Mission as Virtuous Practice: A Theology Of Mission Through the Lens of Virtue Ethics

Michael Niebauer

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MISSION AS VIRTUOUS PRACTICE: A THEOLOGY OF MISSION THROUGH THE LENS OF VIRTUE ETHICS

A Dissertation
Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of the Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Michael Niebauer

December 2019
MISSION AS VIRTUOUS PRACTICE: A THEOLOGY OF MISSION THROUGH THE LENS
OF VIRTUE ETHICS

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ABSTRACT

MISSION AS VIRTUOUS PRACTICE: A THEOLOGY OF MISSION THROUGH THE LENS OF VIRTUE ETHICS

By
Michael Niebauer

December 2019

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Elizabeth Cochran

This work uses theological virtue ethics as a guide both for critiquing various models of Christian mission and for constructing a model of mission that adequately addresses these criticisms. The first section of the dissertation (chapters one, two, and three) is devoted to an assessment of three major models of mission, which I have labeled mission as the *missio Dei*, mission as growth, and mission as dialogue. This assessment generates three recurring issues within the field of missiology that have remained largely unresolved: the problems of distinction, agency, and persuasion. The second half of the dissertation (chapters four, five, and the concluding chapter) involves an elucidation of a model of mission that is grounded in virtue ethics. The thesis proposed is this: *Christian mission is best construed as specific activities (proclamation and gathering) that develop virtue in its practitioners, moving them toward their ultimate goal of partaking in the glory of God.* My conception of mission carries with it three
major goals. First, that it adequately addresses the perpetual problems of distinction, agency, and persuasion elaborated on in the critical section of the dissertation. Second, that such a model is in accordance with the depictions of Christian mission in scripture, particularly the Book of Acts. Third, that this account encourages moral reflection upon the practical activities of missionaries. Chapter four is devoted to a further explanation of these goals and an elucidation of my thesis statement, drawing significantly on the works of Thomas Aquinas and Alasdair MacIntyre. Chapter five involves an examination of the process of Christian conversion and a detailed account of the virtuous missional practice of proclamation. Finally, the concluding chapter situates the virtuous practices of mission within the broader context of a life well-lived.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE OF CONTENTS</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Mission and the Missio Dei</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Mission and Growth</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Mission and Dialogue</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Mission as Virtuous Practice</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: Proclamation</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion: Entering into the Craft of Mission: Tragedy, Tradition, and Telos</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

This dissertation proposes a theology of Christian mission rooted in theological ethics. It will use the tools of theological ethics to critique various conceptions of mission and assess the recurring issues prevalent within the field of missiology, and to construct a theology of mission grounded in virtue.

The genesis of this dissertation begins with my own background in mission and ministry, particularly my fifteen years spent as a church planter in North America. The perpetual challenges faced within this work presented a host of questions regarding missions and the role of the missionary, and I found in the field of missiology that such questions were frequently asked, but inadequately answered. Theological ethics and moral philosophy provide an essential grammar for articulating these critiques and constructing a way forward for mission that more adequately answers these questions. However, this interplay is not one-sided, as the use of theological ethics to discuss mission also provides an opportunity to evaluate key issues within ethics by providing a particular context in which these issues are lived out. For example, an examination of the ways in which a missionary goes about intentionally persuading another to change their worldview, and the ways in which such actions are received, modified, or rejected by the recipient, enables one to see the complex dynamics of human agency at work, revealing the strengths and weaknesses of particular ethical theories of agency.

While this work is based in theological ethics, it is not strictly limited to this field. A broad study of Christian mission necessarily touches on a whole host of topics: the relationship between human mission and Trinitarian missions, Biblical approaches to mission, cross-cultural communication, and the practical activities of missionaries. In order to adequately address these topics as they arise, this dissertation will also draw upon the various fields of study that
undergird these issues. These fields, what we might call minor interdisciplinary partners, are listed here in order of their importance to this study: Communication studies and rhetoric, dogmatics,\(^1\) anthropology, interfaith theology, and management/organizational theory. The selection of these particular partners is twofold: first, in the critical section of the work, I will examine specific construals of mission that are based in part of theories that draw from these fields. In order to adequately critique these models of mission, to ‘cut to their core,’ so to speak, it is thus imperative to engage with their related academic disciplines. Relatedly, my constructive construal of mission and virtue will also touch on topics which can be more fully understood by examining these related fields. The most important application of this methodological approach will be my use of rhetoric and communication in crafting a conception of the missional practice of proclamation.

The risk of such an approach is to craft a dissertation that quickly becomes unwieldy, as each of these disciplines has their own historical trajectories and seemingly interminable debates. In order for this work to fit an appropriate scale and length, I have attempted to engage with these disciplines to address specific issues only when those issues arise in the course of my arguments, using extensive footnotes to engage in some of the broader issues in each of these fields. The use of footnotes in this way is meant to help maintain greater coherence within the work as a whole. In addition, the second section of this dissertation is limited to examining in depth only one of the two missional practices described in chapter four. The focus on proclamation, and not also gathering, is due to the desire for smaller scale, and I believe that a

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\(^1\) Listing dogmatics as an interdisciplinary partner is perhaps creating too great a distinction between this field and theological ethics. For example, one cannot completely extricate the ethics of Karl Barth or Thomas Aquinas from their dogmatic assertions regarding the Trinity and the Incarnation. However, these dogmatic assertions do get discussed on their own apart from ethics, and one can give these issues closer scrutiny while also acknowledging that there will be necessarily implications for human action as a result. Chapters one and four will examine this issue in fuller detail.
discussion of proclamation is sufficient to answering the key issues raised in the critical section of the work.

In the remainder of this introduction I will outline the structure of this dissertation, followed by a brief examination of some of the key terms and thinkers that are discussed extensively throughout this work.

Section I: The Critical Task: Three Models, Three Problems

The first section of this dissertation will examine three models of mission (mission as Missio Dei, mission as growth, and mission as dialogue), in the process generating three perpetual problems within the field of mission. Each of these chapters is devoted first to an examination and critique of one of these models of mission, followed by an extended discussion of one particular problem that emerges through this critique, a problem that remains persistent within the study of Christian mission as a whole. These three issues I have labeled the problems of distinction, agency, and persuasion. These issues, while being highlighted within an analysis of specific models of mission, are not necessarily limited to these models, but in many ways characterize many of the challenges within the study of Christian mission as a whole. In the synopses of each chapter that follows, I will briefly describe these models of mission and their corresponding problems, as well highlight some of the interdisciplinary partners that will aid in this task.

Chapter 1: Mission as Missio Dei and the Problem of Distinction

The first way of construing mission comes out of the field of missiology. It conceives of mission as the participation in and witness to the mission of God (missio Dei). Mission as missio Dei construes election as a call to witness rather than a statement on eternal judgment, and sees mission within a communal context that is beyond simply personal conversion.
While the emergence of *missio Dei* as a preeminent missiological concept has provided a welcome and corrective voice to conceptions of mission that explicitly emphasized the winning of souls and implicitly viewed Western cultural dispersal as intertwined with the Christian message, there remain challenges as a result of its ascendance. A principal challenge is the problem of *distinction*. By placing mission at the heart of theology, there is a danger of mission losing its distinctive character. Mission becomes simply all Christian activity, which makes it difficult to assess both the moral and practical implications of specific missional activities.

The conception of mission as *missio Dei* is grounded in both the field of missiology and dogmatics, particularly the work of Karl Barth. For this reason, the chapter will also serve as an introduction to the field of missiology as a whole and engage in the work and theological reception of Karl Barth, particular his conceptions of mission and agency.

*Chapter 2: Mission as Growth and the Problem of Agency*

Mission as growth construes the goal of mission as the numerical increase in both the number of converts to Christianity and in the numerical attendance of church gatherings. This model addresses the problem of distinction that characterized mission as *missio Dei*. It emphasizes active participation in mission work: the missionary can get better at their job, and such improvement can yield tangible results. However, mission as growth carries with it several weaknesses related to the problem of *agency*. If growth is the ultimate goal, the missionary will subvert ethical claims to the desire to master human behavior with scientific precision; missional growth models attempt to control human behavior in an attempt to maximize numerical success, leaving the morality of missional actions unquestioned. This would appear to rob individuals of their ability to meaningful choose to adhere (or not adhere) to Christianity.
Because adherents to the mission as growth paradigm draw substantially from the social sciences, as well as management and organizational theory, this chapter will also engage in substantial critiques within these specific fields.

Chapter 3: Mission as Dialogue and the Problem of Persuasion

Mission as dialogue attempts to answer the problem of persuasion in mission by characterizing mission as the distinct practice of interreligious dialogue, with the goal simply stated as the knowledge of the other. Here, the ability for individuals to be persuaded of the validity of the Christian message is rejected under the auspices that such persuasion is inherently manipulative. However, such construals of mission deny the intrinsic persuasiveness of ideas, falsely assert a coherence of the self that is incapable of being persuaded, and ignore the multitude of persuasive missional acts present in Holy Scripture. We can characterize these issues as the problem of persuasion. Mission as dialogue ultimately denies the ability of individuals to choose whether to accept, modify, or reject invitations to reassess their current religious and moral worldviews.

Because the mission as dialogue paradigm has been prominent amongst adherents of theologians who hold some form of pluralistic account of religions, and because the focus on dialogue places communication as the central missional activity, this section will draw extensively from the fields of communication and rhetorical studies, as well as engage in some of the debates concerning theologies of religious pluralism.

Section II: The Constructive Task: Mission, Virtue, and the Practice of Proclamation

Chapters four, five, and the concluding chapter construct a theory of mission based upon virtue. The thesis posited is this: Christian mission is best construed as specific activities
(proclamation and gathering) that develop virtue in its practitioners, moving them toward their ultimate goal of partaking in the glory of God. The rest of the dissertation will be spent unpacking this statement. This conception of mission carries with it three major goals: First, that it addresses the aforementioned problems of distinction, agency and persuasion. Second, that it fits with the New Testament accounts of mission, and third, that it enables moral reflection on the practical performance of mission activities. These three goals will be further explained in the beginning of chapter four, and the ends of chapters four and five will summarize the ways these chapters have sufficiently met these goals.

Chapter 4: Mission as Virtuous Practice

Chapter four will be devoted to casting Christian mission in the framework of Aquinas’ moral theology. This will involve first an explanation of Aquinas’ articulation of the relationship between God and creation, human action, and virtue, followed by an explanation of how fitting mission within this framework might solve many of the aforementioned issues surrounding distinction and agency. Within this framework, mission will be construed as two virtuous practices, proclamation and gathering. The next part of chapter four will be devoted to elucidating Alasdair MacIntyre’s concept of a virtuous practice and demonstrating how conceiving of proclamation and gathering as virtuous practices best addresses the aforementioned issues in Christian mission.

Chapter 5: The Practice of Proclamation

Chapter five will be devoted to examining the missional practice of proclamation. The goal of this chapter is to show how this conception of proclamation as a virtuous practice coheres with MacIntyre’s conception of a practice, how it helps to explain the actual practices of
Christian proclamation in the Book of Acts, and how it enables moral and practical reflection on the task of proclamation itself. Because the proximate goal of proclamation is conversion, and because the problem of persuasion is a significant issue in the study of Christian mission, an extended treatment of Christian conversion is also offered at the beginning of this chapter.

Concluding Chapter: Entering into the Craft of Mission: Tragedy, Tradition, and Telos

The concluding chapter will attempt to cover briefly several topics that, because of the limited nature of this dissertation, a fuller account of which is not appropriate. First, it will attempt to place the practices of proclamation within the overall practice of mission itself. This will involve an examination of the dynamics between those who are teachers of mission and those that wish to become experts in the practice of mission. It will also discuss how the practice of mission may be performed by both vocational missionaries as well as those who do not practice mission as a career.

Lastly, the concluding chapter will attempt to place the practices of mission within the overall context of a life-lived well. The practice of mission is one of numerous practices that are open to the Christian, and part of living a life holy and pleasing to God is learning how to order a whole host of these practices. This includes the possibility of tragedy: that practitioners of mission may have points in their life where the conflicting duties of the Christian—to church, to family, to those in need—necessitate a scaling back of the practice of mission.

Key Terms and Figures

Alasdair MacIntyre

A central figure in this dissertation, both in the critical and constructive sections, is the contemporary Scottish Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre. Early on in his career, MacIntyre was
highly influenced by Karl Marx, in particular Marx’s critique of liberalism as an ideology that masks the alienating and oppressive tendencies that underly its notion of freedom. Embedded in his Marxist critique of liberal morality is its reification of individual choice, which MacIntyre believes leads to moral arbitrariness. Such reification of the individual is in part the cause of the alienation and isolation of humanity in the modern era. While MacIntyre would continue to hold to many of these critiques of modernity throughout his career, he was unable to find in Marxism any remedy to these issues, seeing it ultimately as an ideology that is indebted to modern liberalism and shares its moral impoverishment. The subsequent phase of MacIntyre’s work has been devoted to two related projects: a broad scale critique of modern moral philosophy and a recovery of traditional moral philosophy as articulated primarily by Aristotle and, in his later works, Thomas Aquinas.

MacIntyre’s seminal work After Virtue is devoted to charting the breakdown of moral inquiry that ensued as a result of the Enlightenment project. According to MacIntyre, traditional moral philosophy as articulated by Aristotle was comprised of three parts: “untutored human nature, man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-telos and the moral precepts which enable him to pass from one state to the other.” Here, to describe a human being is at the same time to describe what it means for a human being to be good, and morality becomes a way of talking

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2 Alasdair C. MacIntyre, "Notes from the Moral Wilderness," in Alasdair Macintyre's Engagement with Marxism: Selected Writings 1953-1974, ed. Paul Blackledge and Neil Davidson (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 47. It should be noted in this essay that MacIntyre acknowledges that Marxism, particularly its Stalinist incarnation, was incapable of getting beyond this arbitrariness. At this point in his career, MacIntyre believes that a Marxist solution will come through the progress of history. Ultimately, MacIntyre came to believe that such a solution would come not through Marx but Aristotle.

3 After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, Second ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), x. MacIntyre would continue to articulate an indebtedness to Marx in his later career, particularly in Marx’s assertion that morality cannot be completely separated from its social embodiment in communities. What he rejects is that morality can only be limited to its socially embodiment. Instead, MacIntyre believes that the engagement in virtuous practices on a local level can provide the context “within which moral thinking is put to the relevant practical tests and achieves objectivity.” “The Theses on Feuerbach,” in The Macintyre Reader, ed. Kelvin Knight (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 233.

4 After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, 54.
about the process through which a human being might become good. The nature of a person and their purpose are integrally linked. MacIntyre uses the example of a watch to stress this point. What a watch is is intertwined with its function: if one states that their timepiece is horribly inaccurate and continually breaks, then what they are describing is a ‘bad watch.’ Morality is thus intertwined with both an understanding of human nature and some definition of telos, or goal of human beings. We call someone ‘good’ as they move toward this end.

The Enlightenment ushered in the rejection of a key component of traditional morality, the notion of telos, which comes about through a rejection both of Aristotelian philosophy and Christian theology. What is left is a concept of morality that is fragmented, with human nature on one side, moral precepts on the other, and nothing to hold both together. The quest of the Enlightenment was thus an attempt to discover a rationally coherent morality that is grounded solely in human nature. However, because of its rejection of telos, this project was bound to fail, since there exists no impersonal criteria for morality that can be agreed upon apart from some definition of the good or end of human beings. The history of the great Enlightenment figures can be conceived of as a doomed quest for discovering this impersonal criteria. The failure of this project leads to what MacIntyre calls emotivism: the projection of moral beliefs that contain only the guise of rationality. Human beings make moral claims that are simply evaluative utterances that “can in the end have no point or use but the expression of my own feelings or attitudes and the transformation of the feelings and attitudes of others.” MacIntyre affirms the critique of Nietzsche of Enlightenment morality as simply the will to power masked as rationality.

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5 Ibid., 57-58.
6 Ibid., 54.
7 Ibid., 55.
8 Ibid., 24.
What is important for the early chapters of this dissertation, which lay out my critiques of missiology, is the connection between MacIntyre’s critique of Enlightenment morality and his description of the emergence of the bureaucratic manager as a product of this milieu. The manager is a character that claims to possess a factual knowledge of human social behavior that is morally neutral and stripped of any conception of the good of human beings. Social behavior can thus be understood and predicted in a way that mirrors that of the natural sciences. The breakdown in moral philosophy and the emergence of the bureaucratic manager have corollaries within Christian mission, particularly within the conception of mission as church growth. As such, a fuller discussion of these points will be taken up in chapter two.

In order to address the breakdown in morality, MacIntyre advocates for a recovery of traditional morality through a conception of virtue rooted in part on an Aristotelian notion of telos. MacIntyre’s notion of virtue is predicated upon his conception of a virtuous practice, which he describes as

Any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definite of, that form of activity...  

The successful performance of such activities requires the cultivation of virtues, which in turn promote growth towards one’s ultimate telos. This definition of a virtuous practice will be further explored in chapter four.

MacIntyre uses this conception of a practice as a building block for his overall conception of virtue. Two issues emerge as a result of this definition of a practice. First, it necessarily requires the existence of a community. A community is needed to define what separates a good

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9 Ibid., 77.  
10 Ibid., 187.
from poor exercise of such practices, and a community of teachers are needed to help train novices in the development of these practices. Thus there is an intrinsically social character to MacIntyre’s conception of virtue. Second, since human life consists of a range of practices, some understanding of human life taken as a whole is required to balance and order these practices. What is needed is some definition of the **telos**, the ultimate good, of human life, which acts as a guide for discerning between the various practices and roles one partakes in throughout their existence. This opens up the possibility of tragedy, that the individual must choose between competing goods in acceptance of the fact that a life well-lived is a life that is also finite, and an ordering of goods is necessary.

While MacIntyre keeps this basic structure throughout his later works, he does modify it in significant ways after the publication of *After Virtue*. In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre rejects a notion of *telos* that is rooted in metaphysical biology. He instead attempts to develop a notion of teleology that is socially constructed.\(^{11}\) This socially constructed teleology was considered problematic by many, as it did not address the problem of moral arbitrariness that MacIntyre identified with modern morality, but instead merely shifted the cause of this arbitrariness from the individual to the community. MacIntyre himself acknowledged this flaw, stating in the prologue to the third edition of *After Virtue* that “an account of the human good purely in social terms…was bound to be inadequate until I had provided it with a metaphysical grounding. It is only because human beings have an end towards which they are directed by reason of their specific nature, that practices, traditions, and the like are able to function as they do.”\(^{12}\)

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\(^{11}\) Ibid., 197.

This change in MacIntyre’s account of virtue was brought about not through a return to the metaphysical biology of Aristotle, which he believes is still problematic, but through the embracing of a Thomistic account of the good.\(^\text{13}\) This is reflected in MacIntyre’s self-assertion that he became a Thomist (or a Thomistic Aristotelean) after writing *After Virtue*, and the influence of Aquinas on his work can be seen more fully in *Three Rival Versions* and *Dependent Rational Animals*.

MacIntyre’s most recent work, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, features his most well-developed and succinct summation of what he calls his Thomistic Aristotelianism. In this work, MacIntyre acknowledges that an understanding of human flourishing is inherent in human beings as a species, a trait that they share with nonhuman animals.\(^\text{14}\) Human beings develop morally through the engagement in practices, learning in the process how to order their desires based upon a conception of the good, first as the good for one’s self, then for the good as such.\(^\text{15}\) Thus it is through the social engagement in practices that the individual learns to articulate the final, or ultimate good:

> What needs to be considered first is the place that the conception of a final end, of an ultimate human good, has in the life of practice. For it is only in making practical judgements and choices, through the exercise of the virtues, that each of us discovers in our lives a certain kind of directedness toward a final end that is our own, toward perfecting and completing the lives that are our own, by living out what in terms of our particular abilities and circumstances we judge to be the best possible life for us.\(^\text{16}\)

That final end is for MacIntyre an unqualified good, the standard by which all other goods must be ordered. This leads the reflective individual towards some notion of God as just

\(^{13}\) Ibid.


\(^{15}\) Ibid., 37.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 54.
such final good that is above all other goods. Thus “the final end of human activity is inescapably theological, that the nature of her practical reasoning and of the practical reasoning of those in whose company she deliberates has from the outset committed her and them to a shared belief in God, to a belief that, if there is nothing beyond the finite, there is no final end.”  

_Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity_ can be seen as an extension and summation of the work begun in _After Virtue_. It extends the concept of a virtuous practice and its relationship to morality both backwards and forwards. Backwards, in that it grounds such practices in human biology, not merely in social performance. Forwards, in that it sees the final end of human beings as extending beyond human life, residing instead in some form of a relationship with God.  

Section II of this dissertation will draw upon all of these works, particularly in the adaptation of MacIntyre’s notion of a virtuous practice. In so doing I assume the same coherence between these texts as MacIntyre iterates in the third edition prologue, and consider _Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity_ to be the more definitive work concerning MacIntyre’s account of virtue.

_Thomas Aquinas_

While I use MacIntyre’s notion of a practice extensively, my account of virtue is more directly indebted to Thomas Aquinas’s _Summa Theologica_. Aquinas is particularly important in grounding my concept of mission in chapter four. His accounts of nature, grace and agency, his understanding of the relationship between God and creation, and his articulation of the proper ways to speak both of God and humanity, are introduced in order to address the problems of distinction and human agency in articulations of mission. Chapter four will thus provide a more

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17 Ibid., 55.
18 Ibid., 57.
extended discussion of dimensions of Thomas Aquinas’ moral theology important to my constructive argument.

A claim to address Aquinas’ moral theology demands further clarification, given the broad swath of seemingly incompatible interpretations (and schools of interpretation) of Aquinas. My use of particular scholars’ interpretations of Aquinas—D. Stephen Long, Gilles Emery, Charles Pinches, Frederick Bauerschmidt, Alasdair McIntyre, Herbert McCabe and Jean Porter—already places this work within a particular tradition of interpretation, even as there is not complete consensus among these scholars on every aspect of Aquinas’ work. Frederick Bauerschmidt makes two remarks on his own interpretation of Aquinas that demonstrate why Aquinas is an essential conversation partner for my work. First, that “Thomas is a theologian through and through.”19 Thomas writes from the vantage point of the Christian faith, and takes the texts of the Bible to be authoritative. Although Aquinas does utilize certain non-Christian philosophers, and believes that some knowledge can be grasped apart from divine revelation, “he never tries to construct a system of thought out of those things, since he sees them as radically inadequate to true human flourishing.”20 This dissertation takes a similar position to the works of

20 Ibid. This assertion is clearer in the works of the aforementioned scholars that are written explicitly as works of theology. In chapter one of The Perfectly Simple Triune God, for instance, Long states that for Aquinas, “sacred doctrine is necessary for any philosophical presentation of God, including what can be known by reason.” D. Stephen Long, The Perfectly Simple Triune God: Aquinas and His Legacy (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016), 9. However, even in the later work of MacIntyre, though written to explicitly philosophical audiences, adopts this reading of Aquinas. The key passage is in page 140 of Three Rival Versions: “It is only the kind of knowledge which faith provides, the kind of expectation which hope provides, and the capacity for friendship with other human beings and with God which is the outcome of charity which can provide the other virtues with what they need to become genuine excellences…The self-revelation of God in the event of the scriptural history and the gratuitous grace through which that revelation is appropriated…enable such individuals to recognize also that prudence, justice, temperateness, and courage are genuine virtues, that the apprehension of the natural law was not illusory, and that the moral life up to this point requires to be corrected in order to be completed but not displaced.” Alasdair C. MacIntyre, Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 140.
Aquinas: the opening affirmations on sacred doctrine in the first question of the *Summa* should be taken as a foundation and guide for the rest of the *Summa*.\(^{21}\)

A related point is also made by Bauerschmidt concerning an interpretation of Aquinas: that while Aquinas draws extensively on the works of Aristotle, he is not an Aristotelian. Aquinas draws on an extensive number of sources, both Christian and non-Christian, and his commitment to scripture and his embeddedness in the Christian tradition means that he is more than willing to reject or modify Aristotle whenever Aristotle conflicts with divine revelation. As stated above, MacIntyre makes a similar statement implicitly when he describes his movement from Aristotelianism to Thomism. What is embraced by MacIntyre is the metaphysical biology of Aquinas, which differs substantially from that of Aristotle.

These two assertions regarding the interpretation of Aquinas have the added importance of allowing Aquinas to be more thoroughly appropriated by Protestants. Protestant thought, dating as far back as Luther, has a history of interpreting Aquinas as one who is influenced more by Aristotle and less by scripture. Though speaking directly against Gabriel Biel, Luther tended to presume continuity between Aquinas and all other scholastics. David Steinmetz argues that, in so doing, Luther tends to read Aquinas through the lens of Biel, misconstruing Aquinas as more Pelagian and less Augustinian than he was.\(^{22}\) While much of Protestant scholarship followed suit in diminishing the importance of Aquinas, the work of Stanley Hauerwas in the late twentieth century helped to spark a revival of the work of Aquinas in Protestant thought. Two noted interpreters of Aquinas in this work—D. Stephen Long and Frederick Bauerschmidt—were both students of Hauerwas. This dissertation stands within this particular stream of Thomistic

\(^{21}\) Long, 8.

