question of methodology or strategy. It is an ontological one. It is related to the very essence of *koinonia* as fellowship in the Triune God, and to the specific vocation of *koinonia* as participation in God's economy in and for the world. In fact 'being in Christ' (a favourite expression of Paul) is being partner in his work. Therefore unity is participation in the life of the Triune God. Mission is commitment to the work of the Triune God incarnated in Jesus Christ. Both are God's gift and command. It is only in unity with the Triune God that the Church is able to fulfil its vocation.¹³⁴

What Keshishian identifies as unity between God and church, others have identified as 'communion'. This unity is extended into the world.

Keshishian, like Vicedom, avoids putting the authority for God's mission into the hands of humans or even having authority rest in the hands of the church, as he rightly identifies that the church does not have a mission outside of the Trinity. The church has, as its source of being, the Trinity. Therefore, the life and activity of

¹³³ A.I. Keshishian, *Orthodox Perspectives on Mission* (Oxford: Regnum Books & Lynx Communications, 1992), p. 98.

¹³⁴ Keshishian, *Orthodox*, p. 99.

the church is framed through the life and activity of the Trinity. However, for Keshishian, from an Orthodox perspective, participating in God's mission simply becomes an extension of the Eucharist.

Keshishian notes, 'The Eucharist is not a self-contained action of the church detached from the world and worldly things...the church does not become a eucharistic community only around the Lord's Table.'¹³⁵ Consequently, he argues,

Through the eucharist human beings are restored in their God-given responsibility to be 'co-workers' with God. This means that: the mission of the church is rooted in, and emerges from the eucharist; the eucharist is not just anamnesis, namely the remembrance of God's saving act in Christ, but fundamentally a sharing of God's love and promise, liberation and salvation with human beings, and a restoring of the brokenness of humanity and the integrity of creation. Therefore mission, in its genuine sense, is eucharist in extension.¹³⁶

From this ontological perspective of participation, mission is being in the life of the Trinity through the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the relationship between God and persons, being co-workers in holy love.

4.3. Bellini and an Onto-Epistemological Perspective

In *Participation: Epistemology and Mission Theology*, Bellini identifies the quest for a 'vision of epistemology that is compatible with Christian theism and its soteriological work in theology, specifically a theology of mission.'¹³⁷ Bellini's scholarship contributes to this thesis as he discusses key concepts of participation, a Wesleyan perspective of grace, missiology, and the *missio Dei*.

Bellini identifies one characteristic of participation as 'Incarnational'. As he seeks to build upon his understanding that participation is Incarnational, he states, 'Although the creation accounts in Genesis chapter one and John chapter one and

¹³⁵ Keshishian, *Orthodox*, p. 27.

¹³⁶ Keshishian, *Orthodox*, p. 27.

¹³⁷ P.J. Bellini, *Participation: Epistemology and Mission Theology* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2010), p. 7.

the *en Christo* ontology in Paul do not use the particular word “participation,” or *koinonos*, the idea and dynamic is clearly in the Incarnation.’¹³⁸ Bellini connects this use of the term participation with the Trinity, with the person and the church, and with mission. ‘For us, for the church, for mission, participation means to “be there.” It means to be concretely present, spirit, soul, and body with God and others, participating in his grace and love.’¹³⁹

Bellini, influenced by Maximus, Wesley, and Radical Orthodoxy in seeking to develop a vision of epistemology, postulates, ““to participate” is to recognize that nothing created stands alone. We are “part” of God’s greater picture. We are also “partakers” of God’s divine nature.’¹⁴⁰ From this perspective, one may discern that God is the starting point for any discussion about participation.

Bellini’s most concise definition of participation is found in the following statement:

A shared ontology does not permit any epistemological quest to be central and function as a primary interpreter of reality or a first philosophy. Human knowing is a complex activity that takes place within a larger ontological context containing multiple, even innumerable factors that cannot be reduced. Participation puts a primacy on that ontological context which is transcendent in nature and specifically divine, hence participation is qualified as an “onto-epistemology,” an epistemology that is ontologically connected, informed, and shaped.¹⁴¹

Bellini subsumes epistemology within ontology to describe how persons are to relate to God. ‘Even the term “participation” is not primary or primordial but reflects a relationship and a tie to that which is prior and transcendent. God is first, and then we participate in God as creation. Our being is relational and relative.’¹⁴² Bellini makes it very clear that because God is first, persons are able to take part in the activity of God.

¹³⁸ Bellini, *Participation*, p. 95.

¹³⁹ Bellini, *Participation*, p. 144.

¹⁴⁰ Bellini, *Participation*, p. 129.

¹⁴¹ Bellini, *Participation*, p. 129.

¹⁴² Bellini, *Participation*, p. 130.

‘Participation then is in the being of God’s energies and activities and not in the hyperessence of the Trinity.’¹⁴³ Rahner’s scholarship with Trinitarian doctrine has influenced Bellini’s work as he states, ‘another view of participation would be that the immanent Trinity, at least in part, is understood in the economic Trinity. Hence, we could understand and participate in part, or analogically, in the ontology of the Triune life.’¹⁴⁴

Bellini identifies grace and Incarnation as the action of God that initiates and enables persons to participate.

Finally, participation is inherently incarnational. Our participation is not initiated by an ascent and reaching up to God, as much as it is the grace of God through creation reaching down to us in redemption and fellowship. Incarnation is God’s initial move in descent. Participation is our response in ascent.....participation is initiated by the grace of God as he invites us into communion with him.¹⁴⁵

Highlighting the understanding that personal response, participation, is initiated through the grace of God, he states, ‘Participation begins with baptism, as we participate in the death, burial, and Resurrection with Christ and are gifted with the sacrament of the Holy Spirit who anoints us for holy living and service.’¹⁴⁶ Succinctly, Bellini argues that participation as an onto-epistemology, is incarnational, begins with baptism, and is understood analogically.

Bellini does not offer his own definition of the *missio Dei*, but relies upon Bosch, Bevans and Schroeder, who have been influenced by Barth and Hartenstein. At times, he uses the term interchangeably with the term *missio Trinitatis*, and through his process of defining participation as an onto-epistemology he seeks to link them with a mission theology.

Bellini states, ‘Creation is called to gaze continually upward for all that it is and will be, a radical revival of the transcendent and transcendence. This work

¹⁴³ Bellini, *Participation*, p. 130.

¹⁴⁴ Bellini, *Participation*, p. 130.

¹⁴⁵ Bellini, *Participation*, p. 144.

¹⁴⁶ Bellini, *Participation*, p. 158.

reflects an ontological vision that informs knowledge.¹⁴⁷ Bellini is arguing that our understanding of being, based on the transcendent nature of God, held in tension with the initiation and activity of God in Jesus, shapes one's epistemology. Therefore, 'All creation is an analogical relationship with God, and as part of creation, we know as we and all things participate in God. Knowing is a factor of being related to God.'¹⁴⁸

Bellini rightly states, 'the church discovers that through creation's participation in God, there is a universal witness of God through creation in the context of culture.'¹⁴⁹ As God is the initiator of all personal participation in the life or energies of God, culture or communities in the world become privy to the life of God through the lives of those who have responded – Christians. 'A Christian ontology of participation needs to reflect the Triune nature of God. *Missio Trinitatis* will give shape to a mission theology that highlights three key elements: creation, Incarnation and new creation.'¹⁵⁰

Rahner's use of and contribution of the immanent and economic God language to missiology is illumined as Bellini states, 'The mission of God is revealed through the economic working of the Divine persons in the world. Christ demonstrates through his own person and work that the mission is participation in the Triune life of God.'¹⁵¹ Again, in this context, Bellini stresses that participation is in the life of the Trinity, as one becomes witness to it through the activity of Christ.

Bellini makes a jump from a Wesleyan perspective of prevenient grace which incorporates the understanding that all persons, regardless of having, or not having, accepted the justifying grace offered through Jesus Christ, are under the influence of God, to 'Creation in its existence, expression, and purpose participates in the life of God.'¹⁵² This point is pushed further as Bellini argues: 'Creation does not have its own ground but participates in God.'¹⁵³ Bellini identifies creation with 'participatory' language. Therefore, participation, in this sense, functions, as he argues, analogically.

¹⁴⁷ Bellini, *Participation*, p. 10.

¹⁴⁸ Bellini, *Participation*, p. 10.

¹⁴⁹ Bellini, *Participation*, p. 11.

¹⁵⁰ Bellini, *Participation*, p. 23.

¹⁵¹ Bellini, *Participation*, p. 147.

¹⁵² Bellini, *Participation*, p. 149.

¹⁵³ Bellini, *Participation*, p. 149.

Central to Bellini's argument for an onto-epistemology is the concept that creation participates analogically. Creation is able to participate because of the mission of Jesus Christ. 'Through the mission of the person of Jesus Christ, humanity is invited into the life of the Triune God by uniting with the person of Jesus Christ. We participate in Jesus Christ, and Christ dwells in us by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who communicates the sanctifying presence of Jesus Christ to our own personhood, and we become more like Jesus and more authentic and perfect expression of personhood through his person.'¹⁵⁴ Although Bellini does not explicate how a person actually becomes more like Jesus, the implication is that it is through the work or activity of the Holy Spirit.

Bellini offers a philosophical approach to participation in the *missio Dei* that is influenced by an Eastern theological tradition. People participate in the life or energies of God with an emphasis on the significance of what that means through a developed onto-epistemological perspective. Consequently, by emphasizing a 'vision of epistemology', the argument becomes about epistemology.

Bellini is correct when he emphasizes that the only way persons are able to participate in the life of the Trinity is through the initial activity and energies of God in creation. However, Bellini's claim that the Incarnation is God's initial move in descent only serves to illuminate a lack of attention to the biblical grand narrative from a missiological perspective. Further, to note that personal participation in the life of the Trinity begins with baptism fails to account for the activity of God as contained in the Old Testament – in and through the persons Abraham or Moses or the nation Israel. Therefore, not having systematically grounded the *missio Dei* in the biblical grand narrative, as C. Wright and Glasser have done, Bellini's concept of participation in the *missio Dei* does not include participation in the world.

Throughout Bellini's argument one is led to assume that participation is only in and of God's activities and does not give account of participation in other than God. The jump from the confession of faith in the biblical creation story to the assumption that he means Christians when he uses 'creation's participation' becomes blurred as he rightly argues that 'all things participate in God'. Greater clarity is needed in connecting what is understood from an epistemological

¹⁵⁴ Bellini, *Participation*, p. 154.

perspective with what he argues from an ontological perspective, the concept of being created in the image of God.

Bellini, influenced by Wesley, rightly argues, ‘participation is initiated by the grace of God.’¹⁵⁵ However, identifying participation as only being a human activity done as a ‘response’ to God’s grace limits the language of participation to being articulated as one-directional, from person to God. One implication to be drawn from Bellini’s emphasis upon persons’ participation being an onto-epistemology, that is, by analogy to the transcendent nature of God and being in the life of the Trinity, is the question, ‘To what extent and how does one actually take part in the life of the immanent and economic Trinity?’

4.4. C. Wright and a Missions Perspective

C. Wright is known in the field of missiology for his book *The Mission of God* in which he makes the bold assertion that it is more appropriate to say there is a missional basis for the Bible than that there is a biblical basis for mission.¹⁵⁶

Wright’s book, together with the scholarship of Glasser, Bauckham, and others, demonstrated the importance of intersecting the biblical grand narrative and the *missio Dei* concept. Most recently, he is known for leading the 2010 gathering in South Africa for the Lausanne Movement and for his latest book, *The Mission of God’s People: A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission*. Its overall premise is framed in the questions, “‘What is the mission of God’s people?’ is really to ask, ‘For what purpose do those who call themselves the people of God actually exist? What on earth are we here for?’”¹⁵⁷ In other words, ‘How does one participate in the mission of God?’

He states, ‘So, even if we agree that the concept of sending and being sent lies at the heart of mission, there is a broad range of biblically sanctioned activities that people may be sent by God to do, including famine relief, action for justice, preaching, evangelism, teaching, healing and administration.’¹⁵⁸ The biblical grand

¹⁵⁵ Bellini, *Participation*, p. 144.

¹⁵⁶ Wright, *The Mission of God*, p. 22.

¹⁵⁷ C.J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God’s People: A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), p. 24.

¹⁵⁸ Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, p. 24.

narrative is the source for determining what are proper activities, activities that are understood as participation in mission.

In order to answer what our purpose is here on earth, he poses, ‘we have to go one step further back and ask, “Whose mission is it anyway?” And of course, the answer has to be – it is the mission of God. God himself has a mission.’ Consequently, ‘All *our* mission flows from the prior mission of God.’ God has a mission and from that mission persons are able to participate in what he identifies as missions. ‘So when I speak of *mission*, I am thinking of all that God is doing in his great purpose for the whole of creation that he calls us to do in cooperation with that purpose.’ ‘But when I speak of *missions*, I am thinking of the multitude of activities that God’s people can engage in, by means of which they participate in God’s mission.’¹⁵⁹

Wright diligently engages multiple texts and builds, as he did in *The Mission of God*, the hermeneutical congruence of the Old and New Testaments. Throughout his most recent book, he constantly re-engages and answers the question, ‘What are we here for?’ He answers: ‘To participate in God’s promised mission of bringing people from all nations on earth into the sphere of God’s redemptive blessing through Christ.’¹⁶⁰ In this perspective the emphasis is on participating in God’s mission by ‘bringing’ them into God’s redemption. Bringing people into God’s redemption means that they ‘... are created and called to *live* in certain ways in their relationship to God, to the world and to others.’¹⁶¹ The certain way, for Wright, involves being and doing; as he argues, ‘... the mission of God’s people in the Bible is to *be* the people whom God created us to be and to *do* the things that God calls us to do.’¹⁶² To be and do, as Wright claims, revolves primarily in and with sharing the gospel. In his most specific account, Wright asserts, ‘Surely the real mission of God’s people is to get out there and spread the Word, witness, evangelize, tell people about Jesus and how to get saved.’¹⁶³ Without identifying how one is empowered to do so, he summarizes, ‘We are to *live* our mission.’¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁹ Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, pp. 24-25.

¹⁶⁰ Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, p. 81.

¹⁶¹ Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, p. 148.

¹⁶² Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, p. 149.

¹⁶³ Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, p. 163.

¹⁶⁴ Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, p. 265.

Participation, for Wright, is identified as ‘our mission’, a way in which we ‘live’, ‘witness’, ‘be’, ‘do’, and ‘evangelize’. ‘The *mission of God*, therefore, is that dynamic divine love that drives God to seek the ultimate well-being and blessing of human beings by bringing them into a relationship with himself in which they love, worship, and glorify him, and find their greatest joy in doing so.’¹⁶⁵ The mission of God, according to Wright, is God seeking human beings to be restored in ‘right relationship’; right relationship is identified as being the character of divine love that is made manifest in and through those activities that express adoration and give proper attention to the One who makes unsurpassed joy possible.

Wright argues, ‘It is not so much that God has a mission for his church as that God has a church for his mission. We exist to serve God’s mission.’¹⁶⁶ The statement about the church and mission is an affirmation of a missiological perspective that incorporates a biblical grand narrative world view in the *missio Dei*. That is, even as the Bible is part of the *missio Dei*, so too is the church. Both exist as part of the *missio Dei* to serve in the activity of God, ‘dynamic divine love’, so that others may be brought into relationship with God.

He rightly grounds any talk of ‘mission’ in God’s mission or the *missio Dei*. However, when the concept of mission is emphasized almost exclusively as ‘sending’ or being ‘sent’, thereby being identified and treated as an entity, or solely as activity, there is the tendency for reversion to the assertion of ‘my mission’ or the ‘church’s mission’.

To argue for ‘my mission’, ‘our mission’ or the ‘church’s mission’ is to risk identifying, implying, or indicating mission as being an entity or ‘other’, outside or external from the *missio Dei*. Therefore, it is more appropriate to say, as Wright has done many times, but failed to develop as he reverts back to the ‘church’s mission’, that persons and the church are to participate in the mission of God. Wright illumines the ongoing systematic and logical problem that missiologists incur if they maintain the validity of using ‘missions’ when they have already made a compelling argument that mission begins and ends with God, and persons and the church are to participate in the *missio Dei*. Granted, the question remains, ‘What, then, is proper language for talking about the activity of persons and the church as it is contained in

¹⁶⁵ Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, pp. 244–245.

¹⁶⁶ Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, p. 148.

the *missio Dei*?' Hence, missiology is in the midst of a conundrum surrounding the use of terms.

Wright clearly conveys the understanding that participation is to be held within 'covenantal' language. Wright consistently holds in tension the mission of God with the grand narrative, through a developed sense of the Hebraic concept of covenant. 'So the mission of *God's* people has to start and finish with commitment to the *God* whose mission we are called to share. But that in turn depends on *knowing* our God – knowing God in depth, from experience of his revelation and his salvation. So what exactly is it, then, that we are to *know* and to remain loyal to? ... loyalty to the uniqueness of God.'¹⁶⁷ What Wright has identified as knowing God and remaining loyal to God others have identified as obedience and faith. The question that arises, from a theological perspective, rather than merely being construed as matter of practice, is 'How is this done?'

4.5. Lausanne Covenant and an Evangelizing Perspective

It can be argued that two documents, The Lausanne Covenant and the Micah Declaration on Integral Mission, incorporate all the various aspects and perspectives of the scholars previously referred to.¹⁶⁸ Both of these documents are the culminating thoughts and work of hundreds of missiologists, theologians, and ministers. Both documents are representative of a body of people from within the Christian church intent upon seeking greater clarification of how persons and the church might grow in their knowledge and understanding of what it means to participate in the *missio Dei*.

In 1974, it was stated: 'We, members of the Church of Jesus Christ, from more than 150 nations, participants in the International Congress on World Evangelization at Lausanne, praise God for his great salvation and rejoice in the

¹⁶⁷ Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, p. 31.

¹⁶⁸ This thesis has chosen to consider the Lausanne Movement and the Micah Network because both profess to be a movement and network of Christians committed to engaging in activities, through God's empowerment, intent upon sharing the good news of Jesus Christ for the advancement of the kingdom of God. The World Council of Churches, also a self-acclaimed movement, stands apart from the Lausanne Movement and the Micah Network because their stated intent and emphasis is the unity of Christian churches. This recognition of the difference in the primary emphases between the groups is not a negation of the ethos of the World Council of Churches, as this thesis asserts the value in Christian unity. The claim of this thesis is that a theology of participation in the *missio Dei* shapes and informs Christian unity and not vice versa.

fellowship he has given us with himself and with each other.’¹⁶⁹ In part, the Lausanne Movement defines the purpose of God, the *missio Dei*, as, ‘He has been calling out from the world a people for himself, and sending his people back into the world to be his servants and his witnesses, for the extension of his kingdom, the building up of Christ's body, and the glory of his name.’¹⁷⁰ This claim is based on the authority of the biblical grand narrative. They write, ‘We affirm the divine inspiration, truthfulness and authority of both Old and New Testament Scriptures in their entirety as the only written word of God, without error in all that it affirms, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice.’¹⁷¹

Holding as inseparable the mission of God and the biblical grand narrative, the covenant identifies the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ before defining the nature of evangelism and the social responsibility of every Christian. ‘To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gifts of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand.’¹⁷² Being attentive to the scriptures and to others ensures being cognizant and, therefore, responsible for engaging in meaningful activities aimed at identifying and alleviating injustice. ‘We affirm that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all people. We therefore should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men and women from every kind of oppression.’¹⁷³

The Lausanne Covenant does not equivocate in naming the source of all authority for mission as resting in the triune God, as it claims,

We affirm that there is only one Saviour and only one gospel, although there is a wide diversity of evangelistic approaches ... We believe in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Father sent his Spirit to bear witness to his Son; without his witness ours is futile. Conviction

¹⁶⁹ ‘The Lausanne Covenant’ in (PDF) <http://www.lausanne.org> (Lausanne: 1974), p. 1.

¹⁷⁰ The Lausanne, p. 1.

¹⁷¹ The Lausanne, p. 1.

¹⁷² The Lausanne, p. 2.

¹⁷³ The Lausanne, p. 2.

of sin, faith in Christ, new birth and Christian growth are all his work. Further, the Holy Spirit is a missionary spirit; thus evangelism should arise spontaneously from a Spirit-filled church.¹⁷⁴

One activity that girds all others, through the Holy Spirit, according to the Lausanne Covenant, is prayer. ‘We therefore call upon all Christians to pray for such a visitation of the sovereign Spirit of God that all his fruit may appear in all his people and that all his gifts may enrich the body of Christ.’¹⁷⁵ Finally, ‘May God help us by his grace and for his glory to be faithful to this our covenant!’¹⁷⁶ The Lausanne Covenant expresses a strong missiological imperative of evangelization and social responsibility as participation in the *missio Dei*.

The Lausanne Covenant identified that there are many ways to evangelize, lending credence to its appreciation of its ecumenical nature and attention to diverse spiritual gifts. The covenant shapes a mission theology and broadly illustrates the roles of the participants but offers few specifics except for the attention given to prayer. Jesus is acknowledged to serve as the mediator between God and a fallen humanity. The Holy Spirit serves as an illuminating agent through the word of God and the catalyst for the church. The church is to be sent into the world to participate in sacrificial service evangelism, to the extent that the church’s socio-economic lifestyle should be tailored to best meet the socio-political and economic injustices prevalent in the world today so that the good news of Jesus may be shared. Persons are called to pray for the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit to enable the fruitfulness of gifts that might serve to enrich the body of Christ.

Similar to C. Wright’s and Bellini’s perspectives, the Lausanne Covenant recognizes that the concept of mission begins with God and ends with God. However, their perspectives lack the ontological perspective of Keshishian that unites God and persons as co-workers. The Lausanne Covenant mentions grace, but fails to connect it with the Holy Spirit. This leads one to ask, ‘how does God’s grace help us to be faithful, whether it is to the Lausanne Covenant or, more simply stated, being faithful as a participant in God’s mission?’

¹⁷⁴ The Lausanne, pp. 2, 5.

¹⁷⁵ The Lausanne, p. 5.

¹⁷⁶ The Lausanne, p. 6.

4.6. Micah Declaration and an Integral Mission Perspective

It has often been asserted that the epitome of ‘right relationship’ between person and God, as contained in the Old Testament, is Micah 6:8. ‘The Micah Network is a coalition of evangelical churches and agencies from around the world committed to integral mission. Convened by this network, 140 leaders of Christian organizations involved with the poor from fifty countries met in Oxford in September 2001 to listen to God and each other for mutual learning, encouragement and strengthening as we serve the cause of the kingdom of God among the poor.’¹⁷⁷ An assumption is made that everyone knows what is meant by ‘poor’ as they do not offer a definition. Still, this does not detract from the contribution of the document and the concept contained therein in elucidating a broad perspective of how one is to participate in the *missio Dei*.

Similar to the Lausanne Covenant, the Micah Network Declaration emphasizes the centrality of Jesus Christ, prayer as foundational, all persons being made in the image of God, and the grace of God being inseparable from participation in mission. The declaration proposes the term and concept of ‘integral mission’.

Integral mission or holistic transformation is the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. If we ignore the world we betray the word of God which sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore the word of God we have nothing to bring to the world. Justice and justification by faith, worship and political action, the spiritual and the material, personal change and structural change belong together.

¹⁷⁷ ‘Micah Network Declaration on Integral Mission’ in (PDF) <http://www.micahnetwork.org> (Oxford, 2001), p. 1.

As in the life of Jesus, being, doing and saying are at the heart of our integral task.¹⁷⁸

Jesus is the embodiment of integral mission that the church is understood and expected to emulate amongst the 'poor'. The Micah Network Declaration asserts, 'We call one another back to the centrality of Jesus Christ. His life of sacrificial service is the pattern for Christian discipleship.' The declaration argues, 'Justice and justification by faith, worship and political action, the spiritual and the material, personal change and structural change belong together. As in the life of Jesus, being, doing and saying are at the heart of our integral task.'

Holding this together, that is, the emphasis on justice and value transformation and the model of Christ, is grace. 'The grace of God is the heartbeat of integral mission.' Subsequently, 'God by his grace has given local churches the task of integral mission.' Therefore, 'Integral mission is the concern of every Christian.'¹⁷⁹

The Micah Declaration expresses a strong missiological imperative of social justice and evangelization as participation in the *missio Dei*. The nuance between the two documents is slight but definable. The Lausanne Covenant emphasizes evangelization held in tension with social justice while the Micah Declaration emphasizes social justice held in tension with evangelization. With the widespread acceptance of the *missio Dei* concept, there is the recognition and acceptance amongst missiologists, theologians, and 'practioners' that social justice and evangelization are inseparable. Implicitly they have linked the two emphases through 'divine participation'.

4.7. Conclusion

Although neither the Lausanne Covenant nor the Micah Declaration worked specifically with, or developed, the doctrine of grace in relation to participation, it is enough, for them, to identify the grace of God as being intrinsic to participation. Also, implicit to each is the connection between prayer and grace. In both instances this serves to highlight the need for and the contribution from a Wesleyan

¹⁷⁸ Micah Network, pp. 2-3.

¹⁷⁹ Micah Network, pp. 2-3.

perspective: for a developed theology of participation in the *missio Dei* that incorporates the means of grace.

Two streams that run consistently throughout *missio Dei* scholarship are the two imperatives to evangelize the world and social justice. Bellini articulates a philosophy, from an onto-epistemological perspective, of personal participation initiated by the grace of God. People participate in the *missio Dei*, the life of the Trinity. Keshishian has re-emphasized that the church has no mission but to participate in God's mission. Unity with God and participation in God's mission are inseparable. As such, the church's participation in God's mission is unity with the Trinity. C. Wright places the church's participation within a covenantal relationship that emphasizes being sent to witness, to evangelize. From the perspectives of the Lausanne Covenant and the Micah Declaration, participation is heralded by emphasizing the Trinity, the Bible, evangelization and social responsibility. Each perspective has identified the significance of divine grace in articulating an understanding of 'participation'.

Scholars from the broadest of Christian perspectives have written extensively about the practices of evangelism and social responsibility. They have articulated these through ecclesiastical, ethical, doctrinal, and various other lenses. Often these practices are either implicitly or explicitly expressed as the way persons and the church participate in 'mission'. Or, more specifically, the scholars have argued that these have been the 'missions' of the person and the church. These 'practical' approaches can lead to significant anthropocentrism if unconnected by a Trinitarian approach to the *missio Dei*. This chapter illumined how a few scholars who express mission as being inseparable from God have grounded missiology with the biblical grand narrative, and retained the primacy of the Trinity.

Bellini's philosophical approach, C. Wright's Hebraic covenantal approach, and the evangelization and social justice approach from the field of practioners, indicate that their emphases tend to neglect divine priority and suffer from that neglect. This is indicated through claims that God's activity is 'mission', personal or church participation is 'missions', while at the same time claiming that there is only one mission, the *missio Dei*. Cunningham, as a Trinitarian theologian, wrote about participation as an enhanced expression and understanding of relationship between

the triune God and God's creation. The Trinity actively participates, 'takes part' in the world, in the lives of the people.