\(^{22}\) David Curtis Steinmetz, *Luther in Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 55.
interpretation. As a Protestant, my interpretation of Aquinas affirms as well a commitment to scripture as foundational for theological and philosophical investigation. (see chapter four).

**Ethics**

Part of the goal of the ensuing critique section of this dissertation is to demonstrate that ethics is a more appropriate field through which to examine Christian mission. While chapter four will take up this apologia more thoroughly, a few preliminary remarks are in order.

My use of the term ethics in this work is different from a way in which ethics is often construed, which is as simply the schema for demarcating right actions from wrong ones. While the discernment of right from wrong action is a part of ethics, I would argue that this is not its primary purpose. Instead, I take my cues from a definition of ethics outlined by Herbert McCabe in *What is Ethics All About*: that ethics is “the quest of less and less trivial modes of human relatedness.”

For McCabe, in the pursuit of ethics, one probes the depths of human behavior as communication in search of its deeper significance. In doing so, one can “enjoy life more by responding to it more sensitively.” Such a pursuit will involve the discerning of right from wrong, and it will include the demarcation of certain activities as more trivial than others. McCabe draws a parallel between ethics and literary criticism. The point of criticism is not simply to separate good poetry from poetry, but rather to probe the significance of poetry. Such a pursuit done well will identify poetry that is not very significant (bad poetry), and those poems that, because they are exquisite, lend themselves to inexhaustible analysis.

To this end, the point of my critical chapters is not to identify three bad forms of mission, paving the way for one good conception of mission. Rather, it is to probe the depths of the

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24 Ibid., 95.
significance of mission, and search for forms of mission that are more and more significant. Such probing is inexhaustible, and as such this dissertation makes no claims to be the final word on mission.

This dissertation is not only a work of ethics, but specifically a work of theological ethics, a term that I will use synonymously with Christian ethics and Christian Moral Theology. That this is a work of theological ethics can be inferred based upon the aforementioned discussion concerning the authority of Holy Scripture and the discussion of Aquinas’ approach to Aristotle. To state that scripture is authoritative is already to describe some of the limits of moral inquiry. While Christian ethics can be used as both a critical and constructive tool, this dissertation presumes that it cannot be used to contradict scripture. As with Aristotle, the work of various philosophers, both Christian and otherwise, can be used to help better understand and formulate Christian doctrine, but cannot supplant it. As D. Stephen Long states, there can be both a “Christian assessment of ethics and an ethical assessment of Christianity,”25 yet the ‘scandal of particularity’ of the Incarnation of Christ and the assertion that the church is the chosen people of God “assumes that we do not begin by thinking of Christianity in terms of what we know of ethics, but that we think of ethics in terms of what we know of Christianity.”26 As will be addressed in chapter four, one of the goals for my conception of mission is that it fits with the portrayal of mission as evidenced in scripture, and thus what is required is a further elaboration of the relationship between scripture and ethics.

26 Ibid., 11-12.
Chapter 1: Mission and the Missio Dei

Introduction

The field of missiology has been dominated by two major perspectives rooted in different methodologies. At the one end of the spectrum, biblical and dogmatic theology provide a starting point for an understanding of the mission of God as it is revealed in history, with the hope that such an understanding will help the church interpret its task as intrinsically caught up in this divine activity. At the other end, anthropology and history provide a starting point to help better comprehend the ways in which the Christian message is made intelligible in new contexts. The establishment of these approaches as complementary partners within missiology is well justified. As Bevans and Schroeder famously summarize, “Christian mission…must preserve, defend, and proclaim the constants of the church’s traditions; at the same time it must respond creatively and boldly to the contexts in which it finds itself.”¹ Biblical and dogmatic theology has helped better understand the constants of mission, anthropology and history the contexts. These partnerships have borne much fruit, from David Bosch’s dogmatic treatise Transforming Mission,² to Lamin Sanneh’s Translating the Message.³

Despite these achievements, significant gaps and tensions remain between these two perspectives, what Darrell Guder describes as tensions “between Theo- and Christocentric approaches on the one hand and the anthropocentric cluster of approaches on the other.”⁴ In what follows I will trace the development of missiology by describing the emergence of the term missio Dei as the term par excellence of dogmatic mission theology, and by identifying two of

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⁴ Darrell L. Guder, Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 35.
the concerns raised by this emergence, with an ensuing section focusing specifically on the problem of distinction. In the following two chapters, I will proceed to show how two anthropologic approaches to mission (mission as growth and mission as dialogue) address the flaws in *missio Dei* theology, but also present a host of other issues. The critiques of these three major approaches to mission will pave the way for my assertion that what is missing in mission theology today is an account of specific acts of mission and the role of the missionary as moral agent. This dissertation develops such an account in chapters four and five by drawing on the discipline of theological ethics as a basis for construing Christian mission as a virtuous practice.

**Historical Background**

Darrell Guder describes the emergence of what he calls “the *missio Dei* consensus” as a distinct shift in mission studies out of practical theology and into the very heart of dogmatics. Prior to its emergence in the 20th century, the term mission either referred in a very limited way to the movements within the triune God (Trinitarian Missions)\(^5\), or to practical issues faced by missionaries. Thus mission studies focused primarily on evangelistic methods and catechetical best practices, with anthropology being the primary interdisciplinary partner: missiology was primarily the Christian attempt to understand other cultures to better proclaim the Gospel.\(^6\) As such, there was little interplay between dogmatic theology and mission: the former described

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\(^5\) Gilles Emery summarizes a traditional understanding of Trinitarian Missions: God has revealed God’s self as Trinitarian through the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and this sending invites Christians to enter into Trinitarian faith. This sending is a concrete revelation in history, and reveals the very person of God. This ensures that the source of our understanding remains dependent upon the gift of God, and that such understanding is meant to bring us into intimacy with God. Hence the mission of God both reveals God as Trinitarian and enables salvation for humankind. See Gilles Emery, _The Trinity: An Introduction to Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God_ (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011).

\(^6\) The dominance of anthropology in mission theology during the mid-twentieth century is perhaps best evidenced by the popularity of the journal *Popular Anthropology*, which was renamed as *Missiology* in 1973.
theory, the latter practice. This began to change primarily through the work of Karl Barth, whose arguments regarding the intrinsic missionary nature of the church sparked a movement towards situating mission within the context of biblical and dogmatic theology. For Barth, the calling of the individual to Jesus Christ intrinsically unites them to both Jesus Christ and all called by Christ. To be a Christian is to witness to the salvific activity of Jesus Christ and to be united to all those who do the same:

But in his ministry of witness—and it is this essentially which makes him a Christian—he is from the very outset, by his very ordination to it, united not only with some or many, but—whether or not he knows them and their particular situation—with all those who are charged with his ministry. He is united to them by the simple fact that, since there is only one work as the Word of God and only one Mediator between God and man self-declared in His activity, the content of his witness cannot be other than that of theirs, nor the content of theirs other than that of his.

Thus, for Barth, bearing witness to Christ is not a separate or additional activity for the Christian, but is intrinsically part of one’s existence. As the Church is defined as the people united in their witnessing to the triune, salvific mission of God, part of the individual life of the Christian includes such witnessing actions. The term missio Dei, though not mentioned by Barth, began to connote the understanding of the mission of the church as an extension of the triune mission of God and as a witness to God’s salvific activity in human history.

8 Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics Volume IV, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1961), 682-83.
9 John Webster sees this rooted in the Barth’s description of the prophetic office of Jesus. The church does not establish Jesus Christ on earth, but shares in the prophetic office of Jesus by pointing to his already sufficient salvific work. The community of the church is not defined principally by its activity, but by its prophetic pointing to Jesus: “Perhaps the most radical extension of what Barth is arguing concerns the understanding of the mission of the church. In essence, speaking of Jesus as prophet shifts the primary locus of activity away from the community of believers on to Jesus himself, who is the agent of his own realization. Thereby the church is redefined as a community whose task is not that of making effective Jesus’ reality but of attesting its inherent effectiveness.” John Webster, Barth (London: Continuum, 2000), 135.
The apex of the emergence of the term *missio Dei* comes in David Bosch’s 1991 work *Transforming Mission*, which remains arguably the most influential missiological text in the past 50 years. Bosch traces the history of Christian mission and demonstrates how theories of mission have changed based on the particular historical epoch they inhabited. Bosch sees with the end of the Enlightenment era the advent of a postmodern era that must also usher in a new way of thinking of mission. The concept of *missio Dei* is key in the development of this postmodern missiological paradigm. Bosch characterizes the term *missio Dei*, drawing upon the work of Johannes Aagard, as follows: “in the new image mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God…Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission…to participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God’s love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending of love.”

**Key Aspects of the Mission as Missio Dei Model**

There are three key aspects to the conception of mission as *missio Dei* that are particularly pertinent for this study. First, the movement places mission at the heart of Christian theology. By folding the very nature of the church into the mission of God, mission becomes the lens through which the church should perform its theological task. The church’s mission is

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directly related to the Triune missions. Oborji summarizes this development, which is rooted in Barth:

Mission was to be understood in the context of the Trinitarian theology’s classical doctrine of the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Holy Spirit. Barth correctly expanded this to include the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.\(^{13}\)

If theology’s goal is to aid the church in deepening its understanding of God, and if the church is defined by its witness to God’s mission, then theology must flow out of the church’s participation in God’s missional activity. Bosch summarizes the implications of this for missiology:

Just as the church ceases to be church if it is not missionary, theology ceases to be theology if it loses its missionary character. The crucial question, then, is not simply or only or largely what church is or what mission is, it is also what theology is and is about. We are in need of a missiological agenda for theology rather than just a theological agenda for mission; for theology, rightly understood, has no reason to exist other than critically to accompany the *missio Dei*.\(^{14}\)

The second aspect is related to this first point. Since mission is so wrapped up in the Trinitarian missions, mission is ultimately the prerogative of God. Mission is not limited to the activities of the church, and even more so not limited to specific missionaries and missionary agencies. Mission is the *activity of God*,\(^{15}\) and the church’s mission is simply one of “service to the reign of God’s universal *shalom*.\(^{16}\)” Such assertions lead to both a broadening of the activities that constitute mission and an emphasis on history as the arena through which God’s mission is accomplished. God is the source of mission, and his redemptive activity is above and beyond


\(^{15}\) Oborji, 134.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 136.
what is done by the church and by missionaries. The role of the church is to witness to this redemption and point to a hope in the future eschaton and the establishment of God’s kingdom.

Third, an understanding of the church as witness to the *missio Dei* presented a welcome critique of the paternalistic aspects of the missionary past. The emphasis on God’s salvific mission and the characterization of the church as a witness to, rather than creator of, this salvation presented a corrective voice to missionary work that explicitly emphasized the winning of souls and implicitly viewed Western cultural dispersal as intertwined with the Christian message.\(^\text{17}\) The *missio Dei* consensus construes election as a call to witness rather than a statement on eternal judgment, and sees mission within a communal context that is beyond simply personal conversion. Guder thus sees *missio Dei* as a massive critique of Western Christendom:

> In its [Western Christendom’s] tendency to reduce the gospel to individual salvation, it fails to confess the fullness of the message of the inbreaking reign of God in Jesus Christ. In its tendency to make the church into the institution that administers that individual salvation, it fails to confess the fullness of the church’s vocation to be, do, and say the witness to that reign of God breaking in now in Jesus Christ.\(^\text{18}\)

We can trace in all three of these aspects a common thread of expansion. Mission has grown out of the confines of practical theology, it has been expanded to include the very activity of God,

\(^{17}\) It should be noted that critiques of pre-twentieth century missionary activities codified under the auspices of “Western Christendom,” are admittedly overly broad. The relationships between missionaries and colonial governments, for instance, runs the spectrum from overt collusion to overt hostility. In regards to cultural dispersal, perhaps the most charitable read on history is that the conflation of Western cultural values with the Gospel was not a conscious decision on the part of many missionaries, but appeared as an unnecessary and harmful conflation only in hindsight. See Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 49-71. Guder is right, however, in pointing to moments throughout the history of Christian mission where specific missional practices unduly tied conversion to Christianity with conversion to Western culture. One of the most glaring examples would be the practice of sending African leaders to Europe in order to mold them into European Christians. Such leaders were then sent back to Africa in order to become ecclesiastical, and sometimes political leaders. Scott Sunquist charts how such a practice became common for various European missions, both Roman Catholic and Protestant. See Scott W. Sunquist, *Understanding Christian Mission: Participation in Suffering and Glory* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2013), 52.

\(^{18}\) Guder, 24.
and as such it enables a critique of previous theologies of the mission that narrowly focused on
the evangelistic activities of certain churches or individuals.

**A Critical Evaluation of Mission as Missio Dei**

While the emergence of *missio Dei* as a preeminent missiological concept has provided a
welcome and corrective voice, there remain challenges as a result of its ascendance. In many
ways these challenges reflect the perpetual difficulties within the study and practice of mission as
a whole. The first critiques center on the ways in which the *missio Dei* consensus gives rise to a
problematic account of moral agency in human beings. This account reflects greater challenges
emerging from the relationship between nature and grace in Barth’s thought. These issues then
lead to perhaps the biggest problem with *missio Dei*, which I identify as the problem of
distinction. As such the problem of distinction will be treated in extended detail in a separate
section.

The conception of missio as *missio Dei* makes human agency problematic in two ways.
First, it renders the exercise of agency by those engaged in missionary activity superfluous vis-à-
vis the missionary the activity of God. Second, it denies the ability of the recipients of
missionary endeavors to exercise their agency in rejecting the claims of their interlocutors. What
follows will be a treatment of both of these issues, showing how they are in part predicated on
Karl Barth’s view of nature and grace.

**Diminished Missionary Agency**

A conception of mission as participation in the *missio Dei* emphasizes the missional
activity of the triune God in a manner that risks minimizing the individual agency of the
missionary and the church as a human institution. To some degree, the reduced emphasis on
human agency within the missio Dei consensus was intentional—a welcome corrective to the perceived excesses of Western approaches to mission collectively labeled under the banner of Christendom. Here, the emphasis on personal and individual conversion, and the church as the sole bearer and guarantor of salvation seemed to deny the action of God in bringing about the reconciliation of the world, as well as render missionaries both the agents of salvation and the final judge over who is or who isn’t saved. In challenging this discourse, those advocating for mission as the missio Dei argued that election is not primarily about divining foreknowledge of St. Peter’s list, but instead about the call placed on those elected to witness to the work of God in Christ. As Guder puts it, this “engenders great modesty with regard to the claims that the Christian community makes about itself, but at the same time deep conviction about the utter reliability of God’s mighty acts and certain promises.”

While such a corrective is certainly welcome, it can easily be construed in such a way as to discount human effort, and the actual work of the missionary. Such a critique is in many ways a manifestation of a broader tension in Christian theology between human agency and divine grace. Jennifer Herdt sees this tension displayed in the modern anxiety over the development of virtue. The worry, rooted in Augustine but brought to a fever pitch by Luther, is that “ordinary

19 Ibid., 25.
20 The relationship between human agency and divine grace is limited in this paper to its development within theories of virtue and its effects on conceptions of mission. While a larger treatment is outside of the scope of this dissertation, I would concur with David Bentley Hart in his assertion that divine, transcendent sovereignty is different from the immanent freedom existent in creation: “When the transcendent causality of the creator God has been confused with the immanent web of causation that constitutes the world of our experiences, it becomes impossible to imagine that what God wills might not be immediately convertible with what occurs in time; and thus both the authority of Scripture and the justice of God must fall before the inexorable logic of absolute divine sovereignty.” David Bentley Hart, The Doors of the Sea: Where Was God in the Tsunami? (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 90.
21 William Danaher, for instance, describes how Jonathan Edwards’ theory of virtue runs counter to that of Aristotle or Aquinas in his suspicion of habituation. There are those who have the Holy Spirit and possess true virtue, and those who, though they may exhibit justice and generosity, possess only ‘seeming virtues.’ According to Danaher, Edwards’ virtue is a settled habit of the soul. It is already possessed internally in the person, and not something that can be acquired through external actions: “the affections and dispositions within the soul determine the moral content of a person’s character, regardless of the specific choices or actions that a person takes…Edwards believes it
habituation in virtue simply entrenches the vices of pride and self-love.” For Luther, the habitual following of God’s commandments does not promote virtue, but instead reveals our ever-present sinfulness and need of God’s redemption: “The commandments show us what we ought to do but do not give us the power to do it. They are intended to teach man to know himself, that through them he may recognize his inability to do good and may despair of his own ability.” Habituation does not empower us to further obedience, but rather reveals our continual need for dependence on God’s grace.

A conception of mission that emphasizes God as principal actor is meant to counter the prideful habituation of professional missionaries, a pride that often manifested itself in collusion with Western colonialism and the promulgation of Western civilization as essential to Christianity. Mission became construed as a practical task, separate from theology and left to a handful of professional missionaries. The conception of mission as primarily practical led to the leveraging of colonial advantages for pragmatic missionary gains, as evidenced in the 1842 treaty that ended the First Opium War, in which China was “forced open for trade and for missionaries by foreign gunships.” A mission separated from God and stripped of theological depth also led to the undue conflation of Western civilization as Christianity, as in the case of missionaries shipping African church leaders back to Europe to be properly enculturated in

makes as much sense to try to learn virtue through thoughtful cultivation of practical intellect as it does to throw a stone repeatedly upward in the hope of teaching it to fly.” William J. Danaher, The Trinitarian Ethics of Jonathan Edwards (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 143.


24 Sunquist, 94. It is perhaps best to view the interplay between missionaries and Western colonialism under this pragmatic lens. Missionaries would leverage colonial power whenever it suited their needs, but would often circumvent political channels if such channels restricted access to foreign countries. “It is tempting, therefore, to see missionary work as riding on the coattails of Western colonialism. While missionaries are not imperialists, they are often pragmatists. When it seemed difficult to move farther, to go to new regions, or to reach new peoples, missionaries would find a way.” Ibid., 95.
Christian (i.e. European) values before returning to lead, or the insistence of British missionaries on pairing mission work with a proper British education.

What we see in these critiques of mission’s colonial past a prideful conflation of the missionary’s effort with God’s effort. Missionaries developed habits aimed at the efficient conversion of the heathens in the belief that they were learning to further God’s mission. Instead, these habits were entrenching a prideful confidence in the superiority of Western culture over its colonies. What the characterization of mission as missio Dei provides is a reemphasis on the preeminence of divine agency—mission is not ultimately the work of human hands, but fundamentally the work of a God who is missional. The problem is that such an over-corrective leaves little room for real participation amongst human beings in the missionary effort. If mission is everything, and mission is the work of God, then what is left for the missionary to do?

Issues regarding human agency that result from a codification of mission as missio Dei are in part due to its heavy reliance on the dogmatic theology of Karl Barth. The minimization of human agency in the missio Dei consensus reflects the problematic status of human agency within Barth’s theology, and for this reason it is important to briefly trace the development of agency within Barth’s thought. Barth’s theological trajectory was defined in large part by his struggle to create space for a genuine human knowledge of God that does not render God an idolatrous projection of the human mind. This struggle leads Barth away from a sharp dichotomy between God and humankind (which renders knowledge of God nearly impossible), to a grounding of human knowledge solely in the reconciliatory work of Jesus Christ.

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25 Ibid., 52. See footnote above.
28 While Barthian scholars acknowledge a shift in Barth’s theology away from the dialectics of Commentary on Romans and towards a knowledge of God grounded in the doctrine of reconciliation, there is significant
reconciliation is already won for humankind prior to their existence, and establishes the ground through which any and all knowledge of God might be found.

It is not that He [God] first wills and works the being of the world and man, and then ordains it for salvation. But God creates, preserves and over-rules man for this prior end and with this prior purpose, that there may be a being distinct from Himself ordained for salvation, for perfect being, for participation in his own being.\textsuperscript{29}

In his desire to create a genuine space for human knowledge of God, Barth grounds human participation in the prior work of Jesus Christ. The reconciliation of man to God is intrinsic to Christ’s existence—humankind is created both sinful and redeemed.\textsuperscript{30} Such an assertion has a tremendous impact on a notion of human agency, as it would appear to render human participation in actual history as little more than a façade. Such suspicions are in part confirmed by Barth’s implicit universalism—since Christ is the reconciler of all of humankind by His very nature, all of humankind will eventually be saved:

On the basis of the eternal will of God we have to think of every human being, even the oddest, most villainous or miserable, as one to whom Jesus Christ is Brother and God is Father; and we have to deal with him on this assumption. If the other person knows that already, then we have to strengthen him in the knowledge. If he does not know it yet or no longer knows it, our business is to transmit this knowledge to him.\textsuperscript{31}

It is easy to see how Barth’s implicit universalism diminishes the individual efforts of missionaries. Since all of humanity will eventually (or, is already) saved by Jesus Christ, the 

\footnotesize{disagreement concerning how this shift should be interpreted. D. Stephen Long argues that this difference is between those who interpret Barth as claiming that the triune hypostases constitutes election, and vice versa (170). While the details of these disagreements are beyond this dissertation, I would agree with Long that an interpretation of Barth that stresses the preeminence of election over the triune hypostases creates a host of problems that places Barth well outside of the mainstream, and “his work will have little ability to garner ecumenical attention outside a narrow tradition of Reformed theology committed to doing theology under the conditions of modernity.” (183). See D. Stephen Long, "From the Hidden God to the God of Glory: Barth, Balthasar, and Nominalism," \textit{Pro Ecclesia} 20, no. 2 (2011).}

\footnotesize{29 Barth, 9. See Johnson.}

\footnotesize{30 Barth, 9.}

work of the missionary is simply one of hastening the inevitable. We see this in Barth’s view of the particular act of Christian witness. John Webster characterizes Barth’s view of mission as one of herald, or “passive witness.” The goal of the church is not to bring about the presence of Christ, but simply to witness, or “transmit knowledge” of the presence and work of Christ.

According to Barth, the church:

is not commanded to represent, introduce, bring into play or even in a sense accomplish again in its being, speech, and action either reconciliation, the covenant, the kingdom or the new world reality...It lives its true prophecy by the fact that it remains distinct from His, that it is subject to it, that it does not try to replace it, but that with supreme power and yet with the deepest humility it points to the work of God accomplished in Him and the Word of God spoken in Him, inviting to gratitude for this work and the hearing of this Word, but not pretending to be claimed for more than this indication and invitation, nor to be capable of anything more.  

Barth’s view of witness is too passive, and neglects the active and participatory nature of Christian mission. Webster in part refutes this claim, stating that Barth simply places dogmatic concerns above ethical ones, yet even Webster concedes that his account of human action is ‘opaque.’ For Barth, human action does not make history, only attests to a history that is already made.

The emphasis on mission as entirely the work of God places in question the role of human beings as active participants in this mission. Guder codifies these criticisms as stemming from an interpretation of the missio Dei “in ways that ultimately render the visible and organized church marginal, if not a questionable deviation from God’s actual mission in the world.” The logical conclusion of Barth’s account of mission and agency renders the role of the missionary as

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32 Church Dogmatics Volume IV, 836.
33 Webster, 161. Gerald McKenny takes a similar view, asserting that Barth’s theology affirms human moral action while acknowledging “liabilities” in Barth’s thought, particularly in regards to how such human participation occurs and the role of the Holy Spirit in such actions. McKenny rejects an interpretation of Barth’s moral action as representational, arguing instead that it is expressive. See also Gerald P. McKenny, The Analogy of Grace: Karl Barth’s Moral Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 223.
34 Guder, 26.
something akin to a newspaper striving for a scoop: the goal is simply to be the first to present information that will eventually be given by another.

*Diminished Agency of the Recipient*

The problem of agency in Barth’s thought not only affects the missionary, but also the missionary’s interlocutors. If the codification of mission is the mission of God’s salvific actions throughout history, particularly in the reconciliation of all of humanity to God through Jesus Christ, this would seem to greatly diminish the humanity of those with opposing religious views. If the task of Christian mission is to inform the villainous person that they have simply failed to recognize what they will eventually recognize—that God is their Father and Jesus is their brother—then one is in effect limiting the decision-making capacities of the “other.” The non-Christian is denied the freedom to deny Christ. While one can critique the issue of agency from the side of the missionary—if mission is simply the attestation to what God has already done, then this seems to diminish the necessity of the missionary—one can also critique agency from the side of the non-Christian. Here, what is denied in the *missio Dei* consensus is the agency of those who do not know, or want to know, Christ.

35 Related to this problem are issues regarding divine and human agency dating back at least to Augustine’s writings in regards to the Pelagian controversy. Augustine is criticized for a theology of grace that strips free will, creating a determinism similar to Barth’s, albeit a determinism that does not end in universal salvation, but rather a separation between the saved and the eternally damned. These issues will be addressed further below, where I will argue that such debates are in part due to a false equivalence between the functioning of human and divine agency. What is important to stress here is the problem with the presumption of universal salvation and the effects of its promulgation for those who claim such foreknowledge. According to Wetzel, Augustine’s claims to predestination are meant to establish what Augustine sees as the Biblical assertion that faith is ultimately a working of God, “but the implications of having to give up the beginning of faith as a human initiative are left largely to the reader to workout.” James Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 167. The intention is to establish a rule, that faith is a gift from God, not to give a comprehensive and definitive view of the extent to which this gift is given (or not given) to humanity. My point is simple: we cannot know the extent of salvation, and claims to such knowledge, even claims to a universal salvation, do not lead to the kind of logical or moral consistency that their advocates desire. To state that God will save all through Christ does not necessarily render God as more loving, since such salvation may appear to come through the exercise of coercion.

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What we find in Barth’s soteriology is a God who seems to be coercive—all of history is already accomplished in God’s salvific activity. God “over-rules” the human prior to their creation. Thus, while the proponents of the *missio Dei* consensus believe that they are correcting against the coercive activities on the part of missionaries, one could argue that they are in fact bolstering mission’s coercive aspects. Coercion is not necessarily curtailed by the acquisition of divine foresight, as one can coerce in the name of hastening the inevitable. One can forcibly baptize either to save one from damnation, or to enact in history the reality to which they will inevitably adhere. A Puritan eschatology does not necessarily lead to passivity, but can also lead to manifest destiny—the elect are called to establish the new Israel in history, which includes the “civilization” of indigenous populations.36

A dogmatic emphasis on the centrality of mission as the work of God simply does not address the problem of coercion head on. In order to properly address the problem of coercion, one must look not just to the doctrinal assumptions of missionaries and the ways these assumptions may effect their actions, but also to the morality of those actions *as such.* Proleptically, this is precisely what this dissertation hopes to address by viewing mission through the lens of Christian ethics.

Issues surrounding persuasion and coercion remain important, perhaps the most important, issues in the study of missiology. A discipline that emerged out of the work of individuals attempting to convince other individuals to make significant changes to their religious, moral, and social worldviews will always face the critique that such attempts are coercive. The conception of mission as witness to the *missio Dei* fails to adequately redress these critiques.

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36 Bevans and Schroeder, 207.
Nature and Grace

We have seen in the above criticisms how a missiology that is wedded to Karl Barth is imbued with the very same problems regarding human agency which persist in his thought. Here, it seems the agency of both the missionary and their interlocutors are placed in jeopardy. The work of mission is one of passive witness rather than real participation, and the ability of individuals to reject this witness is rendered ultimately and eschatologically futile.

Hans Urs von Balthasar identified the problematic status of agency in Barth, identifying it with Barth’s radical distinction between nature and grace, seen most vividly in his early commentary on Romans. Barth’s insistence on the necessity of grace in order to free theology from the “secular misery” of Schleiermacher forced him to drive too far a wedge between nature and grace, making nature a “pure nature” that was intrinsically sinful and distant from God. While this safeguarded humanity’s need for grace, it came at the expense of human agency: “For Barth…the only authority for the church is God, and no human participates in this authority. The church was merely a conduit through which God works.” 37 Balthasar labels this Barth’s philosophical actualism:

Actualism, with its constant, relentless reduction of all activity to God the actus purus, leaves no room for any other center of activity outside of God. In relation to God, there can only be passivity…Once more everything collapses into the unholy dualism of Romans: viewed from above, the Church completely coincides with God’s Word: but, viewed from below, all her attempts to give expression to this Word are radically fallible. 38

As will be discussed in the next section, this actualism can be seen as the result of a breakdown of the careful distinctions between creator and creature, distinctions that posited a relationship

between God and humanity that was nevertheless different from and lower than the relationships within the triune life of God. The loss of these distinctions led to a radical separation between God and creation that must be fully overcome by God through the reconciled work of Christ. Human nature is radically separate from God, and must be radically repaired through grace. Grace, which is always the work of God, becomes everything, subsuming human nature and human activity.

In his assessment of Balthasar and Barth, D. Stephen Long summarizes the challenges with a radical separation between nature and grace, one that has plagued both Protestantism and Counter-Reformation Catholicism. The result of this separation is that:

Protestantism lost any natural ethical and theological agency by annulling it and lifting nature up solely into grace. This occurred primarily in double predestination where the human being’s fate is decided by an absolute decree prior to the Trinitarian economy. Grace does, or does not do, everything. Election becomes the singular doctrine within which everything gets conceived. Nature is no longer intelligible, but in practice it still exists, so whatever it might still be, it is left to its own devices.” 39

If nature is lifted up solely into grace, then agency is annulled—God has already done everything for the elect. For the missionary, this means that their work is ultimately insignificant. For the recipient of missionary efforts, their decision to accept the Christian message has already been determined. This is true for both for those who believe in that election is universal (as the later Barth) and those who believe that election is not universal (those that believe in double predestination).

For Balthasar, the way through this impasse was a recovery of Aquinas’ subtle relationship between nature and grace, which both affirms the preeminence of grace as well as

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39 Saving Karl Barth: Hans Urs Von Balthasar’s Preoccupation, 60.
leaves room for real human participation.\textsuperscript{40} For Balthasar, a pre-reformation understanding of nature encompassed a “unity of creaturely essence and free gift of grace.”\textsuperscript{41} Balthasar draws the striking connection between this unity and the Chalcedonian definition of the unity of Christ. The unity of the humanity and divinity of Christ is a \textit{de facto} unity and not a fusion of humanity and divinity. Similarly, human beings are \textit{a de facto} (rather than necessary) unity of creaturely essence and grace. By nature, the Church Fathers meant this unity. For Aquinas, the telos of human nature is the beatific vision of God, the end goal of the natural is the supernatural.

Balthasar believes Aquinas is here adapting Aristotle’s philosophical understanding of nature, in which nature is both static and dynamic. To speak of a nature that is dynamic means not only to speak of its meaning, its end, but also implies an environment necessary for it to reach its end.

Balthasar uses the example of a bird to illustrate this point. To speak of a bird as one that is meant to grow from a baby chick to a flying adult implies a real world in which food exists to nurture it and air exists for it to fly. Similarly, to speak of a human being’s goal as the vision of God is akin to speaking of the bird’s goal of flight: the human being may possess this end while not being able to create it on their own, in the same way that a bird may have the goal of flight while being incapable of creating food, air, and gravity. An understanding of nature in this

\textsuperscript{40} My use of Balthasar to critique Barth’s conception of nature and grace, a conception that leads to his implicit universalism, may seem odd given Balthasar’s own seeming advocacy of a type of universal salvation. It should be noted that there are important differences. First, Balthasar does not believe that the portions of scripture that point to eternal judgment can be set aside, nor simply held in dialectical tension, but must be affirmed. (Balthasar, 372.) For this reason Balthasar explicitly rejects any construal of his thought that would make him a promoter of “universal salvation.” \textit{Dare We Hope “That All Men Be Saved”?: With a Short Discourse of Hell} (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1996), 166. Second, as a consequence Christians may (and should) hope for the salvation of all, but they cannot ever claim to know one way or another since such knowledge would be an attempt by the human to limit divine freedom. For Balthasar, we all stand under divine judgment, without knowledge of the extent of hell’s population. Third, Balthasar’s understanding of nature and grace does not lead logically and necessarily to universal election, as it appears to do with Barth. This may mean that Balthasar’s peculiar eschatology does not disqualify him from critiquing Barth, but it is not endorsement of it. I believe Balthasar’s eschatological hope for universal salvation to still be somewhat at odds with Biblical eschatology, most explicitly in Paul’s statement of hope for the resurrection of righteous and the unrighteous (Acts 24:15).

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation}, 271.
dynamic sense is critical for mission theology, as it creates space for the labor of the missionary to truly contribute to the social environment through which their fellow human beings might realize their supernatural end. Chapter 4 will further examine the implications for such an understanding of nature for Christian mission, and purpose a turn away from Barth, dogmatics, and the *missio Dei* and a return to Aquinas’ understanding of virtue, grace, and moral agency.

**The Problem of Distinction**

While ruminations on nature, grace, and agency may not be ever-present on the minds of those engaged in mission on the ground level, these aforementioned issues do manifest themselves in the problem of distinction: what constitutes mission, and what doesn’t constitute mission? As Long states, the false dichotomy between nature and grace means that “grace does, or does not do, everything.” If God’s grace accomplishes everything, or nothing, mission as it witnesses to this grace either does everything, or nothing. If God does everything in salvation, and the church is merely the passive witness to the entirety of this work, then this would seem to render the individual practices of the missionary questionable at best. Missiology is no longer related to soteriology: the missionary is free to leave everything to God, or claim that every type of action they perform is actually the work of God.

“If mission is everything, nothing is mission.” Stephen Neill’s famous quotation from a half-century ago remains the most persistent and prominent critique of the *missio Dei*. By placing mission at the heart of theology, and the heart of the church, there is the danger of mission losing its distinctive character. This is evidenced most visibly in David Bosch’s aforementioned *Transforming Mission*. Bosch’s own approach to mission includes 13 distinct

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42 See ibid., 270-82.
characteristics, and he describes mission as “a multifaceted ministry, in respect of witness, service, justice, healing, reconciliation, liberation, peace, evangelism, fellowship, church planting, contextualization, and much more.” With such a comprehensive definition of mission, it becomes difficult to see what is still distinctive in regards to the term. Bosch himself was aware of this danger, but insists that preference should be given to the flexibility of the term, lest we attempt to limit the infinite God.

Critiques surrounding the distinctiveness of the term *missio Dei* are not simply arguments about semantic fields. The problem with a multivocal term is not just that it is indistinct, but also that this lack of distinction enables the user of the term to preselect a meaning to suit their needs. Here, every work of human hands can be justified as participation in the mission of God. “In this way, all secular activities can get a kind of divine sanction – and support – again indiscriminately and unqualifiedly.” The problem of definition thus has moral implications—if one cannot define mission adequately, then one cannot define what mission is not, and one cannot discern good from bad missional acts.

It is important to note one prominent attempt to remedy this particular issue of the construal of mission as the *missio Dei*: John Flett’s work *The Witness of God*. Flett agrees with Bosch that the emergence of the term *missio Dei* is a crucial breakthrough in mission theology, and that the influence of Barth on the formation of the term was crucial. A problem for Flett, however, is that most missiologists adopt the term unreflectively, without examining the content of Barth’s theology. This lack of critical reflection on Barth leads missiologists to

46 Ibid.
appropriate the term to suit their needs. Flett gives perhaps the best articulation of the problem of the lack of distinctiveness of the term *missio Dei*, summarizing a superb history of the concept with his assertion that “*Missio Dei* is a Rorschach test. It encourages projection, revealing our own predilections rather than informing and directing our responses.” Flett argues that this lack of distinction is due to a failure to understand mission as the work of the Triune God. Mission that lacks any connection to the Trinitarian missions of the Father sending the Son and the Father and Son sending the Holy Spirit will strip mission of its doctrinal content, turning concepts such as ‘mission’ and ‘sending’ into placeholders for any activity one can conceive.

Nevertheless, the conception of mission as the *missio Dei* represents a “Copernican turn” in mission theology that cannot be abandoned, but must be rehabilitated. Flett’s solution is to reconstruct a notion of the *missio Dei* centered upon the Trinity and a close re-reading of Barth. According to Flett, Barth attempted to redress the tendency of theologians to discuss God’s being in general before discussing God’s activity in history. For Barth, there can be no separation between God’s being and God’s revelation: “It is as the personal triune God that He is self-existent. And although the converse is certainly true, it is only because we must first say that it is as the personal triune God that He is self-existent.” Flett grounds his notion of Christian mission in this assertion: the revelation of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit occurs in time and in the context of mission. The immanent Trinity is discovered by humanity through the economic Trinity in the context of the church on mission. God is by God’s nature missionary--His being is

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50 Ibid., 76.
51 Ibid. 49.
52 Ibid., 9.
53 Ibid., 199.
54 Ibid., 11-17.
his becoming—and as such the church’s mission is one of accompaniment of this mission in history:

Mission is not a second step in addition to some other more proper being of the church, because, as the living one, God’s relations to the world belongs to his eternal being. The Christian community is, as such, a missionary community, or she is not a community that lives in fellowship with the triune God as he lives his own proper life.  

While Flett’s work helps to address the ways in which missiology neglects the Trinitarian foundations of God’s mission, it is difficult to see how Flett addresses the issue of lack of distinctiveness within a concept of the missio Dei. While it helps bolster the claims of missiologists that mission should be seen at the heart of Christian theology by giving it a stronger dogmatic footing, it does little to describe the discernable practices of the church as missionary community. This is because Flett’s desire to see mission at the heart of dogmatics undermines his desire to better define the missio Dei. Flett’s preoccupation is with the role of mission vis-à-vis dogmatic theology. Some of his strongest practical exhortations concern the necessity of mission to the task of theology as a whole: “If the missionary act is the concrete form of divine and human fellowship here and now, then the lack of reference to mission at every level of the teaching ministry of the church is a frightful abrogation of theological responsibility.”

However, Flett fails to describe with any degree of clarity what exactly constitutes a missionary act. In his preoccupation with mission and dogmatics, Flett adds to the list of actions that missionary activity encompasses, including Christian fellowship and community: True Christian fellowship is only discovered through a community that moves towards those who do not know God’s reconciled reality. True worship can only come through a community that is missional,

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56 Flett, 34.
57 As will be discussed below, this problem of distinction is also not remedied due a lack of a sufficient understanding of the differences between God and creation, as well as human and divine agency.
58 Flett, 296.
since the God that is worshiped is a missionary God. These assertions help prove that “mission is necessarily, and must become, a central concern of dogmatic theology.”

For Flett, worship, fellowship, witness, joy, and reconciliation all encompass the missionary act. Any attempts to define mission with any further distinctiveness is an attempt to make mission’s “programmatic forms,” its temporal activities, normative for the whole of mission. Instead, the church itself is completely free to contextualize its mission in any way it sees fit. The following quotation, in the last pages of The Witness of God, is an apt summary:

Since creation possesses no inherent capacity to facilitate or retard the communication of the gospel, the community is totally free with regard to the particular forms the community’s witness takes in the world, not with regard to here definite service of witness. In other words, within the limits established by the divine and human fellowship, the community is free as she exercises her freedom; that is, missionary forms develop through the process of intentional engaged movement into the world.

This passage encapsulates the problem of distinction (and the connection of this issue to the problematic relationship between nature and grace in Barth) which haunts the conception of mission as participation in the missio Dei. Because creation does not do anything to advance mission, it is free to take up whatever forms it desires in embodying this mission. Because human beings do not do anything, they are free to do everything. Mission becomes simply “engaged movement into the world.” Mission is simply all activity which is done within the divine and human fellowship. Thus Flett comes full circle—he begins by calling missio Dei a Rorschach Test, but his reconstructed definition of missio Dei actually renders missio Dei more, not less, multivocal.

59 Ibid., 294.
60 Ibid., 296.
61 Ibid., 294.
62 Ibid., 294-95.
If mission is everything, then mission is nothing. If one sees God, the church, the world, through mission colored glasses, then there becomes no way of defining what constitutes mission and what doesn’t. The broadness of the term means that those engaged in radically different, even contradictory approaches to mission can still claim to be faithfully witnessing to the *missio Dei*. David Bosch highlights how the concept of *missio Dei* was used by Hartenstein to “protect mission against secularization,” as well as by Hoekendijk to emphasize the *exclusion* of the church from missionary involvement altogether.63

This lack of definition also comes with significant practical implications for missionaries and the practice of mission itself. If there are no standards to define what constitute mission, there are no standards for discerning good from poor missional practices. One can declare any action they perform as an act of participation in the *missio Dei*, with immunity from criticism. The caustic street preacher, the musical worship leader, the holy war soldier, the public aid worker, are all doing mission, and are free from whatever burdens that the great commission may impose on both what the missionary must do and how they should go about doing it.

The aforementioned issues regarding human agency and distinction vis-à-vis the *missio Dei* consensus will be addressed in chapter four of this dissertation. There I will argue more fully that a recovery of Aquinas’ nuanced account of nature and grace provides resources that effectively remedy Barth’s problematic account of nature and grace. Proleptically, these issues can be adequately addressed through an emphasis on Aquinas’ theory of virtue and Alasdair MacIntyre’s notion of a virtuous practice. MacIntyre defines a practice as an action whose goods are internal to it, goods that “can only be identified and recognized by the experience of participating in the practice in question.”64 Applying this notion to mission enables one to

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64 MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 189.
discern which actions are necessarily constitutive of mission and those actions whose goods may be obtained through non-missional endeavors.

Trinitarian Distinctions, Missio Dei Confusions

There is another way of approaching these aforementioned issues of agency and distinction that sees their emergence as part of a larger loss of distinctive ways of speaking about God. Kathryn Tanner’s *God and Creation in Christian Theology* is helpful for charting this loss. Kathryn Tanner sees throughout the Christian theological tradition the exercise of ruled language when it comes to speaking about God’s transcendence and God’s agency. Tanner lists two rules: “First, a rule for speaking of God as transcendent vis-à-vis the world: avoid both a simple univocal attribution of predicates to God and world and a simple contrast of divine and non-divine predicates…The second rule is as follows: avoid in talk about God’s creative agency all suggestions of limitation in scope or manner. The second rule prescribes talk of God’s creative agency as immediate and universally extended.”

These rules are meant to govern core Christian claims of God’s radical transcendence and radical immanence.

Tanner sees in the history of Christian discourse concerning God the adaptation and importation by theologians of non-theological language that is nevertheless governed by the aforementioned rules concerning God, creation, and agency. Theologians work within these rules and the given theological and non-theological language of their milieu to engage in talk of God. The reason that theologians import non-theological language is to make their work more intelligible, as the language being imported already contains a context for its use and its own history of interpretation. This also lends a greater rhetorical force, as this language also carries its

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own argumentative weight. Theologians can thus play “on the linguistic expectations of an audience.” What I believe Tanner is getting at in this statement is something akin to the use of an enthymeme in rhetoric: a way of speaking, usually in truncated syllogisms, that draws upon the unspoken premises of the audience, enabling the speaker to argue more succinctly, directly, and effectively with their audience.

There is thus in Christian discourse regarding the nature and activity of God both the importation of non-theological language in order to make such discourse intelligible and rhetorically effective, while at the same an implicit adherence to linguistic rules that ensure that such discourse affirms the Christian assertion of God’s radical transcendence and radical immanence.

One can diagnosis the problems of agency and distinction within missio Dei thought as rooted an abrogation of Tanner’s ruled language concerning God’s transcendence and immanence. First, there is a tendency to conflate the distinctions between the divine relations and the divine-human relationship. There is a strain of modern theology, following a particular reading of Barth, that attempts to abolish the distinction between the Trinitarian relationships and the divine-human relationship. This strain of theology is reacting against a perceived overly-

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66 Ibid., 54.
67 It is important to stress that what is being critiqued is a strain of thought from both systematic theologians and mission theologians that is indebted to a particular reading of Barth, a reading that remains disputed. Tanner sees in Barth one who maintains this ruled language of God (see ibid., 77-80.) Gerald McKenny believes Barth to have sufficiently buttressed both human and divine action. Long sees in Barth an attempt to correct an undue separation between de deo uno and de deo trino (Long, The Perfectly Simple Triune God: Aquinas and His Legacy, 320.). This correction quickly leads to a historicizing of God—God’s being is event in history. Whether Barth approved of such a step is debated. However, evidence for such an approval is documented by Long in Barth’s approval of Robert Jenson’s dissertation on Barth, which asserts the temporality of God (ibid., 338.). In can be stated at the minimum that Barth’s work was part of a highly influential trajectory in modern theology that rejects such ruled language concerning God, a trajectory that has also significantly influenced theologians who have developed the conception of mission as missio Dei. Whether Barth’s theology in toto violates traditional understandings of God and creation is a debate best left to Barthian scholars. I would simply state that his rendering of agency, nature, and grace, particularly in regards to mission, is deeply problematic, for the various reasons already stated in this chapter. In addition, the large influential of such renderings on the conception of mission as missio Dei has contributed substantially to its flaws.
Hellenized metaphysics within the tradition, which defined God first in abstract, platonic terms (simplicity, perfection, etc.) and then added the description of God as triune. In response, there is an emphasis on beginning theological discourse with the economic Trinity, and God’s revelation in history: it is only from the revelation of God in history as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that we can begin to speak of his divine attributes. Here, God’s being is God’s becoming, or God is an event in history. Long sees this trajectory in a wide range of theologians, including Eberhard Jungel, Robert Jenson, Jurgen Moltmann, and Greg Boyd.68

While such an emphasis was meant to counter perceived over-stoic conceptions of God, what emerges from this view is a God that is tied to, and a certain degree dependent upon, creation. This is manifest most visibly in the doctrine of the Incarnation. Here, God commits himself to the salvation of humanity through the incarnate Son by virtue of his decision to create. The adoption of the missio Dei in many ways reflects this development. It is seen as a reaction against a Hellenized Christendom, which featured a remote and distant God that gives sole authority of mission to the church, giving a blank check to missionaries to do whatever they saw fit in the name of Christ. Darrell Guder’s own historiography of the development of the missio Dei consensus in many ways parallels the theological history of Moltmann, Jenson, and Jungel. What is adopted by both is a specific historical narrative—about the rise of Christendom and the concomitant infection of Christian theology by Hellenistic philosophy that rendered God distant, remote, and abstract. God and creation become unduly separated. Guder sees in the development of Western doctrine a “continuing pattern of separating the theologically inseparable: separating the church and its mission, separating ethics and witness…separating Christ as moral example from Christ as the basis of salvation. Such dichotomies are a deeply engrained problem in

Western Christendom.” Pulling creation closer to God, which for Guder comes through a
recovery of Christology, enables mission theologians to view the practice of mission as
something in which God was more intimately involved. Flett, drawing on Barth, Jungel, and
Jenson, identifies a similar gap between God and creation, insisting that the formulation of
missio Dei needs to further shore up this weakness by eliminating an undue distinction between
the essential and economic Trinity. Hence there is a need to pull God and creation closer together
through the incarnation as the event of reconciliation in history: God’s being is his becoming,
and the church is taken up into real relationship with God through the event of Christ’s
reconciliation.  

We have already stated above one of the unfortunate side effects of this position in
regards to a theology of mission: if creation is already and entirely redeemed by Christ, the
mission of the Church simply becomes one of passive witness. We may add to these issues the
loss of distinctive language to speak about God and creation. Since the distinctions between God
and creation are abolished, there is, to use Tanner’s words, a univocal attribution of predicates to
God and world. One can no longer speak of the workings of God and the workings of human
beings as distinct yet related. In terms of language concerning mission, creation is so tied up with
God that mission becomes the sole prerogative of God.

The conception of missio Dei also bears with it the collapse of the distinction between
human and divine agency. As the distinctiveness between God and creation is lost, so is the
principle of analogy. One loses the ability to see how God works in different ways from human
beings. With this loss of distinction, there is a tendency to use human concepts of freedom and

69 Guder, 52.
70 Flett, 211-12.
71 For a concise description of the traditional understanding of the distinction between God and creation, how this
distinction necessitates analogous speech concerning God, and the concomitant problems associated with the loss of
agency as the basis for construing divine agency. One begins with an understanding of human agency and freedom, and works backwards to God. Here, God’s agency is rendered as something that is simply human agency multiplied by a large number, pushing matter into form and structuring it with mechanistic efficiency. David Bentley Hart sees in this rendering of agency a reversion to an understanding of God as a demiurge—the maker of things, but not the source of being: God is “an imposer of order, but not the infinite ocean of being that gives existence to all reality ex nihilo.”

Because God’s agency is of the same type as human agency, the workings of God and humanity become competitive.

When such a conception of agency is imported into mission, it inaugurates an interminable debate over the role of the Church vis-à-vis the mission of God. Mission, like other activities performed by both God and human beings, is construed, in Tanner’s words, as competitive and contrastive. The missional activities of God are the same type of missional activities performed by the church, simply done on a larger scale. Human beings either compete with God for space to perform mission, or cede their agency to the workings of God, with their role being one of passive witness.

This can be seen in one of the primary works on the missio Dei, George Vicedom’s The Mission of God. Vicedom begins with a critique similar to that of Guder—that previous conceptions of mission construe it as something secondary to God, done purely under the auspices of a Church intending to spread Christian culture. The missio Dei, in response, sees mission as the prerogative of God:

The church and its missions cannot be conceived apart from God and can therefore be understood only from the viewpoint of the existence of God and His

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this distinction in modernity, see David B. Burrell, "Creatio Ex Nihilo Recovered," Modern Theology 29, no. 2 (2013).

mission. The former are nothing more than an instrument, a work-schedule of God in relation to his creatures, a gathering of those who permit themselves to be called to Him through God’s definite sending.  

What we see here is a loss of the careful distinction between God’s mission and human mission. There is no difference between the two—there is only God’s mission, God’s sending, and human beings who have the ability to become instruments of this sending. The subsuming of all mission under the auspices of the *missio Dei* leads to what Tanner calls theological occasionalism. Here, the occasionalist is one “that refuses to the creature the ability to act or produce effect by its own proper power, in order to ensure the sovereignty of divine agency…What the creature does is simply the occasion for God’s own creative action in bringing to be what happens next. The creature becomes the empty shell for an exercise of divine power.” When there is a loss of the distinctions between divine mission, divine agency, and human mission and human agency, all are subsumed under the universal agency of God’s mission. The missionary is simply an empty shell, providing an occasion for the *missio Dei* to happen in history.

What has emerged in the *missio Dei* consensus is a type of missiological grammar stripped of distinctiveness. Mission is the mission of God, the church does not act on its own but participates in this mission, with no discussion regarding how the workings of human beings may differ from the workings of God. The way in which the church participates, how such participation may differ, is simply not addressed.