From a missiological perspective of the *missio Dei* that embraces the philosophical and biblical concept of participation, properly grounded in Trinitarian doctrine, participation is best understood to be tri-directional but asymmetrical, in the sense that theological priority is given to divine participation. First, God participates in the life of the church or persons. Second, persons or the church participate in the life of the Trinity. Third, persons and the church participate in the lives of others or the world. Personal participation in the life of the Trinity or in other's lives is only possible because God first participates in the lives of persons or the church.

Though accurate, Bellini's philosophical-epistemological lens and C. Wright's covenantal lens, through which they expressed participation, limit a holistic understanding of a theology of participation in the *missio Dei*. All late twentieth century and early twenty-first century missiologists note the central role of the Trinity, but only Cunningham has defined both Trinitarian and human activity as participation.

This thesis argues for a holistic understanding and use of participation in the development of a theology of participation in the *missio Dei*: a holistic, systematic missiology predicated on the condition of right relationship as articulated through the biblical grand narrative and the life of the Trinity.

Further, the triune God who is the creator of everything is the triune God in which all authority exists for *missio*, to include God's sending of self. All Christian participation is framed through a lens of God's participation in the world as contained in the biblical grand narrative. The Trinity frames the understanding of what participation means between God and person and person with person. This is not to say that there is no other form or forms of participation.

It is in keeping with the biblical grand narrative to note that persons, but not God, have the ability and opportunity to participate in that which is outside or other than the life of the Trinity and the *missio Dei*. Scripture argues that God never contradicts God's self; God is the constant in the *missio Dei*. Persons, however, in exercising free will, have the opportunity and the ability to be active participants in something other than the life of God or God's activities.

No scholar has fully integrated the *missio Dei* concept, the biblical grand narrative, and Trinitarian doctrine with the ‘means of grace’ in a systematic theology of participation. By integrating a Wesleyan perspective of grace with the *missio Dei* concept, this thesis claims a missiological understanding of participation that informs and is applicable to all Christian fields of thought and practice.

Chapter 5. Towards a Theology of Participation in the *Missio Dei*

5.1. Introduction

Following Barth's articulation in the 1930s that mission begins with the activity of God, Hartenstein soon thereafter coined the term *missio Dei*. The term was new but the concept was not. It was in the wake of Barth's challenge early in the twentieth century that theologians and the church alike acknowledged that they had been identifying mission from an anthropocentric vantage. Subsequently, almost exclusive attention and research has myopically been centred on the activity of God or the activities of persons and the church as missions.

As the *missio Dei* concept began to take root, each field began to apply their particular lens to the concept. Biblical scholars engaging with the *missio Dei* theory challenged the normative view that mission began with Jesus' command to go and make disciples. With the developing *missio Dei* concept, the Bible is re-emerging in Christian theology as the primary source.

A renewed interest in a Trinitarian dialogue emerged as the *missio Dei* concept challenged the teleological monotheism that had become the norm. Rahner, recognized as a forerunner amongst Trinitarian scholars who articulated the inseparability of the immanent and economic nature of the triune God, invoked new conversation amongst missiologists and theologians who sought to disengage the authority for, and concept of, mission, from the institutional structures of the local church and denominationalism.

Not everyone embraced the concept. Hoedemaker believes the *missio Dei* concept, as addressed through a lens that intersects mission and ecumenicism, does mark a new paradigm in missiological dialogue but fails in that it is too open in all directions to be of significant value. Since Hoedemaker's challenge, respective Christian fields have made significant contributions in answering his claim. Hoedemaker argues, 'it [*missio*] could become the designation of a generalized relationship between God and humanity that makes specific mission work virtually

superfluous.’¹⁸⁰ Hoedemaker, like so many others, in this sense, is conveying the understanding that mission is an entity rather than intrinsic to the nature of God.

Bauckham’s concept of the universal and particular activity in the *missio Dei* challenges the logic behind Hoedemaker’s argument. ‘God never singles out some for their own sake alone, but always for others.’¹⁸¹ Therefore, Hoedemaker’s charge that *missio* is designated as a generalized relationship between God and humanity is anything but superfluous, unless one is willing to make the argument that God’s particular activity in the life of a person is in some way superfluous. The *missio Dei* concept challenges orthodoxy and orthopraxy in light of a renewed perspective of orthopathy.

Many scholars have inadvertently cast a myopic perspective on the concept as they have focused upon the derivation of mission, *mitto*, to send, or sending. Subsequently, an undue amount of attention on the *missio Dei* concept has been limited to the ‘sending of God’, or simply, the activity of God. Others have focused almost exclusively on sending in relation to the church. Subsequently, the *missio Dei* is emphasized through the perspective of the ‘sending of the church’, or the ‘sending of the person’. In part, both of these perspectives are accurate. The triune God has sent and still sends God’s self. Also, the church and persons are understood to be sent by God. However, of equal significance to the concept of being sent, is the answer to what end and by what means the two are integrated and understood to be inseparable. This is an area needing greater attention, framed through a Trinitarian lens, in order for the *missio Dei* concept to be more fully developed and to be the culmination of missiological thinking and practice.

This thesis identifies three overarching streams and challenges running through the *missio Dei* concept. First, the *missio Dei* encompasses the biblical grand narrative, thereby challenging popular mission theology that simply embraces the Great Commission with the Great Commandment as the basis for mission. Second, the *missio Dei* is rooted in the triune God, thereby challenging the popular theology that mission is understood solely as an entity, an activity external to the nature of God. Third, as the *missio Dei* is rooted in the Trinity, that is, in the understanding of

¹⁸⁰ L.A. Hoedemaker, ‘The People of God and the Ends of the Earth’ in F.J. Verstraelen, A. Camps, L.A. Hoedemaker & M.R. Spindler (eds.), *Missiology: An Ecumenical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), p. 166.

¹⁸¹ Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, p. 49.

the inseparability of the immanent and economic God, this challenges the popular articulations that ‘missions’ is an appropriate expression denoting the engaged activities of persons or the church within the *missio Dei*, and the inherited tendency to default mission to the place of beginning with church, person, or a context. In light of the biblical grand narrative and Trinitarian theology, the *missio Dei* can be understood as relationship between God and person, person and God, and person and person. The challenges facing the *missio Dei* may be overcome as relationship is predicated upon, and enhanced through, the language of participation. The triune God is the source and culmination of the relationship, enabling and empowering persons’ participation.

5.2. The Biblical Grand Narrative and the *Missio Dei*

Keshishian asserts, ‘The church itself has no mission,’¹⁸² and C. Wright expands the assertion with, ‘It is not so much that God has a mission for his church as that God has a church for his mission.’¹⁸³ As God made it possible for the nation Israel to participate in God’s mission, God makes it possible for the Christian church and persons to be part of the *missio Dei*.

The common strand uniting the biblical scholars that stands out above all other strands is the overarching theme of ‘relationship’, indicating an action on the part of God that calls for a response from humanity. Scholars in the various theological fields emphasize particular perspectives of how the concept of relationship between God and person is to be understood. Little attention has been given to how the relationship is framed from the perspective of how persons are to be in, or the condition of, relationship between person with God, or with one another.

It has been easier, from a biblical grand narrative perspective as well as a Trinitarian perspective, held in tension with a missiological emphasis, to focus upon the action of God. Scholars like Cunningham, who elicit the language of participation to be dual-action, have insufficiently connected God’s action with human action, due to an underdeveloped emphasis on the biblical grand narrative.

¹⁸² Keshishian, *Orthodox Perspectives*, p. 98.

¹⁸³ Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, p. 148.

Scholars like C. Wright, who educe a covenantal relationship from the biblical grand narrative perspective, have failed to develop the Trinitarian emphasis that does not separate God's being from God's action within a missiological perspective.

By far the greatest lack in current biblical, Trinitarian, and missiological scholarship relating to the *missio Dei* is accounting for concrete participation in the *missio Dei* without falling back into the anthropocentric vantage. The dilemma is to maintain the integrity of the concept of the *missio Dei* and God's action yet make personal and church participation and human action integral and inseparable.

5.3. The Trinity and the *Missio Dei*

All fields point to the Trinity as being the centre of the *missio Dei* concept. The God that we seek to know in truth is the God we have experienced in salvation history and through biblical expressions. Rahner postulates that the triune God who remains true within himself is the triune God whose love we have experienced in history and will experience in the future. 'The "economic" Trinity is the "immanent" Trinity and the "immanent" Trinity is the "economic" Trinity.'¹⁸⁴ However, from a missiological perspective that unites the biblical grand narrative, Trinitarian doctrine, and the language of participation, his argument was developed one-dimensionally as his focus was centred on how God relates to persons, virtually excluding how a person is to relate to God, or how persons are to relate to one another.

What Rahner articulated as the divine self-communications of the economic Trinity in salvation history, which give humanity an understanding of the inner nature and character of the immanent Trinity, Cunningham has described as the 'practices' and 'virtues' of the Trinity. Cunningham develops his concept of practices as the way in which the Trinity 'participates' within itself and in the world.

Cunningham notes, 'God is relation without remainder ... thus, the Three are *mutually constitutive* of one another....Three *participate* in one another in a profound way, undermining any attempt to understand them independently of one another.'¹⁸⁵ The church and persons 'are called to live lives of mutual participation,

¹⁸⁴ Rahner, *The Trinity*, p. 22.

¹⁸⁵ Cunningham, *These Three*, p. 165.

in which our relationships are not just something that we “have,” but are what constitute us as human beings.¹⁸⁶ In this broad sense, Cunningham makes an argument for using the language of participation over relation, or more specifically, a language of participation that further defines relationality.

God’s self-communication as expressed through the biblical grand narrative teaches that the triune God does not ‘need’ anything or anyone. Rather, out of divine love, shared in the communion of the triune God, persons were created in the *imago Dei* to be in relation. God’s activity in the world is participation. Therefore, the proper response of persons and the church is ‘participation’.

The triune God, as revealed in the biblical grand narrative, is unchanging. God is, *in se*, a missionary God; therefore ‘everything the human might offer to God, such as otherness, God already has in himself. God’s self-sufficiency, however, is such that in the goodness of his sovereign freedom, he has moved *ad extra* in creating a world to live in co-existence with him.’¹⁸⁷

Flett argues that the flaw with the *missio Dei* is God himself.

The key flaw of *missio Dei* is its deficient Trinitarianism. Despite the supposed range of positions associated with the concept, they all stem from this same base. The problem is one of dividing who God is in himself from who he is in his economy. While mission is often understood as bridging the divide between God and the world, the Trinitarian problem of *missio Dei* is actually a problem of God himself.¹⁸⁸

Flett believes the *missio Dei* started with the dichotomy of God’s being from God’s activity. Although Rahner, La Cugna and others have addressed the tendency to separate the economy of the Trinity in historicity from the immanence of the Trinity, Flett makes a positive contribution to re-asserting the inseparability of God’s being and God’s action. Certainly, for some missiologists and theologians, an improper or

¹⁸⁶ Cunningham, *These Three*, p. 169.

¹⁸⁷ J.G. Flett, ‘*Missio Dei*: A Trinitarian Envisioning of a Non-Trinitarian Theme’, *Missiology: An International Review*, 37/1 (2009), p. 7.

¹⁸⁸ Flett, *Missio Dei*, p. 5.

undeveloped Trinitarianism has led to a debate on the viability and use of the *missio Dei* concept.

However, the greatest hindrance in the development of the *missio Dei* concept has not been those scholars who have either emphasized ‘sending’ at the expense of answering, ‘to what end?’, based on an underdeveloped or improperly developed Trinitarianism, or contextualization over the biblical grand narrative, or God’s activity to the detriment of personal participation, or proclamation over and against social responsibility. The greatest hindrance has been a lack in articulating and efficaciously connecting the seemingly polemic views, like the being and activity of the triune God, therefore recognizing ‘A corresponding double movement is crucial to our missional spirituality, if we are to be the *imago Dei* on the one hand, the Father, through/with Christ in their Holy Spirit, invites and receives us from the world. On the other hand, the Father commands and sends us through/with the Son, in their Spirit, to the world.’¹⁸⁹ A developed Wesleyan perspective of grace administered through a twenty-first century missiological lens that incorporates all the vantages and vestiges of the various theological streams will serve as the connective tissue of the *missio Dei* concept. Further, through a Wesleyan corpus of grace and the means of grace, a robust theology of participation in the *missio Dei* is imminent.

Flett rightly proposes that the *missio Dei* ‘begins first with God’s own proper life as Father, Son, and Spirit. This is the living God who, in himself from all eternity, lives in the partnership of the above and the below and in the history of the traversing.’¹⁹⁰ The *missio Dei* presupposes the action of God the Father in the Son through the Spirit. The inseparability of God’s being and action is made manifest in the life of the Christian community that moves in fellowship through the Spirit in the life of the Trinity and the world. Flett notes, ‘Mission cannot be something the community possesses, for mission is not lived out by the community in isolation.’¹⁹¹ The *missio Dei* is the relationship between God with person, person with God, and person with person: God created out of God’s love; God restores, reconciles, and renews creation through the Trinity’s presence, pardon, and power. Those made in

¹⁸⁹ S.K. Tan, ‘A Trinitarian Ontology of Missions’, *International Review of Mission*, 93/369 (2004), p. 292.

¹⁹⁰ Flett, *Missio Dei*, p. 15.

¹⁹¹ Flett, *Missio Dei*, p. 15.

the *imago Dei* are to be a new creation, active participants in the *missio Dei*, responding, in faith, to the calling and the sending of God as a community in holy love, with God and with others.

Piper has argued that ‘missions exist because worship does not.’¹⁹² This is wrong. Mission exists because God exists. Mission is inseparable from the triune God. God’s being and action are inseparable and in Rahner’s axiom, the immanent God is the economic God and the economic God is the immanent God. God as Creator is uncreated. All things were created by God. The Bible teaches from beginning to end, that not only did God create but also that God redeems, and God sanctifies. Again, scripture affirms that God did not create, redeem, or sanctify because God needs – God creates, redeems, and sanctifies because God loves and God knows the needs of God’s creation. The relationship or, more specifically, the condition of the relationship between God and those made in the *imago Dei* is the *missio Dei*. For the Christian disciple, mission is to be understood as inseparable from God and intrinsic to the nature of the triune God: the same nature in which the *imago Dei* is to participate.

Therefore, there is a missional basis for the Bible. There is a missional basis for worship. There is a missional basis for proclamation and social responsibility. There is a missional basis for all things that point to or lead one and others to the confession of faith that Jesus Christ is Lord and Saviour. Consequently, worship exists because mission exists. To be a disciple of Jesus Christ is to participate in the mission of God. This thesis claims that the way persons and the church participate in the mission of God is through participation in the means of grace.

5.4. Relationality and the *Missio Dei*

Foundational in the Christian faith is the movement from a broken relationship between person and God to a restored, reconciled, and renewed relationship with God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. The relationship may be categorized in time frames from ‘birth’ to ‘new birth’ to ‘eternity’. The relationship may be categorized in states of conditions as in being ‘broken’ or ‘redeemed’ or ‘perfected’. All are applicable and acceptable within the concept and

¹⁹² J. Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), p. 15.

Christian missiological context of relationship or relationality articulated through a *missio Dei* lens.

Detlev argues, ‘The *missio Dei* is the Trinitarian redeeming and reconciling activity in history, motivated by His loving will for the entire world, grounded in the atoning work of Jesus Christ and carried out by the Holy Spirit of Christ through the means of grace, by which God justifies man, delivers him from rebellion, sin and death, subjects him under His reign and leads him, with the redeemed community, to the final goal in history.’¹⁹³

Bellini subsumes epistemology within ontology to describe how persons are to relate to God. ‘Even the term “participation” is not primary or primordial but reflects a relationship and a tie to that which is prior and transcendent. God is first, and then we participate in God as creation. Our being is relational and relative.’¹⁹⁴ However, by identifying participation as only being human activity done as a ‘response’ to God’s grace, Bellini limits the language of participation to being articulated as one-directional, from person to God.

Bellini’s philosophical approach, C. Wright’s Hebraic covenantal approach, and the evangelization and social responsibility emphases all indicate participation to be one-directional, that is, how person or the church participates in the life of the Trinity or God’s mission. Glasser’s Kingdom perspective, although purporting the biblical grand narrative but lacking attention to a Trinitarian emphasis that articulates the inseparability of the immanent and economic God, relegates mission to being an external activity or entity of God, of church, or of person. Cunningham, writing from a Trinitarian theological perspective, emphasizes participation as an enhanced expression and understanding of relationship between the triune God and God’s creation. The Trinity actively participates in the world, in the lives of the people.

5.5. Church and the *Missio Dei*

This thesis has posited that the Christian church is the community of believers. This Christian community of believers came to be in the activity of the

¹⁹³ K.D. Schulz, ‘Tension in the Pneumatology of the *Missio Dei* Concept’, *Concordia Journal*, 23/2 (1997), pp. 102–103.

¹⁹⁴ Bellini, *Participation*, p. 130.

Father through Son in the Spirit. It has been argued that the economic God is the immanent God and vice-versa. God's nature or character is known through God's activity in the world. Further, the relatedness of the three Divine persons of the Trinity is communion and serves as the basis for what it means for the church to be in relation with the triune God and with each other. From a missiological vantage, much has been written on how God relates to persons and the church through God's self-communicating activity revealed through the grand narrative. There is little disagreement or debate in the twenty-first century, especially amongst missiologists, that the concept of the *missio Dei* begins with and in triune God. However, there are ecclesiological issues that surface as it becomes more widely accepted that the church does not have, in and of itself, a mission and is no longer understood to be the authority or 'sending' agent for mission.

Ecclesiology, in the context of this thesis, is being defined as the nature and function, or activity, of the church. The dominant ecclesiological issue facing the twenty-first church, in light of developing a theology of participation that is rooted in the triune God, is in determining what it means for the church to be understood as a participant in the *missio Dei*? Identifying the church, the community of believers, as a participant in the *missio Dei* does not diminish the nature or function of the church but only serves to enhance it as its very nature and activity is grounded in the nature and activity of the triune God. Gunton frames two dangers when being attentive to Jesus as mediator and noting...

the centrality of the community. Here we must tread our way carefully between two extremes. Much recent theology, particularly as the result of ecumenical discussion, has rediscovered the centrality of the church; it has also sometimes inflated its role, as if the church were itself the mediator of salvation. God uses the church as he uses Israel, but it is only by overmatching their all too obvious limits and weaknesses. Insofar as the church, in both worship and life, is *enabled* to set forth Christ, thus far does it mediate the work of the mediator. The other danger is to make the church merely

instrumental, merely the means to something that is essentially external to it.¹⁹⁵

The church, the community of believers, is the most visible witness of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. There are many ways of thinking about church. Inasmuch as there are many ways of thinking about church there are as many ecclesial bodies that make up the Christian church.

As the activity of the Father through the Son in the Spirit is the meritorious and efficacious means of the nature and function of the church it is appropriate to note that this thesis asserts an ecclesiology that is shaped by discipleship. The intent of this thesis is to maintain the orthodoxy of the Trinity as the basis for church's participation in the *missio Dei*.

5.6. Conclusion

Barth's re-articulation of mission as an activity of God and the subsequent emergence of the *missio Dei* concept has revolutionized scholarship in the fields of Trinitarian theology, missiology and evangelism.

Since the later twentieth century, the *missio Dei* has brought about a paradigm shift in missiological thinking from an anthropocentric view of mission to the understanding that persons and the church are participants in the life of the triune God – that is, the immanent and economic activity of the triune God.

Not all have agreed with the shift in emphasis. Hoedemaker is one of many who either explicitly or implicitly challenge the concept, arguing for the concept of mission or missions to be retained as a particular activity of persons and churches. Hoedemaker is right in recognizing the importance of human activity in the *missio Dei*, but he wrongly prioritizes it over divine participation by articulating mission as an activity unto itself.

If Barth and Hoedemaker are allowed to frame the debate, then we are easily thrust on the horns of a dilemma: mission as the activity of God, eclipsing the significance of human activity; or mission as a human activity, eclipsing its fundamental source in the triune God.

¹⁹⁵ C.E. Gunton, 'One Mediator...The Man Jesus Christ: Reconciliation, Mediation and Life in Community' *Pro Ecclesia*, 11/2 (2002), p. 157.

This thesis proposes that a Wesleyan theology of participation in the *missio Dei* can overcome this dilemma and avoid the repetitive articulations of mission as simply human action or divine action. Scholarship is illumined as the *missio Dei* concept is articulated as fully divine yet inseparable from human activity through the Wesleyan notion of co-operant grace.

Persons can and must respond, but God's grace always precedes the response: as Wesley states, 'for, first, God works; therefore you *can* work. Secondly, God works; therefore you *must* work.'¹⁹⁶ The *missio Dei* in Wesleyan theology has a 'soteriological' heart.

¹⁹⁶ J. Wesley, 'Sermon 85: On Working Out Our Own Salvation' in R.P. Heitzenrater (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley: The Bicentennial Edition* (Abingdon, 2005), section 3, no. 2.

SECTION 2
WESLEYAN THEOLOGY
OF
GRACE AND PARTICIPATION

Introduction

Missiologists focused mainly on the biblical grand narrative exhibit the tendency to overlook a Trinitarian theology that embraces both the immanent and economic God. Trinitarian theologians focused mainly on the activity of God exhibit the tendency to overlook the importance of the biblical grand narrative as the source for how persons and the church are to engage in the *missio Dei*. So, on the one hand, both Trinitarian and biblical theologians engaging with the *missio Dei* focus mainly upon the activity of God. On the other hand, ecumenicists and ecclesiologists influenced by the *missio Dei* have mainly focused upon the activity of persons and the church. So, the need to be addressed is how the immanent and economic God may be articulated and understood as both the source and goal of mission that includes persons and the church, as revealed through the biblical grand narrative.

This Section of the thesis illumines how a Wesleyan understanding of grace and the means of grace may be the answer for maintaining the triune God as the source and goal while asserting the inseparability of human–divine activity. A Wesleyan perspective of divine grace may be articulated, through a missiological lens, as God’s participation in, through, and with the world and be understood as the solution to repair the dis-communion of holy relationships.

This thesis argues that a Wesleyan theology of divine grace is the presence, pardon, and power of God that moves in, through and with the world. Grace is both imputed and imparted, it is immanent and economic. The nature of divine grace is uncreated and inseparable from God. Human participation in the means of grace is a way of life – a life of personal and social holiness made possible through the Holy Spirit. The means of grace include activities such as worship, searching the scriptures, prayer, the Lord’s Supper, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, visiting the sick and those in prison, and feeding, sheltering, and clothing those in need. Divine grace as God’s participation makes possible human participation in the means of grace in the *missio Dei*.

A Wesleyan understanding of the means of grace may be articulated, through a missiological lens, as persons and the church’s participation in, with, and through the life of the Trinity and the world. Wesley identified the means of grace as activities directed towards God and activities directed towards others, that is, works

of piety and works of mercy. This thesis claims that participation in the means of grace form the basis for how one is to be in relation with God and with others.

Chapter 6. God and Grace

6.1. Introduction

The overarching theme of this thesis is participation. The argument has been made that the Bible is a grand narrative, intended for and applicable to all. One strand within the grand narrative of the Bible is how original sin affected all by breaking the communion of holy relationships, one with God, and one with another. Following the strand of original sin, the grand narrative tells how God provides the solution for the dis-communion or alienation of holy relationships in Christ's death and resurrection through the Holy Spirit. Cobb rightly asks the logical question, 'In short, what is our role, and what is God's, in the process of salvation?'¹⁹⁷ Salvation, in this perspective, constitutes overcoming the effects of original sin and being restored in holy relationship. In order to answer the first part of the question 'What is our role?' it is necessary to begin with the second part of the question, 'What is God's role?' This is done by addressing the nature of grace.

Wesleyan theology asserts that grace is the power for salvation. The grand narrative reveals claims that everyone is in need of salvation, and identifies why humanity is subject to conditions and participates in all manner of things that are considered less than that which is noble, pure, righteous, holy, and grace-filled. A Wesleyan lens embraces the perspective that only the grace of the triune God, the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, holds the power to change anyone's way from the path of dis-grace to the path, the way that leads to life eternal in holy love. Salvation may come in an instant, as quick as one simple breath being taken in, but for most, salvation is an ongoing journey – to be worked out with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12), with the hope of hearing, one day, well done good and faithful servant (Matt 25:23).¹⁹⁸

Pelagianists argue that humans have retained the power and the will to choose as a conscious decision and a course of action: through faith, to a life-restoring relationship with God. Quite the opposite, the Calvinists argue that it has

¹⁹⁷J.B. Cobb, *Grace and Responsibility: A Wesleyan Theology for Today* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1995), p. 22.

¹⁹⁸J. Wesley, 'Sermon 85: On Working Out Our Own Salvation' in R.P. Heitzenrater (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley: The Bicentennial Edition*.

been determined; some are elected into the kingdom of heaven and some to an eternity separated from God. Wesley's conjunctive theology offered an alternative. God's prevenient grace, free for all, offered to all, and within all, inspires and enables human will to follow a life of faith: an affirmative response to God's justifying and sanctifying grace. Persons do take a part in their salvation, only being able to do so through grace. This grace is available to all, not only to a select few. What the secularist or humanist has identified as the 'conscience', Wesley identified as prevenient grace. Hence the reason it is said that one moves from grace to grace.

Wesley did not want anyone to believe that they had a power of themselves to make a positive choice but stressed the importance of God's prevenient grace made available for all. Wesley argued against the doctrine of predestination while defending the belief that free will does play a part in what Cobb has called the 'process of salvation'.¹⁹⁹ Wesley writes, 'Natural free will, in the present state of mankind, I do not understand: I only assert, that there is a measure of free will supernaturally restored to every man, together with that supernatural light which enlightens every man that cometh into the world.'²⁰⁰

God begins a work in humans, prevenient grace, which allows them to 'begin again' and take an active part in their salvation. Maddox notes, 'As Outler has nicely phrased it, Wesley's characteristic emphasis was that we are pardoned *in order to participate*.'²⁰¹ God's justifying grace in and through Jesus Christ offers all a 'new birth', to be made alive again. Maddox notes, 'What it brings is a new vitality and responsiveness to God, not completed transformation of our sin-distorted character into the likeness of God. Such transformation is realized by our subsequent responsible participation in God's sanctifying grace.'²⁰² Wesley stressed the importance of inward holiness and not simply external holiness to be seen or understood through the lens of deeds. Maddox argues of Wesley, '...his own typical definition of sanctification consistently placed primary emphasis on this "inward" dimension, described in such terms as "the life of God in the [human] soul, a

¹⁹⁹ Cobb, *Grace*, p. 22.

²⁰⁰ J. Wesley, 'The Difference Between the Moravians and the Wesleys, Predestination Calmly Considered' in R.P. Heitzenrater (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley: The Jackson Edition*, no. 45.

²⁰¹ R.L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994), p. 168.