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74 Tanner, 86. See also Oliver Crisp’s concise definition: “Occasionalism is the doctrine according to which God is the sole cause of all that comes to pass. Creatures are merely the ‘occasions’ of divine action.” Oliver D. Crisp, "Moral Character, Reformed Theology, and Jonathan Edwards," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 30, no. 3 (2017): 274. Crisp gives a charitable reading of what he sees as Jonathan Edwards’ occasionalism, yet still admits that it can only leave a rather thin account of moral agency in Edwards’ theology.
It is perhaps helpful here to retrace the development of the *missio Dei* consensus. We can discern four key steps, articulated most visibly in Bosch’s *Transforming Mission*: (1) a critique of ecclesiocentric views of mission that placed too much power and autonomy in the hands of the church and individuals, (2) the emergence of the term *missio Dei*, an image of mission that is “not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God…To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God’s love toward people.” (3) A widening of the scope of the term and an ongoing tension concerning the role of the church in mission vis-à-vis the mission of God, and (4) the assertion that, despite these disputes, the emergence of the term remains a “crucial breakthrough,” since it has successfully broken mission out of its ecclesiocentric confines and helped to articulate the conviction that “neither the church nor any other human agent can ever be considered the author or bearer of mission.”

My assertion is that the critical flaw in the *missio Dei* lies in step 2, which abrogates the careful ruled language from which theologians have used to speak about the God and creation. There is little to no awareness that such an abrogation has occurred. The sending of the church in mission is simply caught up in the sending of the triune God, without acknowledging the possibility that the ways in which created beings are sent differs from the way God can send of Himself, and without acknowledging that human beings are speaking analogously in the ways in which they speak of God’s sending. This loss of ruled language creates the problems articulated in step 3, which places into question whether the gains articulated in step 4 are worth the appropriation of such flawed terminology.

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76 Tanner sees in modern theology a tendency to break this ruled language in way that is to an extent unintentional—the modern context itself has a tendency to push divine sovereignty and human freedom to extreme and incompatible directions. This context creates a scenario in which the theologian may affirm traditional claims about God while implicitly breaking rules concerning God’s transcendence and God’s agency. Tanner, 122. For instance, in Vicedom, there remains an assertion of the traditional understanding of God and creation in the midst of a conception of mission that erodes the distinction between human and divine agency. See Vicedom, 15-17.
The inability to speak distinctively about human sending and the sending of God also creates a situation in which the *missio Dei* cannot be abandoned, for all of its acknowledged flaws. To abandon it would be to turn back to a model of mission that is human centered and ecclesiocentric: “The Copernican turn of *missio Dei* is not something from which the Christian community can depart. Any other conception of the ground, motive, and goal of mission apart from *missio Dei*’s Trinitarian location risks investing authority in historical accident and human capacity.” Once the distinction between human agency and divine agency, between divine missions and human missions, is abolished, there is only zero-sum gain. Human beings can either witness to the *missio Dei*, or attempt mission on their own as a rival to God.

*Lack of Semantic Distinction, Lack of Rhetorical Force*

As a linguistic concept, the term *missio Dei* fails to say anything distinct about mission. While the collapse of distinction between creator and creation, and between divine and human agency each effect how one views these concepts vis-à-vis mission, the final collapse comes directly within the term *missio Dei* itself. As noted above, Tanner sees in the history of Christian theology a tendency to import language from non-theological fields into theological discourse while maintaining a consistency in discourse as it pertains to language concerning God’s transcendence and immanence. This importation of language allows the concomitant importation of the persuasive weight of the language. In essence, the use of language from outside of theology renders such language more intelligible to a wider audience and more rhetorically persuasive.

77 Flett, 9.
The final critique levied against *missio Dei* is that, in part due to the novelty of the term and the lack of consensus on its precise meaning, the term itself lacks semantic intelligibility and rhetorical force.

First, the technical nature of the term has rendered its use unintelligible. For Tanner, the force of much theological language comes precisely from the way in which such language is adopted from non-theological language and adapted to speak of God in a way that affirms God’s radical transcendence and immanence.\(^{78}\) The adoption of terminology from outside of theology gives such terminology a sort of ready-made intelligibility and a concomitant rhetorical force. The use of novel terminology has none of these advantages, and the intelligibility of such novel terms is entirely intramural within the hyper specific disciplines within which it emerges. Hence the intelligibility of the novel term *missio Dei* is left entirely in the hands of a specific wing of mission theology, and the term bears little intelligibility outside of such a discipline. H. H. Rosin documents how the term *missio Dei* has been plagued by the problem of distinction nearly from its inception: “Thus even before the term “*missio Dei*” was put into circulation, the process of its interpretation and modification was in full swing.”\(^{79}\) Rosin documents how, in 1963, only 11 years after the term was coined, the international missionary conference in Mexico City reached an impasse regarding the relationship between God’s action in all of creation and the Church’s specific activity.\(^{80}\)

We can say, in Wittgenstienian terms, that there is an incessant language game being played over the meaning of the term. The lack of a clear-cut winner in its definition renders the

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\(^{78}\) Tanner, 32-34.

\(^{79}\) H. H. Rosin, *’Missio Dei’ : An Examination of the Origin, Contents and Function of the Term in Protestant Missiological Discussion* (Leiden: Interuniversity Institute for Missiological and Ecumenical Research, Department of Missiology, 1972), 25.

\(^{80}\) Ibid., 26.
term unintelligible. The fact that this game is only being played by a small community of missiologists means that the term will have little resonance within a larger community.

Second, the term *missio Dei* has been adopted with unanimity, but not perspicuity. It has been for many missiologists simply a technical term that stresses the importance of mission, both as a practical and theological endeavor, while the term itself is rarely examined. Flett highlights the relationship between this and the term’s lack of coherence: “Few authors reflect on the underlying theological issues. Most introduce the concept by citing from the few seminal texts but, apart from these oft-repeated forms, little substantive development has occurred.”

This lack of critical reflection creates a situation in which the language the term employs is not examined for nuance or clarity. The result is what in the field of psychology is called “concept creep.” Nick Haslam describes this as the process through which the semantic range of a concept is expanded both vertically and horizontally. Vertical expansion occurs when the definition of a term becomes less stringent. Horizontal expansion occurs when a concept is applied to a new class of phenomena. The result is a semantic inflation that waters down the meaning of concepts.

The historical trajectory of the term *missio Dei* is one of vertical and horizontal expansion. The term has grown horizontally to encompass not only the missional activities of the church, but also all missional works performed by God outside of the church. In addition, it has grown vertically in the degree to which activities great and small all constitute mission. The term *missio Dei* has grown from encompassing specific activities, such as evangelism and church

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81 Oborji, 138.
82 Flett, 35.
planting, to encompass all forms of human activity, including for Flett communal life and the disposition of joy.

If we take both of the aforementioned linguistic weakness of the term *missio Dei* together, a picture emerges of a term whose popular use is so broad so as to encompass nearly every activity, while simultaneously a term whose precise definition is interminably debated within the specific and sometimes idiosyncratic field of missiology. The conclusion reached is simply that the term *missio Dei* has no rhetorical force. It means very little and conveys very little to its audience. For all of these reasons, one must look to other ways of articulating God’s mission in ways that are less problematic, more distinct, and more effective.

While the conception of mission as *missio Dei* does represent, as Bosch affirms, a “crucial breakthrough” in freeing mission from its ecclesiocentric confines, it has replaced a narrow conception of mission with a conception that is broad enough to make it largely unusable. Perhaps it is best to acknowledge the gains in which it has brought—the emergence of mission as a serious and important aspect of theology, the relationship between the sending of God and the sending of the church, and the belief in the intrinsic missional nature of the church—while also affirming that a sole reliance on dogmatics may not be the direction best taken for mission theology moving forward. Chapter four will situate mission within Aquinas’ moral theology and virtue ethics, with the goal of remedying these problems of distinction and agency through a recovery of traditional language concerning the relationship between God and creation and human and divine agency, as well as providing a framework for understanding how human beings might exercise this agency in a way that glorifies God. In addition, this framework will provide a way of speaking of mission that integrates both doctrine and practice. Missiology does

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not have to choose, as Scott Sunquist avers, between dogmatic conceptions of mission and mission’s practical implications. Theological ethics, particularly Thomistic virtue ethics, provides an integral way of speaking of both. While *missio Dei* theology has helped to better understand how the mission of the church is inseparable from the salvific work of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, virtue ethics can help to clarify this relationship as well as clarify how the specific missional actions of the church can best reflect this reality.

### Conclusion

Through this brief introduction to the *missio Dei* consensus one can see the perpetual challenges facing the field of missiology. Issues surrounding the definition and composition of mission activities, the role and agency of the missionary, and the problem of persuasion are all issues that are addressed by the concept of *missio Dei*, yet are still present despite its consensus. Before addressing these concerns through a model of mission based upon virtue, it is imperative to first examine two other anthropological models of mission that offer remedies to the aforementioned issues, one which I will label “mission as growth” and the other “mission as dialogue.” Both of these construals of mission have their own historical trajectories and luminaries. Both offer approaches to mission that appear to be more concrete and distinct as compared to mission as *missio Dei*. However, both have their own set of unique challenges.

The next two chapters will be devoted to understanding and critiquing models of mission centered upon growth and dialogue. The extensive discussion of these models will help to greater understand the unique challenges facing the development of mission as a distinctive enterprise. In addition, selective discussions within theological ethics will be used to aid in the assessment of these models, demonstrating its potential to speak constructively to the concerns of

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85 Sunquist, 8.
missiology. Consistent themes will emerge that will be addressed in more depth: the motivation for mission activities, the ethics of persuasion and conversion, the placement of such activities within a conception of a life lived well. Such questions will pave the way for a conception of mission that draws from the disciplines of moral theology, moral philosophy, and virtue ethics.
Chapter 2: Mission as Growth

Introduction

The construal of mission as the attempt to numerically grow the church through conversions and the planting of new congregations is one that, for some missionaries, seems self-evident. The Gospel is “good news,” and one can infer logically that the more people who receive this message approvingly, the better: most missionaries would prefer that 20 people become Christians as a result of their efforts as opposed to 10. While the association of mission with numerical increases is rarer in the New Testament than one might presume, there are nevertheless instances of rejoicing in light of mass conversions (Acts 2:41, 6:7). A conception of mission as growth has become particularly dominant amongst evangelical Protestant churches in the West. Its development can be traced from the church growth movement pioneered by Donald McGavran in the 1950s and into the church planting movement of the 1990s-present time. Such movements have spawned vast networks of organizations, websites, and resources, as well as thousands of published books. Yet, despite this expansive network, there remain several issues with the movement, ranging from ethical dilemmas that have resulted from an overemphasis on numerical growth, to questions as to whether such numerical success has actually occurred.

This chapter will begin by charting the development of the modern construal of mission as growth, focusing particularly on the work of Donald McGavran and Alan Hirsch. McGavran’s domestic importation of missionary principles into North America inaugurated the church growth movement.¹ Many of its core principles were then adapted by Alan Hirsch and others and applied outward to the expansion of the church through the planting of new congregations.

¹ Portions of this chapter are based, with substantial revisions, on Michael Niebauer, "Virtue Ethics and Church Planting: A Critical Assessment and Reevaluation of Church Planting Utilizing Alasdair Macintyre’s after Virtue," Missiology: An International Review (2016).
Following this brief history, I will use the tools of theological ethics to critique the construal of mission as growth, focusing primarily on Alasdair MacIntyre’s assessment of the social sciences in *After Virtue*. Here, I will show how MacIntyre’s critique of the social sciences bears striking parallels to the current moral issues surrounding the church planting movement. After this critique will be an extended discussion of the problem of agency in mission and how the mission as growth model significantly diminishes both the agency of the missionary and the recipient of the missionary’s message.

**Historical Background: Donald McGavran and His Legacy**

Mission as growth, and its contemporary manifestation in church planting literature, draws directly from the theology and research pioneered by missiologist Donald McGavran in the 1950s through the 1990s. McGavran’s intention was to develop an understanding of the mission of the church as something that does not merely impact individuals, but has the possibility of transforming entire social groups. McGavran was reacting against what he perceived was an undue emphasis on personal conversion that necessitated the severing of converts from cultural and communal ties.²

In response, McGavran developed a concept of church growth centered upon the conversion of social groups to the gospel. This approach sought to better understand specific people groups through the use of a variety of sociological and behavioral science research methods in order to tailor the gospel message to these targeted groups for the maximum number of conversions. Here, the move was to narrow an individual congregation’s focus in order to

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² According to George Hunter, McGavran “saw that the usual mission practice, based on the individualism paradigm rather than the group-consciousness paradigm, produced tragic social dislocation in the lives of many converts, as Christianized individuals were rejected by their people and cut off from them.” George Hunter, "The legacy of Donald A McGavran." *International Bulletin Of Missionary Research* 16, no. 4 (1992), 159.
maximize the potential to reach non-believers. The assumption was that people feel the most comfortable around those that are like them, so churches wishing to attract outsiders should not shy away from focusing on reaching those that are the most like them. Much like a business that cuts its losses on a dying market to focus resources on potentially stronger ones, a congregation must focus on the one group of people they can best reach, diverting all of their resources toward reaching that group.

McGavran advocated the development of monoethnic congregations in order to enable a more contextually appropriate and comfortable environment for sharing the gospel—an environment proven by analytical research to increase conversion: “Churches tend to grow when men becoming Christian join others of their own race — tribe, sub-tribe, caste, or clan. When becoming Christian means joining a different "breed" of men, church growth is always slowed down.” The broader unity of the church became secondary to the desire to see the gospel take root in new cultures.

Alan Hirsch and the Church Planting Movement

The church planting movement is an extension of the church growth movement pioneered by Donald McGavran. McGavran applied his missiological research first to the planting of new overseas congregations, with his research quickly being appropriated for existing congregations.

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3 “Loose the Churches and let them go! At present Churches in many lands are tied hand and foot. In evangelism they are heard to propose: Leave your ethnic unit and join ours. On biblical grounds, they must make sure that they are heard to propose: Believe on Jesus Christ, be baptized, form congregations of Bible-obeying Christians, while as far as possible remaining in cultural harmony with your own ethnic and cultural units. This basic shift in presentation, will help the tide of redemption to flow strongly throughout many tribes and tongues and kindreds and nations to their enormous benefit in this world and the next.” Donald Anderson McGavran, "Loose the Churches: Let Them Go! An Essential Issue in Indian Evangelism," *Missiology* 1, no. 2 (1973): 94.

in North America as an opportunity to increase existing attendance.\(^5\) The church planting movement developed as an extension of church growth through the starting of new congregations within the North American context. It is best seen as the domestic application of church growth techniques to the starting of new congregations in North America. Following an extensive statistical history of missiological terms, Kenneth Nehrbass stated:

Church Growth is a missiological sub-discipline that seems to have had a definite half-life...Some church growth specialists would say this is a worrisome sign. But it doesn’t mean missiologists are thinking less about church growth...What is more likely is that we’re now talking about church planting movements and church multiplication, partnerships, or insider movements.\(^6\)

The church planting movement shares much of the same hallmarks of McGavran’s church growth ethos. It involves a general critique of the ways in which mission has been done in the past, a calling to return to a biblical approach to mission through the planting of new congregations, and the use of extensive sociological research to better understand the demographics of the church plant’s targeted area.

The work of missiologist Alan Hirsch is perhaps the best known proponent of this type of church planting movement. Hirsch imports and modifies McGavran’s growth paradigm for a Western context. Similar to McGavran, Hirsch begins with a critique of the church for its neglect of mission. For Hirsch, the early Church was the missional Church par excellence, while Christendom ushered in an era in which the institutional Church calcified mission for organizational purposes: “For the most part, the Christendom church obscured the need for a full-fledged missional leadership system, because the self-understanding of the church became fundamentally nonmissional.”\(^7\) McGavran cited institutional overreach as being a major cause of


unsuccessful mission abroad: missionaries set up too many organizations to do too many things, forgetting their calling to evangelize and grown churches. Hirsch applies this critique to the church in the West. Here, over-institutionalization has clouded its calling to rapidly expand through the promulgation of the Gospel and the forming of new worship communities.

McGavran moves from critique to a ‘recovery’ of biblical mission, with the parable of the harvest being central for his characterization of mission as growth. Hirsch calls for a similar recovery of a biblical notion of mission, this time using the structures of the church in the Book of Acts as paradigmatic. The name of Hirsch’s most prominent work, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church*, highlights this notion: the church has ‘forgotten’ the missional ethos and missional structures of the early church. What is need for the post-Christendom West is a reactivation of this missional ethos.

After critiquing mission practices, and calling for a return to a biblical view of mission, McGavran proceeds to utilize the tools of the social sciences, particularly statistical research and analysis, to better enable church growth. The focus of McGavran’s research is primarily on the target populations of missionaries. The goal is to discover which people groups are most receptive to the gospel, so that the missionary may better appropriate their resources. With a

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8 One of the ensuing critiques of McGavran will be that his adoption of the social sciences is done without moral or critical reflection. McGavran does not advocate for a particular statistical theory, but simply uses statistical data and analysis as a tool that helps identify where churches are growing. For his data, McGavran uses statistics gleaned from *The World Christian Handbook*, which is itself an amalgamation of reports from various mission agencies. While such data is used for broad assessments of mission, McGavran also advocated for new approaches to the gathering of statistical data on the part of the missionary. The missionary must select, document, and chart over time those statistics that most directly relate to the growth of churches. This includes documenting field totals (simply the number of Christians in a particular area), as well as the totals for specific homogenous units, which are sections of society in which the people all share some common characteristic (85). From here, the missionary should document the sources of change in these statistics, whether the increase or decrease is due to biological growth, transfer growth, or conversion growth (88-89). The task of the researcher is then to identify the homogenous units that have exhibited significant growth, and attempt to discern how such growth occurred. Of particular interest are any new practices implemented by the missionary (123-145). Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970).
focus on a Western context, and upon the notion of church planting, Hirsch similarly utilizes the social sciences, but turns their attention to the missionaries rather than the missionary targets. Hirsch uses many of the tools of organizational behavior (as used in popular business texts) to break down the apostolic church into a simple form that can be easily understood and applied. For instance, Hirsch uses extensive diagrams and charts to map out how to plant churches that will have the “missional DNA (mDNA)” to plant further churches. One of his most well-known charts maps out what he calls the APEPT (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers) leadership team, which divvies the work of the church into various teams that perform specific tasks (prophetic team performs social justice, pastoral team performs pastoral care, etc.). The adoption of such structures promises results for those that implement it effectively:

There seems to be a wonderful “ecology” for healthy ministry at work in a fully functioning APEPT system. It provides us with a theologically rich and organically consistent understanding to help leaders and organizations become more missional and agile. In fact it would be hard not to be missional if one intentionally develops this into the life of God’s people at the local and/or regional levels.

In addition, Hirsch adapts modern psychological profiling theories in order to help potential church planters identify whether they will be successful in their future missional endeavors.

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9 Hirsch is particularly interested in the field of organizational behavior as it relates to business management. His model for a successful and growing church is the successful and growing business, and the successful growing business includes leaders who are able to facilitate an environment that fosters creativity and growth. Jim Collins’ *Good to Great* is a paradigmatic example of the kinds of organizational behavioral methods that Hirsch adapts for use in church mission. The book identifies companies whose growth far exceeded their competitors, and attempts to discern the types of leadership and organizational cultures that foster such success, with the hope that such reasons can help leaders develop more successful companies. The goal is to discern and describe the attributes of business success in order to help leaders replicate such success. For Hirsch, these attributes are transferable, without modification, to the church. The leadership principles that foster business growth are akin to the successful apostolic leadership of growing church movements, and the culture of a successful business is akin to the culture of a church that is growing. For a detailed example of Hirsch’s utilization of business management texts, see Hirsch, 159-66. Prominent business management sources for Hirsch include Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... And Others Don’t* (London: Random House, 2009). Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1999). Thomas J. Peters, *Thriving on Chaos: Handbook for a Management Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1987). Hirsch, 177. Hirsch is here appropriating Richard Pascale’s theories of business management and leadership in Richard T. Pascale, *Managing on the Edge: How Successful Companies Use Conflict to Stay Ahead* (London; New York: Penguin Books, 1991).
Hirsch has developed his own variant, the APEPT test, which helps the assessor find out which of the 5 ministry orders they fit into. This is but one example of so-called “Church-Planter Assessments” have become commonplace amongst many North American church planting organizations, with various assessments based upon self-assessment tools of psychology.\(^\text{11}\) The multitude of pop-psychology evaluations (from Meyers-Briggs to Strength Finders) have their spiritual and missional equivalents in the North American church planting world, of which Hirsch stands as one its most prominent figures.

**Key Aspects of the Mission as Growth Model**

The impact of Donald McGavran on both North American and world missions should not be understated. In practical terms, his work at Fuller Seminary influenced generations of missionaries and church planters. His pioneering efforts of utilizing statistical and social scientific research is widely adopted even amongst his critics. Hirsch, likewise, has been highly influential amongst North American mission practitioners. In what follows I will summarize three key components of the mission as growth model.

*First, growth is the goal of mission.* While other mission activities, such as the development of education systems, the advocating of changes to social structures, and relief to the poor, are important, they must not obfuscate the preeminent purpose of missions—the salvation of the lost: “In mission today many tasks must be carried on together; yet the multiplicity of good activities must contribute to, and not crowd out, maximum reconciliation of men to God in the Church of Jesus Christ.”\(^\text{12}\) The purpose of mission is the numerical increase of the church, and all methods and research should be coordinated towards this end. Hirsch assumes

\(^{12}\) McGavran, 51.
that the goal of mission is growth—his models of mission are the explosive growth of the early church and the contemporary Chinese church—but couples this with an insistence that such growth will come about primarily through the starting of new congregations, rather than simply the growth of current congregations.  

A second feature of the mission as growth model is that, not only is growth the goal, but *growth can be predicted*. McGavran is explicit in what he means by growth—it is the numerical increase of Christian converts, and as such it is quantifiable and predictable. Such an assertion is not for McGavran simply pragmatic, but is itself a theological principle: “The lost are always persons. They always have countable bodies…Our Lord would have rejected the thought that the number of those found has no bearing on the direction of the search.”  

For McGavran, mission is a purposeful effort to reconcile men and women to God, the more that are reconciled the better, and thus the counting of those saved both drives mission strategy and well as keep the missionary accountable. As McMahon states in a forum on McGavran’s legacy:

> One of the things that strikes you about McGavran is his real emphasis on accountability. That’s part of the inconvenient questions that he asked, right? That was part of the drum beats he kept bringing up. You know, we measure growth by counting people in a fellowship of believers. You can tell us you are doing mission stuff out there, but where is the accountability in it? Did he get blowback? I know he did because people said it was all about numbers. That’s one of the big criticisms, but it comes out of that emphasis on accountability.

McGavran’s emphasis on counting and accountability presumes that the pathway to the numerical increase of the church is predictable, and as such missionaries should be held accountable as to whether their works are moving them towards this goal. McGavran was...

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14 McGavran, 43.
reacting against what he perceived was a weakening of missionary energies in the West. He believed that the rising indifference to mission in the West, coupled with a rise in religious relativism, had led missionaries to conclude that their job was simply to proclaim the Gospel and help the poor, and be content with whatever results would emerge. McGavran calls this a ‘neutralist’ position. Such a position not only weakens missionary efforts, but is contradictory to the Biblical mission mandate: “At base, the trouble is that mere search, detached witness—without the deep wish to convert, without wholehearted persuasion, and with what amounts to a fear of the numerical increase of Christians—is not biblically justified.”

For Hirsch, the growth of the church is predictable through an analysis of the leadership and organizational structures of individual congregations, and whether such structures sufficiently replicate what he believes is the proper structure of the Biblical church. Like McGavran, such assertions for Hirsch are as much theological principles as pragmatic ones, as scripture contains the organizational principles necessary to unlock church growth.

That growth is the priority of mission, and that such growth is predictable, leads to a third hallmark of the mission as growth model: the tools of the social sciences should be utilized in order to discern the most effective way to proceed in mission in order to maximize the numerical growth of the church. Missions should be strategic, and better research aids in better strategy. Again, such an assertion is not for McGavran purely pragmatic, but also theological. For biblical support McGavran construes the parable of the harvest as a command from Jesus to think strategically: one should discover the people groups who are ripe for the harvest and shift resources towards these groups in order to maximize growth. The use of quantitative research

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16 McGavran, 38.
17 Ibid., 40.
18 On Hirsch’s use of scripture, see below.
helps identify which fields are ripe for the harvest, as well as aid in discovering which methods yield the best reaping of that harvest.19 In short, statistical research helps to identify what methods work best for planting and growing churches in specific cultures. This research should be used by the missionary to purposefully plan church planting efforts. “(The missionary’s) goal is to devise an intelligent plan for establishing churches—one which fits his population, is similar to plans which have multiplied churches in other populations of this sort, and can be carried out with the resources which God has put into his hand.”20

For Hirsch, the tools of organizational behavior help elucidate the leadership qualities and organizational culture that best yield success, qualities that are present as well in the leadership abilities of the apostles and in the missional structure of the early church. The tools of organizational behavior help to unlock the leadership and structural secrets of the New Testament.

When compared to conceptions of mission as missio Dei and mission as dialogue, the mission as growth model offers the best solution to the problem of distinction. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the term mission is often so broadly construed that it allows one to apply the term to any activity, eliminating the possibility of discerning the difference between missional acts that are performed well or poorly. McGavran explicitly viewed his emphasis on growth as a counter to broader conceptions of mission that he believed obscured the need for

19 As an example, McGavran includes a graph showing the rapid increase of baptized membership in the Church of Christ in the Sudan from 1930-1963. The graph charts both the membership of the church as well as the number of people enrolled in missionary led schools. Since the rise of both over 33 years appears to follow a similar trajectory, McGavran presumes that school enrollment is the principle cause for growth in the Sudan, and missionaries should employ this tactic in the future in order to continue to bolster church growth in Sudan. Following the homogenous unit principle also means that such a tactic may only apply to the situation of the Sudan—in other countries, school enrollment may not correlate to church growth. McGavran, 120-21.
20 Ibid., 360.
effective evangelism. Service to the poor, the development of Christian education, or political advocacy are important, but such activities are not at the heart of what McGavran saw as the Biblical missional mandate, which is the conversion of the lost. McGavran, Hirsch, and their disciples are offering a conception of mission that is concrete and distinct—mission is about converting the lost and forming new churches out of the numerical increase of these conversions. It provides a clearly defined goal, an assertion that such a goal can be obtained, and that there are resources and skills which can help the missionary in such a pursuit. For this reason it offers the missionary the opportunity to hone their skills: the missionary can get better at their tasks of proclaiming the Gospel and establishing churches. The nebulousness of *missio Dei* obscures such advancement—the missionary could at any time focus on a myriad of other missional activities, with little to know tools for assessing whether such activities are being performed well.

**A Critical Evaluation of Mission as Growth**

The tools of moral philosophy and theological ethics can help better understand this conception of mission, as well as identify its flaws. It is not a coincidence that the mission as growth paradigm emerged as a distinct enterprise in the modern era. Just as the concept of a fact, the emergence of social sciences, and the notion of empirical research are all modern phenomena, so too is the missiological fact, and empirical missiological research. The modernist underpinnings of the growth paradigm have been largely unrecognized by its adherents, a fact that is revealed particularly in its use of scripture to support its undertakings. Missiologists like McGavran and Hirsch claim to be heralding in a return to the missional dynamics of the New Testament while advocating the essential use of scientific and psychological methods completely.

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foreign to any first century society. For Hirsch in particular, the Book of Acts is a model for
Christian mission, but a model that is coded—psychological resources and scientific diagrams
must be used to help crack its code.

But perhaps this is speaking proleptically. A fuller critique of the mission of growth
paradigm begins by situating it within its modern context. In what follows, I will show how the
paradigm fits well into Alasdair MacIntyre’s critique of the social sciences and of modern
management.

*Ought, Is, and the Myth of Moral Neutrality*

MacIntyre’s critique of the social sciences is situated within his broader critique of
modernity and modern morality in *After Virtue*. His critique of modernity is shared in part by a
number of moral philosophers and theologians, notably Charles Taylor and Colin Gunton.
MacIntyre’s assertion is that one of the most profound changes that emerges in the wake of the
Enlightenment is the severing of the link between “ought” and “is.” This break had its roots in
voluntarism and in portions of reformation Protestant and post-reformation Catholic thought,
which stressed that Christian morality was linked primarily with the divine will and the divine
command, and not embedded in God’s created order.22 Enlightenment thinkers, most notably
David Hume, brought this to its fuller secular conclusion: the rationality of descriptions of

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22 It is perhaps not a coincidence that the mission as growth paradigm has its roots in American Evangelicalism, to
the degree in which this movement is indebted to the radical elements of the Protestant reformation. While in *After
Virtue*, MacIntyre highlights Hume’s distinction between ought and is as paradigmatic of the Enlightenment break
with Aristotelian notions of telos, in *A Short History of Ethics*, MacIntyre is quick to point out how such a break is
earlier evident in the work of Luther and Calvin. According to MacIntyre, Luther splits the individual from the
community, emphasizes the obedience to the divine will over the rationality of the created order, and affirms the
absolute sovereignty of the political order. “It is, therefore, not just that Aquinas’ Christian Aristotelianism and
Luther’s Christian fideism are based on alternative and competing metaphysical schemes; it is also the case that they
are providing an analysis of and insight into different moral vocabularies (125). See Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *A Short
History of Ethics: A History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age to the Twentieth Century* (New York:
human nature is in no way related to human morality. With this comes the emergence of the historical novelty of the fact/value distinction: the tools of science provide value-neutral facts that are rationally discernable, while values are inherently irrational and distinct, coming from some other place (for most, religion).  

A key presumption of this view is the belief that the descriptions of human nature are value-neutral. Just as a microscope can be used to understand the structure, function, and movement of an organism, the tools of the social sciences can be used to understand the functions of human beings, and such descriptions are just as neutral. “The explanation of action is increasingly held to be a matter of laying bare the physiological and physical mechanism which underlie action.”

For MacIntyre, this Enlightenment rendering of value neutrality renders morality unintelligible due to the severing of the intrinsic link between human nature and human ends. MacIntyre codifies this link, prevalent in Aristotle and pre-reformation Christian thought, as a threefold schema: human nature as it is (in its untutored state), the goal of human beings (their telos), and the principles and virtues that enable a human being to reach their goal (ethics). To describe a human being is to speak in some way, implicitly or explicitly, of all three. Descriptions of human beings are thus intrinsically value-laden. For instance, to describe a person that compulsively lies, cheats, steals, and commits violence, is to describe a bad or deficient person, in the same way that a description of a watch that fails to accurately keep time

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23 Charles Taylor charts a similar course in his depiction of the rise of modernity in *A Secular Age*. For Taylor, Hume’s thought is paradigmatic of the rise of the modern disengagement of the mind from both the body and the rest of the created world. Taylor’s keen observation is to chart the ways in which such disengagement correlates as well to what he calls the “buffered self” which offers the “attached sense of freedom, control, invulnerably, and hence dignity (285).” According to Taylor, this trajectory leads to an expressive individualism, a term that coheres with MacIntyre’s assessment of modern morality as emotivism. See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

24 MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 82.

25 Ibid., 52-53.
is a description of a bad watch. To describe what something “is” in its essence, is also to describe in part what it “ought” to be if it reached its telos. An Enlightenment rejection of this link between “ought” and “is” operates under a moral fiction: that human behavior can be understood with scientific precision, and that such understandings have no moral implications.

It is with this that we can see how a conception of mission as growth emerges. Here, the tools of the behavioral sciences are used to predict with precision the behavior of missionary targets. For McGavran, statistics can help better show the Gospel acceptance rate amongst differing people groups, and such statistical methods are value neutral: “The numerical approach is essential to understanding church growth. The Church is made up of countable people and there is nothing particularly spiritual in not counting them.” McGavran goes on to show how counting occurs in the bible in both negative and positive ways—to show the number of people accepting the Gospel, and the number of people unfaithful to God. This demonstrates that the use of statistical research is morally neutral.

For Hirsch, psychological profiles and the utilization of organizational behavior research are predictive of church planting success. The primary tool developed by Hirsch is his APEST test, which is used to assess the giftings of ministers. Such a test is unabashedly derivative of modern business practices, with Hirsch drawing corollaries to organizational behavior assessments:

*The Apostle is the entrepreneur:* Innovator and cultural architect who initiates a new product, or service, and develops the organization.
*The Prophet is the questioner:* Provocateur who probes awareness and fosters questioning of current programming leading to organizational learning.
*The Evangelist is the communicator:* Recruiter to the organization who markets the idea or product and gains loyalty to a brand or cause.

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26 McGavran, 83. Emphasis mine.
27 Ibid.
28 APEST is an adaptation of Hirsch’s APEPT abbreviation. The second P, Pastors, is replaced by S, Shepherds.
The Shepherd is the humanizer: People-oriented motivator who fosters a healthy relational environment through the management of meaning.

The Teacher is the philosopher: Systems-thinker who is able to clearly articulate the organizational ideology in a way as to advance corporate learning.29

According to Hirsch, the purpose of the test “measures an individual’s current ministry motivation and expression in ministry settings. As a result, APEST leads one to new areas of learning and integration for increased ministry engagement. APEST provides a quantified result to identify one’s current place for influence within a larger community.”30

There is no moral reflection on the utilization of such tests, as Hirsch believes that the application of these tests is to help missionaries uncover the appropriate Biblical model for mission and growth. The belief that what is gained by the application of the social sciences is a better understanding of the missional Church as portrayed in scripture is used to insulate the use of such methods from critique. Even though The Forgotten Ways reads as an organizational behavior manual, its use of modern technical approaches to mission are justified because they reveal what is more biblical, and hence more “natural.”

However, the counting of people for the sake of maximizing church growth, and the use of psychological and organizational behavior research to predict successful church planting movements, are not morally neutral. Most significantly, McGavran’s work has been severely criticized for creating a kind of cultural siloing that perpetuates racial biases for the sake of church growth. One of McGavran’s key sociological discoveries, the homogenous unit principle, states that churches grow more quickly when they are generally made up of people from the

29 http://www.alanhirsch.org/faq. Hirsch gives a more detailed account of the relationship between the APEPT system and business management theory in The Shaping of Things to Come (with Michael Frost). Unfortunately, Hirsch does not cite specific sources for the corollaries between management theory and APEPT, stating instead that this correlation is “affirmed by the current best practice in leadership and management theory and practice (173).” It should be noted that, for Hirsch, leadership and management theory are simply reflecting the best leadership practices laden in scripture and articulated by St. Paul: “Current secular leadership theory yearns for the synergistic, creative, dynamic, interactive community proposed by Paul (175).” See Frost and Hirsch, 173-75.

30 http://www.alanhirsch.org/tests/
same culture. Hence, the missionary should be free to focus on a particular people group, starting homogenous churches for the sake of quicker growth.

While McGavran’s intention was not to create segregated churches, but to ascertain mission principles based on the observed fact of tribal and cultural distinction overseas, his observations were utilized as tools in the West to exacerbate distinctions for the sake of numerical growth. Rene Padilla asserts that the adoption of McGavran’s strategies in the American suburbs perpetuates and condones the cultural sins present there. For Padilla, McGavran’s missiology is “tailor made for churches and institutions whose main function in society is to reinforce the status quo. What can this missiology say to a church in an American suburb, where the bourgeois is comfortable but remains enslaved to the materialism of a consumer society and blind to the needs of the poor?”

In order to maximize growth, the missionary (perhaps unintentionally) downplays specific embedded cultural sins.

Particularly in its adaptation to the west, mission as growth faces another unintended consequence due to its perceived moral neutrality: that growth can occur due to the transferring of Christians from one church to another. William Chadwick documents the ways in which the unreflective use of the social sciences from the church growth movement in part lead to an exorbitant increase in the number of people moving from one church to another. Chadwick describes the growth of churches based primarily on this movement as stealing sheep. According to Chadwick, there is a fatal flaw in McGavran’s program: statistical research determines the most highly efficient ways to numerically grow churches, yet the most efficient way to grow

31 McGavran, 213-14.
33 Chadwick describes this lack of reflectiveness as a failure to inner examination on the part of the missionary. William Chadwick, Stealing Sheep: The Church's Hidden Problem with Transfer Growth (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 94.
churches is not through evangelism, but by appealing to Christians dissatisfied with their current church. By unreflectively adopting these methods, McGavran actually helped to divert missional resources away from evangelism and towards the transferring of Christians between churches.\textsuperscript{34}

If the telos of mission is growth, defined as the numerical increase of persons in a local congregation, then the fastest way to obtain such growth is often by appealing to existing Christians. McGavran may not have been able to foresee such unintended consequences, but this is in part due to the belief that his statistical methods were value-free. The goal of mission from the outset is numerical growth and the methods used for assessing such growth were considered morally neutral.

Mission thus proceeds under the auspices that the acceptance of the Gospel and the numerical success of mission can be predicted, and that the utilization of social scientific methods to enable better church growth is morally neutral. Criticisms of this approach stem from this assertion. MacIntyre’s critique of the social sciences is that they are both manipulative, and ultimately, ironically, ineffective. The same critique holds for the mission as growth model as well.

\textit{Manipulation and Missional Contrivance}

If human behavior can be studied, analyzed, and predicted with scientific precision, human beings can be manipulated in order to achieve predetermined outcomes. Human beings can be manipulated and controlled in a way similar to laboratory rats.\textsuperscript{35} Colin Gunton

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 90-99.
\textsuperscript{35} It is no coincidence that animals are used in experiments to help understand and predict human behavior, and the use of animals in many cases comes only after it is determined, retroactively, that human beings should not be put through such lab experiments.
characterizes this aspect of modernity as instrumentalization: “We use the other as an instrument, as the mere means for realizing our will, and not as in some way integral to our being.”

In turn, if human beings are predictable, then the power to manipulate lies in the hands of those who can discern such predictability. MacIntyre sums up this connection, first made by Marx, thusly:

> It is clear that the Enlightenment’s mechanistic account of human action included both a thesis about the predictability of human behavior and a thesis about the appropriate ways to manipulate human behavior. As an observer, if I know the relevant laws governing the behavior of others, I can whenever I observe that the antecedent conditions have been fulfilled predict the outcome. As an agent, if I know these laws, I can whenever I can contrive the fulfillment of the same antecedent conditions produce the outcome.

If a given set of social conditions will consistently lead to specific and predictable human behaviors, then one can seek to create such social conditions in order to bring about these predictable behavioral outcomes. Thus a conception of mission grounded in the ability to predict, with scientific precision, the antecedent social conditions necessary for numerical growth can attempt to contrive those same antecedent conditions to necessarily cause numerical growth.

The church growth/church planting publishing industry deals primarily with the business of contrivance. It is about discovering the conditions that lead to church growth, describing those conditions, and inviting missionaries to replicate such conditions. Here, Hirsch’s statement of

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36 Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three, and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 14. According to Gunton, the Cartesian detachment and disengagement of the individual mind renders all of nature, including other human beings, as instruments for realizing the will. Such instrumentalization effects both the environment and human relationships.

37 MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 84. Cf. Marx’s 3rd Thesis on Feuerbach: “The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that it is essential to educate the educator himself. This doctrine must, therefore, divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society.” Commenting on these Theses, MacIntyre believes that Marx demonstrates that such a split in society drives the social theorist to believe that their theories grant them a degree of autonomy over their non-autonomous subjects: social theorists “understand those who are the subjects of their enquiries. They understand those whose actions and experiences are to be explained by their theory as the wholly determined products of circumstance and upbringing…By contrast such theorists understand themselves as rational agents, able to and aspiring to embody their intentions in the natural and social world (229-230).
“cracking the code” of New Testament growth is telling—the ability to convert non-believers, to get those believers to attend a church, is one that is achieved mainly through solving the code. The New Testament church was the first to experience seismic missional growth because the early Christians were the first to crack this code.

Because the social and psychological tools used to predict human behavior are value-neutral, the possibility that such contrivances are manipulative is simply never raised. The question is always “what actions can create the environment for church growth,” and never “what are actions that create church growth, but are morally questionable.” This is a problem when the goal of mission becomes numerical growth. If the goal is numerical growth, then the actions that lead toward growth are good, or at the minimum morally neutral.

MacIntyre believes that the implementers of the social sciences, the modern day managers, are often unaware of the manipulative undertones of much of their work. Effectiveness becomes the veiling term for manipulation:

Managers themselves and most writers of management conceive of themselves as morally neutral characters whose skills enable them to devise the most efficient means of achieving whatever end is proposed. Whether a given manager is effective or not is on the dominant view a quite different question from that of the morality of the ends which his effectiveness serves or fails to serve. 38

In a similar way, modern mission contrivers veil their manipulation under the auspices of growth, success, and effectiveness. Efficiency is a prominent value in McGavran’s missiology—the use of statistical research is meant to help cater missional resources to those areas in which the largest number of converts is possible: “Since many aspects and activities have very little to do with reproduction, the student of church growth concentrates on those most directly responsible for propagating the Christian religion. The facts he selects are relevant to “bringing

38 Ibid., 74.
the nations to faith and obedience.” Similarly for Hirsch, the goal is to develop the ideal church structures that replicate the missional dynamics of the early church, and will thus replicate its numerical successes. If one can replicate these right conditions, “metabolic growth and impact are catalyzed.”

Now, to this argument one could reply: “these missionaries are not amoral, they are, after all, Christians!” It is true that those engaged in this type of model of mission are for the most part aiming to form churches with a particular moral worldview. The hope of many of these missionaries is that those who are the product of their growth strategies live lives that are good and in accordance with some conception of biblical morality. McGavran does not believe that mission is a purely sociological enterprise—the faith of missionaries is important. Hirsch lists a robust confession of Jesus as Lord as one of the six fundamentals of his mDNA. The issue is that, since success is defined as growth, missionaries should leverage all resources necessary towards this goal. As a result the particular missional actions related to church growth—the systems put in place, the advertising, market research, partitioning of resources, etc. are not considered moral actions. There is not, in this scheme, a discussion of actions that could lead to church growth, but should not be partaken in. Faithfulness in both Hirsch and McGavran becomes one of many components of a church growth, listed for Hirsch amongst other essentials such as Organic Systems. Faithfulness here is an essential part of the life of the missionary, not only because it is part of being a Christian, but also because it is one of the many components that help bring about church growth: the confession of Jesus as Lord becomes instrumentalized towards the goal of growth.

39 McGavran, 98.
40 Hirsch, 76. Emphasis added.
41 McGavran, 16.
42 Hirsch, 79.
We see this particularly manifest in the ways in which mission in the Bible is construed. Here, I am adapting a notion from David Kelsey that the uses of scripture in modern theology, the ways in which the Bible is construed, are partially determined by pre-textual judgments. For theology, one’s imaginative judgment of God’s presence amongst his people determines not only which scripture passages are highlighted, but also how those scriptures are construed (as concepts, or judgments, etc.). I would assert the same for missiology—our imaginative judgments about the purpose of God’s mission helps to determine which Biblical texts related to mission are highlighted, as well as the way we construe such texts. For the mission as growth paradigm, the controlling image is the advancement of God’s kingdom through the increase of the number of Christians to the ends of the earth. This exerts a control over the types of scriptures used (McGavran’s parable of the sower, Peter’s speech in Acts 2), but also how such missiological texts are construed. Here, because the goal of mission is the increase of converts and churches, and such goals are advanced through an understanding of the mechanics of human nature, Biblical texts related to mission are construed as missional contrivances—they provide replicable models for how to produce effective mission.

Alan Hirsch’s interpretation of Ephesians 4:4 is a vivid example. This passage becomes for Hirsch the foundation of his APEPT system. According to Hirsch, Paul is giving instructions on how to create a system that will grow the church. The church’s recovery of this system is key to “unlocking the real power of Pauline teaching.” Such a recovery can be bolstered by the


44 Hirsch is explicit in his appeal to a reading of scripture that stems from an imaginative pre-judgment. The second edition of *The Forgotten Ways* asserts that the book “is written to appeal to the imagination and to direct the church to embrace the more dynamic movement-based paradigm evidenced in the New Testament.” Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating Apostolic Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), xxvi.

45 *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church*, 171.
behavioral sciences—minsters can take personality profiles to discover which of the fivefold gifts they have, and which ones they need to fully unlock the fivefold power Paul describes.\textsuperscript{46}

The relationship of Ephesians 4:4 to the rest of the epistle—particularly its relationship to the unity of the church and the ascent and descent of Jesus—is ignored. The passage is instead construed as a providing a prescriptive model for church growth. Hirsch sees his task as that of Biblical decoder—utilizing scientific tools to unlock the model for growth hidden throughout the New Testament:

> We need a comprehensive mental model of movement that makes sense of New Testament ecclesiology as well as unlocks the logjam of thinking that has resulted from twenty centuries of Christianity in Western settings. What this book proposes is just that: a synthesized, integrated model that does justice to the primary codes of Jesus’s church and provides us with a viable way forward.\textsuperscript{47}

> When the business of mission is growth, its currency will be contrivances. The goal of McGavran and Hirsch is to manipulate mission strategies and church structures in order to bring forth a numerical increase of Christianity, with scripture providing the key strategies. The problem is that such success is predicated on the belief that individuals can be manipulated in such a way that their conversion to Christianity is partially predetermined by such strategies. The conversion of the unbeliever is not the result of a free decision by the individual as much as it is the product of the strategic effectiveness of the missionary.

\textit{Ironically Ineffective}

> According to MacIntyre, managerial effectiveness and efficiency will always be proved to be a farce. Though the manager may possess a limited, short run capacity to manipulate circumstances to achieve desired outcomes, their methods and tactics will ultimately be undone

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 172.

\textsuperscript{47} Hirsch, \textit{The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating Apostolic Movements}, xxiv.
by the interminable unpredictability of human beings, characterized by Machiavelli as the
goddess *Fortuna*: “What I want to emphasize is Machiavelli’s belief that, given the best possible
stock of generalizations, we may on the day be defeated by an unpredicted and unpredictable
counter-example—and yet still see no way to improve upon our generalizations and still have no
reason to abandon them or even to reformulate them.”48

Such unpredictability can derive from a sort of uncontrollable feedback loop—our
interactions with other people necessarily change the circumstances by which future interactions
are premised. In addition, the ability to exert control over human beings will always be limited—as
both the manager and the customer exist within an infinitely complex web of other
relationships that exert their own influence on them. There is also the simple fact of contingency.
Something as simple as the common cold could change the course of key events in human
history.49

Human beings cannot be manipulated as inert objects, and hence the use of scientific
means to manipulate human beings will be doomed to eventual failure: “The dominance of the
manipulative mode in our culture is not and cannot be accompanied by very much actual success
in manipulation.”50 Managerial effectiveness is a fiction, and hence the manager must devise a
way to prop up such a fiction, which is done through the equally mythical notion of bureaucratic

49 Ibid., 100.
50 Ibid., 107. Public policy theorists William Dunn and David Miller come to a similar conclusion through their
assessment of the New Public Management theory of administration and its major rival, the Neo-Weberian State.
They see in both of these theories similar deficiencies as those outlined by MacIntyre, in that they are unable to
overcome instrumental rationality, nor are they able to provide the kind of efficiency they promise: “Both
perspectives are also abstract, sweeping, and often ambiguous, leaving much to the imagination. Both tend to ignore
the mixed or plainly ineffective results of organizations that have historically been governed by their principles.
Both embody a techno-utilitarian perspective that in most respects resembles the kind of instrumental rationality that
Max Weber exposed, criticized, and feared.” William N. Dunn and David Y. Miller, "A Critique of the New Public
expertise. The manager becomes involved in a masquerade: they must present themselves as experts of human behavior in a world in which such experts cannot exist. They must engage in a type of social performance—displaying their credentials, success, expertise, and continually adjusting means to suit their ends. Such a social performance is most evident in the literary genre of the business success book. Such books begin with a display of business success, an analysis of why such business succeeds, and a practical application for the reader. Of course, if the application of the insights displayed in such texts strongly predicted business success, they would be perpetual bestsellers. However, most of these books are quickly forgotten, since few such success stories exist. On occasion, the failure to predicate success is followed up by a kind of doubling down by the author—the reasons for this lack of success is on the part of the implementer, who has failed to fully implement their system.

Mission as growth attempts to develop law like generalizations that predict mission outcomes, but have ultimately been shown to have little to no predictive power. The goddess Fortuna is as much at work in the mission manager as their counterpart in business. This is because the missionary cannot account for the immense and infinite complex web of social relationships that exist in their particular locale. The conversations that missionaries have with others do not take place in a vacuum. Previous relationships and conversations influence their interlocuter’s view of Christianity, positively, negatively, or both. The people in which they communicate have other responsibilities that limit the amount of time the proportion for church related activities.

51 There are numerous examples of such books. One of the most popular over the past twenty years is Jim Collins’ Good to Great, which analyzes several companies that superbly outperformed their particular markets and discerning the organizational principles common to these companies, with the hope that such principles can then be applied by the reader. Tom Peters’ Thriving on Chaos is structured first around key management principles, with examples from successful businesses used to highlight the effectiveness of these principles if applied by the aspiring business manager. See Collins. Peters.
There is also the sheer contingency of mission. For all of the strategizing, for all of the careful analysis of human tendencies, for all of the growth secrets allegedly divined from scripture, at the end of the day, someone may catch a cold. That cold may prevent the next Billy Graham from attending a church service or strategy meeting. Perhaps the next week they attend some other church, or begin a new activity that prevents them from attending. Difficult people may begin attending the church plant, driving away other potential attendees. Contingency is perhaps even more of a factor in missions as opposed to business—church gatherings are often public events in which random strangers may attend, strangers who defy demographic datum. The church planter typically does not have the same luxury of hiring and firing their parishioners as the business manager can with their employees.

The contingencies of working with human beings, as opposed to atoms, severely limits the effectiveness of the modern manager. Their ability to successfully manipulate human beings is short lived and capricious, and because of this fact they must engage in an elaborate charade, adjusting means to ends and social customs that certify their expertise.

For these missional managers, the means of achieving the end of church growth must be continually adjusted to validate their vocational existence. This helps to explain the proliferation of church growth and church planting publications, a proliferation that has warranted the codification of church planting as a distinct literary genre. Each successive book provides tips and strategies to better unlock the secrets of church growth. Of course, if such numerical success were highly replicable, there would no need for such a litany of publications.