²⁰² Maddox, *Responsible*, p. 177.

participation of the divine nature, the mind that was in Christ, or the renewal of our heart after the image of [God who] created us.’’²⁰³

6.2. Free Grace

Wesley makes explicitly clear that, first and foremost, salvation begins with God, continues with God, and is culminated by God when he emphatically states, ‘it does not depend on any power or merit in man; no, not in any degree, neither in whole, nor in part. It does not in any wise depend either on the good works or righteousness of the receiver; not on anything he has done, or anything he is.’²⁰⁴ The language of ‘participation’ is developed and used alongside the language of ‘relationality’ to emphasize the interconnectedness between a creative God and a responsive people. Participation, as an activity of God, is framed through the language of ‘grace’. Participation, as an activity of persons, is framed through the language of the ‘means of grace’.

We are reminded by Wesley of the prominent place of original sin within his soteriology; that it was with the fall of Adam that all persons suffer under the condition of total depravity, and it was through the death of Jesus Christ that all persons have been enabled, mysteriously, through God’s prevenient grace to recognize their need and inability of and by themselves to move in and to any praiseworthy thought or action. Therefore, ‘whatsoever is good in man, or is done by man, God is the author and doer of it.’²⁰⁵

In *Free Grace*, one of his earlier sermons, Wesley lays out his argument against the doctrine of predestination based on God’s grace being for all and in all. He ardently denies that predestination is a doctrine of God, as God cannot be divided against God’s self. The doctrine of predestination ‘tends to destroy the comfort of religion, the happiness of Christianity’ and to ‘... destroy our zeal for good works’ but it ‘hath also direct and manifest tendency to overthrow the whole Christian revelation.’²⁰⁶ The revelation that Wesley is speaking of and to leads to the understanding that ‘... God is love’ (1 Jn 4:8) and as such, it is not possible for a God

²⁰³ Maddox, *Responsible*, p. 178.

²⁰⁴ J. Wesley, ‘Sermon 110: Free Grace’ in R.P. Heitzenrater (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley: The Bicentennial Edition*, paragraph 3.

²⁰⁵ Wesley, ‘Sermon 110: Free Grace’, paragraph 3.

²⁰⁶ Wesley, ‘Sermon 110: Free Grace’, paragraph 19.

who is love to predestine and elect some to an eternity with God and others to an eternity of hell and torment. For those who seek to defend the doctrine of predestination, Wesley responds, ‘no Scripture can mean that God is not love, or that his mercy is not over all his works. That is, whatever it proves beside, no Scripture can prove predestination.’²⁰⁷ Rather, ‘Yea, the decree is past. And so it was before the foundation of the world. But what decree? Even this: “I will set before” the sons of men “life and death, blessing and cursing”; and the soul that chooseth life shall live, as the soul that chooseth death shall die.’²⁰⁸

Wesley’s argument in *Free Grace* against predestination serves to illuminate the utmost importance of understanding that God initiates and God makes possible the person’s response to God’s grace. Equally and explicitly clear is that a person accepts responsibility for how they respond. The argument presented here is that a proper response to God’s grace is to participate in the means of grace. The intention is not to intimate that Maddox or any other Wesleyan theologian do not clearly understand or hold to the belief that God’s grace precedes a person’s response; on the contrary, Maddox, Cobb, and others make it abundantly clear that God’s grace is first.

As Maddox rightly argues, ‘in short, Wesley did indeed affirm a role for meaningful human participation in salvation. However, he always maintained that this role was grounded in God’s gracious empowering, not our inherent abilities.’²⁰⁹ Maddox then uses a well known biblical axiom that Wesley emphasized – apart from Jesus one can do nothing (Jn 15:5) and I can do all things through Christ (Phil 4:13) – to stress that his preferred term for this position is ‘responsible grace’. Arguably, this is a conflation of concepts as Maddox is talking about a person’s response to God’s grace and not that God is responding to a fallen world with God’s grace. The use of this expression inadvertently contributes to the tendency of those scholars who embrace predestination to decry ‘works righteousness’.

From another perspective, Collins acknowledges Wesley’s use of the concept of co-operant grace as contained in the sermon *On Working Out Our Own Salvation*, and holds this in tension with Wesley’s emphasis of the work of God alone in the sermon *Free Grace* to make the point, ‘Consequently, more accurate readings of

²⁰⁷ Wesley, ‘Sermon 110: Free Grace’, paragraph 26.

²⁰⁸ Wesley, ‘Sermon 110: Free Grace’, paragraph 29.

²⁰⁹ Maddox, *Responsible*, p. 92.

Wesley's theology suggest that a synergistic paradigm, which contains both divine and human acting, must itself be caught up in an *even larger conjunction* in which the Protestant emphasis on the sole activity of God, apart from all human working, is *equally* factored in.²¹⁰ Collins, from a systematic perspective, logically emphasizes that God's grace is free and not responsible.

Collins identifies Wesley as a conjunctive theologian as he has consistently demonstrated a 'both-and' approach over the 'either-or' approach through an amazing ability to hold together two concepts that were often understood to be polemical: whether that was Catholic and Protestant, or 'faith alone' and 'holy living'.²¹¹

This thesis is in agreement with Collins on the need to emphasize the importance and clarity of thought that God, and only God, makes possible, through God's prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace, a renewed, restored, and reconciled relationship of holy love with God and neighbour. In Adam all died, and in Christ all have been offered life; and whether or not a person chooses to accept the justifying grace of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, God's prevenient grace is free in all and free for all.

Consider Wesley's words that bind together scripture with the concepts of prevenient grace and original sin:

Keep to the plain, old 'faith, once delivered to the saints,' and delivered by the Spirit of God to your hearts. Know your disease! Know your cure! Ye were born in sin: Therefore, 'Ye must be born again', 'born of God'. By nature ye are wholly corrupted: By grace ye shall be wholly renewed. 'In Adam ye all died': In the second Adam, 'in Christ, ye are all made alive.' You 'that were dead in sins hath he quickened': He hath already given you a principle of life, even 'faith in him who loved *you* and gave himself for *you*'. Now 'go

²¹⁰ K. J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), pp. 12-13.

²¹¹ Collins, *The Theology*, p. 4.

on' 'from faith to faith', until your whole sickness be healed, and all that 'mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus'.²¹²

Wesley's theology of grace and understanding of sanctification is constructed from holding together the inseparability of the concepts of what original sin did in the world and what Jesus Christ's death and resurrection did for the world. Wesley was not content to blindly accept the Calvinist assertions of predestination, nor was he comfortable with believing that humans were anything less than totally depraved.

Wesley, like Calvin, believed in total depravity, whereas Roman Catholic and many Eastern theologians do not insist that depravity was total. 'For Wesley this underestimated the impact of Inbeing Sin and endangered the unmerited nature of God's restoring *grace*.'²¹³ Thus, Wesley sought and answered how it was possible for totally depraved humanity to still be able to participate in God's saving action without it being automatic. 'In this search he turned to an emphasis on "provenience;" i.e. that God's grace always pre-vents (comes before) and makes possible human response.'²¹⁴ 'Uncreated' grace was the answer and prevenient grace the keystone upon which 'total depravity' and 'free will' might be synergistic. 'Seen in terms of uncreated grace, depravity is not the obliteration of our human faculties, but their debilitation when devoid of God's empowering Presence.'²¹⁵

Based on his interpretation of Phil 2:12–13 Wesley defines prevenient grace in his 1785 sermon – *On Working Out Our Own Salvation*.

Salvation begins with what is usually termed (and very properly) 'preventing grace'; including the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning his will, and the first, slight, transient conviction of having sinned against him. All these imply some tendency toward life, some degree of salvation, the beginning of a deliverance from a blind, unfeeling heart, quite insensible of God and the things of God. Salvation is carried on by 'convincing grace,' usually in Scripture termed 'repentance', which brings a larger

²¹² J. Wesley, 'Sermon 44: Original Sin' in R.P. Heitzenrater (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley: The Bicentennial Edition*, section 3, paragraph 5.

²¹³ Maddox, *Responsible*, p. 83.

²¹⁴ Maddox, *Responsible*, p. 83.

²¹⁵ Maddox, *Responsible*, p. 90.

measure of self-knowledge, and a further deliverance from the heart of stone. Afterwards we experience the proper Christian salvation, whereby ‘through grace’ we ‘are saved by faith’, consisting of those two grand branches, justification and sanctification.²¹⁶

Through Christ’s death, all people have been afforded preventing grace. Wesley argued that the conscience that is in everyone, given by God, is better understood as preventing grace. Wesley argues,

Allowing that all the souls of men are dead in sin by *nature*, this excuses none, seeing there is no man that is in a state of mere nature; there is no man, unless he has quenched the Spirit, that is wholly void of the grace of God. No man living is entirely destitute of what is vulgarly called ‘natural conscience’.²¹⁷

Cobb argues that, ‘how effective grace is at any time is partly a function of past decisions and partly of the present one.’²¹⁸ Though ‘men are dead in sin by *nature*,’ through God’s prevenient grace, albeit the ‘natural conscience’ made possible through God’s justifying grace, each person is ‘responsible’ in either resisting or not resisting the grace of the triune God – by participating or not participating in the means of grace. Participation in the means of grace is both an outward and inward expression of an inner assurance, which is faith. This faith continues to grow as God’s grace continues to enable and inspire participation in the believer’s life. It is God’s grace, the presence, the pardon, and the power that begins and ends the ‘working out’ of one’s salvation.

Grace, articulated in this light, is uncreated. Common grace, that is, personal unmerited favour, expressed as that which encompasses pardoning or forgiveness with mercy and justice, is rooted in the uncreated grace of God. Thus, ‘prevenient grace should not be considered a gift *from* God, but the gift *of* God’s activity in our lives, sensitizing and inviting us.’²¹⁹

²¹⁶ Wesley, ‘Sermon 85: On Working Out Our Own Salvation’, section 2, paragraph 1.

²¹⁷ Wesley, ‘Sermon 85: On Working Out Our Own Salvation’, section 3, paragraph 4.

²¹⁸ Cobb, *Grace*, pp. 39-40.

²¹⁹ Maddox, *Responsible*, pp. 89–90.

Maddox expresses it well in his summary of prevenient grace:

To summarize, Wesley understood Prevenient Grace to be God's initial move toward restored relationship with fallen humanity. As a first dimension, this involved God's merciful removal of any inherited guilt, by virtue of Christ. A second dimension of God's initial move to restored Presence is a partial healing of our debilitated human faculties, sufficient for us to sense and respond to God. The final dimension is God's specific overtures to individuals, inviting closer relationship. If these overtures are welcomed, a grace-empowered relationship of co-operative and progressive transformation sets forth. Since God's grace is universal, so is the possibility of such relationship. Since God's grace is resistible, no individual's participation is inevitable.²²⁰

From a Wesleyan perspective, it is essential to emphasize that God's grace is first of all, free, and not contingent upon a person's response. Free grace and Maddox's articulation that God's grace in the second and third dimension should not be confused with the irresistibility of God's grace, that is prevenient grace made available to all.

As Collins clarifies,

Nevertheless, since men and women in the natural state, according to Wesley, do not even have the freedom to accept or reject any offered grace, then this gift itself must be graciously and *irresistibly* restored. In other words, to deny that prevenient grace is irresistible in terms of graciously restored faculties is also to deny that Wesley held a doctrine of total depravity ... irresistibility in this context pertains not to the call of overtures made to these faculties ... but to the reestablishment of these faculties that constitute responsible personhood and accountability.²²¹

²²⁰ Maddox, *Responsible*, p. 90.

²²¹ Collins, *The Theology*, pp. 80–81.

God's free grace restores the faculties thereby making it possible for persons to be able to respond.

The concepts of grace and faith are inextricably linked in Wesleyan theology, but from a missiological vantage, free grace should not be conflated with a person's response. Especially misleading, arguably, is to conflate the terms in such a way that the response precedes God's activity, as has been done with the popular expression 'responsible grace'. This has become a tendency amongst some Wesleyan theologians, which lends itself organically to a misunderstanding and misrepresentation of Wesley's foundational emphasis that 'the grace or love of God, whence cometh our salvation, is free in all, and free for all.'²²²

God's empowering presence inspires awareness in persons of prevenient grace, of their 'fallen' state. Persons inspired by God's prevenient grace are therefore enabled to accept God's justifying grace in Christ and empowered for participation in God's sanctifying grace. Said another way, the presence, pardon, and power of God the Father, in God the Son, through God the Spirit is the grace of God made manifest in the lives of persons, for the purpose of communion between God and persons, and one with the other. There is a movement from grace to grace to grace.

6.3. Holy Spirit

When Wesley speaks of the mind being in us which was also in Jesus Christ, he is asserting that this is a proper goal, an aspiration of the Christian, one that is zealously sought and only possible through the Spirit of God. Wesley affirmed the human inability to fully understand God. Yet, he held in tension with this the knowledge that the Spirit of God acts in person's lives, through a myriad of ways and means, identified as what scripture has called the fruit of the Spirit. Wesley purports:

It is hard to find words in the language of men to explain the deep things of God. Indeed there are none that will adequately express

²²² Wesley, 'Sermon 110: Free Grace', paragraph 2.

what the Spirit of God works in his children. But perhaps one might say (desiring any who are taught of God to correct, soften, or strengthen the expression), by ‘the testimony of the Spirit’ I mean an inward impression of the soul, whereby the Spirit of God immediately and directly witnesses to my spirit that I am a child of God, that ‘Jesus Christ hath loved me, and given himself for me’; that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God.²²³

Wesley’s zeal for developing a sound theology of grace for practical discipleship was held in tension with a multi-faceted and conjunctive style and use of language.

Wesley presented two sermons entitled *The Witness of the Spirit*, one in 1746 and the other in 1767. Wesley’s primary intent was to solidify a course of argument that avoided the polemical stances of the ‘enthusiasts’ and the ‘formalists’ by emphasizing the witness of the Spirit. The ‘gift of assurance’ that a person is a child of God is testified to by the Spirit and is found evidenced through the ‘fruit of the Spirit’ that one reads of in Galatians 5.

We are reminded by Wesley in his 1733 sermon *The Circumcision of the Heart* that it is through the initiative of the Spirit that we experience divine love and grace:

At the same time we are convinced that we are not sufficient of ourselves to help ourselves; that without the Spirit of God we can do nothing but add sin to sin; that it is he alone ‘who worketh in us’ by his mighty power, wither ‘to will or do’ that which is good – it being impossible for us even to think a good thought without the supernatural assistance of his Spirit as to create ourselves, or to renew our whole souls in righteousness and true holiness.²²⁴

The purpose is to be restored with God and neighbour in right relationship, to be embraced in God’s love, which is holy, that one might embrace others in holy love. ‘But we must love God before we can be holy at all, this being the root of all

²²³ J. Wesley, ‘Sermon 11: The Witness of the Spirit’ in R.P. Heitzenrater (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley: The Bicentennial Edition*, section 2, paragraph 2.

²²⁴ J. Wesley, ‘Sermon 17: The Circumcision of the Heart’ in R.P. Heitzenrater (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley: The Bicentennial Edition*, section 1, paragraph 3.

holiness. Now we cannot love God till we know he loves us: “We love him, because he first loved us.” And we cannot know his love to us till his Spirit witnesses it to our spirit.²²⁵ This is the grace of God: that is, the presence, the Spirit enabling and inspiring the person to the growth of zeal for the holy love of God.

The presence of God is one with and at the same time the power of God that works within a person, both for internal spiritual maturation and external missional practice or expression. Wesley speaks of the power of the Holy Spirit in his sermon *The Witness of Our Own Spirit* when he writes,

By the ‘grace of God’ is sometimes to be understood that the free love, that unmerited mercy, by which I, a sinner, through the merits of Christ am now reconciled to God. But in this place it rather means that the power of God the Holy Ghost which ‘worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure’. As soon as ever the grace of God (in the former sense, his pardoning love) is manifested to our soul, the grace of God (in the latter sense, the power of his Spirit) takes place therein. And now we can perform, through God, what to man was impossible. Now we can order our conversation aright. We can do all things in the light and the power of that love, through Christ which strengthen us.²²⁶

Some theologians have historically emphasized grace as the power of God through the Holy Spirit to renew one’s nature in the image of God while other theologians have articulated grace as the pardon and forgiveness of God through the Holy Spirit. Wesley holds in tension the power and the pardon of God in Jesus Christ through the presence of God in Spirit.²²⁷

There is great significance in this understanding from a missiological perspective intent upon demonstrating the inseparability of the *missio Dei* concept from a Wesleyan doctrine of grace. The argument presented here is that the *missio Dei* is the grace of God, articulated as the Spirit at work in, through, and with the world. Cobb argues, ‘the Holy Spirit is the informing, transforming, and

²²⁵ J. Wesley, ‘Sermon 10: The Witness of the Spirit’ in R.P. Heitzenrater (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley: The Bicentennial Edition*, section 3, paragraph 5.

²²⁶ J. Wesley, ‘Sermon 12: The Witness of Our Own Spirit’ in R.P. Heitzenrater (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley: The Bicentennial Edition*, paragraph 15.

²²⁷ Maddox, *Responsible*, p. 85.

empowering energy.²²⁸ There are many words that are applicable and appropriate to describe God's grace and the Holy Spirit yet all will be incomplete in their efficacy to convey a complete understanding of God, even amidst the conviction that 'the Spirit works directly in the heart of the believer.'²²⁹

We are also reminded in Wesley's sermon *The Great Privilege of Those Born of God* that it is the Holy Spirit who inspires. Wesley believed 'that the all-encompassing goal of the Christian life was perfection in love of God and neighbour, that this love inevitably and spontaneously expressed itself in service to others.'²³⁰ Wesley identifies the Holy Spirit as the source of inspiration:

The life of God in the soul of the believer ... immediately and necessarily implies the continual inspiration of God's Holy Spirit; God's breathing into the soul, and the soul's breathing back what it first receives from God; a continual action of God upon the soul, the re-action of the soul upon God. ... And hence we may infer the absolute necessity of this re-action of the soul (whatsoever it be called) in order to the continuance of the divine life therein.²³¹

It is fair to say that Wesley's use of the word re-action influenced Maddox in articulating the appropriate response to God's grace as being responsible. Though it is true that one is to re-act or respond to God's presence and action in one's life, the point to be emphasized is that it is only possible through God's grace, which is the presence and power, or God the Holy Spirit.

6.4. Justification and Sanctification

Jesus is one with the Father and Holy Spirit and Jesus is the way of salvation. Salvation, that is, freedom to move from the yoke of slavery to sin and death to an eternal life of holy love with the triune God begins only through God's prevenient grace acting in one's life to enlighten, to make one aware of one's need for

²²⁸ Cobb, *Grace*, p. 44.

²²⁹ Cobb, *Grace*, p. 44.

²³⁰ J. Wesley, 'Sermon 19: The Great Privilege of Those Born of God' in R.P. Heitzenrater (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley: The Bicentennial Edition*, section 3, paragraph 2.

²³¹ Wesley, 'Sermon 19: The Great Privilege of Those Born of God', section 3, paragraph 2.

redemption. As God's prevenient grace enables one to see their need, salvation continues through the justifying grace of Jesus Christ as one accepts, 'by grace through faith', Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

The 'new birth' is a time to begin again: this time, on a journey of faith, inspired by God, through Christ, with the Holy Spirit. The promise of the Holy Spirit by Jesus to share with, participate in the believer's life, once again, is by grace through faith. Without the self-revealing God of grace acting in and through the Holy Spirit no one is able to confess that Jesus is Lord and Saviour or participate, in faith, in the life of the Trinity. What has been identified as 'initial sanctification', only possible through the 'new birth', continues in the life of the believer through fulfilling grace, imparted grace and sanctifying grace, all one and the same in the sense that they are the work or self-revelation of the Holy Spirit, until the achievement of 'entire sanctification'. 'Let all therefore that desire to please God condescend to be taught of God, and take care to walk in that path which God himself hath appointed ... see that ye love God; next your neighbour ... So shall that "mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."'²³² The Holy Spirit makes this possible; 'Stir up the spark of grace which is now in you, and he will give you more grace.'²³³

In Christ's pardoning love and through God's presence in each person – prevenient grace, God's power through the Holy Spirit – one may grow in likeness to Jesus Christ with the ultimate goal being complete renewal of the *imago Dei*. Salvation is more than imputed righteousness – 'the greatest value of justification was precisely its contribution to the higher goal of sanctification – our recovery of the Likeness of God.'²³⁴

In short, Wesley's understanding of the relation of justification and sanctification expressed structurally his fundamental conviction about the inherent relation of *grace* and *responsibility*: our very capacity for growth in Christ-likeness (New Birth) is contingent upon God's gracious pardoning provenience (initial justification), while the

²³² J. Wesley, 'Sermon 120: The Unity of the Divine Being' in R.P. Heitzenrater (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley: The Bicentennial Edition*, paragraph 25.

²³³ Wesley, 'Sermon 85: On Working Out Our Own Salvation', section 3, paragraph 6.

²³⁴ Maddox, *Responsible*, p. 172.

continuance of God's acceptance (final justification) becomes contingent upon our responsive growth in Christ-likeness (sanctification). Justification is not a stage that we leave behind to enter sanctification, it is a facet of God's saving grace permeating the entire Way of Salvation.²³⁵

Jesus Christ, fully human and fully divine, God's own Son, begotten and not created, offered himself, in sacrificial grace and imputing righteousness, to restore right relationship between all humanity and the triune God. For Wesley, imputed grace is free and invites and enables an affirmative response. Grace, by nature, that is, of God, never compels but always invites. God inspires, enables, and invites persons to participate in what God has done, is doing and will do through grace. God imparts grace so that no one who has responded in faith to accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour will be alone or forsaken. Further, grace is the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in the faithful, to the end that allows one to be perfected in love, resting eternally in the triune God's embrace. What Catholics have traditionally understood to be justification, that is, forgiveness and transformation, Protestants – and in this specific case those of a Wesleyan understanding – articulate as justification and sanctification.

Jesus Christ is the hermeneutical centre of God's grace. 'We receive God's pardon through Christ the Priest, we behold the moral image that God intends for us in Christ the Prophet, and we are led towards its recovery by Christ the King.'²³⁶ Scripture tells the story of God's gracious offer in Christ, a pardon for all people, in all people, an empowering Presence – 'for Wesley, this Presence is the Holy Spirit.'²³⁷

The Holy Spirit is the internal presence and power within the heart of the faithful. It is through the Spirit that one is able to express outwardly the inner assurance of God's real and present love with neighbour. 'The immanence of God in all human beings is a major and emphatic theme of Wesley'²³⁸ that is held in tension

²³⁵ Maddox, *Responsible*, p. 172.

²³⁶ Maddox, *Responsible*, p. 119.

²³⁷ Maddox, *Responsible*, p. 119.

²³⁸ Cobb, *Grace*, p. 51.

with the economy of God, as witnessed through the salvation history of those in the Bible to the present day.

God the Holy Spirit, uncreated, one with God the Father and God the Son, is, in part, to be understood as imparted grace. ‘But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you’ (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit as presence in each believer’s heart and also, as previously argued, in each person’s conscience, invites, directs, and empowers the person to an ever-deepening degree of communion with the triune God. ‘And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit’ (2 Corinthians 3:18). Therefore, the imputed and imparted grace of God is indwelling; ‘the kingdom of God is within you’ (Luke 17:21b).

Cobb reminds us that,

Wesley is clear that grace is not a substance or entity introduced into human beings. It is the power for good...this power is not a thing at all. It is the Holy Spirit, which is the life of God within human beings. That means the concrete human beings are constituted in part by the presence of God within them. Human beings do not first exist in separation from God and then come into relation with God. Their very life is already God’s presence within them. They exist by virtue of their inclusion of the divine life within them.²³⁹

This perspective is indivisible from Wesley’s holistic understanding of salvation that begins with God’s grace and culminates through God’s grace. Persons must take part in their own salvation, but are never to be understood as having the ability, in and of themselves, to do so. The presence of God is within each person, inspiring, enabling, and inviting one to a deeper and more meaningful communion with the triune God; Wesley argues the relational change becomes real, and this is the power of God.

²³⁹ Cobb, *Grace*, p. 40

Further, Wesley reminds us, ‘the testimony of the Spirit is an inward impression on the souls of believers, whereby the Spirit of God directly testifies to their spirit that they are children of God.’²⁴⁰ Therefore, as the word became flesh in Jesus Christ we see and know the external grace of God, and in the assurance that we have in our heart, the witness of the Spirit to our spirit, we know the internal grace of God. As the Spirit works within and through and with a person, one’s life becomes a witness of and to the fruit of the Spirit. Therefore, ‘two inferences may be drawn from the whole: let none ever presume to rest in any supposed testimony of the Spirit which is separate from the fruit of it ... let none rest in any supposed fruit of the Spirit without the witness.’²⁴¹ From a missiological vantage, Wesley’s multi-faceted articulation of grace is a reminder of the immanent and economic God’s external and internal nature.

Subsequently, it must be argued that Wesley’s attention to the primacy of God the Holy Spirit, combined with the equal attention and articulation grace as pardon and forgiveness as well as power, lends itself to the organic understanding that the *missio Dei* embraces a holistic understanding of the doctrine of grace that holds God’s grace and Spirit as inseparable.

Wesley consistently and vehemently defended the understanding that justifying and sanctifying grace is resistible. If grace was not resistible, then it would not be love and of God, for love invites but never compels. It is wholly possible and plausible that Christians, those confessing faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, might very well accept, through grace, the grace offered in Christ, yet falter in continuing to move from ‘grace to grace’, and be stymied in growing in faith. Wesley argues that the key is to use the means of grace, not expecting there to be any intrinsic value in the means of themselves, but fully expecting that God’s self is present.

What began in the internal presence of the triune God, made manifest through the external action of Jesus Christ, so that it be internalized in each person, is the grace of God moving in and through and with the world for the purpose of being embraced in the holy love of God and neighbour: eternal, loving relationships between persons and the triune God and each other.

²⁴⁰ J. Wesley, ‘Sermon 11: The Witness of the Spirit – Discourse II’ in R.P. Heitzenrater (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley: The Bicentennial Edition*, section 5, paragraph 1.

²⁴¹ Wesley, ‘Sermon 11: The Witness of the Spirit – Discourse II’, section 5, paragraph 3.

To know and understand grace as only of pardon and forgiveness is to give only partial merit to what God has done in Christ and the Spirit for the present reality or the future perfect. It is accurate to say that grace is unmerited favour and mercy. However, one must press on to ask and answer the question, ‘What kind of life is intended and offered through the grace of God in Jesus through Spirit; what kind of life is intended for those who, through the presence, pardon, and power of God, are inspired, enabled, and empowered to live?’

6.5. Salvation

From a missiological perspective that begins with the *missio Dei* concept, it is important to stress that the presence, pardon and power of God is not static, containable, or relegated to a formula that is performed or achieved. In part, the emphasis upon the relationship and the condition of that relationship between God and person may be articulated in one sense as a process, one that moves through various stages or degrees in historicity. However, the argument presented here holds in tension the understanding that the grace of God works both in an instantaneous and a gradual sense. Therefore, the Holy Spirit, argued in this sense as grace, is uncreated and unlimited by human constructs of either mind or physicality, inviting the question, ‘How does one most fully participate in, through, and with the power, pardon, and presence of God?’

Wesley’s sermon *On Working Out Our Own Salvation* is an account of divine and human interaction in which Wesley is quick to remind us, ‘first, we are to observe the great and important truth which ought never to be out of our remembrance, “It is God that worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”’²⁴² Secondly, one is never to be confused as to where Wesley placed primacy between grace and the means of grace; grace is always understood to precede the means.

For Wesley, salvation begins with prevenient grace, then convicting, then convincing, until it reaches the place of Christian salvation, that is, ‘through grace’ one is ‘saved by faith’ which is comprised of justification and sanctification.²⁴³

²⁴² Wesley, ‘Sermon 85: On Working Out Our Own Salvation’, section 1, paragraph 1.

²⁴³ Wesley, ‘Sermon 85: On Working Out Our Own Salvation’, section 2, paragraph 1.

Therefore, one is never to be confused about which came first, grace or faith. Unequivocally, grace precedes faith as grace is of God and faith is only possible through God's self-revelation in a person's life. Wesley articulates, through his understanding of grace, the holding in tension of the 'instant' with the 'gradual', the 'grace' with the 'faith', and 'sin' with 'love'.

By justification we are saved from the guilt of sin, and restored to the favour of God: by sanctification we are saved from the power and root of sin, and restored to the image of God. All experience, as well as Scripture, shows this salvation to be both instantaneous and gradual. It begins the moment we are justified, in the holy, humble, gentle, patient love of God and man. It gradually increases from that moment, as a "grain of mustard seed, which at first is the least of all seeds, but" gradually "puts forth large branches", and becomes a great tree; till in another instant the heart is cleansed from all sin, and filled with pure love to God and man.²⁴⁴

Therefore, grace does enable and inspire a person to 'respond' or even to 'co-operate', as Wesley makes very clear in the above passage drawn from his sermon. Equally clear is that the response or action or expression of faith always follows that of the self-revelation of God. Said another way, grace must ever be understood as 'free' or there is the risk of feeding the continued controversy of it being misunderstood as 'works righteousness'. Grace is free.

It can be argued that Wesley makes a clear case that God does expect a 'response', but that does not make God's grace anything less than free. Wesley never intended for his doctrine of grace to be limited by the constructs of a particular denomination. In part, it can be argued that there has been, up to this point, a gap, a failure to develop a systematic approach to articulating a theology of participation in the life of the triune God and the *missio Dei*. Responsible grace as a concept is largely relegated to Wesleyan and Methodist circles. In part, Wesley bears some responsibility as he did not develop his doctrine of grace within a systematic approach and understanding of Trinitarian doctrine. Rather, in large part, his

²⁴⁴ Wesley, 'Sermon 85: On Working Out Our Own Salvation', section 1, paragraph 1.

theology of grace was a ‘working theology’ in progress to combat the enthusiasts, formalist, and predestinationists of his generation and era. In light of the recent developments and renewed interest in Trinitarian theology, mission, and discipleship, Wesley’s work with grace is becoming a credible and authoritative voice in the field of missiology.

Cobb argues, ‘Wesley’s whole thought and ministry was about salvation.’²⁴⁵ Salvation begins with God’s grace and Wesley’s primary source for proper theory and practice came from within and is tested by the scriptures. In the sermon *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, Wesley states, ‘What is salvation? The salvation which is here spoken of is not what is frequently understood by that word, the going to heaven, eternal happiness...it is not a blessing which lies on the other side of death, or (as we usually speak) in the other world....It is a present thing, a blessing which, through the free mercy of God, ye are now in possession of.’²⁴⁶

It is helpful to note that although no static time frame can be set for salvation, Wesley found it appropriate to categorize human salvation in three dimensions. ‘Wesley’s most explicit delineation of these three dimensions was pardon – salvation begun, holiness – salvation continued, and heaven – salvation finished.’²⁴⁷ God’s pardoning grace is in Christ’s death and God’s empowering grace is through the Holy Spirit. The present time in the life of the Christian and how they live out their faith, also referred to as ‘the process of salvation’, was of the gravest importance to Wesley. ‘Salvation here and now was the end for which he strove...he emphasized that in addition to *imputing* righteousness to us in justification, God *imparts* righteousness to us through sanctification. The stated mission of the United Methodist church is, “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world”.’²⁴⁸ This transformation begins within each person through God’s imputed grace and continues with God’s imparted grace.

Salvation, for Wesley, was mainly articulated from a personal perspective, but like so many other seemingly conflicting concepts and, in true Wesleyan fashion, personal salvation was held in tension with and inseparable from ‘social holiness’. ‘Hence the focus remains on the inner transformation of the individual

²⁴⁵ Cobb, *Grace*, p. 26.

²⁴⁶ Cobb, *Grace*, p. 27.

²⁴⁷ Maddox, *Responsible*, p. 143.

²⁴⁸ Cobb, *Grace*, pp. 27-28.

that expresses itself in outward righteousness.’²⁴⁹ In speaking of Wesley, Cobb states, ‘He was convinced that people would turn to holiness only if they understood that they had a responsibility to do so.’²⁵⁰

Divine grace is the integral component of Wesley’s theology of salvation. For Wesley, the personal journey, from being ‘dead in sin’ to ‘alive in Christ’ then onward to being ‘perfected in love’, is articulated as the order of salvation. The process of being perfected in God’s holy love through God’s grace is the way and the means by which this happens.

Wesley expressed in many ways and at various times, both explicitly and implicitly, the belief that one is to work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12). All responsibility did not rest with and upon God’s grace; there must be reciprocation, a commitment from the person. What many have termed and understood as co-operant grace, Maddox has identified as responsible grace. Wesleyan theology, from Maddox’s perspective, like Cobb’s and others, is all about grace and salvation.

God the Father sends the Son, and Father and Son send the Spirit: grace of God, in God, and through God for the salvation of the world from sin. Each graceful presence and action of God is inseparable, one from another, yet remains distinct. They are prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace. They are part of the way that Wesley emphasized throughout his sermons in defence of the *via salutis* – ‘not an ordered series of discrete states, they are intertwined facets of an overarching purpose – our gradual recovery of the holiness that God has always intended for us.’²⁵¹

In his sermon *The Unity of the Divine Being*, Wesley describes God as eternal, omnipresent, all perfect, omnipotent, omniscient, holy, and spirit, while emphasizing that God created person in God’s image. Adding to this profundity, Wesley, referencing scripture, states, ‘when he had raised man from the dust of the earth, he breathed into him an immortal spirit.’²⁵² In this sermon, Wesley makes the leap from ‘there is one God’ to arguing that ‘there is one religion and one happiness’. Although Wesley rarely used Trinitarian language, as he exercised great

²⁴⁹ Cobb, *Grace*, p. 29.

²⁵⁰ Cobb, *Grace*, p. 37.

²⁵¹ Maddox, *Responsible*, p. 158.

²⁵² Wesley, ‘Sermon 120: The Unity of the Divine Being’, paragraph 8.

care in referring to God in biblically explicit expressions, it is not inappropriate to do so.

Wesley used the terms of presence, pardon, and power to reflect the grace of God through the Holy Spirit. In Jesus Christ all might know through faith that sin, their own sin, is no longer a barrier or a burden to be carried or lived out. As one accepts the justifying grace of the triune God through Jesus, then a person's heart is no longer bound and directed by fear, but the life of Jesus, the love of Jesus, reigns in one's heart. Jesus is not bound by human reason, intellect, law, or anything less, and all such things are less than the Uncreated.

God created persons to glorify and enjoy him forever (1 Cor 10:31). There are three principle rivals that keep people from glorifying God: 'objects of sense, objects of the imagination, and pride.'²⁵³ However, there is a fourth which Wesley argues is the greatest of all: 'false religion; that is, any religion which does not imply *the giving the heart to God* ... True religion is right tempers toward God and man. It is, in two words, gratitude and benevolence: gratitude to our Creator and supreme Benefactor, and benevolence to our fellow creatures.'²⁵⁴

6.6. Conclusion

A Wesleyan theology asserts that God's grace, the presence, pardon, and power of God the Holy Spirit, works in a transforming way. Therefore, a Wesleyan theology of grace is the key to what it means for the triune God to be caught up with and participating in the *missio Dei*. Although Wesley did not articulate a theology of participation for missiology, his theology of grace serves as the hinge that connects the activity of God with the activity of the church and persons. The Wesleyan perspective of grace as the presence, pardon, and power of the triune God upholds the Trinity as being the centre of the *missio Dei* concept and serves as the resource to overcome the notion that the concept of 'mission' within the *missio Dei* is solely associated with 'sending'.

Further, a Wesleyan theology of grace is the basis for the claim of this thesis that the *missio Dei* is the grace (presence, pardon, and power) of the triune God,

²⁵³ Wesley, 'Sermon 120: The Unity of the Divine Being', paragraph 12.

²⁵⁴ Wesley, 'Sermon 120: The Unity of the Divine Being', paragraphs 15-16.

moving (restoring, reconciling, and renewing) in the world that all might be embraced in the holy love of God and neighbour.

The *missio Dei* is the relationship, and the condition of that relationship, between the triune God and those made in the image of God. Wesley's account of the activity of God's prevenient, justifying and sanctifying grace forms the basis, for missiology, of what it means for God to be understood as participating in that relationship. Wesley's theology of grace, in keeping with the missiological claim that the Trinity is the centre of the *missio Dei* concept, asserts that any human response is predicated on God's activity. Therefore, a Wesleyan soteriology grounded in a theology of grace is the foundation for asserting that God's participation makes possible, and calls for, human participation in the *missio Dei*.

Divine grace is a promise, as revealed through the biblical grand narrative, in the Incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. As a result, grace is both imputed and imparted, it is immanent and economic, and it is internal and external. Further, the affirmation that God is love is affirming that grace is the nature of God. As grace is the nature of God, also articulated as the immanence of God, it can thus be argued that love is the expression of grace through the action of God, also articulated as the economy of God. Through divine grace, persons are enabled and invited to enter the holy love of the triune God, to be restored to the *imago Dei*, and to live a Christ-like life of love for God and neighbour.

Maddox writes of Wesley,

He insisted that while Christ is the meritorious cause of grace being provided to humanity he is not the efficient cause by which it is conveyed. This efficient cause (or power), in the most proper sense, is the Holy Spirit's Presence. Precisely because of its 'uncreated' nature, this Presence is *immediately* effective even when mediated through means. Thus Wesley had no reservations about encouraging his people to seek God's grace through the various outward signs,

words, and actions that God has ordained as ‘ordinary’ channels for conveying saving grace to humanity.²⁵⁵

The nature of divine grace, therefore, is uncreated and inseparable from God. When understood in this way, it is without limits and at the same time remains not fully comprehensible by humanity, which is created. ‘If grace is the uncreated personal Presence of the Holy Spirit, then while it surely can be mediated through created means (for these are products of God’s gracious activity in creation), it need not be confined to such means.’²⁵⁶ God the Father, in sending God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, enables and invites all to participate in the *missio Dei* through participation in the prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace of God which is the promise of salvation.

A Wesleyan theology of grace forms the basis of the *missio Dei* that overcomes the issues raised in Section 1. Divine grace as God’s participation in God’s creation, that is, the relationship between the triune God and those created in the image of God, begins in the communion of the Trinity. The concept of mission is grounded in the nature of the Trinity and although the Great Commission is ‘part’ of what it means for disciples to participate in the *missio Dei*, it does not constitute the nature of the church which derives its nature through the communion of and with the Trinity. Wesley’s understanding of divine grace as both imputed and imparted might be posited as being the seedling that overcomes the notion of mission being only that which is articulated as ‘sent’ or ‘sending’, albeit God’s self or God’s church; the nature of God becomes the nature of the church only inasmuch as the church embraces the presence, pardon, and power of God through participation in the means of grace.

²⁵⁵ Maddox, *Responsible*, p. 193.

²⁵⁶ Maddox, *Responsible*, p. 195.

Chapter 7. The Means of Grace

7.1. Introduction

Grace is the presence, pardon, and power of God that moves in, through, and with the world. Jesus Christ is the meritorious means and the Holy Spirit is the efficacious means of making possible the participation of all persons in the *missio Dei*. The focus in this chapter is not limited to a historical explication of the means of grace from a Wesleyan perspective but includes implications for how the means of grace might contribute to a theology of participation in the *missio Dei*.

Grace is the activity, that is, the participation of God in, through, and with the world. Human participation in the means of grace is the activity of those in response to God's participation. A Wesleyan perspective of the means of grace, grounded in a theology of grace, has the ability to overcome a twenty-first century missiological problem of identifying participation as either exclusively a human or divine activity in the *missio Dei*.

Language surrounding the means of grace – terms like ‘works of piety’ and ‘works of mercy’ – and even the term itself have been criticized, albeit without proper foundation, arising from the vestiges of Calvinistic claims about ‘works righteousness’. However, grounded in a theology of grace that is properly Trinitarian, a Wesleyan understanding of the means of grace is able to make a significant contribution to missiology in the twenty-first century.

Adding the simple concept of participation, that is, to take part in something or someone, to the language of relationship, adds a missing link to the developing concept that the way for persons and the church to participate in the *missio Dei* is to participate in the means of grace. This participation includes taking part in something, the means of grace, and someone, the life of God and neighbour: again, only possible because God first takes part in God's creation.

7.2. Defining the Means of Grace

Wesley defined the means of grace as ‘outward signs, words, or actions ordained of God, and appointed for this end – to be the ordinary channels whereby

he might convey to men preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace.’²⁵⁷ There are three general types that frame the means of grace. The first distinguishes between ‘general’ and ‘particular’ means of grace. The second distinguishes between ‘instituted’, also referred to as ‘ordinary’, and ‘prudential’ means of grace. The general means are identified as universal obedience, keeping all the commandments, watching, denying ourselves, taking up our cross daily, and exercise of the presence of God.²⁵⁸ ‘The general means denote certain attitudes and practices which pervade the Christian life ... The particular means are more specific acts of worship and discipline ...’²⁵⁹ The particular means of grace are: all forms of prayer (private, family, public, both extemporaneous and written, to include prayers of deprecation, petition, intercession, and thanksgiving); searching the scriptures by reading, meditating, hearing, and attending the ministry of the word, either read or expounded; the Lord’s Supper; fasting or abstinence; and Christian conference.²⁶⁰

The instituted means include the particular means: all appointed by God as means of grace. In this sense, like the general means of grace which pervade the Christian life, the instituted means are for the universal Church. ‘In contrast, the prudential means of grace vary from age to age, culture to culture, and person to person; they reflect God’s ability to use any means in addition to those which are instituted in accordance with different times and circumstances. The prudential means of grace include a number of specific occasions and practices not mentioned in the first typology, such as classes, bands, and love feasts; they also include those practices listed as general means of grace.’²⁶¹ Presented in this manner, though it is thorough and accurately depicts what Wesley taught, it is confusing because the first two types overlap and give the appearance of being repetitious.

The third type, arguably, is less confusing and more readily aligned with a missiological perspective attentive to both Godly and personal participation because it is ‘based on the object of the human activity in the means of grace. The first category is works of piety, which are directed to God; these are the “ordinances of

²⁵⁷ J. Wesley, ‘Sermon 16: The Means of Grace’ in R.P. Heitzenrater (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley: The Bicentennial Edition*, section 3, paragraph 12.

²⁵⁸ H.H. Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1992), p. 5.

²⁵⁹ Knight, *The Presence*, p. 5.

²⁶⁰ Knight, *The Presence*, p. 5.

²⁶¹ Knight, *The Presence*, p. 3.

Christ” and are thus identical to the instituted means of grace. The second category is works of mercy, occur when “we are called to relieve the distress of our neighbour, whether in body or soul,” and are related to certain prudential means of grace.²⁶² Both works of piety and works of mercy are understood as being inseparable from those that have been identified as general means of grace.

As problematic as the concept of ‘works’ was in Wesley’s time, and potentially still is today, the concept that there were means or works directed towards God and there were means or works directed towards others is a simple concept to grasp and easily identifiable with what Jesus said was the first and second Great Commandment: ‘love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind...and...you shall love your neighbour as yourself’ (Matthew 22:37–39).

7.3. Works of Piety and Mercy

The third type, from a missiological viewpoint, leads to a better or more holistic understanding of the means of grace as intrinsic to the *missio Dei* because it supports the understanding that the means of grace are intended for the church and persons, and emphasize the concept of participation in a relational context. The means of grace, according to Wesley, direct one’s attention, focus or, more specifically, one’s love: the object of one’s participation is God and neighbour. God does not need the means but God will use the means through God’s grace.

Wesley expressed a systematic or methodological approach and insight into how the means of grace can be understood as the best way, or as activity one might be engaged in as they ‘wait upon the Lord’ (Isaiah 40:31). In Wesley’s 1781 sermon *On Zeal*, there is a practical prioritization of a theological and methodological understanding of how one is to love God and others. Granted, the word ‘zeal’ is now understood to mean many of the things that Wesley was arguing against in the eighteenth century: language and concepts surrounding enthusiasm, fervour, and passion. The important aspect to be gleaned from Wesley’s work with the concept of zeal is the practical priority that he argued for: to achieve the end which he believed all Christians should desire.

²⁶² Knight, *The Presence*, pp. 3–4.

Wesley asked, ‘... are there any ordinances now ... any means ordained of God, as the usual channels of his grace?’²⁶³ For Wesley, the means were the ordinances of God.

It is generally supposed, that the means of grace, and the ordinances of God, are equivalent terms. We commonly mean by that expression, those that are usually termed, works of piety; viz., hearing and reading the Scripture, receiving the Lord’s Supper, public and private prayer, and fasting. And it is certain these are the ordinary channels which convey the grace of God to the souls of men. But are they the only means of grace? Are there no other means than these, whereby God is pleased, frequently, yea, ordinarily, to convey his grace to them that wither love or fear him? Surely there are works of mercy, as well as works of piety, which are real means of grace.²⁶⁴

First, zeal is inseparable from charity and charity is inseparable from love. Hence, ‘true Christian zeal is no other than *the flame of love*.’²⁶⁵ The characteristics found in love are the same characteristics of zeal: humility, meekness, patience, and the knowledge that ‘the proper object of zeal is good.’²⁶⁶ Consequently, if the proper object of zeal is good, then zeal is not to be misunderstood or connected with anything that is not good: pride, anger, hatred, or discontentedness. Further, for the proper object of zeal to be good then it must be ‘proportioned to that good, to the degree of goodness that is in its object.’²⁶⁷

Wesley argues, ‘In a Christian believer *love* sits upon the throne, which is erected in the inmost soul; namely, love of God and man, which fills the whole heart, and reigns without rival.’²⁶⁸ Circling this throne of love are the ‘holy tempers’, which Wesley identifies as long-suffering, meekness, goodness, gentleness, fidelity,

²⁶³ Wesley, ‘Sermon 16: The Means of Grace’, section 1, paragraph 1.

²⁶⁴ Wesley, ‘Sermon 98: On Visiting the Sick’ in R.P. Heitzenrater (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley: The Bicentennial Edition*, paragraph 1.

²⁶⁵ J. Wesley, ‘Sermon 92: On Zeal’ in R.P. Heitzenrater (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley: The Bicentennial Edition*, section 1, paragraph 3.

²⁶⁶ Wesley, ‘Sermon 92: On Zeal’, section 2, paragraph 4.

²⁶⁷ Wesley, ‘Sermon 92: On Zeal’, section 2, paragraph 6.

²⁶⁸ Wesley, ‘Sermon 92: On Zeal’, section 2, paragraph 5.

and anything else affirming that ‘your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus’ (Philippians 2:5). Just outside the circle of holy tempers are the works of mercy and then the works of piety and, lastly, the church, the body of believers in which Christ is the head.²⁶⁹ ‘This is the entire connected system of Christianity, and thus the several parts of it rise one above the other: from the lowest point, “the assembling of ourselves together”, to the highest, love enthroned in the heart.’²⁷⁰

The intent is to highlight the practical prioritization of Wesley’s approach to the concept of zeal and, ultimately, to demonstrate the plausibility of a theology of participation in the *missio Dei* through participation in the means of grace. Thus, Wesley argues, one should be zealous for the church but even more zealous for the works of piety and yet even more zealous for the works of mercy. Wesley says of the person:

Thus he should show his zeal for works of piety; but much more for works of mercy; seeing that ‘God will have mercy and not sacrifice’; that is, rather than sacrifice. Whenever, therefore, one interferes with the other, works of mercy are to be preferred. Even reading, hearing, prayer, are to be omitted, or to be postponed...²⁷¹

Wesley continues, be ever more zealous still for the holy tempers, ‘but our choicest zeal should be reserved for *love* itself, the end of the commandment, the fulfilling of the law.’²⁷² This, for Wesley, is what it means to proportion one’s zeal to the value of its object.

7.4. Relation and Participation

Wesley does not equivocate. ‘God is above all means. Have a care therefore of limiting the Almighty. He doth whatsoever and whensoever it pleaseth him.’²⁷³ Whether one uses the term means or works, Wesley makes it abundantly clear

²⁶⁹ Wesley, ‘Sermon 92: On Zeal’, section 2, paragraph 5.

²⁷⁰ Wesley, ‘Sermon 92: On Zeal’, section 2, paragraph 6.

²⁷¹ Wesley, ‘Sermon 92: On Zeal’, section 2, paragraph 9.

²⁷² Wesley, ‘Sermon 92: On Zeal’, section 2, paragraph 11.

²⁷³ Wesley, ‘Sermon 16: The Means of Grace’, section 5, paragraph 4.

throughout his writings and works that neither of the two concepts, nor anything else, are to be recognized as, or receive an emphasis that is, greater than God. Love of God is the highest inspiration of any and all activity that one participates in, whether it is activity directed towards God or neighbour: this is the true end of all means.

Wesley's intent was not the development of a theology of participation in the *missio Dei* concept. His intent was to faithfully grow in the way of what it meant to be a disciple of Jesus Christ in his lifetime and to confront the challenges arising in that context. Wesley confronted the challenges arising from and behind what were commonly identified as the 'formalists' and the 'enthusiasts' of his day.

'To Wesley the formalist was so "dissipated": so attentive to and divided by the things of this world that he or she was unable to sense the presence of God.'²⁷⁴ The danger of forgetting God, what Wesley would say was 'dissipation', takes place as one becomes more attentive to perfunctory performance of the means of grace or to turning them into ends in themselves. While on the other hand, the tendency towards succumbing to self-deception transpires as one's efforts to experience, and understand experience of, God are ensconced in the sense of feeling and are devoid of those traditional and experiential means of grace: all of which are discernable in God's self-revelation as told in the scriptures. For Wesley, grace was mediated, but that meant presence or nearness, not absence or distance.²⁷⁵

The seeing and feeling and loving him is spiritual life. And whatever is said or done in the sight or love of God, that is full of spirit and life. All beside this is *form*, mere *dead form*; whether it be in our public addresses to God, or in our private; or in our worldly business, or in our daily conversation.²⁷⁶

Wesley believed that in order to grow in the love and knowledge of God one should use the means of grace. Moreover, Christ did and it is written in the scriptures, and so must we out of obedience and in order to receive the benefits. In

²⁷⁴ Knight, *The Presence*, p. 11.

²⁷⁵ Knight, *The Presence*, p. 11.

²⁷⁶ J. Wesley, 'A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion' in R.P. Heitzenrater (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley: The Jackson Edition*, section 3, paragraph 10.

part, this is where Knight's work with the means of grace proves to be helpful as he provides insight into Wesley's stand against 'formalism' and 'enthusiasm', or the problems of 'forgetting' God and 'self-deception'.

Few have given such thorough examination to a Wesleyan perspective of the means of grace as Knight does in his book *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace*. As the title indicates, Knight examined the means of grace through a Wesleyan lens of how one might understand the 'presence of God in the Christian life'. Knight observes that, according to Wesley, 'grace is most essentially God's triune act of love which has as its goal the renewal of human lives ... for the goal of grace is the relationship and the transformation of human life within the relationship.'²⁷⁷

Knight articulates his understanding of a Wesleyan approach to the means of grace when he argues, 'the means of grace form an interrelated context within which the Christian life is lived and through which relationships with God and one's neighbour are maintained.'²⁷⁸ Underlying this statement is the assumption that the Christian understands that the means of grace are the way that the Christian life is to be lived and relationships maintained. The argument is made that the *missio Dei* is the grace of the triune God moving in, through, and with the world for all to be embraced in the holy love of God and neighbour. Therefore, this thesis is in agreement with Knight that the Christian life is primarily concerned with one's relationship with God and with neighbour.

Drawing the two interrelated claims of his study together: 'The first is that grace, for Wesley, is *relational*: grace both enables and invites us to participate in an ongoing personal relationship with God. The second is that there is a *pattern* of means of grace which is essential to the maintenance and growth of that relationship.'²⁷⁹ Knight articulates the concept of being relational as more than simply being in the presence of another; it requires that we know the identity of the other. Hence, he argues that there is a pattern of interrelatedness between the means of grace that fosters the presence and identity of God, thereby making it conducive for there to be relationship between God and person.

²⁷⁷ Knight, *The Presence*, p. 9.

²⁷⁸ Knight, *The Presence*, p. 2.

²⁷⁹ Knight, *The Presence*, pp. 8–9.

Knight contends, rightly, it is not enough to know that there is a God or to know the presence of God, one must know the identity of God in a relational way. However, the language of ‘presence’ and ‘identity’ is not particularly helpful in developing a theology of participation. Rather, it adds to the already dichotomous and problematic language that arose from the Enlightenment era, that was intent upon articulating knowledge or reason as being superior to action or practice. However, Knight’s use of the terms ‘presence’ and ‘identity’ is in keeping and appropriate with his articulation of the interrelatedness amongst the patterns of the means of grace. What Knight has convincingly argued as a balanced pattern of interaction amongst the various means of grace might be better articulated as intentional participation.

Wesley asserts that persons must engage in the means of grace. It is how they are to ‘wait’ properly, whether that is understood to be waiting upon the assurance of justification and regeneration or waiting for entire sanctification. God’s grace, incarnate through Jesus, is made available to us, for us, and in us through the Holy Spirit. God’s grace is active and makes possible person’s activity in the means of grace for the purpose of Christian perfection. Therefore,

Beware...of imagining you shall obtain the end, without using the means conducive to it. God can give the end, without using any means at all; but you have no reason to think he will. Therefore constantly and carefully use all those means which he has appointed to be the ordinary channels of his Grace.²⁸⁰

A Wesleyan perspective of waiting is a missiological perspective of participation. To wait in the means of grace is to participate in the means of grace.