Hirsch exemplifies this adjustment of means to ends in the second edition of his book *The Forgotten Ways*. The first edition promises a simple and replicable method for recovering the

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52 On amazon.com, for instance, Church growth is a searchable literature category, containing 2000 books.
missional DNA of the early church through the replication of the six key components of Apostolic Genius. The codification of this system as missional DNA is intended to show how a “simple, intrinsic, reproducible, central guiding mechanism is necessary for the reproduction and sustainability of genuine missional movements.”\textsuperscript{53} The utilization of the DNA metaphor is also meant to evoke the notion that such a system of mission is engrained in the lifeblood of all Christians, so much so that the great explosions of church growth throughout human history involve an intuitive grasp of these six components.\textsuperscript{54} Hirsch’s two examples are the growth of early Christianity and the recent growth of underground churches in China.

Yet, despite the alleged simplicity of this system, Hirsch admits in the second edition that few have been able to successfully replicate it. The lack of success in implementing this simple sixfold model, however, does not deter from the fact that those that have adopted one or two of these six critical aspects can still see great benefit.

But if we look for full and mature expressions of the Apostolic Genius system—where all six elements of mDNA are cooking in the one total system—there are still very few exemplary models in the West. But I am extremely hopeful: the good news is that some are now established; they are maturing and are gaining momentum, influence, and strength as viable expressions of apostolic movements. And it takes only a few of these to validate the model for others to follow. For instance, only two churches (Willow Creek and Saddleback) in effect validated the seeker-sensitive model that subsequently became the standard expression of evangelical church throughout the West! It doesn’t take many to change the paradigm and demonstrate validity.\textsuperscript{55}

There is in this instance a moving of the missional goalposts. What is promised is a simple and reproducible mission growth strategy that has proved, despite 10 years and millions of books sold, not to be simple or reproducible. Hirsch is hopeful, however, that a few

\textsuperscript{53} Hirsch, \textit{The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church}, 76.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 77.
\textsuperscript{55} Hirsch, \textit{The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating Apostolic Movements}, xxvi.
movements will emerge that have all six aspects of Apostolic Genius, and that these few will validate his system.

What is obscured amidst such scheming is the simple recognition that people can, in the end of the day (not the eschaton), choose not to become Christian. The transcendent belief that every knee shall bow is confused with the immanent reality that, until that point, people may reject the gospel despite our best laid plans. The missionary can plan and strategize the most effective APEPT leadership team, only to have members of that team unexpectedly move, fall ill, or quit. There is an over-realized eschatology undergirding the mission as growth paradigm—the belief that the kingdom of God will be made manifest through our works, and that manifestation will be the turning of souls to Jesus Christ.

The Problem of Agency

The Diminished Agency of the Mission Recipient

We can codify the central issue of the mission as growth paradigm as the problem of human agency. Following the lead of the social and behavioral sciences, these missiologists attempt to elucidate law-like generalizations of human behavior that are predictive. As Charles Taylor puts it, such an understanding reduces personal agency to a performance criterion. The behavioral sciences, taking their cue from the natural sciences, sought to provide a significance-free account of human action, that “the explanatory relationship between situation and response can be captured in an absolute description; or that…the features picked out in the significance description are not essential to the explanation, but just concern the way things appear to us in ordinary life.”57 Taylor makes an important and nuanced distinction concerning the behavioral

57 Ibid., 108.
sciences. It is not that human beings are simplistic, or that human beings do not have complex reasons for engaging in specific behaviors. However, the assertion is that one can pick out the explanatory factors amongst these various reasons. The significance of the choice for the individual is irrelevant, what matters is the identification of the underlying process that is ultimately determinative of the individual’s choice of action. One views agency as the predictive performance of the individual with no reference to a decision’s importance to that individual. Taylor gives an example of the sun rising—the individual experiences the sun going up and down each day, yet the scientist knows that this is merely the individual experience of an underlying process of the revolution earth around the sun.\textsuperscript{58} The behavioral scientists apply this reasoning about the sun and the earth to human beings.

The example of church growth becomes illustrative of this point. If forty new people arrive at a church service, or at an outreach event, what is important is describing the factors that predicated the performative action of attendance. The missionary thus attempts to describe the tactics and strategies that brought about the actions of these forty people. What is irrelevant to the description are the various individual reasons that are only significant to that individual and not to their action of attendance. Some of these individuals may have arrived at church because they felt a sense of obligation to the friends that had invited them, some may have attended because they had felt shame for not having engaged in the religion of their parents, some did not attend because they were sick, or because the advertisements struck them as kitschy. However, all of these individual reasons are irrelevant. What Taylor calls the representation account seeks to redescribe these actions as naturalistic ends that are thus “discoverable by objective

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 107.
The individual’s reasons for showing up to church are only significant to themselves: the only descriptions that matter to the missionary are those that relate to the objective act itself, and can thus be scrutinized and manipulated.

To use our example above—what matters to the church planter is not the pluriform of reasons why each of the forty people show up at a church who successfully implements its program. What matters is that the program implemented produced its desired effect, and what matters is whatever explanation best describes how these forty people showed up. The personal desires and emotions of each individual do not matter in regards to the missionary’s primary task of numerical growth.

The consequence of the adoption of the mission of growth paradigm is thus to severely limit human agency. The primary task of the missionary is to discover the underlying processes that lead to the expansion of the church and to replicate these processes in order to bring about such growth. The enactment of this program necessarily relegates all other individual cares and desires to secondary matters. It is important to note that, under this system there is still room to acknowledge the importance of individuals desires, emotions, and needs, however such acknowledgement is only for the individual’s benefit, and must be subordinated to the overarching project of discerning and implementing the process of church growth.

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59 Ibid., 113. One might also construe the representation account as an attempt to reduce the choice of whether to accept the Gospel, or to attend a church gathering, to one of simple mental causation. Here I’m referring to G. E. M. Anscombe’s distinction between mental causes on the one hand, and ‘reasons’ (motives and intentions) on the other: “the more the action is described as a mere response, the more inclined one would be to the word ‘cause’; while the more it is described as a response to something as having a significance that is dwelt on by the agent, or as a response surrounded with thoughts and questions, the more inclined one would be to use the word ‘reason’ (331).” The attempt in the mission as growth paradigm is to reduce the receptivity of an invitation to a church gathering, or an invitation to become a Christian, into one of mere response, since such responses can thus be more easily predicted and thus manipulative by misional contrivance. See G. E. M. Anscombe, "Intention," Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 57 (1956).
The Diminished Agency of the Missionary

While it seems as though the agency of the missionary target is diminished at the expense of an enlargement of the agency of the missionary, the implementation of the growth paradigm ironically leads to a similar diminishment of agency for the missionary. The task of the missionary in this regard is stripped down to one of process and implementation, and their effectiveness becomes determinate purely on outcomes.

The role of the missionary is no longer creative, flexible, or even spiritual. The program is implemented, and the missionary is judged on the benchmarks reached or unreached. The joy that is possible in mission is determined solely on outcomes—more growth, more joy.

This diminishment in agency on the part of the missionary is a failure to understand the task of mission as spiritual—as something that is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God working in and through us to accomplish His will, and John 14:6 highlights the reception of the Holy Spirit as empowering and inaugurating the era of Christian mission. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit renews moral agency—the disciple’s missional actions, done in accordance with and empowered by the Spirit, become part of God’s actions: “Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven (Matthew 16:19).”

The Holy Spirit is the presence of God at work renewing and restoring His creation, thus the recipients of the Trinitarian mission of the Holy Spirit find their mission in cooperating in the creative activity of the renewal of God’s creation. Oliver O’Donovan remarks upon the weakened agency of sinful humanity apart from the working of the Holy Spirit. Agency is impaired because we don’t know exactly what lies ahead of us: “Striving to produce something but unable to tell what it would produce, it is wholly bent upon painful effort, a world with a
The gift of the Holy Spirit does not give us divine foreknowledge, but rather takes our desires and aspirations and weaves them up into the purposes of God.

The promise of the Holy Spirit gives the missionary not a divine foreknowledge of the end results of their efforts, but rather an assurance that the work they do in the power of the Holy Spirit will be taken up into the divine purposes of God. This frees the missionary to be joyful and creative in their charge. The missionary is free to serve God at the behest of the movement of the Spirit, which “blows where it chooses (John 3:8).” Here lies the source of so much creativity throughout the centuries of Christian mission.

What the mission as growth paradigm offers, at its worse, is an assurance to the missionary that their efforts will produce the desired results. This futile attempt strips the missionary of their creative freedom, since “factual narrative of future events would entirely undercut the indeterminacy that freedom requires.” If the immediate future can be controlled by the implementation of a specific missional program, then the indeterminacy from which springs creative freedom is stripped. The missionary is left only to implement programs, and judge (and be judged) by their effectiveness in implementation.

There is in the end a sinful dramatic irony fit for a Dante poem: in their attempts to control human behavior to conjure numerical increases, the missionary becomes controlled by the ups and downs of weekly Sunday attendance figures. They are happy and content when the numbers match their projections, even if these numbers may be the result of manipulation or manipulation or

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60 Oliver O'Donovan, Finding and Seeking, Ethics as Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 1.
61 Ibid., 2.
62 Ibid., 156.
63 O’Donovan goes on to suggest that this desire for certainty about the near future may spring from a fear of freedom. In the present case, the missionary is attracted to the certainty of growth strategies out of a fear of failure, or the possibility that the secrets to mass conversion may lie outside of their ken. Ibid., 158.
sheer luck. They will be sad when the numbers miss the mark, believing that they have missed a key aspect of some system.

What is offered is the false assurance of a system and a program, and assurance of the ability to predict a future that is known only to God. There is an overconfidence in the ability to predict with certainty events in the near future. In the process what is lost is the assurance and comfort of the Holy Spirit, which gives the missionary the delight in knowing that their labors are not done in vain.

**Conclusion**

These criticisms notwithstanding, there remains much to be commended about McGavran’s growth-centered approach to mission. An emphasis on mission as growth addresses some of the perpetual missiological challenges evident in an approach to mission centered on participation in the *missio Dei*. It emphasizes active participation in mission work: the missionary can get better at their job, and such improvement can yield tangible results. It also provides greater clarity in defining the work of the missionary: mission work is the focused activity of evangelism with the expressed goal of increasing the number of Christians throughout the world. Other Christian activities may be related to this task, but mission at its core is defined by such activity. These distinctive aspects of the mission as growth paradigm do have a place within mission, but the practical skills that they offer must be placed in a context free of the burdens of numerical growth and earthly success. As will be demonstrated, the development of practical skills on the part of the missionary is better conceived of as the honing of craft, a craft whose benefits are ultimately not the numerical success of the mission, but the glory of God. This conception will be addressed in the ensuing chapter on mission and virtue. But before this discussion, it is imperative to address another major conception of mission, a conception that
consciously attempts to redress the manipulative aspects of the growth paradigm by instead highlighting the dialogical aspects of mission.
Chapter 3: Mission as Dialogue

Introduction

The previous chapter examined many of the difficulties inherent in an approach to mission as church growth, particularly surrounding the idea of agency. Developed over a similar period of time (mid to late twentieth century), the conception of mission as dialogue can be seen as directly addressing the criticisms of the mission as growth paradigm, particularly in regards to its charges of manipulation. However, its emergence was not in reaction to the work of McGavran and others, but rather in response to the perceived excesses of the missionary enterprise throughout Christian history, particularly in the occasions of missionary collusion with European colonization. Coupled with this anxiety of the history of Christian mission was an awareness of the decline of Christianity in Europe and the emergence of a de facto religious pluralism of many Western countries in the twentieth century. The theological superiority of the West was challenged by the erosion of Christianity from within its European strongholds, and thus “the Eurocentric view of the world and of the Church lost its persuasiveness, undermining the territorial concept of mission at its root.”

The concept of interreligious dialogue emerged out of these critiques, both by those who wished to qualify the concept of mission and those that wished to abolish it. It emphasizes the intrinsic value of other persons and their religious beliefs, and the value in interpersonal

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1 Jacques Dupuis clarifies the difference between de facto pluralism and de jure pluralism. De facto religious pluralism simply acknowledges the fact of the “plurality of religions, characteristic of the landscape of today’s world.” Dupuis does not mean that religious diversity has not existed as a reality for millennia, but what is new for many in the West is the persistent encounter with those of different religions. One is confronted with a plurality of religions and religious beliefs, rather than existing in relative isolation from those of differing religions. One can choose to accept this reality simply as a fact, or, to accept it as de jure: something to be welcomed as a good development, and one that is “positively willed by God.” Jacques Dupuis, Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 386.

encounters with others in their difference.\(^3\) Interreligious dialogue stresses encounter rather than confrontation, the conversion to the other rather than the conversion of the other. Such an emphasis addressed both the theological anxieties of a post-Enlightenment West and the religious pluralism that emerged out of globalization, but it also created problems for traditional concepts of mission, as dialogue seemed to be at odds with the long held Christian belief in Gospel proclamation. Some sought to submerge mission into the concept of dialogue, eliminating the need for proclamation altogether.\(^4\) Following the postmodern rejection of any universal and univocal beliefs, theologians began stressing the inherent salvific character of other religions, and the rejection of certain forms of evangelization as intrinsically coercive. Here, dialogue is preeminent, and absolutist claims to truth only erect barriers to such dialogue. The affirmation of the truth claims of all religions, coupled with the intrinsic truth and goodness of other religions, demands an interreligious dialogue purged of the absolutist claims of proclamation.

It is perhaps not surprising that a conception of mission born out of both a critical reflection of missionary endeavors and a growing awareness of global religions emerged through the writings of theologians working within global ecclesial institutions.\(^5\) The development of the mission as dialogue paradigm can be traced along two often interloping trajectories: that of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches.

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\(^5\) This is contrasted with the mission as growth paradigm, which emerges primarily through the writings of mission practitioners. Thus the mission as growth paradigm has as many of its most important texts one’s written for practical instruction and published through popular presses. In contrast, the mission as dialogue paradigm has as its most important texts official Roman Catholic and World Council of Churches documents, as well as theological texts from academic presses.
This chapter will begin by tracing the history of the mission as dialogue paradigm and a summation of its key tenets, followed by an extensive critique. This critique will pave the way for an in-depth analysis of the problem of persuasion in mission.

**Historical Background—Key Theologians and Texts**

The mission as dialogue paradigm emerged in the 20th century out of two historical trajectories, one Protestant, the other Roman Catholic. Before assessing the central characteristics of the mission as dialogue model, it is important to first give an overview of its key proponents and texts, as both theologians and conciliar gatherings (Vatican II and World Council of Churches meetings) feature prominently in both trajectories. This overview is not meant to be comprehensive, but is intended to help provide a context for the mission as dialogue model and help to situate some of its prominent adherents within it.

The historical development of the Roman Catholic perspective on mission as dialogue can be charted alongside a series of official Church documents beginning with Vatican II. The most important text of Vatican II related to dialogue is *Nostra aetate*, which articulated a positive valuation of world religions and an exhortation to engage in mutual respectful dialogue between Christians and adherents of other religions:

> The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men.  

This exhortation to engage in interreligious dialogue inaugurated a debate amongst Roman Catholic theologians (and reflected in official documents) regarding this exhortation to dialogue.

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and to the calling of Christians to proclaim the salvific work of Christ. While some interpreted *Nostra aetate* as an affirmation of interreligious dialogue as the preeminent activity of mission (as will be discussed below), future Papal encyclicals reiterated the necessity of the proclamation of Christ. This is seen most vividly in John Paul II’s encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, which stated that:

Proclamation is the permanent priority of mission. The Church cannot elude Christ's explicit mandate, nor deprive men and women of the "Good News" about their being loved and saved by God…All forms of missionary activity are directed to this proclamation, which reveals and gives access to the mystery hidden for ages and made known in Christ (cf. Eph 3:3-9; Col 1:25-29), the mystery which lies at the heart of the Church's mission and life, as the hinge on which all evangelization turns.\(^7\)

Much of 20\(^{th}\) century Roman Catholic thought concerning the Church’s relationship to peoples of other religions can be characterized as a tension between dialogue and proclamation, with *Nostra aetate* and *Redemptoris missio* functioning as the boundary markers.\(^8\) Those that promote mission as dialogue thus tend to emphasize *Nostra aetate* and deemphasize *Redemptoris missio*. At its best, this tension has helped to fuel substantial work in the fields of mission, world religions, and interreligious dialogue, with major works such as Paul Knitter’s *No Other Name* and Jacques Dupuis’ *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* interacting substantially with papal documents. At its worst, it has led to incessant internecine conflict over the interpretation of these documents. My construal of mission as dialogue will highlight the works of Knitter and Dupuis, both of whom highlight the dialogical emphases of these documents and deemphasize the aspects which promote the priority of proclamation.\(^9\)

\(^7\) [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html)

\(^8\) For a detailed account of modern Roman Catholic history in regards to dialogue and proclamation, see Marcello Abp Zago, "The New Millennium and the Emerging Religious Encounters," *Missiology* 28, no. 1 (2000).

The roots of a Protestant approach to mission as dialogue lie in the World Missionary Conferences of the first part of the 20th century and continue through the formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948.10 John Cobb charts the development of dialogue through the first three World Missionary Conferences, with the first clearly taking an adversarial approach to other religions, the second more accommodating, and the third a reaction against this accommodation.11 Here there is a tension similar to the one between dialogue and proclamation in Roman Catholic circles, a tension that remained through the various consultations and statements from the World Council of Churches. Cobb’s assessment of the various documents is that they both establish the necessity of dialogue while not further developing the theological grounding for such dialogue. The prevention of this grounding is due to tensions within the WCC between those who are willing to embrace full mutuality between Christianity and other religions, and those who are not:

Despite the acceptance of dialogue as a major program emphasis of the World Council of Churches, the theological grounds for dialogue are still undeveloped. This is because of a tension between two basic Christian positions. One group, and this includes many of those who participate most actively in dialogue with persons of other faiths, takes the religious conviction of these persons with great seriousness and want to understand them better. For these Christians, dialogue is a profound spiritual sharing on the basis of full mutuality between religions movements…For (the other) group, there cannot be full mutuality between, for example, Christians as Christians and Muslims as Muslims.12

10 The first World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910, is considered the beginning both of modern Christian missions and the ecumenical movement. While the gathering was exclusively Protestant and advocated for what would now be considered a conservative, exclusivist approach to mission, future conferences organized through the International Missionary Council allowed for both an expanded engagement with non-Protestant churches (Orthodox and Roman Catholic), and an expanded engagement with non-exclusivist approaches to mission centering on interreligious dialogue. The merging of the International Missionary Council with the World Council of Churches in 1961, and the rejection of this merger by some conservative evangelical churches, can be seen as the culmination of this expansion. For a detailed history, see https://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/cwme/history
12 Ibid., 18.
John Cobb is representative of those Protestant theologians who prioritize the mutuality of religions and the preeminence of dialogue in Christian mission. Protestant views on the relationship between dialogue and mission vary widely when compared to Roman Catholic positions, in part due to the potential institutional constraints of the magisterium on Catholic teaching.

My assessment of the mission as dialogue paradigm will focus on the work of John Cobb for several reasons. First, his work has been highly influential within the fields of interreligious dialogue and religious pluralism, with numerous works authored and edited. Second, unlike the most prominent proponent of religious pluralism and dialogue, John Hick, Cobb does not accept the view of a universal equality of religions. The acknowledgement of robust differences between religions enables Cobb to still maintain a concept of Christian mission, albeit one that is greatly modified from traditional understandings. Hick’s assertion of the universal equality of religions points instead to a wholesale dismissal of mission. In the interest of providing a more complete picture of the mission as dialogue paradigm, one that accounts for the work of Roman Catholic theologians, I will also highlight the contributions of Jacques Dupuis and Paul Knitter.

13 Cobb is representative of what he calls progressive Christianity, of which includes members of his own network, Protestant Christians Uniting. Other Protestant theologians that hold similar positions include Ward McAfee and the contributors to John B. Cobb and Ward McAfee, The Dialogue Comes of Age: Christian Encounters with Other Traditions (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010).

14 This constraint was highly visible in the trial of Jacques Dupuis by the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith in 2001, in which Dupuis’ work Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism was investigated. Though Dupuis was not censured, the book was reissued with a pontifical notification clarifying official Catholic teaching: “It is therefore legitimate to maintain that the Holy Spirit accomplishes salvation in non-Christians also through those elements of truth and goodness present in the various religions; however, to hold that these religions, considered as such, are ways of salvation, has no foundation in Catholic theology, also because they contain omissions, insufficiencies and error.”

Four Key Aspects of the Mission as Dialogue Model

What follows is an assessment of the key aspects of the construal of mission as dialogue. The focus will be particularly on the communicative directives and goals that undergird this approach, which includes its understanding of persuasion and conversion, but will also include the pertinent theological and anthropological underpinnings of this approach. The choice to emphasize communication is due to this model’s emphasis on communicative acts as central to Christian mission: “To view and practice mission as dialogue is to see the church’s mission essentially as one of communication.”

In focusing on mission as the engagement in communicative acts also means that a concomitant issue, religious pluralism, will only be addressed tertiarily. Concerns surrounding a theology of religions and the relationship of Christianity to those religions are intertwined with the mission as dialogue paradigm—to assert the preeminence of interreligious dialogue begs the question of what one believes about the religious views of their interlocutors. Regarding the relationship between Christianity and other religions, much has been written. However, few works have taken seriously the conception of dialogue as the preeminent act of mission, and subsequently address the ethical and philosophical

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16 Knitter, 144.
17 Catherine Cornille’s development of the term “soteriological agnosticism” highlights the ways in which conceptions of dialogue are intertwined with a theology of religions. Cornille advocates for a bracketing of issues of salvation—neither the exclusivist nor the pluralist can claim salvific knowledge of non-Christian religions. Yet she admits that, even with such bracketing, one’s theology of religions will necessarily impact the way dialogue is conducted: “The very openness to engaging another religion in a constructive way indeed implies certain views or presumptions about the intelligibility of the teaching of the other, their compatibility with and relevance for one’s own, and about the possibility of actually discerning teaching that might deepen, broaden, or generally enhance one’s own religious understanding (210).” Catherine Cornille, “Soteriological Agnosticism and the Future of Catholic Theology of Interreligious Dialogue,” in The Past, Present, and Future of Theologies of Interreligious Dialogue, ed. Terrence Merrigan and John R. Friday (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017).
underpinnings of dialogue as a communicative act in which missionaries participate. It is with this that a work devoted to ethics and missiology will thus address.

*Common Humanity and The Kingdom of God*

The mission as dialogue paradigm is rooted in an anthropology that rejects ethnocentrism and emphasizes the common humanity existent among all cultures. Kathryn Tanner argues that such an anthropology developed in reaction to an evolutionary anthropology of the 18th and 19th century which discerned a hierarchy amongst various cultures based upon scientific, technological and (perceived) cultural advancement. Such evolutionary anthropology was perceived as inherently ethnocentric and in part the cause of Western colonialism. The response was to emphasize the common humanity of all and to see cultural differences as a goods within this common humanity.19 This is one of the preeminent markers of the modern, anthropological idea of culture.20

Cobb, Knitter, and Dupuis’ theologies reflect this modern idea of culture in their emphasis on a universal common humanity which eschews claims of superiority and stresses the intrinsic goodness of religious diversity. The use of scripture by the adherents to the conception of mission as dialogue reflects this emphasis on a common humanity as the grounds through which dialogue proceeds, and thus passages of scripture that reflect the universal love of humanity and respectful dialogue become hermeneutical keys. We see this first of all in the emphasis on the biblical concept of the Kingdom of God by Paul Knitter and Jacques Dupuis. The Kingdom of God is that which all of the religious traditions of the world share in, and the church, rather than being the Kingdom of God, is in service to this Kingdom. Dupuis takes the

20 Tanner sees this particular understanding of culture emerging in the United States in the 1920s, peaking in the 1960s, and coming into criticism by postmodern theorists starting in the 1980s. Ibid., 25.
large number of Jesus’ teachings on the Kingdom of God and the paucity of his direct references to the church as indicative of the term’s expansiveness.\textsuperscript{21} For Dupuis, Jesus inaugurates in history the Kingdom of God, of which Christians and non-Christians \textit{already} belong.\textsuperscript{22} This renders both Christians and adherents to other religions “co-members and co-builders with God of God’s Reign on earth,” and forms the foundation for interfaith dialogue.\textsuperscript{23} For Knitter, the distinction between the Church and Kingdom, and the church’s subservience to the Kingdom, is foundational for a conception of mission as dialogue:

Integral to the new paradigm for understanding the mission of the church as service to the Kingdom is the necessity of integrating dialogue into that mission-as-service. If, in this new regnecentric paradigm, the religious traditions of humankind are looked up as potential “agents of the Kingdom,” then clearly, cooperation and dialogue with them are essential elements in a missioner’s job description.\textsuperscript{24}

Though not as central to Cobb’s theology,\textsuperscript{25} he nevertheless concurs with Knitter and Dupuis in their assessment of the Kingdom of God as something shared by all, of which Christians as well as peoples of other faiths might work toward. For Cobb, the Kingdom of God is:

the longed-for situation in which God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven. In the community surround Jesus there is already a foretaste of that situation…But in most of the pronouncements, there is no suggestion that those who fail to believe in Jesus Christ are to be excluded or that God cannot work through those who are not believers in bring the situation to pass.\textsuperscript{26}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
  \item\textsuperscript{21} Dupuis, \textit{Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism}, 342-43.
  \item\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 346.
  \item\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 358.
  \item\textsuperscript{24} Knitter, 136.
  \item\textsuperscript{25} Cobb also uses his interpretation of the Logos in John 1 as a way to conceive of a common humanity. For Cobb, the Logos is first the power of transformation in all living things, and “is incarnate in all human beings and indeed in all creation (138).” While Christ is the fullest incarnation of the Logos, any individual can grow in their fullness of the Logos, including through the practice of other religions. John B. Cobb, \textit{Christ in a Pluralistic Age} (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1975), 137-46.
  \item\textsuperscript{26} "Introduction," in \textit{The Dialogue Comes of Age: Christian Encounters with Other Traditions}, ed. John B. Cobb and Ward McAfee (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 16.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
For Cobb, Knitter and Dupuis, Christians and non-Christians alike are building a common project together, the Kingdom of God. They are already co-laborers, and as such competition through evangelization is rejected in favor of cooperation through dialogue.