²⁸⁰ J. Wesley, ‘Sermon 37: The Nature of Enthusiasm’ in R.P. Heitzenrater (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley: The Bicentennial Edition*, paragraph 39.

7.5. The Means of Grace and Christian Perfection

Knight argues, 'For Wesley, Christian perfection was the holiness without which none shall see God. Thus, he tied sanctification as a *present* divine activity securely to the *future* hope for both heaven and eschaton.'²⁸¹ Christian perfection can be described:

In one view, it is purity of intention, dedicating all the life to God. It is the giving God all our heart; it is one desire and design ruling all our tempers. It is the devoting, not a part, but all our soul, body, and substance to God. In another view, it is all the mind which was in Christ, enabling us to walk as Christ walked. It is the circumcision of the heart from all filthiness, all inward as well as outward pollution. It is the renewal of the heart in the whole image of God, the full likeness of Him that created it. In yet another, it is the loving God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves.²⁸²

The Christian perfection that Wesley spoke of, that is, 'giving God all of our heart', in one sense, and 'the love which sits upon the throne ... the inmost part of our soul ... filling our heart' in another, inspires hope for others. It can be argued, participating in those means of grace which have as their object, others,

that there is a better religion to be attained, a religion worthy of God that gave it. And this we conceived to be no other than love: the love of God and of all mankind; the loving of God with all your heart and soul and strength, as having first loved *us*, as the fountain of all the good we have received, and of all we ever hope to enjoy; and the loving every soul which God hath made, every man on earth, as our own soul.²⁸³

²⁸¹ Knight, *The Presence*, p. 51.

²⁸² J. Wesley, 'A Plain Account of Christian Perfection as Believed and Taught by the Reverend Mr. John Wesley, From the Year 1725, to the Year 1779' in R.P. Heitzenrater (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley: The Jackson Edition*, paragraph 27.

²⁸³ J. Wesley, 'An Earnest Appeal To Men of Reason and Religion' in R.P. Heitzenrater (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley: The Jackson Edition*, paragraph 2.

For Wesley, perfection was neither absolute nor finished. It was, in part, the eradication of intentional sin and understood to be ‘a point of culmination in the process of sanctification ... a decisive point in the participation in the life of the age to come ... as yet a new beginning.’²⁸⁴ The focus is the reign of love in one’s heart – the love for God and others which might ever continue to grow and deepen; it is through God’s grace and participation in the means of grace that the rhythm and context for the Christian life are shaped. Therefore,

In using all means, seek God alone. In and through every outward thing, look singly to the *power* of His Spirit, and the *merits* of His Son. Beware you do not stick in the *work* itself; if you do, it is all lost labour. Nothing short of God can satisfy your soul. Therefore, eye Him in all, through all, and above all.²⁸⁵

C. Wesley is in agreement with this statement, as noted in Anderson’s assertion, ‘Charles repeatedly addresses the first of these problems by distinguishing between the form and the power of the means of grace. While the form is not to be dispensed with, the power is what we are to seek.’²⁸⁶ C. Wesley argues, ‘... a man may make prayers, yea, and long prayers too, and yet be a Pharisee. He is not Christian who is not constant in the means of grace; and yet a man may use them constantly without being a Christian.’²⁸⁷

Ordinary channels, means, are made available by God because all are subject to original sin in need of salvation, and whereby grace is the power for salvation, all are inspired, enabled, and empowered through the triune God’s grace to a life of faith, hope, and love: to be perfected in the holy love of God and neighbour.

²⁸⁴ Knight, *The Presence*, pp. 71–72.

²⁸⁵ J. Wesley, ‘Sermon 16: The Means of Grace’, section 5, paragraph 4.

²⁸⁶ E.B. Anderson, ‘The Power of Godliness to Know: Charles Wesley and the Means of Grace’, *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 43/2 (2008), p. 11.

²⁸⁷ Cited in E.B. Anderson, ‘The Power of Godliness to Know: Charles Wesley and the Means of Grace’, *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 43/2 (2008), p. 15. (I have been unable to locate C. Wesley’s original work from which Anderson quotes.)

From a Wesleyan perspective, human participation in the means of grace is bi-directional: movement towards God and movement towards others. A missiological perspective embracing a Wesleyan theology of grace and the means of grace in the *missio Dei* recognizes there are three participants: Trinity, person, and neighbour. Participation by the three constitutes a tri-directional rhythm: God to person, person to God, and person to person. God reveals God's self to persons, persons participate in the life of God, and persons participate in the world in mutually fulfilling relationships embodying the love shared between the triune God and the triune God with persons, even while God reaches out and enters into the life of others and they in turn participate in the life of God and in our lives as well. Conceivably, Christian perfection is a divine embrace constituted by love, nurtured through faith, and inspired by hope.

7.6. Conclusion

Faith is the inner assurance and affirmative response to God's grace in one's life. Human participation in the means of grace is participation in the *missio Dei*. This occurs both knowingly, that is one participates after being made aware of and having accepted the justifying grace offered through Jesus Christ, as well as unbeknownst to the participant who is capable, through God's prevenient grace, of works of mercy. Faith is active. No matter how closely connected faith is to, and inseparable from, grace, never does the response come before the extension of grace (invitation). This would be impossible if one accepts that original sin destroyed any ability on the part of humanity to know that which is good, holy, or perfect, before the triune God reveals God's self known through divine grace. The inauguration of the kingdom of God, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, was made manifest through Jesus Christ, the word incarnate. Grace, therefore, is both external and internal: understood and experienced as divine immanence and divine economy, inseparable, one from another.

God works in, through, and with ordinary channels to relate to persons and the church; this is the mission of God, that is, the grace of God moving in creation. A Wesleyan perspective of the means of grace, viewed and understood from any of the three types, formed the basis for what it meant for a person to wait properly upon

the Lord, and framed the character of how one was to be in relation with God and with others. A motive behind Wesley's attention to articulating a theological prominence on using the means of grace was to address the theological polemics of his day from a practical perspective. The means of grace illumined human movement directed towards God and towards others with the ultimate purpose being the love of God and neighbour, to be perfected in holy love. In part, this was a response to the Moravian quietists' perspective that they need not do anything to wait properly upon God. At the same time, Wesley's focused attention on the end – the purpose for which one engages the use of the means of grace, that being the love of God and neighbour – was equally stressed to combat the formalists, those giving greater attention to the use of the means over and above the end.

God's grace, the Holy Spirit, is active in the lives of persons and the world: that is, participating or taking part in that which is restoring, reconciling, and renewing the relationship between God and person and person with person through God's participation. It can be argued that because God acts, people are able to be active, participating in the means of grace. If this is true, then proper waiting is waiting to grow in the knowledge and love of God, in this lifetime, or for eschaton.

A Wesleyan articulation of waiting is a missiological articulation of participation. For Wesley, there is intentionality in one's waiting: it is to wait with the expectation of Christian perfection. This is only possible through God's grace, the inspiration to live out one's days and life in full participation in the means of grace, in the life and love of God and life and love of neighbour, the proper objects of our activity. From a Wesleyan perspective, the end is being perfected in love, having 'the mind of Christ', or the holy love of God and neighbour. For Wesley, it was as much a present reality as a future promise.

Using the language of participation enhances a deeper understanding of relationship between God and person. Through God's grace, people participate, taking part in both something and someone. That is, people are enabled to participate in the means of grace, a relationship that reflects movement towards God and neighbour.

Wesley's attention to the means of grace, which is articulated as personal and corporate participation in the *missio Dei*, is an answer to mission being construed primarily as 'sending'. The problem of the *missio Dei* and mission being

construed as entity, as is often implied and noted in Section 1 of this thesis, is best addressed and answered through a Wesleyan theology of waiting in the means of grace.

In missiology, acts of piety are often overlooked in favour of emphasizing personal and church engagement in those activities that are often articulated as ‘reaching out’, extending beyond the walls of church buildings, that is, evangelizing, feeding, clothing, sheltering, to name a few. Subsequently, mission and the *missio Dei* are often construed simply as sending. The means of grace, made possible through God’s participation, is equally attentive towards those activities, that is, worship, searching the scriptures, prayer, and the Lord’s Supper. This movement, these personal and communal activities, are, from a Wesleyan perspective of waiting, to be considered participation in the *missio Dei* as much as the engaged activities that are towards neighbour.

Chapter 8. Participation in the *Missio Dei* through the Means of Grace

8.1. Introduction

There are several assumptions being carried forward. First, the Bible is a grand narrative that is foundational in telling the story of the relationship between God and persons. Second, the triune God is the author and perfecter of the *missio Dei*. Third, original sin affects all of humanity. Also, and equally, the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection affected all of humanity. Last, for Wesley, the Bible was the standard against which all thought and action are to be measured, to be held accountable.

Wesley argued that prevenient grace is available for all and enables one to accept the free grace of God to be restored in the image of God. Blevins notes, ‘The means, like grace, are available to all, even to those who do not yet experience what Wesley would call “salvation” (or the witness of the Spirit). As grace is dynamic, so are the means of grace.’²⁸⁸

The grace of God always precedes and supersedes the means of grace. Grace, that is the prevenient, justifying and sanctifying grace of God, as the participation of God in God’s creation, is sufficient and the only thing necessary for one to accept and grow in the faith that Jesus Christ is Lord. For Wesley, the activity of God, the movement of the Holy Spirit, was always first, as Blevins notes: ‘in every use of the means, Wesley was concerned about spiritual pride. He would tolerate no sense of works righteousness. He endeavoured to make sure that each individual first recognized God’s activity on their behalf.’²⁸⁹

For Wesley, the acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord was a new birth, a new beginning. Following the new birth, the condition of that restored relationship, whether it grew, stagnated, or even died remained subject to the condition of one’s heart. The heart, only regenerated in the first place through grace, must be maintained through grace: always God first. As the grace of God is first, persons must avail themselves of all the means to be had to accept their responsibility for growing in their love of God and neighbour. Inasmuch as one begins with the

²⁸⁸ D. Blevins, ‘The Means of Grace: Toward a Wesleyan Praxis of Spiritual Formation’, *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 32/1 (1997), p. 72.

²⁸⁹ Blevins, ‘The Means of Grace’, p. 79.

confession of faith that God, and only God, is the author and perfecter of the *missio Dei*, the need is not to prove the authority of God; rather, the task is to be faithful in waiting in the means of grace, the focus not being the means themselves, but always being focused upon the Godhead.

Wesley's theology of grace and the life of the Trinity as revealed in the biblical grand narrative is the connective link between the *missio Dei* and his soteriology. The Bible was the primary source for Wesley's theology. For Wesley, all contexts were to be measured against the Bible. However, Wesley's focused attention on the grand narrative was salvation. Salvation, for Wesley, was structured through his theology of grace. Wesley's theology of grace, the presence, pardon, and power of God, is the centre of the *missio Dei* concept. The *missio Dei*, as argued by this thesis, is the grace of God moving in, through, and with the world that all might be embraced in the holy love of God and neighbour. Although persons might not be in a reconciled relationship with God, no person is outside the grand narrative.

From a Wesleyan perspective, personal participation in the means of grace is possible because God, the Holy Spirit, has empowered one to take part. For Wesley, participation in the means of grace was understood as a 'way of life', a way of living out personal and social holiness empowered through divine grace. Personal holiness for Wesley was inseparable from social holiness: a life of personal holiness made possible in and through the Holy Spirit, in and through the body of Christ, the church, and in the world, amongst those not of the Christian faith.

The initial and initiating activity in the *missio Dei*, articulated through a Trinitarian lens, is the creative activity of a loving God. The ensuing participatory relationality reflects movement tri-directionally between God, person, and other.

Wesley did not outline a strong Trinitarian or missiological doctrine to support his understanding of the means of grace. However, an implication of a theology of participation in the means of grace, from a Wesleyan perspective, serves as a resource for ending the ongoing and repetitious cycle of articulating the activity of persons or the church as 'my' or 'our' mission, or 'missions'. No longer will the claim for the authority of the *missio Dei* be in logical or systematic conflict with the claim that the church has a mission. Rather, the church is called to a life in, through, and with the triune God, in acts of piety. At the same time, and inseparable, one is sent into the world, in, through, and with the grace of God, in acts of mercy. Further,

Wesley's own articulation and emphasis upon the prudential means of grace, as Blevins notes, '... were designed to meet the person at the point of need,'²⁹⁰ lending themselves organically to language being renewed in the twenty-first century. Although the language may change the concept remains the same when properly grounded in the *missio Dei*. There is a need in the twenty-first century for language to reflect the new understanding of mission, that all communal and personal participation in the *missio Dei* is possible through, and as a reflection of, the triune God's participation in God's creation.

8.2. Trinity, Grace, and Participation

There is a reciprocal movement in the *missio Dei* from universal to particular and particular to universal. One can see evidence of this within the life of the Trinity. God the Father sends the Son and the Spirit to a particular people in a particular time in history. In turn there is the expectation that the particular, the disciples, those accepting Jesus as Lord and Saviour to be in the world, will go forth into the world. They go forth to share the good news that all might know the love of God in Christ through Spirit as the One who is the propitiation for all persons' sins, and have the hope of eternal life in the resurrected Christ.

Runyon frames a Wesleyan perspective of prevenient grace through a Trinitarian lens:

The approach suggested by a Wesleyan perspective is Trinitarian rather than exclusively Christological. The spirit is wider-ranging than the explicit knowledge of God through Christ and goes where Christ is yet to be known. But the Spirit is not independent of Christ. Not only are the persons of the Trinity united in all their works *ad extra*, but the God who acts through the Spirit is the God whom Christ reveals as loving, who seeks out human beings wherever they are. Thus the authority of Christ's revelation is not undermined,

²⁹⁰ Blevins, 'The Means of Grace', p. 79.

because the witness of the Spirit is grounded in Christ's disclosure of God's being toward humanity always and everywhere.²⁹¹

Blevins argues, 'Wesley's description of the activity of the Trinity, whether explicit or implicit, does impact the purpose and the process of the means of grace. His general description of the Trinity enriches any understanding of how God both provides the purpose of the means of grace and participated within the process of the means of grace to insure its goal.'²⁹² All movement towards God begins with God's movement towards persons. Crofford tacitly identifies that, 'If God the Son was the means by which God the Father *provided* prevenient grace, then God the Holy Spirit is the means by which it is *mediated* to humanity.'²⁹³ Therefore, 'prevenient grace is really tied to the universal ministry of the Holy Spirit, God at work amongst all, including those who have never heard the gospel. While the activity of the Holy Spirit is accentuated, it is not severed from its Christological moorings, since the atonement is the source of prevenient grace.'²⁹⁴

The *telos* of this movement is the relationship between the Creator and the created. The relationship between God and humanity, as previously noted, is further developed and better expressed through the language of participation. Participation, in its most fundamental articulation, means 'to take part in'. In this case, within the *missio Dei* framework that is enumerated from within a Trinitarian theology, participation means to take part in something and someone. Therefore, the *missio Dei* and a Trinitarian theology organically unite with a Wesleyan understanding of the means of grace. The triune God whose grace makes it possible for one to be restored in relationship with God's self, who takes part in and shares God's life with the world, enables, invites, and empowers the person to participate and share in the life of the Trinity through participating and sharing in the means of grace. 'Wesley understood that the means of grace were practices established by the Trinity.'²⁹⁵

²⁹¹ T. Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), pp. 34–35.

²⁹² D. Blevins, 'The Trinity and the Means of Grace: A Sacramental Interrelationship', *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 36/1 (2001), p. 244.

²⁹³ J.G. Crofford, *Streams of Mercy: Prevenient Grace in the Theology of John and Charles Wesley* (Lexington: Emeth Press, 2010), p.12.

²⁹⁴ Crofford, *Streams*, p. 12.

²⁹⁵ Blevins, 'The Means of Grace and the Trinity', p. 247.

Recalling the previously posited claim of the two fronts that Wesley battled in his day, Blevins elucidates the concept, ‘Wesley, living in a deeply dualistic society, provides a remarkable alternative grounded in the gracious activity of God, *analogia gratia*, or the analogy of grace. One may define *analogia gratia* as the relationship that describes both God’s action through human activity for the sake of salvation and, vice versa, the anticipation of human action that mirrors the activity of God.’²⁹⁶ Subsequently, ‘since the quality of grace is relational and the character of the Godhead is communally collaborative, the practices described within the means of grace would also be interactive and relational in nature.’²⁹⁷

The nature of the participation and sharing is characterized by the life of the triune God and reflected in the *imago Dei*. The reconciling, restoring, and renewing of one to the image of God, held in tension with a Trinitarian expression of the *missio Dei* concept and a theology of participation through grace and the means of grace, may be expressed as creating, forgiving, and perfecting.

Any action, any thought that may be deemed as ‘good’, that one may do before accepting the justifying grace of God, is attributable to God’s grace. God’s preventing or prevenient grace makes this possible. Following justification persons are a ‘new creation’. God’s justifying grace in Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit then makes it possible for one to be for-giving, even as Christ for-gave His life that all might be saved in order to be a witness of Jesus Christ. Finally, God’s grace through the Holy Spirit continues to empower persons and the church to a life of holy love of God and neighbour.

Each of the three persons of the Trinity, understood to be inseparable and distinct, participate in and share with creation in a universal and particular movement or rhythm. In short, the *missio Dei*, expressed through a Wesleyan lens, challenges an ongoing and harmful dichotomy of theory versus practice. Consequently, as Meadows shares, ‘We might learn from Wesley to understand theological reflection as church practice – that the early Methodist commitment to disciplined discipleship was *itself* the very mode and character of their theological competency.’²⁹⁸

²⁹⁶ Blevins, ‘The Means of Grace and the Trinity’, pp. 251–252.

²⁹⁷ Blevins, ‘The Means of Grace and the Trinity’, p. 253.

²⁹⁸ P. Meadows, ‘On Taking the Method Out of Methodism’, *Quarterly Review*, 21/3 (2001), p. 295.

The church and persons participate in the *missio Dei* by participating in the means of grace. They are able to participate in the means of grace because the triune God participates; that is, the presence, pardon, and power of God moving in, through and with the world enables their participation. This claim constructively maintains the integrity of a Trinitarian emphasis, the grand narrative, and a theology of participation that enables persons to be in relationship with God and others, but also shapes the condition of that relationship: the holy love of God and neighbour.

8.3. Waiting in the Means of Grace

Wesley's emphasis upon waiting in the means of grace, the works of piety and the works of mercy, establish an implication for understanding them as a way of life: a way that one is to live in relation to God and others. Waiting, in this Wesleyan sense, denotes being perfected in love, in holiness, or holy love of God and neighbour. Personal participation in the means of grace, as a way of life, may also be identified with the concepts of being and doing, and immanent and economic. As the argument has been made that the immanent God is the economic God, those made in the image of God are to reflect the nature of God. Whereas God is relation without remainder, absolute and in need of nothing or no one, persons made in the image of God are in need of something and someone. Humanity needs its Creator, humanity needs love.

Wesley believed that all persons were to wait in the means of grace, whether they were in a fallen or unregenerate condition or had experienced or accepted the justifying grace of God. The condition of the heart determines the course of actions one takes, and subsequently the course of actions that one engages shapes and determines the condition of the heart. Waiting in the means of grace, for Wesley, is to reflect the love of God and the love of others. The ontological and teleological implication for personal participation in the *missio Dei* is always predicated on the triune God being and doing who and what God has revealed through word, deed, and sign.

McGonigle rightly states, 'The Christian life begins, continues and develops *only* through the grace of God in Christ ... grace is not mechanistic and it is not tied inextricably to any institution no matter how long and well established. It is only by

the action of the Holy Spirit, working through these institutions, that grace comes to the obedient and believing Christian.²⁹⁹ Therefore, as Dunlap argues, ‘Wesley saw religion in relational terms rather than abstract or mechanistic ... his relational view of grace resisted locating the saving activity of God merely in some “objective” or abstract past or future event, and understood the means of grace as neither subjective nor metaphysically objective, but relational, remaining both the source and true object of the religious affections.’³⁰⁰

P. Shrier and C. Shrier have spent time researching the effects of waiting in the means of grace, specifically those designated as works of mercy, in relation to sanctification. They argue,

Since recent developments in neuroscience seem to support Wesley’s view that acts of mercy are essential means of grace, what ought we to do? First of all, it seems obvious that we ought to focus more on teaching about facilitating the regular practice of visiting the sick and those in prison, feeding the hungry, and doing other acts of mercy – in person ... we also need to rediscover and effectively present Wesley’s teachings, and ultimately the Bible’s instruction, that doing acts of mercy changes us to be more Christ-like ... it also effects physical changes in our brains (after noting that the process has supernatural and eternal benefits).³⁰¹

Wesley’s emphasis upon waiting in the means of grace not only signifies a relationship but implies the enhancement of that relationship: one that reflects dual movement, movement towards and with the triune God and movement towards and with others. In the twenty-first century, there still remain opportunities for greater clarification of a Wesleyan concept of the means of grace in order to more fully inform a theology of participation in the *missio Dei* as being participation in the means of grace.

²⁹⁹ H. McGonigle, ‘Peer Review of The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace’, *Evangelical Quarterly*, 70/2 (1998), p. 177.

³⁰⁰ E.D. Dunlap, ‘Peer Review of The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace’, *Church History*, 65/ 3 (1996), pp. 507–509.

³⁰¹ P. Shrier & C. Shrier, ‘Acts of Mercy as Mimesis: A Neuroscientific Critique of John Wesley’s Means of Grace in Sanctification’, *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 15/1 (2005), p. 15.

8.4. Ongoing Dilemmas

There are ongoing dilemmas that have potentially kept the means of grace from gaining appropriate attention. The obstacles do not lie within the language surrounding the concept, expressions like ‘works of piety’ or ‘works of mercy’, although they are especially problematic for those holding a strict reformed theology. The greatest obstacles stem from systematic and conceptual understandings surrounding the nature of grace, the immanent and economic God in Trinitarian theology, a lack of attention to the biblical grand narrative, and ecclesiology in relation to missiology.

Grace is often articulated as either the ‘pardon’ of God or the ‘power’ of God. Many, in emphasizing the activity of God, inadvertently separate God’s activity from God’s nature. When myopic attention is on the activity of God, a key part of the biblical grand narrative is overlooked, that is, the activity of those made in the image of God. On the other hand, those emphasizing the activity of the church often eclipse the activity of God which makes possible their participation and they inadvertently emphasize ecclesiology.

Zahl and Vickers hold concepts of grace and the Holy Spirit that illumine the ongoing dilemma confronting missiology and Methodism and, subsequently, the context of participation in the *missio Dei*. Zahl purports a theology of grace that stands in opposition to the ‘law’. Vickers decries and cites the overly used term ‘grace’ as being the catalyst for ‘a regrettable domestication of our theological language, not to mention our lives.’³⁰²

Zahl, at one point argues, ‘God is purest law.’³⁰³ Then, he follows with, ‘Law is true. It is also impotent and counterproductive. It produces the opposite.’³⁰⁴ Missiologically speaking, from within a biblical understanding, if God is the same yesterday, today, and forever – that is, God is unchanging – then how can God be the purest form of law and at the same time be impotent and counterproductive? He goes on to argue that ‘grace as one-way love is the opposite of law. Law depresses

³⁰² J.E. Vickers, ‘Charles Wesley’s Doctrine of the Holy Spirit: A Vital Resource for the Renewal of Methodism Today’, *Asbury Journal* 61/1(2006), p. 55.

³⁰³ P.F.M. Zahl, *Grace in Practice: A Theology of Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), p. 2.

³⁰⁴ Zahl, *Grace in Practice*, p. 9.

and incites. Grace enlivens and enables.’³⁰⁵ This perspective is not in keeping with scripture or a Trinitarian approach for informing a theology of grace. Jesus said, ‘Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them’ (Matthew 5:17). Jesus Christ is justifying grace, God the Father offering God the Son for the sin of the world. How does one know or accept this in faith? One is empowered to accept in faith that Jesus Christ is Lord only through God the Spirit moving in their life. For Wesley, it begins with prevenient grace and continues through the sanctifying grace, the indwelling and outpouring of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Zahl continues to locate the concept of grace as an external entity to God, rather than articulating grace as intrinsic to the nature of God. Wesley has articulated that God’s grace is both imputed and imparted to those made in the image of God. Therefore, grace is understood to be both external and internal. Grace is not merely extraneous activity of God. God is *in se* who God is *ad extra*. In part, Zahl’s statement, ‘A systematic theology of everyday life has to be focused on relationships,’ is in agreement with a Wesleyan perspective.³⁰⁶ The focus is the relationship. On the surface, Zahl and Wesley both emphasize grace, but Zahl fails to give proper attention to grace as the movement of God making it possible for persons to respond in kind.

Zahl boldly states, ‘A theologian of grace has no ecclesiology. The ecclesiology of a theologian of grace is a negation of ecclesiology.’³⁰⁷ Few would argue: Wesley was a theologian of grace, yet he never shied away from the ecclesial body even when forced from preaching from the pulpit within a church building to preaching in the fields. Having an ecclesiology is not the problem. The problem stems from placing the *missio Dei* under the auspices of ecclesiology rather than systematically aligning a theology of grace in proper Trinitarian theology.

In the article, ‘Charles Wesley’s Doctrine of the Holy Spirit: A Vital Resource for the Renewal of Methodism Today’, Vickers asks the question, ‘Are grace and the Holy Spirit interchangeable?’³⁰⁸ His argument is that they are not. Rather than beginning the construct of his argument against the notion that they are

³⁰⁵ Zahl, *Grace in Practice*, p. 37.

³⁰⁶ Zahl, *Grace in Practice*, p. 131.

³⁰⁷ Zahl, *Grace in Practice*, p. 253.

³⁰⁸ Vickers, ‘Charles Wesley’s Doctrine of the Holy Spirit’, p. 53.

interchangeable, from within the life of the Trinity, he begins by ‘considering how the term “grace” functions in everyday discourse.’³⁰⁹ This is not Wesleyan practice. Wesley emphasized measuring everything, including context against and with the scriptures. As stated earlier, language changes from culture to culture, era to era. To speak of the Trinity, of itself, or in conjunction with other terms and concepts, one must begin with the Trinity as revealed in the biblical grand narrative. Context does not supersede the Trinity.

Vickers notes, ‘...the peculiar thing about our use of the term “grace” in theological discourse today is the way in which we often speak of grace as though it were a personal agent rather than a type of action...’³¹⁰ Further, he states, ‘Indeed, the activity of the Holy Spirit is, from beginning to end, gracious activity.’³¹¹ Herein lies the problem. Again, like Zahl, Vickers is implying that the immanent God is different from the economic God, that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is different within the life of the Godhead than who the Godhead is as revealed through the grand narrative or in the twenty-first century. The Wesleys, both John and Charles, never misunderstood the inseparability of the concept of grace from the Holy Spirit.

Who God is immanently is who God is economically. Divine grace is a personal agent, the Holy Spirit. Divine grace is also the proper conceptualization of the concept for the activity of God that moves in, through, and with the world. The immanent and economic God, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, the Three–One, is One.

Warner is one of many scholars who recognize that ‘... the contemporary Wesleyan tradition continues to struggle with balancing personal and social holiness.’³¹² It can be argued that in part this stems from the fact that ‘... repercussions of the Fundamentalist–Modernist debate continue to cause difficulties...when it comes to practice of disciple-making.’³¹³ The problem, according to Warner, does not lie only with Wesleyans or Methodists but is reflected in the steady decline of mainline denominations throughout North America.³¹⁴

³⁰⁹ Vickers, ‘Charles Wesley’s Doctrine of the Holy Spirit’, p. 53.

³¹⁰ Vickers, ‘Charles Wesley’s Doctrine of the Holy Spirit’, p. 54.

³¹¹ Vickers, ‘Charles Wesley’s Doctrine of the Holy Spirit’, p. 54.

³¹² L. Warner, ‘Making Disciples in the Wesleyan Tradition: Practicing the Means of Grace’, *Quarterly Review*, 23/2 (2003), p. 162.

³¹³ Warner, ‘Making Disciples in the Wesleyan Tradition’, p. 167.

³¹⁴ Warner, ‘Making Disciples in the Wesleyan Tradition’, p. 168.

Warner notes, ‘... a pervasive spirituality within American society ... broad but shallow ... a consumer driven ethos ... results in a “marketplace” of spiritualities that provide “samples” of the most attractive and appetizing aspects of spirituality at “competitive prices.”’³¹⁵

Warner argues,

Disciple-making formed by the biblical narrative and practiced as an aspect of sanctification within communities of faith provides an alternative to these cultural and ideological influences. This kind of holistic disciple-making recognizes the importance of qualitative as well as quantitative growth and nurture of disciples over their lifetime through practices that cultivate both personal and social holiness.³¹⁶

Therefore, Warner argues, ‘through practice of the means of grace, individuals are continuously being transformed and reminded of the purpose of Christian discipleship: participation in the kingdom of God through local communities of faith as the church in the world.’³¹⁷

8.5. Conclusion

The concept of the immanent God being the economic God is integral to a theology of participation in the *missio Dei*. Many of the approaches to the *missio Dei* are deficient in this regard. Subsequently, mission is often articulated as an entity external to the nature of God. Consequently, the activities of persons and the church, even when identified as being rooted in the Trinity’s external or economic activities, become aligned exclusively with the concept of ‘sending’ or being sent. Therefore, inadvertently mission and the *missio Dei* simply become about going out into the world, even in the ‘name’ of God, but eclipsing the relational part of what life is to be like in communion with the triune God and neighbour.

³¹⁵ Warner, ‘Making Disciples in the Wesleyan Tradition’, p. 168.

³¹⁶ Warner, ‘Making Disciples in the Wesleyan Tradition’, p. 168.

³¹⁷ Warner, ‘Making Disciples in the Wesleyan Tradition’, p. 171.

Wesley's theology of grace provides the resources for answering this dilemma for missiology and the *missio Dei*. As the triune God is the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of all that was, is, and is to come, it is logical to note that God's nature is the initiating and culminating determinant for the condition of the relationship existing between God and persons. God's nature being grace and love, persons are inspired, enabled, and empowered to be like Christ. Persons and the church, through the Spirit moving in them, move in obedience, faith, and love: movement towards God and neighbour.

Wesley's approach to the concepts of works of piety and works of mercy is helpful to a theology of participation in the *missio Dei* that overcomes mission being understood only as an external activity of God or persons because the spiritual works of piety and mercy are grounded in the grace, the participation of the triune God who calls and sends. Wesley's theology of grace affirms the Trinitarian axiom that the immanent God is the economic God. As a result, the church and persons participate in both the life of the triune God and others.

In one sense it may be argued that Wesley did not have a strong ecclesiology but was intent upon the renewing of hearts, minds, and actions of all persons in the love of God and neighbour as may be discerned through his 1750 sermon *Catholic Spirit*.³¹⁸ In another sense, Methodism as a renewal movement may be argued to be the epitome of what the nature and function of the catholic (universal) church is to be based on one's participation in the means of grace to the end of being perfected in the love of God and neighbour. As the report of the BCC notes, 'theological language is designed to serve the Gospel, the good news of God's love in Christ; and trinitarian language to anchor human worship, life and thought in the way that love takes shape in the 'economy', which, in this thesis, is being argued as the grace of

³¹⁸ In the *Catholic Spirit* Wesley lays out a convincing argument that the overall concern amongst those who would call themselves Christian disciples, is the condition of one's heart. 'Is thy heart right with God?...Do thou believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?...Dost thou love God?...Is God the centre of thy soul?...In all thy labour, thy business, thy conversation aiming only at the glory of God in all?...Is thy heart right toward neighbour?...Dost thou 'love as thyself' all mankind without exception?...Do you show your love by your works?'

J. Wesley, 'Sermon 39: Catholic Spirit' in R.P. Heitzenrater (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley: The Bicentennial Edition*, section 1, paragraphs 12-18.

God moving in, through, and with the world that all might be restored, renewed, and reconciled in the love of the triune God.³¹⁹

Further, in Chapter 5 The Trinity and the Church in *The Forgotten Trinity*, it is rightly stated,

the heart of the matter is, once again, the relation between christology and pneumatology in our thought about the Church...by stressing the fact that God's being consists in community, it asserts the theological priority of community over institution or anything impersonal...the church must cease to be looked on primarily as an institution and be treated as a *way of being*... by stressing the action of the Spirit as of equal importance to that of the Son, it makes possible to emphasize God's present as well as his past action in constituting the church and along with this the eschatological, future oriented, dimensions of ecclesiology.³²⁰

From this perspective, Wesley's attention to participation in the means of grace as a way of life for Christian disciples is deeply ecclesiological and deeply Trinitarian, as the unity of the church is rooted in the triune God's love of the Father in the Son through the Spirit for the world. The grace of God makes possible disciples participation in the means of grace.

The formalist–enthusiast debate of Wesley's era and the evangelical–social justice imperative dilemma of today are best addressed through the progressive lens of the *missio Dei* informed by a Wesleyan theology of grace and participation in the means of grace. The missiological approach that follows is one that accounts for spiritual formation and integrates proclamation into social responsibility and vice versa, thereby removing a distinct separation of one from the other, or worse yet, myopically focusing upon one to the detriment of the other.

Warner's attention to the ongoing polemic within the Methodist circle, those that emphasize social holiness over or against personal holiness, or vice versa, is

³¹⁹ The Report of the BCC Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today, *The Forgotten Trinity*, p. 14.

³²⁰ The Report of the BCC Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today, *The Forgotten Trinity*, p. 29.

indicative of the greater culture and community of those that call themselves Christians. Three major movements within the last few decades have drawn attention to the growing dissatisfaction of ‘organized religion’ or the ‘institutionalized church’ who turn to *missio Dei* for a solution. At the same time, this dissatisfaction is held in tension with the understanding that, as Tennent notes, ‘... the indestructibility of the church is not tied to any particular institutional manifestation of it ... there is a need to discover a deeper ecumenicism that can unite all true Christians.’³²¹ There is a strong contingency of twenty-first century Christian scholars seeking answers through an ecumenical imperative. Although the imperative remains indistinct, one aspect remains clear: the imperative is grounded in the *missio Dei* concept.

Although Wesley never spoke of the ‘biblical grand narrative’, all of his theological practice was firmly grounded in scripture. Wesley’s greatest attention was towards the ‘end’, that is, salvation. Wesley’s soteriology is clearly framed on the understanding that the Bible tells the story of God’s relationship with humanity and all that it entails, past, present, and future. This was never a point of debate for Wesley. Consequently, Wesley paid great care and attention to the explication to the restoration of the broken relationship between God and person.

Wesley’s theology of grace and means of grace may be articulated as a challenge to all for whole-life participation in disciplined discipleship, thereby serving as the answer for overcoming the polemics and problems in missiology with the *missio Dei* concept. The challenge for some is a renewed emphasis on ‘practical’ matters or those activities that are directed towards others; for others, the challenge is a renewed focus upon the Three–One. In both emphases, the Spirit of God makes this possible and points to the triune God as the focus of discipleship. Arguably, disciplined discipleship is the intentional participation in all the means of grace which constructively upholds the understanding that God is the beginning, the middle, and the end of the *missio Dei*, and persons and the church are fundamental to the relationship.

³²¹ T.C. Tennent, ‘Wesley’s “Catholic Spirit” and Global Christianity’ in D.L. Whiteman & G.H. Anderson (eds.), *World Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Franklin, TN: Providence House Publishers, 2009), p. 110.

SECTION 3
MISSIO DEI
AND
THE MEANS OF GRACE

Introduction

Wesleyan scholars engaging the *missio Dei* also contribute valuable insights to missiology through engagement with Wesleyan resources and the concepts of evangelization and social justice. However, as their focus is upon ecclesiology, they inadvertently perpetuate the inherited anthropocentric approach to the *missio Dei* while actually trying to avoid it. Only as Wesleyan resources are freed by removing ecclesiological emphases and moving to discipleship can they be the solution for framing a theology of participation in the *missio Dei* that embraces both divine and human activity through co-operant grace.

While emphases remain upon renewing ecclesiology rather than discipleship through an integrated Wesleyan understanding of grace and Trinitarian theology, then participation simply remains another activity or programme of the church. However, when the *missio Dei* is properly developed through Trinitarian theology it subsumes all Christian thought and practice and informs the understanding that the church is mission. A holistic missiology purports the understanding that all Godly and Christian activity is part of the *missio Dei*.

The means of grace are intended for all persons and ecclesial bodies. The form of corporate and personal participation in the means of grace varies depending on culture, eras, and ecclesiology. As the triune God is unchanging and is the meritorious and efficacious means of personal and communal participation in the means of grace, there is only one mission, the *missio Dei*. The *missio Dei* is the relationship between God and persons and the condition thereof that all might be embraced in the transforming love of God and neighbour. Persons and the church participate in the *missio Dei* through participating in the means of grace. This thesis asserts that *missio Dei* in the twenty-first century is renewed through a Wesleyan-missiological image that participation in the means of grace may be viewed as a rhythm of discipleship that emphasizes persons and the church growing in their faith of Jesus Christ, sharing through hope of Jesus Christ, and serving with the love of Jesus Christ. This thesis is making the radical claim that a Wesleyan theology of disciplined discipleship informs ecclesiology.

Chapter 9. Wesleyan Perspectives

9.1. Introduction

There are three recently published books, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century* by Timothy C. Tennent, *World Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit* edited by D. L. Whiteman and G.H. Anderson, and *Missio Dei: A Wesleyan Understanding* edited by K. Schwanz and J. Coleson, that represent many Wesleyan scholars engaging with mission and the *missio Dei*. Tennent's book, unlike the other two books which include multiple authors, is brought into the conversation with them to tease out similar strands and identify the gaps. All scholars referred to in this chapter are identifiable as Wesleyan scholars or have been largely influenced by Wesleyan theology.

For the sake of clarity in presenting their contributions, it is helpful to place their viewpoints in several broad strands or themes that run throughout this developing theology of participation. The strands are: the *missio Dei* concept; mission or missions; attention to the biblical grand narrative; the role of the Trinity; a theology of grace and the means of grace; the theme of relationship and participation; and the role of the church.

Wesleyan scholars engaging with missiology make contributions to the dialogue surrounding the concepts of the *missio Dei*, mission and missions, and highlight the disconnection between divine and human activity. There is an emphasis on giving proper attention to reaching out into the world through evangelization and social responsibility. Their attentiveness to Wesley's overarching theology that bespeaks an intentionality to draw multiple perspectives together is a voice that adds to the conversation. However, in bringing Wesleyan resources to the *missio Dei* they are still bringing the inherited tendency to ecclesiological emphases. This chapter illumines the inherited problems identified in Section 1 and the Wesleyan contributions in Section 2 to note the overarching weakness of the often prioritized emphases upon ecclesiology rather than discipleship.

9.2. *Missio Dei*

Coleson clearly links the *missio Dei* concept in the biblical narrative with a concept of relationship. In describing the *missio Dei* concept, Coleson asserts,

I believe both the Bible and the natural order teach that God's original and ultimate mission, at least with respect to humans, was/is to form an "other" – a class of creatures capable of relationship with God, with each other, and with the rest of God's creation. Incredible as it seems, God's mission included even making this relationship eternal through the incarnation, as Jesus Christ, second person of the Trinity, became human in the womb of his virgin mother.³²²

However, as Coleson is arguing that God has an 'original' and 'ultimate' mission, there is an implication that God's mission changes at some point. This may be problematic in light of the understanding that God is unchanging.

Perhaps there is insight to be gained through Hahn's defining of the *missio Dei*. Hahn argues, 'The mission of God may be described as God's intention and activity to restore all creation to the purposes for which he created it.'³²³ Hahn, in seeking to add clarity to his understanding of the *missio Dei*, argues, 'One would certainly expect that the teachings of Jesus would articulate the mission of God. Without doubt the kingdom of God is the central concept taught by Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels.'³²⁴ Hahn does identify Jesus' teachings of kingship as being relational. In speaking of the concept of kingship, he argues, 'It provides a way of understanding the integration of worship with compassionate ministry, of theological reflection with social justice ministries.'³²⁵ In seeking to determine the 'point' of God's mission, Peterson frames his argument by 'exploring how God's

³²² J. Coleson, 'The Creation as Missional Paradigm in K. Schwanz & J. Coleson (eds.), *Missio Dei: A Wesleyan Understanding* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2011), p. 32.

³²³ R.L. Hahn, 'The Mission of God and a Covenant People' in K. Schwanz & J. Coleson (eds.), *Missio Dei: A Wesleyan Understanding* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2011), p. 40.

³²⁴ R.L. Hahn, 'The Mission of God in Jesus' Teaching on the Kingdom of God' in K. Schwanz & J. Coleson (eds.), *Missio Dei: A Wesleyan Understanding* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2011), p. 58.

³²⁵ Hahn, 'The Mission of God in Jesus' Teaching in the Kingdom of God', p. 66.

mission begins with the church as the body of Christ ...³²⁶ One potential implication of Peterson identifying God's mission as beginning with the church is that God's mission does not include the Old Testament.

Noble, in drawing together his closing argument for an understanding of the mission of the Holy Trinity, concludes, 'this brings us finally to an important conclusion: the *missio Dei* is not the End. To put it another way, the End will end the mission. Continuing the *missio Dei* is not the *ultimate* purpose of God, so mission is not the *ultimate* purpose of the church. At the End, the *eschaton*, the end of "the present evil age" (Galatians 1:4), the mission will be completed.'³²⁷ Clearly, for Noble, even though mission is part of the *missio Dei*, it is not the ultimate purpose of God. Yet, he argues, 'the purpose of mission is the gathering of all, uniting in the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church to the glory of our Trinitarian God.'³²⁸ God's greatest purpose, according to Noble, is the glory of God. The *missio Dei* ends, in Noble's argument, as the 'gathering' is completed. However, glorifying God continues. This line of thinking inevitably raises the question, 'If the mission is the gathering of people and the glorifying of God by the church which is the body of Christ is there any difference in the concept of glorifying God in this age from glorifying God in the future reality?' If the answer is yes, then how that it is the case must be explored. If the answer is no, then how does the mission ever end?

Tennent begins the development of his argument by stating that, '... a flaw occurred in the application of the *missio Dei* in the last century because of the undue separation of God's mission from the church.'³²⁹ In large part he is attributing this belief to the wrong understanding that developed following Vicedom's work in the sixties that articulated the inappropriateness of speaking of the mission of the church, that is, the church does not have a mission, that mission belongs to God. Most missiologists hold this to be a foundational assumption regarding mission. Tennent argues, 'the starting point of missions must be the *missio Dei*. Missions must first and foremost be about what God is doing in the world, not what we are

³²⁶ B.D. Peterson, 'What is the Point of God's Mission' in K. Schwanz & J. Coleson (eds.), *Missio Dei: A Wesleyan Understanding* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2011), p. 116.

³²⁷ T.A. Noble, 'The Mission of the Holy Trinity' in K. Schwanz & J. Coleson (eds.), *Missio Dei: A Wesleyan Understanding* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2011), p. 83.

³²⁸ Noble, 'The Mission of the Holy Trinity', p. 84.

³²⁹ T.C. Tennent, *Invitation To World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2010), p. 56.

doing.’³³⁰ A key to understanding Tennent’s argument is noting that he holds to the belief that there is a difference between ‘missions’, what he assigns to be the activities of the church, and the *missio Dei*.

Although Peterson, Noble, Hahn, Coleson, and Tennent do not give an explicit definition for the *missio Dei*, it becomes apparent that their particular points of emphasis reflect how they articulate the *missio Dei*. One addresses ‘relationship’ and the Bible, another that God’s mission begins with the church, another emphasizes restoration, while another stresses that the *missio Dei* is not the end. This is a common representation of the differing emphases throughout missiological scholarship, which further illumines the lack of consistency amongst scholars regarding the *missio Dei*. One problem that comes to the fore is the dichotomy between the *missio Dei* being relationship between God and humanity with the assertion that the *missio Dei* is not the end. If the *missio Dei* is not the end but the *missio Dei* is understood to be the relationship between God and humanity, then the relationship between God and humanity would end. To say that the *missio Dei* comes to an end is to ignore its roots in the immanent Trinity. If Noble and others are asserting that the *missio Dei* is all those activities that go into restoring the broken relationship between God and humanity, and thus the mission ends when the restoration is complete or the time of eschaton is upon us, then this conflicts with the understanding that God is unchanging and does not account for the creation narrative before there was the need for humanity to be restored.

9.3. Mission and Missions

Tennent seeks to make an argument for the use of the terms mission and missions with the *missio Dei* concept. Tennent states, ‘... I have become concerned that missions practice has drifted quite a long way from intentional, disciplined missiological reflection.’³³¹ After speaking about how mission was originally about God and what God was doing he states, ‘However, in its popular usage within the church, it seems that *mission* has now come to refer almost exclusively to various

³³⁰ Tennent, *Invitation*, p. 487

³³¹ Tennent, *Invitation*, p. 9.

tasks the *church* is doing.³³² Both mission and missions reflect popular usage within the church. However, in the popular usage of mission and missions in the academy, it seems that both refer almost exclusively to the *actio Dei*. Tennent attempts to argue that the way to overcome this dilemma is to attribute mission to God and missions to the church.

Tennent argues, ‘Mission is first and foremost about God and His redemptive purposes and initiatives in the world, quite apart from any actions or tasks or strategies or initiatives the church may undertake. To put it plainly, *mission* is far more about *God* and *who He is* than about *us* and *what we do*.’³³³ Further, ‘...missions refers to all the specific and varied ways in which the church crosses cultural boundaries to reflect the life of the Triune God in the world and, through that identity, participates in His mission, celebrating through word and deed the in-breaking of the New Creation.’³³⁴ In a footnote Tennent explains that he is not willing to abandon the distinction between evangelism and missions as long as it is removed from longstanding associations with geography. Similarly, Chilcote demonstrates an understanding that evangelism is separate from mission. He argues, ‘While evangelism includes all of those activities that draw others in, mission reaches out to all, and particularly to those dear to God’s heart who are most vulnerable and in need.’³³⁵ Evangelism is, for Chilcote, activity that attracts, while mission is activity directed outward, especially to whoever is deemed to be in need.

Tennent has argued that ‘mission’ is about what God is doing and ‘missions’ is about what the church is doing. He also makes the assertion, ‘Mission is made possible only at God’s invitation. The title of this book, *Invitation to World Missions*, refers to God’s gracious invitation to the church to participate in His mission to the world.’³³⁶ The tendency to conflate the terms is an ongoing problem in missiology.

In seeking to develop a defence for his use of ‘missions’, Tennent argues, ‘Missions should never be conceptualized apart from the *missio Dei* ... as an

³³² Tennent, *Invitation*, p. 54.

³³³ Tennent, *Invitation*, pp. 54–55.

³³⁴ Tennent, *Invitation*, p. 59.

³³⁵ P.W. Chilcote, ‘The Mission–Church Paradigm of the Wesleyan Revival’ in D.L. Whiteman & G.H. Anderson (eds), *World Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Franklin, TN: Providence House Publishers, 2009), p. 160.

³³⁶ Tennent, *Invitation*, p. 59.

evangelical ... we are among the first to verbalize that missions flows out of God's heart and God's initiative but still remain quite busy with our own initiatives ... with little reflection on how what we are doing may or may not relate to God's redemptive action in the world.'³³⁷ It appears Tennent is acknowledging the ongoing dichotomy between the academy emphasis upon the *actio Dei* and the popular usage and understanding in the church of its action.

Tennent insists that, 'This distinction between *mission* and *missions* helps the church to avoid triumphalism by keeping missions God centred. We must have the humility to remember that we can never claim that missions are always identical with the *missio Dei*.'³³⁸ Tennent is claiming that by using the concept of mission as belonging to God and missions being the activities of the church, the church is able to resist claiming ownership or authority for its actions. Further, he argues, 'Maintaining the distinction between mission and missions enables the church to be both God-centred and church-focused.'³³⁹ Also, Tennent argues, 'So, a biblical Missiology must be built firmly on the foundation of Trinitarian theology. Further it must be simultaneously God-centred and church-focused.'³⁴⁰ Two questions may arise from this perspective. First, is the church supposed to be church-focused or focused upon making disciples of Jesus Christ? The second question is, if all authority for mission begins and ends with God, the *missio Dei*, why is it necessary to refer to the activities of the church as missions?

Although Tennent argues, 'Understanding missions as an extension of the Holy Spirit's life and work through the church and into the world carries with it a wide range of implications for missions ...'³⁴¹, he does not develop the connection between the work of the Holy Spirit and the work of the church, or how 'missions' is informed by the Holy Spirit.

In his conclusion, Tennent claims, 'The Trinitarian framework of this Missiology, which roots missions in the *missio Dei* and places it within the larger eschatological context of the New Creation and the emergence of the global church, seeks to provide the necessary basis for a healthy Missiology for the twenty-first century. Missions must increasingly be seen as flowing forth from God's initiative

³³⁷ Tennent, *Invitation*, p. 59.

³³⁸ Tennent, *Invitation*, p. 64.

³³⁹ Tennent, *Invitation*, p. 64.

³⁴⁰ Tennent, *Invitation*, p. 59.

³⁴¹ Tennent, *Invitation*, p. 99.

to Abraham to bless all the nations (Gen 12:3) and moving forwards that day in the New Creation when men and women “from every nation, tribe, people and language” will be worshipping our Lord Jesus Christ (Rev 7:9).’³⁴² In choosing to locate the flow of ‘missions’ from the onset of Abraham, the implication is that what God had done previously is not part of God’s mission.

While Tennent’s missiology stresses that mission reflects God’s activity and missions reflect the church’s activities, other Wesleyan scholars do not find this to be a point of contention. Snyder, in the book *World Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit*, simply states, ‘Viewed inductively, I argue, Wesley’s theology was *fundamentally* and in *essence* a theology of mission, and to miss this fact is to misunderstand Wesley.’³⁴³ Arguably, what Snyder is noting is that Wesley’s attention to mediating and answering the polemics of formalism and enthusiasm of his day was in fact being answered through his developing theology – a theology of mission.

The inherited problem in Tennent’s desire to attribute mission to God and missions to the church is the natural reversion to the sense of personal ownership or authority. With the claim of my, your, or our mission, rather than the simple assertion of ‘God’s mission’, comes the implication that there is a separation of who God is from what God does, and we are thrust back to an anthropocentric view of mission.

9.4. The Biblical Grand Narrative

Most Wesleyan scholars had little to say concerning ‘missions’ and less to say about the biblical grand narrative. Tennent offers a critique of McGavran and Glasser after acknowledging that they paid attention to traditional strands, stating, ‘However, they were not able to appreciate the insights of the *missio Dei* emphasis; nor were they able to fully envision the biblical witness of the church in the social and political sphere.’³⁴⁴ He then states, ‘Nevertheless, central to a biblical vision of God’s mission is that God *does, in fact, work in and through His church and that is*

³⁴² Tennent, *Invitation*, p. 506.

³⁴³ H.A. Snyder, ‘The Missional Flavor of John Wesley’s Theology’ in D.L. Whiteman & G.H. Anderson (eds), *World Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Franklin, TN: Providence House Publishers, 2009), p. 62.

³⁴⁴ Tennent, *Invitation*, p. 58.

*central, not ancillary, to His mission.*³⁴⁵ For Tennent, the primacy of the church in God's mission is to be emphasized. Glasser's intent was not the defence of or development of ecclesiology in the *missio Dei* but to demonstrate that the Bible in its entirety tells the story of the *missio Dei*. However, Tennent's location of the flow of 'missions' beginning with Abraham raises the question of whether he claims that the Bible is the grand narrative of the *missio Dei*.

9.5. The Trinity

Gilliland, Noble, and McCormick stress the understanding and importance of the Trinity in shaping an understanding of contextualization, the image of God, and the inseparability of who God is *in se* from who God is *ad extra*. McCormick argues, 'ultimately, then, according to the Gospels, the mission of Christ was fulfilled through the mission of the Spirit, and the mission of the Spirit was fully embodied and carried out in the mission of Christ.'³⁴⁶ Further, 'The mission of Christ and the Spirit comes to us wrapped in the enigma of love that "is" God. God is abundant outpouring love.'³⁴⁷ According to Noble, who God is in relation in the Godhead shapes the kinds of people Christians are called to be. Rahner's Trinitarian axiom is reflected in Noble's argument, 'If this is *who God is* – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – should it not be intimately related to all God does? If we are to be "in the image of God," does that not mean that *who we are to be* is to be shaped and formed by *who God is*?'³⁴⁸ Also, being made in the image of God, regardless of time or era, Gilliland observes, 'Therefore, contextualization is first and always the work of the Holy Spirit.'³⁴⁹ Additionally, although contexts change, McCormick notes the unchanging nature of the Trinity as reflected in the proposed activity of the church.

McCormick argues, 'The Spirit gathers the church into the fellowship of the triune God, then sends (breathes out) the church into the world to be bearers of

³⁴⁵ Tennent, *Invitation*, pp. 58–59.

³⁴⁶ S.K. McCormick, 'The Mission of the Holy Spirit' in K. Schwanz & J. Coleson (eds.), *Missio Dei: A Wesleyan Understanding* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2011), pp. 92–93.

³⁴⁷ McCormick, 'The Mission of the Holy Spirit', p. 93.

³⁴⁸ Noble, *The Mission of the Holy Trinity*, p. 77.

³⁴⁹ D.S. Gilliland, 'John Wesley as a Contextual Theologian' in D.L. Whiteman & G.H. Anderson (eds.), *World Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Franklin, TN: Providence House Publishers, 2009), p. 250.

God's reconciling mission.³⁵⁰ He adds, 'As we are gathered up into the fellowship of triune love, the Spirit heals our babbling divisions, our loss of memory and identity, by *re-membering* us into the body of Christ, and *sending* us back into the world to be a sacrament of holy, healing, and enabling love for the life of the whole world.'³⁵¹ Insight into how the Spirit gathers in order to send the body of Christ out to be a healing presence and love for the world is, in part, addressed through those scholars addressing the role of grace and the means of grace.