**Intentional Bracketing of Evaluative Judgments**

The modern anthropological idea of culture developed in response to previously ethnocentric understandings of culture, and its turn to an emphasis on a shared common humanity concurrently promoted a non-evaluative understanding of various cultures. Similarly, the theologies of Cobb, Knitter, and Dupuis emphasize a shared common humanity and the intrinsic goodness of other religions which leads to a rejection of any claims of religious superiority. Thus their approaches to mission involve dialogue which is to be conducted with the *intentional bracketing of evaluative judgments*. At the heart of the conception of mission as dialogue paradigm is the belief that unethical and immoral missionary practices are rooted in a false superiority on the part of Christian missionaries, a superiority that is part and parcel of Western colonialism: “Christians have often made claims of superiority and even of exclusive possession of the way to salvation that have done great harm. We have blinded ourselves to the wisdom of other communities and have often used political, economic, and military power over them abusively. We have much of which to repent.” It is the presumption of superiority that compels missionaries to engage in a “monologue” with opposing worldviews, demanding assent and blinding the missionary to the ways in which they are imposing their will through economic and political power. To conceive of mission as dialogue must mean to bracket claims to superiority and judgments as to the truth, goodness, and beauty of other religious adherents.

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27 Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*, 36.
Before engaging in dialogue, the missionary must first reflect and assess their Christian beliefs and develop approaches that seek to minimize the ways in which they might be conceived by their interlocutors as offensive. As Cobb puts it, “we will undertake to formulate our own teachings in ways that discourage any sense of our own superiority or negative attitudes towards others.”29 Knitter similarly states that Christians cannot enter into dialogue with any “prepackaged final word.”30

For these scholars, the desire to win adherence from an interlocutor is necessarily an imposition of power and a barrier to relational understanding. The possession of strongly held beliefs—even claims to truth—is not in and of itself problematic, but rather it is the seeking of adherence that is relationally damaging. Thus those engaging in dialogue must assess the ways in which their exclusivist beliefs may erect barriers to understanding, and “seek to minimize or neutralize them so they do not remain impediments.”31

The missionary thus brackets judgments regarding the religious other under the auspices that, in so doing, one is rejecting competition for religious superiority in favor of cooperation within the common human project of building the Kingdom of God.

Conversion as Manipulation

The bracketing of evaluative judgments before engaging in dialogue and the belief that all religions have the ability to cooperate (rather than compete) in the common human project of building and witnessing to the Kingdom of God leads to a correlative aspect of the mission as dialogue paradigm: the explicit rejection of conversion as inherently manipulative.

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The rejection of conversion is key to understanding the mission as dialogue paradigm, as it is often difficult to see in Knitter, Cobb, and Dupuis the relationship between dialogue and other common missional terms such as evangelism and proclamation. Dupuis prefers to see dialogue as a key part of mission, but one that does not necessarily reject evangelism, although Dupuis characterizes evangelism in such a way as to make it almost entirely passive, emphasizing the change that occurs in the missionary.\textsuperscript{32} The relationships among evangelism, mission, and dialogue are murky in Cobb’s writings,\textsuperscript{33} but one area in which there is agreement is in the rejection of the intentional desire on the part of the missionary to convert the religious other.

If the term conversion is to remain in the mission as dialogue paradigm, it must be radically reinterpreted to mean the growth of the individual through dialogue, and not as a change of religious affiliation. Knitter’s radical reinterpretation of conversion within his understanding of the priority of the Kingdom of God is demonstrative: Conversion means the conversion of someone to a greater awareness of the Kingdom, not to the Church. Conversion is simply the change that results from dialogue—a Hindu that is changed by a dialogical encounter is “converted” while remaining Hindu.\textsuperscript{34} Conversion as understood as the change from another religion into the Christian church, though sometimes a byproduct of mission, can never be the goal of mission. Change may occur as a result of dialogue, and such change may even be construed as a kind of conversion, but such a change cannot be the desire of the missionary as they engage in dialogue. Dialogue “does not…aim at “conversion” of others to Christianity,
while, of course, it necessarily implies, on the part of the evangelizer, the witness of life.”

One may witness to their life and their Christianity, even to those portions of Christianity that make truth claims, however the goal of such dialogue must never be the conversion of the other to Christianity.

Underlying this assumption is the belief that persuasion is inherently manipulative. The engagement in persuasive dialogue with the expressed goal of changing another is the attempt to exert one’s superiority over another. Such an assumption is not limited to the mission as dialogue paradigm, but is shared by some within the field of rhetoric and communication. For example, Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin see the entire history of Western rhetoric as predicated upon the “conscious intent to change others,” with the implicit desire to exercise domination over others. The desire to persuade is the desire to change another, and thus exert control over another. Foss and Griffin’s rejection of intentional persuasion leads them to propose a radical reinterpretation of rhetoric predicated upon feminist principles of “equity, immanent value, and self-determination,” which they dub invitational rhetoric. Here, the goal of dialogue is to simply bring one’s personal narrative to the conversation table. Intentional persuasion is rejected in favor of a witnessing of one’s own life. The interactions that occur as a result of such testimonies may or may not lead to changes of opinions, but such changes cannot be the goal.

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35 Dupuis, Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism, 360.
36 Foss and Griffin, 2. Foss and Griffin’s conception of invitational rhetoric remains both influential and controversial within the discipline of rhetorical studies. For an overview of its impact and responses to its major critiques, see Jennifer Emerling Bone, Cindy L. Griffin, and T. M. Linda Scholz, "Beyond Traditional Conceptualizations of Rhetoric: Invitational Rhetoric and a Move toward Civility," Western Journal of Communication 72, no. 4 (2008).
37 Foss and Griffin, 3.
38 Ibid., 4. For a more detailed comparison between interreligious dialogue and the specific concept of invitational rhetoric, see Michael Niebauer, "Dialogue or Proclamation? Communication Ethics and the Problem of Persuasion in Mission," Missiology 45, no. 3 (2017).
Self-Conversion as the Goal of Mission

The rejection of the intentional desire to see others convert to Christianity is rejected as the goal of mission work, which leads to the fourth feature of the mission as dialogue paradigm: Self-conversion is the goal of mission. Rather than the goal of mission being the conversion of another to Christianity, the goal is rather the expansion and refinement of one’s own Christian beliefs as the result of an interreligious encounter. Dupuis describes the goals of this approach to mission:

Christians have something to gain from the dialogue. They will derive a twofold, combined advantage. On the one hand, they will win an enrichment of their own faith. Through the experience and testimony of the other, they will be able to discover at greater depth certain aspects, certain dimension, of the Divine Mystery that they had perceived less clearly…At the same time they will gain a purification of their faith. The shock of the encounter will often raise questions, force Christians to revise gratuitous assumptions, and destroy deep rooted prejudices…\(^\text{39}\)

For Dupuis, genuine dialogue cannot be means to further some predetermined ends. It is not prolegomena to evangelization. The ends are simply the enrichment and refinement of the missionary’s Christian faith.

For John Cobb, the goals of enrichment and transformation are grounded in his process theology.\(^\text{40}\) The progress of history affords the ability for personal and religious advancement. Dialogue affords the Christian the opportunity for further advancement in their faith, and thus to reject dialogue is to falsely presume that religious progress has come to an end. If the interlocuter proceeds with the utmost respect for the religious other, they will receive not the conversion of

\(^{39}\) Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 382.

\(^{40}\) Cobb acknowledges his indebtedness to Alfred North Whitehead throughout his writings. His view that human beings are constantly in flux, and that each opportunity, including each dialogical encounter, is an opportunity for growth are predicated upon the work of Whitehead, of which he sees parallels in Buddhist thought. See John B. Cobb, *Transforming Christianity and the World: A Way Beyond Absolutism and Relativism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 156-57.
the other, nor the syncretistic blending of the two religious, but rather the further beneficial
transformation of themselves:

As dialogue proceeds, glimpses of aspects of reality heretofore unnoticed are
vouchsafed the participants. This is not felt as a threat to the religious traditions
from which the participants come but as an opportunity for enrichment and even
positive transformation.  

The ends of dialogue as personal transformation are in many ways the logical conclusion
of a modern concept of anthropology as articulated by Kathryn Tanner. As noted above, Tanner
asserts that anthropocentric views of culture are rejected under the auspices of shared common
humanity. Cross-cultural engagement thus becomes not the grounds to exert cultural superiority,
but rather an opportunity to “further the humanistic project of social criticism.” The
confrontation of cross-cultural differences affords the opportunity for reassessment and critique
of one’s own cultural assumptions.

The communicative process is tailored in such a way as to further cross-cultural
interaction and afford greater opportunities for mutual flourishing and enrichment. Here Foss and
Griffin’s characterization of “invitational rhetoric” fits well with the conception of mission as
dialogue. Foss and Griffin posit invitational rhetoric as a rhetorical form, a way of intentionally
engaging in dialogue that is stripped of intentional persuasion and focused instead on the
dissemination of viewpoints through personal narrative. This form can be appropriated to various
settings, including small group discussions and formal speeches that include audience
interaction:

In invitational rhetoric, change occurs in the audience or rhetor or both as a result
of new understanding and insights gained in the exchange of ideas. As rhetors and
audience members offer their ideas on an issue, they allow diverse positions to be
compared in a process of discovery and questions that may lead to transformation
for themselves and others…rhetors recognize the valuable contributions audience

41 "Beyond "Pluralism"," 86.
42 Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*, 37.
members can make to the rhetors’ own thinking and understanding, and they do not engage in strategies that may damage or sever the connection between them and their audiences.\textsuperscript{43}

With the goal of mutual flourishing and enrichment, communication must proceed with the continual desire for respect of the other and hence the rejection of any claims to superiority which may sever the relationship between interlocutors, jeopardizing opportunities for further enrichment.

\textit{Summary and Assessment of the Positive Contributions of the Mission as Dialogue Model}

It is helpful in summarizing the mission as dialogue model to compare it to the previous chapter’s description of the mission as growth model. In essence, the conception of mission as dialogue fundamentally inverts the mission as growth paradigm. As described in the last chapter, Donald McGavran developed his model of mission with the base assumption that the various adherents to non-Christian religions around the world are lacking and in need of the Gospel message. Implicit in this assumption is a claim to the religious superiority of Christianity over the world religions. From here, the purpose of cross-cultural engagement and dialogue is conversion. The understanding of a particular culture is not meant for self-enrichment, but rather to discover the best available ways of maximizing conversion. In contradistinction to this, the conception of mission as dialogue fundamentally rejects implicit or explicit claims to religious superiority and the concomitant ends of the missionary endeavors being the conversion of others.

For the growth paradigm, the goal is the expansion of Christianity to the ends of the earth, for the dialogue paradigm, the goal is the expansion of one’s own Christianity through engagement with the various religions of the earth. For the growth paradigm, the differences of other religions become differences that must either be rejected or refined by the incorporation of Christianity.

\textsuperscript{43} Foss and Griffin, 6.
For the dialogue paradigm, the differences of other religions provide fodder for religious self-criticism.

Positive evaluations of the mission as dialogue paradigm stem from the ways in which it addresses some of the problems with the conception of mission as growth, particularly its lack of moral self-awareness. As stated above, a chief problem with the mission as growth model is that it views the appropriation of the social and behavioral sciences as intrinsically amoral, in the process becoming unaware of the potential ways in which their engagement with the religious other might be manipulative. Although, as we will see below, the mission as dialogue paradigm may not completely solve the problem of manipulation, it does provide a framework for approaching mission that takes seriously the ethical implications of the ways in which mission is conducted. For McGavran and Hirsch, missionary practices are deemed better or worse based upon efficiency—those practices that produce more churches and more converts are preferable to those that produce less. The agency of the missionary’s interlocutors are not considered, and the only responses on behalf of the missionary’s audience that matter are those pertinent to their decision to convert.

The dialogist sees moral reflection on the ways in which mission is conducted as necessary prolegomena. The missionary must reflect on their biased negative evaluations of other religions, and allow for the possibility that their own Christianity may be in need of correction. This should be done before, during, and after interreligious dialogue.

A Critical Evaluation of Mission as Dialogue

What follows is a critical evaluation of the mission as dialogue paradigm, utilizing the same communicative, anthropological, and theological tools in the aforementioned assessment. These critiques will demonstrate how this paradigm fails to adequately address the very issues it
has set out to remedy. First, that instead of eliminating evaluative judgements it simply shifts the
target of those judgments. Second, that its denial of conversion strips the agency of those who
wish to convert, and third, that it denies the clear instances of intentional persuasive arguments
present in scripture. What these critiques hope to show is that the answers to the issues in which
the mission as dialogue model hopes to answer cannot be found through non-evaluative
conversation. Instead, answers will come through a reevaluation of the problem of persuasion
and a renewed understanding of conversion. Thus, following these critiques will be an extended
section on persuasion, with conversion being taken up again in chapter five.

Displaced Evaluative Judgments

The conception of mission as dialogue calls for an intentional bracketing of evaluative
judgments on the part of those missionaries engaging in interreligious dialogue. The posture is
one of self-effacement, with a rejection one’s own claims to religious superiority in the
acknowledgment of a shared humanity and the intrinsic goodness of the religious other.
However, the problem with this approach is that is fails to bracket all types of evaluative
judgments, instead simply replacing one set of judgments for another. To enter into this type of
dialogue requires the refrainment from absolutist claims in such a way that one does not attempt
to convince others of the necessity of adopting them. However, this position itself is a type of
persuasion disguised under the auspices of openness. One must accept a priori the belief that one
should not strongly try to intentionally persuade others of their absolutist beliefs before coming
to the dialogue table. One must either change, or soften their beliefs, or enter into a less fruitful
form of dialogue.

By insisting on the bracketing of evaluative judgments of other religions, the mission as
dialogue paradigm sets up their own set of evaluative judgments on the relative openness of
others. While rejecting an evaluative judgment that another religion is lacking or deficient, the dialogist establishes new criteria for discerning the level to which another religion is open and tolerant. These criteria coincide with values prioritized by Western liberal democracies. For Cobb, those who engage in interfaith dialogue should be committed to peace, justice, the integrity of creation, community building, and social justice.\(^{44}\) Knitter’s approach to dialogue is “based on the common ground of global responsibility for eco-human well-being.”\(^{45}\)

Such evaluative judgments clearly give preference to a specific type of interlocutor. First, it prioritizes those who are committed to a non-exclusivist position regarding their own religion. As Gavin D’Costa states of Knitter’s position:

> While the intention of Knitter and others is no doubt honourable in promoting peace and harmony, this would be a spurious harmony, for it…takes no one seriously by discounting their absolute claims from the outset. This would mean that only liberals within each tradition, like Knitter and Hick, could take part in dialogue.\(^ {46}\)

Essentially, fruitful dialogue can only take place within (to use Cobb’s phrase) those “sub-traditions” that favor pluralistic understandings of their faith. There is still a judgment that occurs on the part of the dialogist: It is not a judgment as to the superiority of a particular religious standpoint, but a judgment on the degree of openness to which one approaches dialogue. For Cobb, this means, perhaps ironically, that superiority reemerges in the form of one’s claims to openness: “What happens in dialogue, then, is that one norm that can be applied with relative objectivity to the great religious traditions has to do with their ability…to expand their understanding of reality and its normative implications.”\(^ {47}\) The best religious traditions and sub-traditions are those that are open, and thus capable of growth and expansion. Those religions and

\(^{45}\) Knitter, 18-19.
\(^{46}\) D'Costa, "Pluralist Arguments: Prominent Tendencies and Methods " 336.
\(^{47}\) Cobb, "Beyond "Pluralism"," 87.
sub-traditions (he has in mind religious fundamentalism) that claim a possession of the truth are closed, and hence incapable of growth and expansion.

Not only is an evaluative judgment cast on others based upon their degree of openness, there is also a judgment based upon the willingness to embrace an agenda for dialogue that includes criteria largely defined by the West. Terms such as social justice, global responsibility, and eco-well being are defined largely by Western scholars. In essence, Cobb and Knitter define the agenda through which fruitful dialogue can take place. John Milbank critique’s this dialogical agenda:

The terms of discourse which provide both the favored categories for encounter with other religions—dialogue, pluralism, and the like—together with the criteria for the acceptable limits of the pluralist embrace—social justice, liberation, and so forth—are themselves embedded in a wider Western discourse become dominant.  

From the perspective of communication ethics, the insistence on openness is a persuasive argument which attempts to limit persuasion. Richard Fulkerson calls invitational rhetoric an equity critique of traditional forms of rhetoric and persuasion, criticizing it for being:

awkwardly compromised by being self-contradictory. On the broadest level, writers who develop it almost invariably are clearly interested in moving readers to agree that argumentation should be seen as inherently patriarchal, oppressive, a violation of the sovereign rights of the audience. In other words, they seek to persuade their readers of the good sense of their views. And thus, perforce, most writers who articulate the equity critique simultaneously violate it, by attempting to argue readers into sharing their views.

49 While Richard Fulkerson presents critiques from the vantage point of traditional rhetoric, an interesting critique of invitational rhetoric is also levied by feminist rhetoricians. Dana Cloud and Nina Lozano-Reich argue that the requirement for a disciplined openness when engaging in dialogue often ignores the inequality of power that often exists between interlocutors: “to refuse persuasion is to refuse participation in real-world encounters marked by material and antagonistic interests.(221)” When antagonistic differences exist, non-confrontational dialogue favors those in positions of power. It provides the appearance of cooperation while enabling differences to remain unchallenged, thus favoring the status quo. See Nina M. Lozano-Reich and Dana L. Cloud, "The Uncivil Tongue: Invitational Rhetoric and the Problem of Inequality," *Western Journal of Communication* 73, no. 2 (2009).
Fulkerson’s critique is just as apt when applied to the mission as dialogue paradigm. The major works of their proponents: Knitter’s No Other Name and Cobb’s Transforming Christianity and the World, for instance, are written in the interest of presenting persuasive arguments in order to convince their audience to refrain from Christian persuasion. The persuasive elements of this paradigm are masked by the surface appeals to openness and dialogue. The danger in such an approach is that it is unaware of its own persuasive underpinnings. While the mission as dialogue approach creates a welcome awareness of the ways in which missionaries have exerted cultural dominance through the claims of religious superiority, there is the danger that it has replaced this model for a method that is equally unaware of its cultural embeddedness. This issue will be taken up more fully in the section on persuasion below, where I will argue for the inevitability of persuasion.

**Agency Still Limited**

The mission as dialogue approach is a persuasive calling to limit persuasion, and a judgment on certain types of evaluative judgments. It is also, ironically, an approach that may limit human agency even as it tries to safeguard it. A fundamental tenet of the dialogist is their commitment not to engage in intentional acts of conversion: “Given our history, dialogue requires that we create a climate in which there is no manipulation, no effort on anyone’s part to convert the others.”\(^5\) Intentional attempts at conversion are equated with manipulation, and hence efforts to convert must be policed. While such policing may simply mask subtler forms of persuasion, it also attempts to deny the capacity of interlocutors to be persuaded. If the mission as growth paradigm attempts to limit human agency by contriving the means through which conversion is inevitable, the dialogist attempts to contrive a climate in which conversion is

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impossible. The former denies the right to reject Christianity, the latter the right to accept Christianity.

Cobb, Knitter, and Dupuis assume that interlocutors are unable to exercise personal judgment in response to intentional acts of persuasion. It suggests that *those who are converted have been manipulated*, which denies the ability of individuals to process such calls to conversion and exercise their ability to accept, reject, or qualify such messages. An assessment of the history of missionary work shows how recipients of Christian proclamation accept, adapt, and reject the message they receive. There have been numerous missiological studies describing and analyzing the multitude of ways in which direct proclamation of the Christian message is received both by individuals and by groups. Alan Tippett categorized four ways in which indigenous populations responded to Christian missionary advocacy: rejection, total acceptance, modification, or group fission (the splitting of indigenous groups). Such a process is negotiated by groups of people under the auspices of what is perceived as best for the group as a whole.

According to Richard Hibbert, Tippett’s framework of decision making asserts that local people are “active agents rather than passive recipients in the process of conversion.” An interesting example of the plurality of ways in which such conversion does and does not take place lies in Hibbert’s description of Hindus and Muslims that adopt hybrid identities, identifying as culturally Hindu or Muslim, but Christian in religion. Such individuals often vacillate between religious communities.

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54 Ibid., 67-68.
The assertion that recipients of intentional Christian persuasion are active agents in the process of their own conversion poses difficulties for those, such as Cobb and Knitter, that see conversion as inherently manipulative. While Cobb allows for the possibility of persuasion to occur within dialogue, intentional attempts to convert are wrong because they invite one to abandon their traditions and communities. This assumes that the abandonment of part or all of a tradition or community is de facto the product of coercion. Essentially, the recipient of Christian proclamation must either exert their freedom by rejecting this proclamation, or accept this proclamation and thus accede to coercion. Tippett’s research suggests that a high degree of agency is exerted by recipients of intentional Christian proclamation, and that such agency is evidenced by the multiform ways in which recipients accept, reject, or modify all or part of the Christian message that they have received. Cobb must view the assertion of this agency legitimate only if it is exercised in rejection of the Christian message. The free decision to convert is not free, despite the convert’s own self-understanding. The danger in Cobb’s underlying assumption of evangelization as manipulative is a type of paternalism: it informs those who have converted (and who believe such conversion has enhanced their lives) that they have actually been manipulated.

As stated earlier, the conception of mission as dialogue is grounded in a modernist anthropology that views cultures as distinct wholes which can be compared and contrasted.

56 Sherry Ortner traces the development of this holistic view of culture and its critique within the discipline of anthropology. In the 1950s, there was one prominent work by Robert Redfield whose title, The Little Community: Viewpoints for the Study of the Human Whole, is evocative of such a holistic approach. However, even within the 1950s such an approach was critiqued as unduly homogenous by Oscar Lewis. Ortner believes that contemporary anthropology, what Kathryn Tanner dubs postmodern anthropology, follows the critiques levied by Lewis. Ortner advocates for a study of community that emphasizes people as “contextualized social beings.” Here, Anthropology becomes the study of networks of social practices and their understandings. See Sherry B. Ortner, "Fieldwork in the Postcommunity," Anthropology and Humanism 22, no. 1 (1997): 63-64.
While rejecting an evolutionary view of the superiority of Western culture, it embraces the view that assessments of other cultures be from the outset non-evaluative. The interaction with distinct cultures becomes instead the grounds for self-correction. Thus attempts at conversion are damaging because they threaten the stability of a native culture, destroying difference under the auspices of a false superiority and Western dominance.

The desire in dialogue is not therefore conversion, but for each interlocutor to remain within their cultural and religious silos, somehow better and purified as a result of an interreligious encounter.\(^{57}\) The desire is for the Muslim to remain a Muslim, or a Hindu to remain a Hindu, as a result of the Church’s mission.

The problem with such an assumption is that, although one can identify discreet religious beliefs and practices, such beliefs and practices do not neatly map onto distinct cultural wholes. The convert is free to judge which specific practices are and are not in accordance with their changing religious beliefs. In short, a conversion to Christianity need not be a wholesale conversion to Western culture, however it is construed. To make such an assertion is to assume a rather low opinion of the agency of the new convert.

Tippet’s assessment of the actual practice of Christian missionaries suggests that the cross-cultural interaction between Christians and (in this example) Muslims are far from monolithic. Cultural adaptation of the Christian message occurs in a piecemeal fashion, both on the part of the missionary and the missionary’s interlocutors. The missionary makes decisions as to which social practices can be kept, adapted, and rejection in light of the Christian message,

\(^{57}\) For Cobb, Knitter, and Dupuis, conversion from one religious worldview to another is at best a rarity, and may not come about through direct persuasion, but rather through a vague and lengthy historical process that ensures that such change is sufficiently scrubbed clean of Western imperialism.
and the interlocutor decides whether to accept, reject, or modify to message being proclaimed. In such a process, the missionary targets are able to exert a large degree of agency—the ability to choose to convert, and also (often to the chagrin of missionaries) synchronize their religious views.

Judgment and Conversion in Scripture

Lastly, in its attempts at bracketing evaluative judgments and rejection of intentional conversion, the mission as dialogue paradigm abandons the clear exercise of evaluative judgments and intentional persuasive acts in Scripture. In the Book of Acts, for instance, there are clear instances of negative judgments upon false gods and, correlatively, intentional discourse which invites the reject of false belief and the acceptance of Christianity. In approaching scripture, the dialogist utilizes an inclusivist view of the Biblical concept of the Kingdom of God as a hermeneutical lens through which scripture is interpreted. This enables the dialogist to continually emphasize the common humanity shared between all religions and the possibility for cooperation as they work together to further the advancement of the Kingdom.