Tennent asserts, 'It is one thing to see the Trinitarian basis for mission; it is entirely another to fail to see that the church has been ordained by God to reflect the Trinity through redemptive actions in the world.'³⁵² Without question, Tennent is proposing a stronger emphasis upon ecclesiology, one he believes is necessary on the basis of a weakened sense of ecclesiology that stemmed, in part, from a growing acceptance of the *missio Dei* concept that proposed God was the source and authority for mission in the world, not the church. He argues that the misunderstanding of the *missio Dei* started in the 1960s when 'The World was the stage of God's redemptive action, and the church was effectively sidelined.'³⁵³ Arguably, few, if any, missiologists are claiming that the church, or those who call themselves Christians, are not supposed to reflect the Trinity. Again, most scholars are in agreement with Tennent's stance: 'Everything must be founded on the prior nature, character, and initiative of God.'³⁵⁴ Equally, there are others who have asserted, 'The Holy Spirit is the empowering presence of the *missio Dei*.'³⁵⁵

Tennent rightly identifies that 'the Holy Spirit is the empowering presence of the *missio Dei* in the book of Acts, and the church is summoned to participate in His work in the world.'³⁵⁶ Since Tennent's primary emphasis, arguably, is the strengthening of ecclesiology, although he appropriately recognizes the activity of the Holy Spirit he does not properly frame it in a Trinitarian theology that asserts the unchanging nature of God. This thesis agrees that, in part, 'The Holy Spirit empowers the church for a global mission; the Holy Spirit endues the church with

³⁵⁰ McCormick, 'The Mission of the Holy Spirit', p. 95.

³⁵¹ McCormick, 'The Mission of the Holy Spirit', p. 99.

³⁵² Tennent, *Invitation*, p. 56.

³⁵³ Tennent, *Invitation*, p. 56.

³⁵⁴ Tennent, *Invitation*, p. 488.

³⁵⁵ Tennent, *Invitation*, p. 491.

³⁵⁶ Tennent, *Invitation*, p. 410.

God's authority; the Holy Spirit extends the in-breaking of the New Creation through the powerful manifestation of signs and wonders and holiness of life.³⁵⁷ The implication to be drawn by claiming empowerment of the church 'for a global mission' is that mission is cast into the sphere of only being economic.

9.6. Relationship and Participation

Chilcote affirms, 'While mission belongs to God, the Wesleys believed that all people have the privilege of participating in God's mission through their own proclamation and embodiment of the Good News of God's love in Christ.'³⁵⁸ This participation is reflective of love, as Warner declares: 'Love is central to Christian discipleship and constitutes our response to God's love offered through Jesus Christ. Therefore, love is not merely ethics or something that we do to "be nice"; rather, love is a response to our justification and constitutive of our sanctification, or holiness, as the image of God is renewed in us.'³⁵⁹

Warner brings to light that God loves, first, and then persons love in response. Noble argues, 'But there is a way we are called to participate in his mission ... the *kenosis*, the self-emptying or self-denial, is not optional; it is required.'³⁶⁰ Our example of self-emptying is based on the activity of Jesus. Noble argues, 'It lay in his willingness to deny himself all the way to the cross, his willingness to *die*. And we can only participate in his mission if we are prepared to go with him through the garden of surrender all the way to the cross. Only in that way can we participate in the *missio Dei*.'³⁶¹ What would be helpful is to attend to how self-emptying and love are both possible and reflective of what it means to participate.

Hardy asserts that, 'we are missional to the extent we are dynamically in relation with the missional God.'³⁶² In this sense, for Hardy, the condition of our relationship with God determines the condition of what it means to be missional.

³⁵⁷ Tennent, *Invitation*, pp. 412–413.

³⁵⁸ Chilcote, 'The Mission—Church Paradigm of the Wesleyan Revival', p. 152.

³⁵⁹ Warner, 'Making Disciples in the Wesleyan Tradition: Practicing the Means of Grace', p.170.

³⁶⁰ T.A. Noble, 'Kenosis: The Mission of the Son' in K. Schwanz & J. Coleson (eds.), *Missio Dei: A Wesleyan Understanding* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2011), pp. 90–91.

³⁶¹ Noble, 'Kenosis: The Mission of the Son', p. 91.

³⁶² D.S. Hardy, 'Becoming Who We Are' in K. Schwanz & J. Coleson (eds.), *Missio Dei: A Wesleyan Understanding* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2011), p. 178.

Hardy notes, ‘The most ground-level (literally!) basis for our being missional is being in relationship with God, but not just any kind of relationship. It is a formational – a created, shaped, dynamic – relationship.’³⁶³ The centre of this relationship, the key dynamic for Hardy, is Jesus; as he notes, ‘Apart from having Christ formed in us, however, this beginning will not result in the ongoing conversion necessary for full participation with God in God’s mission.’³⁶⁴ Hardy identifies a Wesleyan understanding of the means of grace as participation but identifies that as the prescription that makes mission possible. He argues, ‘When, as believers in the triune God, and members in the church of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit, we participate in worship, discipleship, shared life, compassion, and witness, we are being *reformed* for mission.’³⁶⁵ This thesis claims that, in part, these activities are what it means for the church and persons to be missional and are not to be understood merely as activities that lead up to ‘mission’.

Not all speak directly of the activity of persons; many frame participation from within their ecclesiology. Again, this is not a sign of one being understood as right and the other wrong, but it does reflect the need for a clarifying lens that embraces personal Christian activity as undividable from church activity. Further, attention is given to the division and importance of either evangelistic or social justice activities being superior, one over the other, in the church and in an understanding of mission.

Abraham claims of the United Methodist church and mission, ‘... the problem of the reduction of mission to humanitarian work remains intact.’³⁶⁶ However, in alluding to evangelistic activity, he contends, ‘... but the default position is that we have handed the work of mission to agencies and let them do the work on our behalf.’³⁶⁷

In part, Whiteman addresses Abraham’s claim of mission being reduced to humanitarian work as he states, ‘The Wesleyan spirit in world mission is also seen in the integration of evangelism with social ministries in what is frequently called

³⁶³ Hardy, ‘Becoming Who We Are’, p. 178.

³⁶⁴ Hardy, ‘Becoming Who We Are’, p. 183.

³⁶⁵ Hardy, ‘Becoming Who We Are’, p. 183.

³⁶⁶ W.J. Abraham, ‘Methodism, Mission, and the Market State’ in D.L. Whiteman & G.H. Anderson (eds.), *World Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Franklin, TN: Providence House Publishers, 2009), p. 75.

³⁶⁷ Abraham, ‘Methodism, Mission, and the Market State’, p. 75.

holistic mission. In practical everyday activity, this means that we hold together both the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.³⁶⁸ At the same time, a caution is raised as ‘Hunter warns that it is easy for a dynamic movement to lose its way when the means for fulfilling the objectives of a movement become more important than the ends, and participants in the movement become caught in the “activity trap” – keeping busy but going nowhere that advances the kingdom of God.’³⁶⁹ Hunter claims, ‘... a generation of leaders emerged who assumed that they knew better than their founding genius. They quietly hijacked the movement and turned it into an institution, and in time the people lost their theological and strategic vision.’³⁷⁰

Blevins addresses the concept of participation and mission within the strands of catechesis and discipleship. Blevins states, ‘We need a different understanding of discipleship, one that calls for an ongoing commitment based less on our “arrival” as Christians and more on God’s mission in the world.’³⁷¹ Without specifically defining mission, an implication may be drawn from his contention that ‘missional catechesis focuses on the conversion of people and of communities.’³⁷² Blevins identifies a dual perspective within his concept of discipleship.

Formation and engagement work together at every phase of discipleship. We listen for God at work in Scripture and in the world. We kneel to allow ourselves to be transformed. We also kneel to serve as transformational agents in the world, following Christ’s sacrificial service. We rise to enter the community of faith only to find ourselves “commissioned,” sent out into the world where God is at work. Through this process we realize our discipleship never ends primarily because the missional God who calls us also commends us to God’s missional heart.³⁷³

³⁶⁸ D.L. Whiteman & G.H. Anderson (eds.), ‘Introduction’ in *World Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Franklin, TN: Providence House Publishers, 2009), p. xviii.

³⁶⁹ D.L. Whiteman & G.H. Anderson (eds.), ‘Strategic Perspectives’ in *World Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Franklin, TN: Providence House Publishers, 2009), p. 289.

³⁷⁰ G.C. Hunter, ‘Mission Strategy in the Wesleyan Spirit’, in D.L. Whiteman & G.H. Anderson (eds.), *World Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Franklin, TN: Providence House Publishers, 2009), p. 298.

³⁷¹ D.G. Blevins, ‘A Missional Catechesis for Faithful Discipleship’ in K. Schwanz & J. Coleson (eds.), *Missio Dei: A Wesleyan Understanding* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2011), p. 141.

³⁷² Blevins, ‘A Missional Catechesis for Faithful Discipleship’, p. 146.

³⁷³ Blevins, ‘A Missional Catechesis for Faithful Discipleship’, pp. 147–148.

Therefore, ‘discipleship calls for a lifelong journey after Jesus. Wesleyan discipleship seeks to transform people and churches toward holiness of heart and life.’³⁷⁴

There is an ongoing tension between evangelistic activity and social responsibility. This tension is not restricted to Methodism, but is inherent in missiology. While some are embroiled in this tension others like Blevins are stressing the importance of spiritual formation being included with the emphases on evangelization and social justice. Blevins rightly identifies all forms of participation as being our discipleship.

9.7. Church

Chilcote contends, ‘Wesley’s quest was for Christian wholeness, for holiness of heart and life, for faith working by love. His driving passion was to bring balance and vitality to the Christian life and to restore it to the church he loved.’³⁷⁵ Steve Harper argues, ‘A “religion of the heart” challenges the whole church to integrate faith. Far from being the touchy-feely practices, the works of piety dispose us to deep levels of devotion, into which God speaks not only a formational word, but also a missional word.’³⁷⁶ Chilcote stresses, ‘The church, they believed, is not called to live for itself, but for others. It is called, like Christ, to give itself for the world. It is not so much that the church has a mission or ministries; rather, the church is mission.’³⁷⁷

The declaration that church ‘is’ mission is beginning to take root and is drawing a more focused concentration amongst missiologists. The claim that the church is mission reflects congruence with how the church is understood to be a participant in the *missio Dei* and is integral to this thesis. Further the claim that church is mission could serve as a new starting point for Tennent and Abrahams who maintain ‘... the indestructibility of the church is not tied to any particular

³⁷⁴ Blevins, ‘A Missional Catechesis for Faithful Discipleship’, p. 146.

³⁷⁵ P.W. Chilcote, ‘The Wesleyan Tradition: A Paradigm for Renewal’ in P.W. Chilcote (ed.), *The Wesleyan Tradition: A Paradigm for Renewal* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), p. 23.

³⁷⁶ S. Harper, ‘Works of Piety as Spiritual Formation’ in P.W. Chilcote (ed.), *The Wesleyan Tradition: A Paradigm for Renewal* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), p. 94.

³⁷⁷ Chilcote, ‘The Mission–Church Paradigm of the Wesleyan Revival’, p. 155.

institutional manifestation of it ... there is a need to discover a deeper ecumenicism that can unite all true Christians,³⁷⁸ and, 'In time we can expect that the formal theology of mission in the United Methodism will be adjusted and corrected.'³⁷⁹

D. Wesley argues, 'Mission is the very nature of the church, seeking first God and his kingdom. It flows directly from God. A living relationship with the God of mission distinguishes the church as a living organism, as opposed to a mechanistic (and secular) organization. Because of this relationship, we truly can say that the church does not *support* a program of missions; rather, the church is missionary.'³⁸⁰ Thus, as de Souza notes, 'The roots we have in John Wesley's theology tell us that being a church in context requires the church to be a *mission movement that is open to and enriching of creativity*.'³⁸¹ That is, the church is both context in movement and creative through the work of the Spirit.

D. Wesley notes,

It means, first and foremost, that we are called to *be* Christian. Before any emphasis on goals, programs, and activities, we are called to draw into God's holy presence. If God's nature is mission, then those of us who partake in his nature will share that same nature of mission. In this sense, therefore, mission is not a program, but rather the essence of being Christian.³⁸²

The argument is that the church is mission as God's nature is mission; therefore, to be Christian is to be missional.

D. Wesley affirms, 'It means the whole church is missionary ... It also means that as the church is sent, the whole church also sends missionaries.'³⁸³ Additionally, 'another way to state this perspective is to say that the church is not just a sending

³⁷⁸ Tennent, 'Wesley's "Catholic Spirit" and Global Christianity', p. 110.

³⁷⁹ Abraham, 'Methodism, Mission, and the Market State', p. 78.

³⁸⁰ D. Wesley, 'The Church as Missionary' in K. Schwanz & J. Coleson (eds), *Missio Dei: A Wesleyan Understanding* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2011), p. 21.

³⁸¹ L.W. de Souza, 'The Challenges of John Wesley's Theology in Latin American Mission Contexts' in D.L. Whiteman & G.H. Anderson (eds), *World Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Franklin, TN: Providence House Publishers, 2009), p. 87.

³⁸² Wesley, 'The Church as Missionary', pp. 24–25.

³⁸³ Wesley, 'The Church as Missionary', p. 25.

church; it also is a *sent* church.³⁸⁴ Moreover, ‘It means the church joins God’s activities of justice and reconciliation in those places where social systems and power structures allow for the destruction of well-being and of human life.’³⁸⁵ Likewise, ‘It means we participate in what God is doing to restore God’s creation.’³⁸⁶ D. Wesley clearly put emphasis on the understandings that God has already gone ahead of the church, the church as ‘sending’ and being ‘sent’, and confronting the injustices imposed on persons through systems and institutions. Pointer argues, ‘Just as it was for Jesus, the witness of the early church was not an event or program, but a 24/7 lifestyle.’³⁸⁷

There is a tendency in the academy and in the life of the church for the delineation of activities that place one in the position of being superior to another: evangelism against social justice, even worship against mission. Noble declares ‘the *ultimate* purpose of the church is *the glory of God ... Worship is the ultimate* purpose of the church.’³⁸⁸ This claim is not unlike Piper’s, C. Wright’s and Tennent’s claims, to name a few, asserting that ‘worship’ is ultimate. The problem with claiming that ‘worship’ is ultimate, in this sense, is that it is not articulated as part of what it means for humans to participate in the *missio Dei*.

9.8. Conclusion

There are many excellent contributions to missiology from the Wesleyan field. Some of the key concepts contributing to a theology of participation in the *missio Dei* are:

- The church does not have a mission; the church is mission
- The witness of the early church was not an event or programme, but an everyday lifestyle
- A church in context requires the church to be a mission movement that is open to and enriching of creativity
- Persons live the Christian life by grace

³⁸⁴ Wesley, ‘The Church as Missionary’, p. 23.

³⁸⁵ Wesley, ‘The Church as Missionary’, p. 26.

³⁸⁶ Wesley, ‘The Church as Missionary’, p. 26.

³⁸⁷ L. Pointer, ‘Witness of God’s Grace’ in K. Schwanz & J. Coleson (eds.), *Missio Dei: A Wesleyan Understanding* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2011), p. 171.

³⁸⁸ Noble, ‘The Mission of the Holy Trinity’, p. 83.

- As the person responds to God, the means of grace become the ongoing expression of the spiritual encounter God initiated
- Discipleship calls for a lifelong journey after Jesus. Wesleyan discipleship seeks to transform people and churches towards holiness of heart and life
- There is need for a different understanding of discipleship, one that calls for an ongoing commitment based less on our 'arrival' as Christians and more on God's mission in the world

Although one or two authors illumine the importance of either Wesleyan grace or the means of grace, none have systematically or methodologically connected the means of grace as the way in which one participates in the *missio Dei*.

Harper argues, 'We live the Christian life by grace'³⁸⁹ but does not explicitly connect grace as the empowering activity of the Holy Spirit. Both Schwanz and Coleson directly mention the means, acts of mercy and acts of piety. Coleson argues, 'Seeking justice and *shalom* for all is central to Christian life and witness because it still is God's vision and mission. Wesley termed this "acts of mercy," and coupled them with "acts of piety" as the Christian's duty to God and one's fellow creatures,'³⁹⁰ whereas Schwanz argues, 'As the person responds to God, the means of grace become the ongoing expression of the spiritual encounter God initiated.'³⁹¹ In essence, what is being discussed is the relationship between God and persons and how persons are to participate. This is central to the argument made in this thesis that persons and the church participate in the *missio Dei* through participating in the means of grace.

The underlying issues in this chapter are: mission and the *missio Dei* articulated through an emphasis on ecclesiology; mission articulated, myopically, as sending of church and persons intent upon evangelization and social justice; and mission is the activity of God, and missions is the activity of church.

³⁸⁹ Harper, 'Works of Piety as Spiritual Formation', p. 87.

³⁹⁰ J. Coleson, 'Let Justice Roll Down' in K. Schwanz & J. Coleson (eds.), *Missio Dei: A Wesleyan Understanding* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2011), p. 56.

³⁹¹ K. Schwanz, 'Worship: The Heartbeat of Missional Living' in K. Schwanz & J. Coleson (eds.), *Missio Dei: A Wesleyan Understanding* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2011), p. 140.

It is argued, from era to era, that mission comprises many things. Mission has been understood as the activity of the church. Mission has been articulated as evangelization of the world, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. With the birth of ‘practical theology’, mission is often construed as being contextual. In the twentieth century, mission was articulated as the action of God, or the liberation from economic and political bondage, hardships, abuse, or, simply, worship.

Snyder recognizes Wesley’s theology as a theology of mission. Popular usage of the terms and understanding of the concepts of mission and missions in the life of the church identifies them as being the activities of the church. The disparity between the academy’s emphasis upon the activity of the triune God in the *missio Dei* and the church’s emphasis upon mission or missions as being their activity is significant. Tennent’s attempt to overcome this dilemma by maintaining and promoting the usage of ‘missions’ as proper only exacerbates the polemic. His quest for a deeper ecumenicism that might unite all Christians might better be addressed through the simple acknowledgement, as other scholars have purported, that the church does not have a mission but is a participant in God’s mission. In fact, through a properly developed *missio Dei* theology, the claim that the church is mission is proper.

The primary issues that were raised in Section 1, ‘The *Missio Dei* and Participation’, are:

- Mission only articulated as the action of God
- Mission articulated as having its origin in the Great Commission
- Mission emphasized as ‘sending’ therefore articulated as an external entity
- Participation articulated one-dimensionally as the activity of the church and persons
- God’s activity is mission, church or personal activity is ‘missions’

All scholars support the inseparability of the triune God from the *missio Dei* concept. However, the *missio Dei* concept is often limited by emphasizing a focused attention on ‘sending’ and not accounting for the question, ‘To what end?’ The image of God is important in the context of relationship, and how persons are related

to who God is. In the image of God concept, Jesus is understood to be the exemplar for persons and the special emphasis is given to the Holy Spirit as the One who empowers.

The resources of Section 2, 'John Wesley on Grace and the Means of Grace, and Participation', that contribute to a solution are:

- Grace is the presence, pardon, and power of the triune God
- Wesley's perspective of the means of grace is the activity of the church and persons directed towards God and others
- Grace is God's participation in the *missio Dei* and the means of grace are the church's and persons' participation in the *missio Dei*
- The activities of persons and the church are not 'missions' but are better understood as participation and what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ

Although there are a few scholars addressing grace and the means of grace from a Wesleyan perspective, none develop or link the concepts with participation and the Holy Spirit through a missiological lens.

The concepts of relationship and participation, for some, are characterized by the nature of God, love. Most scholars continue to engage the concept of participation and relation through weighted focuses on evangelization or social justice. When equal attention is given to the two strands it has been identified as holistic mission. Noticeably absent is an attention to spiritual growth, with the exceptions being Hardy and Blevins. Another prevalent perspective is the attempted argument asserting the glory of God as being the ultimate purpose of God. The implication is that worship or the glory of God is somehow separate from the concept of mission and the *missio Dei*.

The claim that the church is mission, and mission is the essence of being Christian, lends itself organically to the consummation of the *missio Dei* concept and what it means to participate in the *missio Dei*. However, there is still the need for properly linking the concepts. This is done through Wesley's theology of grace and the means of grace, which embraces the concepts of both 'calling' and sending as opposed to the myopic emphasis upon sending. Further, a Wesleyan lens of the

means of grace embraces both emphases of evangelistic and social justice activities with an equal attentiveness to spirituality.

The church, as the body of Christ, is understood as inseparable from God's mission. This speaks to the conditions of the relationship, reconciled through Christ's atonement, restored in the image of God, and being renewed in the holy love of God and neighbour. That being said, those who have not yet accepted Christ as Lord and Saviour are still in relationship, albeit a broken relationship with God. This broken relationship may be expressed as being one-directional as God continues to invite persons, through prevenient grace, into a restored relationship characterized by the renewing love of God. Hence, the *missio Dei*, ultimately, is about the relationship between God and those made in the image of God. The church is eternal, to the glory of God, for the glory of God and embraced in the transforming love of God and others.

A systematic development of the *missio Dei* professes that the triune God is understood to have one mission, of which the church is a part. The *missio Dei* crosses all ecclesial lines. A Wesleyan-missiological view identifies the action of God as grace, and persons' and the church's participation as the means of grace. Authority remains in the hands of God, yet persons are empowered to participate in God's mission.

From a Wesleyan perspective, within the *missio Dei* concept, the 'call' is for all persons to be in a restored, reconciled, and renewing relationship with the triune God. This relationship is marked by God's love for God's creation and all of humanity. God's prevenient grace assures that no person is in a mere state of nature, totally devoid of the opportunity for restoration. The relationship is also marked by persons' love for God and neighbour.

Church and personal participation in the *missio Dei*, that is, in the means of grace, is uncomplicated. There is no 'right' model stating how one is to administer or receive the Lord's Supper. There is no prescription for a proper method of worship. There is no system of accounting for the number of times, or specific forms, one is to pray in a day, week, month, or year. All persons who accept and confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour are to share the good news of Jesus Christ through word and deed. Is the good news, as McLaren argues from a confessional perspective, not the good news for all persons? If the *missio Dei* or a mission

theology is perceived as coming out of ecclesiology then God's mission remains subject to the polity and doctrine of the many ecclesial perspectives, rather than a determinant in what it means to be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.

This thesis claims that a Wesleyan theology of grace and the means of grace have the ability to connect key missiological concepts which are unhelpfully divided: the Bible as grand narrative, Trinitarian theology with mission, the concept of participation, that is, the activity of the triune God with the activity of the church. The Trinity is communion and is the source for what it means for the community of disciples to be in proper relation with God, with each other and with the world. The triune God is relation without remainder in need of nothing or no one. A Wesleyan perspective of the economic God that is God's grace as the presence, pardon and power of God the Father through the Son in the Spirit in, through, and with the world is what makes possible disciples and the church's participation in the means of grace.

It is the Father's love through the Son in the Spirit for the world that enables persons to be co-operants in the *missio Dei*. A Wesleyan perspective maintains the reign of love in one's heart for God and neighbour is only possible through the Son's meritorious and the Spirit's efficacious grace. All credit, all authority for the condition of love in one's heart for God and neighbour in word and deed is credited to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Missiologists and theologians have struggled to hold in tension human-divine cooperation. A Wesleyan articulation of God's grace as Divine participation and disciples' participation in the means of grace overcomes this dilemma. The inseparability of the economic and immanent God that is the communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is love and is for the world that all might be restored in the love of God and love of neighbour.

Chapter 10. *Missio Dei* and the Means of Grace as a Way of Life

10.1. Introduction

The *missio Dei* confronts the long-standing anthropocentric understanding that mission or missions is a programme or activities of the church. Trinitarian scholars, biblical scholars, and theologians have been challenged by Barth's emphasis on mission and the *actio Dei*. Much has been and continues to be written on the subject as scholars seek to articulate three general principles associated with the *missio Dei*: the Bible is its grand narrative; the triune God is the centre of the concept; and the need for the church and persons to participate in the *missio Dei*.

This chapter summarizes: the issues raised in Section 1 that are found to be inherent in modern movements, from a missiological perspective; how Wesleyan resources can overcome the deficiencies; and how participation in the means of grace might better be understood as discipleship.

All claims in this thesis are grounded in and return to a confession of faith that is comprised of several parts. The biblical grand narrative shapes all our ways of thinking and embraces all narratives, past, present and future, and is the primary source for telling the story of the *missio Dei*. The immanent triune God is the economic triune God. Grace is the life-transforming presence, pardon and power of God that moves through history with a purpose. The way that we actually participate in that is through the means of grace.

The biblical grand narrative is the revelation of the immanent and economic God in creation, through a nation, in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, and the church and persons. The activity of God is to be understood as both physical and spiritual. The physical and spiritual activity of God may be articulated as grace. Grace is the presence, the pardon, and the power of God the Father in God the Son through God the Holy Spirit.

The biblical grand narrative answers the question, 'What is the unity in, behind, and amongst all those who would call themselves Christians?' The Bible claims the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the unity amongst Christians. God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier is the beginning, the end, and the means.

The concept of mission, in the holistic sagacity of ‘sending’ and ‘calling’, is inseparable from the triune God. The nature of God is indivisible from the activity of God. For Christians, an understanding of holistic mission, which includes all forms of being sent and being called, begins with the triune God: God’s nature and activity. If Christian mission begins with the triune God and one accepts that the triune God is unchanging, then it is reasonable to assert that the nature of God was made visible in the activity of God in creation. Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness ... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them’ (Genesis 1:26a, 27). Arguably, the essence of the *missio Dei* is the relationship between God and those made in the image of God.

This thesis has argued that the triune God created humanity in God’s image out of love. God is love (1 John 4:8). Love is inseparable from the *missio Dei* as God is love and mission is inseparable from God. Arguably, the heart of the relationship between the triune God and humanity is love. This thesis affirms the range of verses relating to love in the biblical grand narrative to be truth: this is a confession of faith.

A Wesleyan articulation of grace and the means of grace serves as a solution to overcoming the dilemma of mission being articulated as either human or divine activity; to maintaining the Trinity as being the hermeneutic of the *missio Dei*; and to framing the context of the relationship between God and humanity as mutual participation in the transforming love of the triune God.

Arguably, the relationship between God and humanity is only possible through God’s grace. Grace, in this sense, is articulated as the way in which God participates in God’s creation. God’s participation in the *missio Dei* may be marked in three historical periods: creation, redemption of fallen humanity, and sanctification of humanity. Personal and corporate participation in the *missio Dei* is possible through the prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace of God. Personal and corporate participation in the means of grace may be expressed as participation in the *missio Dei*. This participation is marked by both spiritual and physical activity, movement towards God and towards others.

Mission emphases have moved from being rooted in and inseparable from the nature and activity of God in the early church to being framed as an entity, an

external activity of the person under the authority of the church. Arguably, the ‘enlightened’ era set the platform for the separation of ‘being’ from ‘doing’. Theologians, in part, succumbed to this anthropological underpinning, establishing the superiority of ‘pure theory’ over and, hence, against, ‘practice’. The Christian church, in part, guided by and subject to ‘enlightened thinking’ became the ‘practioners’ and the academy became the ‘theoreticians’. Wesley’s practical theology is a corrective to this method of thinking and was applicable to both the academy and the church, then and now. Twenty-first century missiology, framed through the *missio Dei* lens, has much to learn from Wesley’s attention to the means of grace as a way to hold in constructive tension the inseparability of being and doing.

10.2. The Trinity as Love in Action

The United Methodist Church statement of faith asserts, ‘There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body or parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the maker and preserver of all things, both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there are three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.’³⁹²

The one living and triune God is understood to be the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. The triune God is not in need of anything or anyone. The triune God is relation without remainder, the very essence of communion. Those created in the image of God, persons, are made to be in relationship with their Creator. Scripture reveals that God’s purpose is the relationship between God’s self and God’s creation, especially persons, those created in the image of God. The nature or character of that relationship was and is framed through the nature or character of God. If God is in need of nothing or no one, the assumption is made that God created out of love. This claim is grounded through a biblical revelation of love. Although the relationship between God and persons became broken through original sin, disobedience, God’s love did not cease. Those who were created in the image of God need to be reconciled, restored, and renewed.

³⁹² Olson (ed.), *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, p. 59.

There are many verses in the grand narrative that speak of love. ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him’ (John 3:16–17). ‘God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him’ (1 John 4:8). The apostle Paul said this of love,

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails (1 Corinthians 13:4–8a).

In the words of Jesus, through the Gospels of Matthew and John: ‘Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: love your neighbour as yourself’ (Matthew 22:37–39); ‘If you love me, you will obey what I command’ (John 14:14):

As the father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my father’s commands and remain in his love ... My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends (John 15:9–10, 12–13).

Love, viewed through a missiological lens, frames an understanding of the nature and activity of God and the intended nature and activity of persons, as well as the intended condition of the relationship. Love, in this sense, is inseparable from God’s being and God’s doing. God the Son roots his love in and gives his obedience to God the Father. Scripture reveals that God the Son gave his life – laid down his life for the sin of the world. The assertion of Jesus that there is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for another (Jn 15:13) is not to be understood in the exact

sense of Jesus laying down his life for the sin of the world. Only Jesus takes away the sin of the world. Persons or the church are not Jesus and are not capable of taking away the sin of another. The missiological concept of laying down one's life, that is to love God and neighbour, may be framed through the concept of participating in the means of grace, that is, participation in the *missio Dei*.

One inherent problem with the *missio Dei* is exclusive emphasis upon sending, whether it is the activity of God or persons. For those theologians and missiologists who emphasize sending without having acknowledged or grounded economic activity with the Trinitarian axiom of God's immanence being God's economy, the concept of mission often defaults to being an external entity or programme of God or the church rather than the essence of their very nature. Wesley's approach to grace being articulated as the Holy Spirit connects the nature of God with the activity of God: what God the Father has done in God the Son through God the Spirit for the relationship between God and humanity.

10.3. Grace is the Presence, Pardon, and Power of God

Grace is the Spirit of God that makes the relationship between Jesus Christ and the disciple possible and meaningful. Grace as the Holy Spirit is more than pardon or power: it is the creative presence which enables one to be a new creation. The grace of God is unchanging and is at the same time, through the means of grace, creating unlimited opportunities for those made in God's image to express and live into the love of God and neighbour.

A Wesleyan perspective of grace fills the missing link in twenty-first century missiology between Trinitarian theology, the *missio Dei*, and personal participation. It maintains the integrity for the authority of mission being inseparable from and of God, and enables proper relationality between persons and the church serving, moving in love, towards and with God and others. A Wesleyan understanding of grace conveys the overarching emphases of grace being the presence, pardon, and power of God.

It might be helpful for the Christian to consider that the mission of God begins with a confession of faith not a statement of scientific fact: faith that God is the One as revealed through the Bible, over and against any context imaginable or

any particular ecclesial body. The revelation of God, as contained in the biblical grand narrative, claims that who God is *in se* is who God is *ad extra*. The *telos* of the *missio Dei* is God from two perspectives: the Christian, in relationship with God and others, and God who seeks and makes it possible to be in relationship with persons. First, movement begins with God. Because God moves, persons can move and must move. Love does not coerce, persons have a choice to move with God or move without God. Prevenient grace enables all persons to choose. God's movement is grace – inspiring, enabling, and empowering grace. Persons' movement by grace becomes the means of grace – movement towards God or others.

Deficiencies in current missiology include: identifying God's movement as grace but failing to connect it with biblical grand narrative; emphasizing the authority for mission beginning with the triune God but failing to hold together the immanent and economic God, so that mission is relegated to merely being an external activity rather than being understood as grounded in the nature of the triune God; and emphasizing the activity of God or the activity of persons and the church but failing to link grace as the way God participates and the means of grace as the way the church and persons participate in the *missio Dei*. Wesleyan theologians identify grace and means of grace but have not clearly connected them with the *missio Dei*, the biblical grand narrative, and Trinitarian theology.

Grace is the presence, pardon, and power of God the Holy Spirit through God the Son. The Spirit of God the Father and Son imputes and imparts grace so that one may participate in the *missio Dei*. The relationship is only possible through God's grace. The condition of the relationship is nurtured or withers as one relates with God and others through God's grace and participates in the means of grace. There is no 'personal holiness' apart from 'social holiness'. God's participation in the lives of persons, church, and the world may be articulated as grace. Personal and church participation in the life of God and the world may be articulated as the means of grace.

The *telos* of the mission of God is soteriological in nature, both a present and future reality. Grace is the presence of God, enabling one to participate in their salvation history. Faith as a response to God's grace, in that a person is a new creation, embodies the inseparability of being and doing. The action of professing

faith is held as inseparable from, and in tension with, the action of God, through a Wesleyan lens of grace.

Professing God as a participant in God's own mission does not diminish God. The biblical grand narrative affirms this claim in that the Father sends the Son, and the Father and Son send the Holy Spirit. God as presence, pardon, and power is God's prevenient, justifying and sanctifying grace. Wesley does not talk about the mission of God but contends for Christian perfection, a life of personal and social holiness, all predicated on grace.

10.4. The *Missio Dei* as Relationship between God and Humanity

Therefore, by integrating a Wesleyan perspective of grace with the *missio Dei* concept, a working definition for a theology of participation might be: the grace (presence, pardon, and power) of God moving (reconciling, restoring, and renewing) in, with, and through the world that all might be embraced in the transforming love of the triune God.

The presence of God, in part, for all people from Christ's death forward is prevenient grace, with no person being in a state of mere nature. C. Wright, Bauckham, and Glasser made compelling arguments in defending the biblical grand narrative that the presence of God was available to persons and the nation of Israel before Jesus walked on earth. The pardon of God for sin comes through the death of Jesus that is the justifying grace available for all to accept through confession of faith. The power of God in persons, the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit, enables Christians to grow in their knowledge and love of God and their neighbour: that is sanctifying grace. Persons are to move from grace, to grace, to grace. God's prevenient grace is in the life of all for all to be in the life of God. God's justifying grace through Jesus Christ is for all and imputed. God's sanctifying grace is imparted with all who have accepted the justifying grace of God through Jesus in the Holy Spirit.

The relationship, the *missio Dei*, is not simply an outward and visible activity of God and person into the world but also is the inward spiritual movement of God and person in the lives of each other. Wesley understood this to be a 'condition of the heart'. Missiologically, this can be articulated from a Trinitarian perspective of

relationship as communion between God, person, and other. Persons created in the image of God by God are to understand themselves to be as integral to one another in relationship as the Trinity is to another. They are not called to ‘be’ the Trinity but to be a restored, reconciled, and renewed creation participating in the life of the Trinity and the world. Christian participation in the world, mirroring the communion of the Trinity, made possible by the Trinity, always points to Christ. Jesus Christ is the missional hermeneutic of both the spiritual and physical activity identified as the participatory relationality in which all human activity is rooted.

Part of the working definition of this thesis for the *missio Dei* is the claim of God moving (reconciling, restoring, and renewing) in, with, and through the world ... The concept of reconciling, restoring, and renewing is related to God’s prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace. Persons are reconciled with God, restored in the image of God, and are renewed in the knowledge and love of God. Therefore, God works in, through, and with a person’s life so that, as a ‘new creation’, they may grow in faith, share with the hope, and serve through the love of Jesus Christ. Wesley rightly identifies grace as the connective link between God and the lives of persons in the *missio Dei*. The means of grace is the connective link between persons participating in the life of God and others.

10.5. Called and Sent in God’s Transforming Love

One of the inherited deficiencies in missiology surrounding the *missio Dei* concept is the propensity for mission being conveyed as the activity of God or mission being articulated almost exclusively as sending and being sent. Although sending and being sent is not improper, it is only part of the *missio Dei*. Arguably, a myopic emphasis upon sending inadvertently and organically aligns with an emphasis upon ecclesiology. When ecclesiology becomes the focus, then the *missio Dei* remains subject to the various nuances of ecclesial polity and doctrinal stances.

Conversely, if all understandings of sending and being sent begin with the triune God rather than a person or those gathered as the community of faith, the church, then the nature of being sent will be consistent with the nature of God which is to embrace all in holy love. This is not to imply that the various ecclesial bodies

do not love. The intent is to argue that the *missio Dei* is as much about being ‘called’ as it is about being sent.

To be sent implies movement from one place to another. If God is the one sending and all of humanity experienced brokenness in relationship with God through original sin, then before one can be sent by God, one must be ‘called’ by God. A Wesleyan perspective of prevenient grace argues that although all persons are totally depraved, no person is outside of the grace of God, which is made possible through Christ’s atonement.

In missiology, as argued through the definition of the *missio Dei* in this thesis, persons and the church are sent by the triune God. They are sent by God and called by God to be embraced in the transforming love of God and neighbour. The grace of the triune God is for all people. God the Father sent God the Son and God the Holy Spirit that all might be called into a life-transforming relationship. God’s prevenient grace ensures that no person is in a state of ‘mere nature’ or totally devoid of the opportunity to respond to God’s invitation to reconciliation and renewal. As persons respond to God’s ‘call’ and confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, they too, like Jesus and the Holy Spirit, are sent. Christians’ claim to being sent into the world is grounded in God’s call upon their life and the life of the church to be embraced in the holy love of the triune God. This holistic approach to calling and sending challenges the popular articulation of calling or being called in reference to persons ‘going into the ministry’, for whatever that might mean as viewed through ecclesial structures.

The *telos* of the *missio Dei* is the embracing relationship of holy love with the triune God and neighbour. Therefore, the concept of all being called into the life-transforming relationship with God is equally as significant in the *missio Dei* as being sent. Mission only articulated as sending limits the holistic perspective of the *missio Dei* and unintentionally leads to the assumption that mission is simply human or God’s activity directed towards the world.

Persons and the church participate in the *missio Dei*, in part, that others may hear God’s calling in their life. They are to be a witness. A Christian’s life serves as a means of grace and the church is a corporate embodiment of that relationship. The hinge upon which movement towards God and movement towards the world rests is

the grace of God. The movement towards God and the world is one's participation in the means of grace.

Arguably, God's call on one's life is not a call to a specific task, but inspires, enables, and equips one for full participation in the *missio Dei*. Specific ministries that persons undertake flow out of the desires of the person to serve God and others. The nature of the service, a Wesleyan perspective of personal and social holiness is love made possible through grace.

10.6. One God and One Mission

Missiologists, theologians, and biblical scholars in the twenty-first century are mostly in agreement that the concept of mission in its many ways of being defined or articulated begins with God and is of God. There is an assumption that the triune God is inseparable from the concept of Christian mission. Arguably, if there is only one God, there is only one mission. Persons and the church, as the body of Christ, participate in the one mission, the *missio Dei*.

An assertion of this thesis is that the *missio Dei* is the relationship and the condition thereof between God and those made in God's image. All authority for personal and corporate participation in the *missio Dei* begins with God, and scripture affirms that God is unchanging; therefore, the *missio Dei* is unchanging. Those who are reconciled, those who have heard the call of God upon their life and accepted the loving embrace of God the Father in God the Son through God the Spirit, are sent into the world to be a living witness in the world to the presence, pardon, and power of God.

Arguably, personal or church participation in the *missio Dei*, when framed as 'my mission', 'your mission', 'our mission', or 'missions', unintentionally and implicitly teaches a sense of 'authority or 'ownership' versus faithful participation in what God has done, is doing, and will do in and through and with the church. Said another way, it unintentionally serves to promote the separation of a key Wesleyan resource, the grace of God, from persons and the church's participation in the means of grace. Grace as the movement of God in, through, and with the world is what makes possible the participation of persons and the church, thereby averting the tendency to personal or corporate pride and institutionalism.

A passage of scripture that might be helpful to further illumine this perspective for the Christian is Paul's claim,

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing (Galatians 2:20–21).

Authority for all Christian activity always begins and ends with God. The assumption in using these verses is the understanding that Christ is the fulfilment of the law. Further, the concept of sending, separated from the concept of the calling of God, does make the context of 'missions' plausible. However, by doing so, the church and missiology remain ensnared in a dichotomy: the separation of personal and church activity from the activity of God. If the *missio Dei*, the relationship between God and those made in God's image, begins and ends with God, and the grace of God is what makes this possible, it is reasonable to claim that the church and persons participate in the *missio Dei*. From this principle it is perhaps more appropriate to refer to personal and church participation in the *missio Dei* as ministry or ministries.

Before moving into the means of grace as discipleship it might be helpful to succinctly list the principles that have surfaced, as well as those that are behind and underpin this thesis. There are several key principles in this proposal:

- There is only one mission, the *missio Dei*
- The *missio Dei*, as relationship, is tri-directional between the triune God, person, and neighbour
- The *missio Dei* is as much about being 'called' as it about being 'sent', that is, movement in the life of the Trinity and movement in the world
- Grace is the presence, pardon, and power of God participating in, through, and with the world
- All persons are empowered to participate in the means of grace

- Personal and corporate participation in the means of grace may be framed as dual movement, movement towards God and movement towards others

It appears that all attention, all authority for participation in the *missio Dei* is directed towards and originates with the triune God. The relationship between God and humanity is not only paramount, it is, arguably, the essence of what is being identified as the *missio Dei*. As all authority and source for this relationship begins with God it is reasonable to claim that God provides the channels or opportunities for persons and the church to participate in the relationship for which and for whom they were created. Wesley has identified that personal and corporate participation in the means of grace are the key to growing in personal and social holiness, to be perfected in love.

10.7. Participation in the Means of Grace is Discipleship

Wesley holds in tension personal holiness with social holiness, with the end being Christian perfection. Each person is equipped to participate in God's mission which involves reciprocal movement between God and person to include person with person. The use of the expression 'reciprocal movement', in this sense, is not intended to indicate God and person are equal, only that the condition of being in relationship is predicated on God's movement first, thereby making it possible for persons to participate. Created is not equal to Creator. What is ensured through the activity of God is the inspiring, enabling, and empowering of persons to be restored, reconciled, and renewed in right relationship with God.

From an elemental view, participation reflects relationality between God and humanity. Further, the condition of the relationality is shaped by the movement, grace and the means of grace, between God and person. Arguably, the catholic (universal) church is only unified in, through, and with Jesus Christ, not varying doctrinal perspectives, and serves as the primary and eternal body, as Christ is the head, to reflect the image of God. The church only does so as it grounds all authority for being called and being sent in the triune God and not in the particular nuances of ecclesial polity. In other words, the Trinity is first, thereby shaping the church and

persons to be participants in the *missio Dei*. If the *missio Dei* is not about structures it is about discipleship.

Participation in the means of grace as a ‘way of life’ serves to articulate what it means to be a Christian disciple. Persons and the church participate in the *missio Dei* through participation in the means of grace. The means of grace encapsulate all the marks of faithful activity of Jesus Christ: prayer, fasting, searching and using scripture, and serving the physical and spiritual needs of others, to name a few.

This claim in this thesis that discipleship informs ecclesiology and participation in the means of grace is a way of life is rooted in the understanding that the presence, pardon, and power of the triune God make this possible. A Wesleyan understanding of the works of piety that is all those activities of love that are directed toward God come forth from the communion of love that is God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit toward creation exemplify our worship. This thesis embraces the understanding that ‘worship is above all the act of the Christian community, in which God enables his people, in all their human diversity, to realise that communion with their creator and with each other without which they are not truly human. Worship in the Spirit is truly our worship, but it does not originate in ourselves.’³⁹³

Worship as an act of the community, in a Wesleyan-missiological context encapsulates all forms of prayer, all manners of searching the scriptures by reading, hearing, meditating, and attending the ministry of the word through preaching and exemplifies the community of disciples participating in that part of the *missio Dei* which reflects one side of the dual-movement, movement toward and in the life of the Trinity. Regardless of denominational or ecclesial affiliation all those who claim to be a disciple of Jesus Christ are to participate. Further, and not less than, in accordance with the BCC claim, ‘we believe that the doctrine of the Trinity has important contributions to the life of the world’,³⁹⁴ this thesis has affirmed that the basis for the community of disciples’ movement into the world and their participation in works of mercy begins in the life of the triune God. ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him

³⁹³ The Report of the BCC Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today, *The Forgotten Trinity* (London: The British Council of Churches, 1989), p. 3.

³⁹⁴ The Report of the BCC Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today, *The Forgotten Trinity*, p. 43.

shall not perish but have eternal life' (John 3:16). God calls all and God sends those who have responded to the triune God's call of being restored in holy love that in turn, as disciples they may be a witness to the love of God through the Son in the Spirit as Torrance asserts when he states, 'to hear Christ's call to us in our day to participate through the Spirit in his communion with the Father and his mission from the Father to the world, to create in our day a new humanity of persons who find true fulfilment in other-centred communion and service in the Kingdom of God.'³⁹⁵

Christian discipleship is participation in an ongoing relationship between the triune God and person, and person with person. The church, as the body of Christ, comprised of Christian disciples, is eternal, as Christ is eternal, and exists as a living witness of Jesus Christ. Contexts change, but the essence of the *missio Dei* is unchanging. Christian disciples speak many languages and represent many ethnicities, but the marks or activities of Christian discipleship, rooted in the life of Jesus Christ, are ordinary channels available to all through that which is unchanging, the triune God. Discipleship, made possible through the grace of God, embodies the inseparability of the love of God and the love of neighbour from the Great Commission.

Wesley's attention to the means of grace might be articulated as the use of ordinary channels for the purpose of an extraordinary or supernatural end. For the Christian disciple, a theology of participation in the *missio Dei* may be articulated in three overarching strands that reflect a rhythm of discipleship or a rhythm of mission spirituality: growing in faith in Jesus Christ, sharing through the hope of Jesus Christ, and serving with the love of Jesus Christ. Keeping in mind that Wesley believed that the means of grace were to be used by all persons, including those who had yet to come to the point of confessing faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, prevenient grace enables all to be participants.

The concept of obediential potency that Rahner purported but did not develop from a theological perspective may be a good place to start discussing the means of grace as a rhythm of discipleship for a way of life. The life of Jesus Christ could be characterized as one of obedience. The concept of obedience is rooted throughout the biblical grand narrative. The law of the Old Testament may be said to

³⁹⁵ J.B. Torrance, 'The Doctrine of the Trinity in our contemporary Situation' in A.I.C. Heron (ed), *The Forgotten Trinity* (London: British Council of Churches, 1991), p. 17.

have culminated through Jesus Christ as he took on the propitiation of humanity's sin through his death on the cross – this is a confession of faith; whether one believes and accepts this as truth or not, there is an implication to be made. An implication is that persons may live into and out of the characteristic of obedience as Jesus did in his life and death. As one lives into and out of obedience to God through the means of grace, whether it be understood from the Wesleyan perspective of acts of piety or acts of mercy, or simply movement towards God or others, there is a potency that accompanies the means. Potency might be understood in this sense as the presence, pardon, and power, that which makes faith in God a reality.

It is written, 'for it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that none can boast' (Ephesians 2:8–9). Growing in faith in Jesus Christ is one strand of how one grows in the love of God and neighbour. Grace and the participation in the means of grace make this possible. Grace makes it possible for one to respond in faith: first grace then faith. The proper order then, is grace, then faith, and the means of grace. Or, for the one who has not confessed faith in Jesus Christ, the proper order might be articulated as first grace, which allows for one to submit or be obedient, then obedience, and then the means of grace.

Growing in one's faith in God is proportionate to the direct activity of God's grace and the subsequent activity of one's participation in the means of grace. From a missiological perspective articulating participation in the means of grace as discipleship, growing in faith may be aligned with the Wesleyan emphasis upon the acts of piety, that is, acts directed towards God.

The concepts of 'sharing through the hope of Jesus Christ' and 'serving with the love of Jesus Christ', might, from a Wesleyan perspective, be aligned with acts of mercy, or those movements directed towards others, neighbours. From a missiological perspective articulating participation in the means of grace as discipleship, and by identifying them as two distinct strands, the biblical imperative to evangelize and an emphasis for social justice may be held in tension without denigrating either while affirming the necessity of both.

The communion of the triune God shared the Son with the world through the birth, crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. 'Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see' (Hebrews 11:1). From a point

of confession, Jesus is the hope of the world. Hope for all, for being reconciled, restored, and renewed unto God. Persons and the church participate in the hope of Jesus Christ through sharing the good news, their lives, and their faith stories with others.

Arguably, what is most often identified in popular Christian culture as ‘missions’ are those activities that represent acts of social justice. By identifying the concept of serving with the love of Jesus as a strand of discipleship that denotes those activities that meet the physical and emotional needs, that is, in part, feeding, clothing, sheltering, and visiting the sick and those in prison, there is potential for avoiding one of the three strands of discipleship being labelled as ‘mission’ or ‘missions’ to the exclusion of the other two.

A parallel might be drawn between the claim of Jesus, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’ (John 14:6), and the claim of this thesis that ‘growing in faith in Jesus Christ’, ‘sharing through the hope of Jesus Christ’ and ‘serving with the love of Jesus Christ’ reflects the rhythm of discipleship. Participation in the means of grace is a witness that faith, hope, and love are the way, the truth, and the life for the disciple of Jesus Christ and what it means to participate in the *missio Dei*.

10.8. Conclusion

In what sense does attention to the means of grace become missional? The concept of being missional is best understood through the *missio Dei* lens. Trinitarian theology is an integral part of the *missio Dei* concept. To speak of being missional, one begins with the nature of the triune God. The nature of the triune God, also articulated as the immanent and economic God, is the basis of being missional, the perfect example is Jesus Christ, for those made in God’s image.

To maintain the integrity of the *missio Dei* beginning and ending with God, and being of God, any participation or activity on the part of persons must be grounded in the Trinity. Wesley’s articulation of the doctrine of grace and the emphasis of one’s participation in the means of grace secures the authority for anything identified as being Christian and missional as beginning with the activity of God. The Holy Spirit imputes and imparts grace, and persons respond. Grace always

precedes persons participating in the means of grace and, at the same time, participation in the means of grace enables persons to grow in their love of God and neighbour.

Therefore, the concept of being missional is rooted in God. God is love and the biblical grand narrative affirms that God creates, redeems, and sanctifies with a purpose. The purpose is the relationship between God and humanity. This relationship is only possible through, and inseparable from, the triune God's participation. God's participation may be framed as grace. Personal and church participation in the means of grace is missional as it reflects intentional movement in the transforming love towards God and neighbour.

How does this proposal advance ecclesiology? This proposal advances ecclesiology by illuminating the origins of the Methodist movement through a missiological lens, which is the renewing and making of Christian disciples. Those areas and contexts of Methodists that are growing are those that intentionally emphasize discipleship as a way of life, rather than programmes as a way to church growth.

Wesley battled the polemics of 'formalism' and 'enthusiasm'. In the twenty-first century, arguably, missiology, when integrated with Wesleyan resources, seeks to frame a holistic approach that embraces evangelism, social justice, and spiritual growth. Wesley's attention to discipleship through the means of grace offers insight into how missiology and the twenty-first century church might better follow Christ's example of what it means to love God and neighbour.

It can be argued that church growth happens when the church emphasizes discipleship. Wesley's inseparability of personal and social holiness, participating in acts of piety and mercy, offers twenty-first century ecclesiology a 'way of life' that is grounded in the *missio Dei*.

From a missiological perspective, few would deny that the church is intended to grow. Statistics, strategic planning, and assessing ministry effectiveness are instrumental and important in understanding church growth. However, neither a statistic nor a strategic plan is responsible for enabling a person to become a Christian disciple. Only by grace through faith does one become a disciple.

Based on this proposal, how does one decide what to do? The simple profundity of participation in the means of grace as an understanding of what it

means to participate in the *missio Dei* lies in the persons' and the church's response to God's grace. Christian activity directed towards God and others, in one sense, is uniform to all because it is rooted in the love of God. Specific methods or expressions of participating vary from age to age, culture to culture, and ecclesial bodies to ecclesial bodies. Of utmost importance is attention to the end, that is, the triune God, and not the means. All are called by God. All who answer God's call to enter a life-transforming relationship with the triune God are sent to participate in being a living witness.

A Wesleyan perspective of grace and the means of grace inform the development of a theology of participation in the *missio Dei* that overcomes the repetitive articulations of mission as simply being human action or divine action. Twenty-first century missiology has much to learn from Wesley's attention to the means of grace as a way to hold in constructive tension the inseparability of being and doing. Scholarship is illumined as the *missio Dei* concept is articulated as fully divine yet inseparable from human activity through the Wesleyan notion of co-operant grace.

This thesis points the opportunity for a developed engagement with three movements in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries that have sparked widespread interest and attention for their use of the *missio Dei* in relation to mission practice. The earliest of the three is the Church Growth movement, followed by the Gospel and Our Culture movement, and the most recent is the Emerging Church movement. Each of these movements has offshoots, or para-movements, sometimes under a different name with a slightly nuanced theoretical approach. An example of this is the Missional Church proponents. Typically, they are identified with Gospel and Our Culture but recently there are indications of a developing place in the Emerging Church, at least in part.

Each of the three movements reflect having been influenced by the *missio Dei* concept and each stresses an intentionality for discerning and articulating a theology of participation for the church based on that influence. New questions raised from this thesis and the potential engagement with the contemporary movements are:

- How might Wesleyan resources and Wesleyan scholars contribute invaluable insights that open the door to overcoming the inherited deficiencies confronting missiology and the *missio Dei* in the twenty-first century as articulated through contemporary movements?
- What does a practical vision for engaging the means of grace as one's participation in the *missio Dei* look like for a local congregation or a specific denomination in the Christian church?
- How might this research add to the conversation of the Rethink Church Campaign of the United Methodist Church?

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