This poses enormous difficulties when approaching passages that clearly emphasize the particularity of Christ, the need to change one’s worldview, and the persuasive attempts to convince others of the necessity of conversion. A Kingdom of God hermeneutic renders the Book of Acts especially problematic.

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58 This is echoed in Tanner’s account of the history of Christian missionary practice: “Western Christianity’s historical relations with other cultures have not always involved judgments typifying the practices of those cultures as wholes; those cultures were not viewed as having a single uniform character worthy, for example, of either simple condemnation or respect. Although often all that seemed relevant about another way of life was that it was not Christian—the basic categories to understand other cultures involved a simple distinction between Christian and heathen—the missionary impulse in Christianity tended to work against a dichotomous typification, against a “they are all one way and we are all another” mentality.” Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*, 118.
Of the three authors representative of the mission as dialogue perspective, Paul Knitter is most willing to accept the challenge posed by the exclusivity that seemingly backs the actions of the apostles in the Book of Acts. Knitter sees this challenge codified in Peter’s declaration that “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).” Such an emphasis would seem to assert the exclusive soteriological claims about Jesus Christ and thus stress the priority of proclamation and conversion in mission activities.\(^{59}\) The New Testament church existed in an atmosphere of religious pluralism similar to that of today, and yet emphasized the exclusivity of Jesus and a rejection of other gods. Following the Kingdom of God hermeneutic, however, Knitter views Peter’s statement not as a rejection of other religions per se, but of a Roman syncretism that demanded the absorption of Christianity into the pantheon of gods, stripping it of its ethical and social attributes:

The early Christians rejected the religious pluralism of their age not because it offended against their belief in the uniqueness of Jesus, but because it could not be reconciled with the right action or with the ethical-social vision contained in Jesus’ message about the Kingdom of God. Soteriocentric or Kingdom-centered motivations, rather than Christocentric or monotheistic convictions, brought about this rejection of pluralism... They rejected pluralism then, not because it offended against the role or nature of Jesus Christ but because it offended against the kind of God and the kind of society that were integral to Jesus’ vision of God’s reign.\(^{60}\)

According to Knitter, the apostles’ rebukes were not part and parcel of a call to convert others, but rather a rejection of the attempts of others to be converted. Their rejection of false idols was not a condemnation of other religions, but a condemnation of attempts to assimilate Jesus Christ

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\(^{59}\) As Luke Timothy Johnson comments on Acts 4:12: “The Greek sentence is awkward and somewhat tautologous; the second clause, however, does make clear that the “no other” means “no other name given to humans” (or: “among humans”), and that “salvation” means “by which we must be saved.” The theme of salvation in the name of Jesus is announced explicitly, and involves, as we have seen, physical, spiritual, and social dimensions. Luke Timothy Johnson, \textit{The Acts of the Apostles} (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 78.

\(^{60}\) Knitter, 71.
into other religions, stripping Christianity of its ethical uniqueness and its calling to build a community that furthered the Kingdom of God.

Situating Peter’s assertion as to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ (“no other name”) within the framework of his actual speech in Acts 4 clearly counters Knitter’s characterization of the New Testament witness. First, Peter’s audience in his speech is Jewish, not pagan: “Let it be known to you, and to all of Israel (Acts 4:10).” The assertion regarding the uniqueness of Jesus Christ is not predicated upon a fear that this uniqueness would be absorbed under a pagan pantheon—it is addressed to fellow monotheists. Furthermore, such an audience would share the same ethical framework as the apostles, as Peter’s speeches affirm continuity with the Old Testament and a vision of Torah as fulfilled rather than supplanted by Jesus. One may argue that what is happening in this passage is the exact opposite of Knitter’s construal: the rejection of an alleged syncretism is made by the Jewish leaders, who see the proclamation of Jesus as Lord and God as an attempt to destroy a monotheistic account of God.

Within the work of Cobb, Knitter, and Dupuis there is an emphasis on the distinction between the church and the Kingdom of God—the church is in service to the Kingdom. Such distinctions are utilized in order to assert both the distinctiveness of Christianity and the universal good of all religions that share in the Kingdom. Scripture is parsed to fit this claim, with mentions of exclusivity referring only to the assertion that the church can be distinct, and calls for repentance referring only to the calling to share in the universal Kingdom. 61 Mission is then construed along the lines of this hermeneutic as the participation in the building of the

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61 Gerald O’Collins’ Salvation for All is another example of an approach to scripture that emphasizes the Kingdom of God as referring to the entirety of humanity: “For all Christians the reign of God should be a decisive point of reference. The Church exists for this wider, universal reality and at its service (250).” According to O’Collins, since Jesus’ teaching was about the Kingdom of God and his death was for human beings in the coming Kingdom of God, and since this Kingdom of God refers to the entirety of humanity, then ipso facto Jesus’ death brought about salvation for all of humanity.” Gerald O’Collins, Salvation for All: God’s Other Peoples (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 192-94.
universal Kingdom in cooperation with those of other religions: “A lead is found in the sacred books for a positive approach to religions, firstly and principally in the biblical faith in God’s universal involvement with humankind in a dialogue of salvation.”

The passage that most strongly counters this approach to scripture, and the mission as dialogue paradigm, is Acts 14. Paul and Barnabas flee from persecution in Iconium and travel to Lystra, “proclaiming the good news (Acts 14:7).” During one such proclamation of the good news, there is a healing of a man crippled from birth on account of his faith. The response from the pagan crowd, however, is to confuse Paul and Barnabas for Zeus and Hermes. Paul’s response is to exhort the crowd to turn from worthless idols and embrace the living God. Such idols were permitted when God “allowed the nations to follow their own ways (Acts 14:16),” but, such time has past. Paul’s words fall on deaf ears, and the crowd offers him sacrifices. Furthermore, a group of Jews come and win over the crowds, leading to Paul’s stoning and near death (Acts 14:19-20).

We see in this passage several elements that challenge a conception of mission as dialogue. The free assent of the pagans in Lystra is demonstrated in their ability to hear the gospel proclamation and modify its message despite the pleadings of the missionaries. We see also the persistence of Paul and Barnabas in condemning their religion, and a statement concerning the religions of the ‘nations’: that the time of God permitting alternative worship has come to an end. As Kavin Rowe states, what is advocated by Paul and Barnabas is “not simply an admonition to tweak a rite or halt a ceremony. It contains, rather, the summons that simultaneously involved the destruction of an entire mode of being religious.”

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63 Christopher Kavin Rowe, World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 21. Rowe will later qualify the extent of this destruction of a mode of religiosity by asserting as well Luke’s portrayal of the Gospel message in Acts as being “non-seditious.” Christianity is about
dialogue of Paul and Barnabas is caustic, as evidenced by Paul’s ensuing stoning. Here is a passage, much like the stoning of St. Stephen, that confounds conceptions of mission as dialogue and growth alike: the proclamation is judgmental yet non-coercive, well-articulated yet ultimately ineffective.

The mission as dialogue paradigm sets out to achieve a form of mission that is respectful of the religious other, rejects intentional conversion as manipulation, and focuses on the refinement of the missionary. It falls short of these goals. Its respect for the religious other is limited by the degree to which the adherents of other religions accept the dialogist’s commitment to intentional openness. While it does not call for a conversion to Christianity, it does call for a conversion to an ethical and social framework that is as much, if not more imbedded in Western values. Its focus on the refinement of the missionary misses the explicit scriptural references to acts of intentional conversion.

The Problem of Persuasion

Despite its flaws, the mission as dialogue paradigm offers an important contribution to the study of Christian mission, as it raises the questions of manipulation and coercion in regards to evangelism, and advocates for the need to critically reflect on the ways in which the Christian message is communicated. It stands as a necessary critique of the mission as growth paradigm, resurrection, not insurrection. While the Christian message is culturally destabilizing, such upheaval is an invitation to “an alternative and salvific way of life,” a way of life that can involve both the rejection of certain aspects of pagan culture and an appropriation of other aspects. Ibid., 136. This accords with the discussion early concerning the ways in which individuals and groups of individuals accept, reject, or modify the Christian message. Conversion does not entail the wholesale rejection of one culture in favor of another, but rather a conversion to a new way of life that can involve both the rejection and modification of previous social practices.

Luke Timothy Johnson’s interpretation of Acts 14:1-18 is similar to Rowe’s, albeit more measured: Paul and Barnabas are portrayed as “Jewish evangelists who correct misguided idolatrous impulses by means of an abbreviated but effective exhortation to conversion from such ‘foolishness’ to belief in the one ‘living God.’” At the same time, the passage also shows the openness of the gentiles to “God’s providential ‘witness to himself’ among these nations who until now had been allowed to ‘follow their own paths.’” Johnson, 251.
and all attempts to engage in Christian mission in ways that do not serious grapple with the ways in which such actions are conducted. As mentioned above however, the issues the Cobb, Knitter, and Dupuis raise are not adequately addressed by their conceptions of Christian mission, and at the root of much of these issues lie in inadequate understanding of persuasion. In order to address the problem of persuasion in mission head on, it is thus imperative to develop a fuller understanding of persuasion, using the fields of communication ethics and rhetoric.

Persuasion, and its related term rhetoric,\textsuperscript{64} connote in popular parlance the underhanded subterfuge imbedded in the tactics of a used car salesman. They are crafts devoted simply to winning over another for self-gain. There are no moral limits on the means employed to win assent, and whether such assent is in the best interest of the other is immaterial: the rhetor persuades for personal gain. This view of persuasion is summed up in Foss and Griffin’s definition of traditional rhetoric: "Embedded in efforts to change others is a desire for control and domination, for the act of changing another establishes the power of the change agent over that other."\textsuperscript{65}

Such a critique can just as easily be levied at the missionary enterprise. For many, anxiety over Christian mission is centered upon the problem of persuasion. If embedded in efforts to change others is the desire for control and domination, a profession devoted to efforts to change

\textsuperscript{64} The relationship between rhetoric and persuasion exists as far back as Aristotle, who defines it as the art of the discovery of the available means of persuasion in particular cases. Aristotle, \textit{On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse}, trans. George A. Kennedy (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991), I.1.14. Contemporary definitions of rhetoric within the discipline give a much broader scope to the term, but persuasion still weighs heavily on such differences. As Bizzell and Herzberg define it: "Rhetoric has a number of overlapping meanings: the practice of oratory; the study of the strategies of effective oratory; the use of language, written or spoken, to inform or persuade; the study of the persuasive effects of language; the study of the relation between language and knowledge; the classification and use of tropes and figures; and, of course, the use of empty promises and half-truths as a form of propaganda." Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, "Introduction," in \textit{The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present} (Boston, MA: Bedford Books, 1990), 1.

\textsuperscript{65} Foss and Griffin, 3.
the religious affiliation of others must be a profession devoted to control and domination. Lamin Sanneh elucidates this anxiety:

The forces pitted against a fair understanding of mission in the late twentieth century are formidable. To start with, many people are committed to the ideological position that mission is oppressive, and anachronistic to boot, and Christians have been afflicted by the consequences…Most mainline Western Christian bodies have, as a consequence, retreated from the subject, afflicted by a heavy sense of guilt. It is not, therefore, easy to inveigh against such strong a deep obstruction.66

If one starts with the presupposition that persuasion in manipulative, then mission is indeed in a precarious position, and attempts at a fair understanding of its operations are formidable. But persuasion need not be considered intrinsically manipulative. As will be shown, such an understanding of persuasion is an inheritance of Enlightenment rationality—a false split between dialectics and analytics as problematic as the split between fact and value and ought and is. Furthermore, the anxiety over the missionary enterprise described by Sanneh can be alleviated by an understanding of how acts of intentional persuasion can have the effect of changing both rhetor and their audience. Sanneh’s work Translating the Message documents how such changes have occurred throughout the history of Christian missions. The remainder of this chapter will further a critique of persuasion within the various construals of mission and point to the possibility of a rehabilitation of persuasion in Christian mission, which will then be explored further in chapter five.

Rhetoric and Reason, Dialectics and Analytics: A Brief History of the Break

Rhetoric and persuasion did not always have negative connotations. While the relationships among rhetoric, persuasion, and reasoning is fuzzy in the works of Plato,67 Aristotle

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66 Sanneh, 88.
67 For an extended background on the history of rhetoric, see David S. Cunningham, Faithful Persuasion: In Aid of a Rhetoric of Christian Theology (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 8-27. The tension in Plato
forged a consensus on the relationship between rhetoric, persuasion, and reasoning that would last through the middle ages. Aristotle separates the process of reasoning into two methods: analytical and dialectical. Analytical reasoning is reasoning that occurs within agreed upon shared first principles. It takes place within a relatively closed system of agreed upon terms, and as such, its conclusions are tautological, and do not purport to discover new knowledge. The most obvious example of analytical argumentation is the mathematical proof, which takes place within a set of principles and procedures agreed upon within the discipline. Modern notions of logic typically involve reasoning along analytical lines. Analytical argumentation purports a kind of absolute certainty, but, because of its closed nature, does not produce new knowledge.

Analytic argumentation is contrasted with dialectics. Dialectical reasoning (which includes dialogue, rhetoric, and argumentation) is reasoning that occurs within fields of knowledge that are inherently ambiguous and contingent, of which there are not shared first principles. It is a method of arguing on practical matters that are necessarily contingent, and as such arguments advance not from false to true, but probable to more probable. The contingency of such arguments means that any conclusions reached cannot be universalized. However, according to Cunningham, “its ambiguity makes it able to achieve genuinely new (nontautological) insights.” For instance, the assent of the validity of an analytic argument, say a simple mathematical equation, brings a definitive end to discussions. But the assent to certain

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is between his negative characterization of rhetoric in Gorgias and his beneficial view of rhetoric, provided its use in persuading towards transcendental truth, in Phaedrus: “But this ability [the art of speech] he will not gain without much diligent toil, which a wise man ought not to undergo for the sake of speaking and acting before men, but that he may be able to speak and to do everything, so far as possible, in a manner pleasing to the gods.” Plato, "Phaedrus," in The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present, ed. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg (Boston: Bedford Books, 1990), 139. It is perhaps best to say that for Plato, rhetoric is an instrument that can be used for both harm and good. For Aristotle, the connection is transparent: “Let rhetoric be [defined as] an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion.” Aristotle, 1.2.

Cunningham, 15.

Ibid.
dialectic arguments, say that democracy is preferred to autocracy, could be said to be merely the beginning of a long series of further discussions and insights.

What is crucial to this assessment of dialectics and analytics is the breadth of topics that fall under dialectics. For Aristotle, politics and ethics both fall under the category of dialectics.\(^70\) Because issues in these fields are highly particular, the result of such dialectic will not be universal truths that are axiomatic. After all, if it were held to be true definitively, there would be no need of arguing. Few argue that 2+2=4, many argue over whether socialism or democracy are better for a society. However, for many, it is precisely these contingent matters, matters that are in the realm of probability and not certainty, that matter the most.\(^71\) Furthermore, these are issues through which engagement with others is crucial. We argue, debate, persuade, discuss, with others in our community about what is good, what is beautiful, how we should act, what is best for a country.

Aristotle’s distinction between discussions within communities about matters of probability and formal analytic reasoning begins to break down in the Enlightenment. Reasoning becomes synonymous with analytic reasoning—to reason is to demonstrate syllogistically through intuitive first principles.\(^72\) Scientific reason, so important for the advancement of the hard sciences, is extended to philosophy and the emerging social sciences. Furthermore, such

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\(^70\) Aristotle, I.4-5.

\(^71\) According to Aristotle, “most of the matters with which judgment and examination are concerned can be other than they are; for people deliberate and examine what they are doing, and [human] actions are all of this kind, and none of them [are], so to speak, necessary.” Ibid., I.2.14.

\(^72\) Stephen Toulmin traces the development of formal logic and its tendency to neglect five essential distinctions, for instance the distinction between necessary and probable arguments and between arguments that are formally valid and those that cannot be formally valid. Logicians conflated these distinctions into “one single distinction, which they made the absolute and essential condition of logical salvation…the analytic syllogism thereby became a paradigm to which all self-respecting arguments must conform.” Stephen Edelston Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument*, Updated Edition ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 138.
reasoning can take place solely within the individual mind, and is not dependent on outside forces.\textsuperscript{73}

Since reason becomes synonymous with analytical reasoning, all reasoning that is not related to self-evidence is cast aside as irrational. In their landmark text, \textit{The New Rhetoric}, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca claim this development emanates from Descartes:

The domain of argumentation is that of the credible, the plausible, the probable, to the degree that the latter eludes the certainty of calculations. Now Descartes’ concept, clearly expressed in the first part of The Discourse on the Method, was to “take well nigh for false everything which was only plausible.” It was this philosopher who made the self-evident the mark of reason, and considered rational only those demonstrations which, starting from clear and distinct ideas, extended, by means of apodictic proofs, the self-evidence of the axioms to the derived theorems.\textsuperscript{74}

For Descartes there is only the rational, which is the realm of self-evident axioms, and the irrational, which is all that is outside of the axiomatic, including that which is probable.\textsuperscript{75} Thus dialectic reasoning is eliminated as a form of reason—matters of uncertainty are left to the subjective whims of the individual. Rhetoric is equated not with reason but with eloquence and presentation. We see in the Enlightenment an enlargement of the number of topics that can be

\textsuperscript{73} MacIntyre’s summary of Kant’s philosophy aptly describes this shift: “Central to Kant’s moral philosophy are two deceptively simple theses: if the rules of morality are rational, they must be the same for all rational beings, in just the way that the rules of arithmetic are, and if the rules of morality are binding on all rational beings then the contingent ability of such beings to carry them out must be unimportant—what is important is their will to carry them out.” MacIntyre, \textit{After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory}, 43-44. Moral reasoning is of a same type as arithmetic reasoning, and reasoning becomes detached from social environment. Similarly, Descartes demonstrated an affinity towards arithmetic reasoning, questioning why it had not been applied to philosophical reasoning in the past: “I was most keen on mathematics, because of its certainty and the incontrovertibility of its proofs; but I did not yet see its true use. Believing as I did that its only application was to the mechanical arts, I was astonished that nothing more exalted had been built on such sure and solid foundations; whereas, on the other hand, I compared the moral works of ancient pagan writers to splendid and magnificent palaces built on nothing more than sand and mud.” René Descartes, \textit{A Discourse on the Method of Correctly Conducting One’s Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences}, trans. Ian Maclean (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006), 9.


\textsuperscript{75} “I deemed anything that was no more than plausible to be tantamount to false.” Descartes, 10.
claimed as “facts” with a kind of mathematical certainty,\textsuperscript{76} coupled with a rendering of topics deemed probable to the realm of “values” and individual taste.

Furthermore, in the realm of values, the individual is free to believe what they wish, so attempts to persuade are an assault on individual freedom. The demise of persuasion is articulated most vividly in eighteenth century philosopher Immanuel Kant’s \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}:

Persuasion is a mere semblance, since the ground of the judgment, which lies solely in the subject, is held to be objective. Hence such a judgment also has only private validity, and this taking something to be true cannot be communicated. Truth, however, rests upon agreement with the object, with regard to which, consequently, the judgments of every understanding must agree. The touchstone of whether taking something to be true is conviction or mere persuasion is therefore, externally, the possibility of communicating it and finding it to be valid for the reason of every human being to take it to be true…I cannot assert anything, i.e., pronounce it to be a judgment necessarily valid for everyone, except that which produces conviction. I can preserve persuasion for myself if I please to do so, but cannot and should not want to make it valid beyond myself.\textsuperscript{77}

For Kant, persuasion is a “mere semblance” that cannot be communicated. There is according to Kant a universalizable morality that is objectively binding on the human will, yet such morality is accessible through the subjective reason of the individual. The grounds for judgment of moral claims exist solely in the individual, yet these judgments can be claimed to have universal validity, and so are objective. So, for something to be true it must be capable of being communicated in a way that garners assent from every human being. One cannot assert anything that cannot be judged valid for everyone. What is probable can only be stated as a mere opinion.

\textsuperscript{76} MacIntyre traces the expansion of mechanical causality from Newtonian physics to a wider scope of human behavior throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century. See MacIntyre, \textit{After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory}, 82-84.

Persuasion is thus privatized: We should not attempt to communicate persuasively, since that which is in the realm of persuasion cannot be proved valid for everyone.

The concept of rhetoric, stripped of its persuasive connotations, must now be rendered inert. For 19th Century rhetorician and Church of Ireland Bishop Richard Whatley, rhetoric becomes subservient to logic, becoming not the discovery of the available means of persuasion, but the available means of argument, defined as logical proof. Rhetoric becomes the art of effectively arranging and communicating logical arguments, its role reduced to the eloquent presentation of these logical arguments. Whatley’s definition of rhetoric is of particular importance due to the popularity of his work *Elements of Rhetoric*, which became the standard English textbook on rhetoric in the 19th Century. There are those, however, that are not content even with this reduced role of rhetoric as eloquence. For John Locke, rhetoric can only be the clear, orderly, and efficient transmission of knowledge through language, and “all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment.”

Despite the widespread critique of Enlightenment rationality, its impact on an understanding of persuasion still remains. For MacIntyre, an acceptance of the Enlightenment’s

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79 Cunningham, 24.


81 As has already been mentioned in the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, the Enlightenment’s attempt at grounding morality in universal principles that are self-evident failed. Morality must be rendered, in the Enlightenment framework, also to the arena of private validity (what MacIntyre calls ‘emotivism’).
failures means either to accept a “genealogical” (Nietzschean) morality, which asserts that moral claims are simply impositions of the will on others, or to return to some form of Aristotelianism. For rhetoric, a similar choice is posed: one must either accept that all attempts at persuasion, including those that are moral and religious, are the imposition of the will on others, or return to a form of reasoning as argumentation and persuasion regarding that which is probable. Foss and Griffin’s conception of invitational rhetoric is an example of the former, as are the communicative presumptions of the construal of mission as dialogue.

For Foss and Griffin, since persuasion is intrinsically coercive, and since rhetoric occurs outside of the realm of the hard sciences (i.e. it is not subject to formal logic and inference), any attempt at communication must be scrubbed clean of persuasion. Any change that occurs from an encounter must not be due to the intentional persuasive force of the interlocutor, but must emanate from the individual. Here one sees echoes of Kant in Foss and Griffin’s model: persuasion may still occur, provided that it exists firmly and completely within the subjective will of the individual.

This is precisely what is happening in the conception of mission as dialogue. The attempt of the missionary to convert another is intrinsically coercive, therefore persuasion must be eliminated in the communication of the Christian message. Note, however, that conversion can still occur, but it must solely be the product of the internal movements of the individual. It cannot come as a result of the intentional actions of the missionary.

*Persuasion is Unavoidable, So Attempts to Limit it May Themselves Be Manipulative*

What follows is a critique of the mission as dialogue paradigm based upon its limited notion of persuasion. I echo the assertion of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca in *The New Rhetoric*, that the Cartesian rejection of argumentation is a “perfectly unjustified and
unwarranted limitation of the domain of action of our faculty of reasoning and proving.” The following critiques stem from the false attempts at limiting persuasion, as well as the ways in which persuasion does not have to limit the personal faculties of reasoning and proving. Both critiques take as their starting point the assertion of the inevitability and unavoidability of persuasion.

We exert influence on others in a variety of ways, both intentionally and unintentionally. To encounter another is to be changed in some way, whether we desire that change or not. This point is brought out famously in Martin Buber’s *I and Thou:* we know ourselves as I only through our relationship to the You. In the exchanging of ideas, the selection of what topics to discuss and what to omit will affect the impact of our ideas. Speech is not value neutral, and cannot be scrubbed clean of its judgments. As the prominent twentieth century rhetorician Kenneth Burke states, “speech in its essence is not neutral. Far from aiming at suspended judgment, the spontaneous speech of a people is loaded with judgments. It is intensely moral—its names for objects contain the emotional overtones which give us the cues as to how we should act towards these objects.”

For Burke, the simple expression of an opinion or belief changes the ways another thinks, as does the wording we use to formulate a belief. Even the selection of the word we use to name something, for instance, whether someone is “pro-life” or “anti-choice,” can speak volumes about both what we believe and what we hope others will believe.

It is therefore extraordinarily difficult to define what intentional persuasion is and what it isn’t. Gass and Seiter state that a definition of persuasion should “take into account the rich
complex of verbal, nonverbal, and contextual cues found in interpersonal encounters…these elements do not function separately, but rather, they operate in an interrelated manner.”\textsuperscript{85} Once one factors in nonverbal communication, as well as contextual and implicit cues, it becomes clear that persuasion can take place without intent being obviously stated. The danger in a communication ethic that attempts to purge intentional persuasion is that it could potentially enable subtler and more deceptive forms of persuasion to occur, a form of argumentative seduction. Using the metaphor of arguers as lovers, Wayne Brockriede says that “such devices as ignoring the questions, begging the question, the red herring, appeals to ignorance or to prejudice all aim at securing assent through seductive discourse that only appears to establish warrantable claims.”\textsuperscript{86}

The attempts to construe mission as dialogue that intentionally bracket calls to conversion do not safeguard against the possibility that such encounters will exert influence on another, whether such influence is welcome or not. In limiting the possibility of manipulation to the act of intentional conversion, they miss the other ways in which one may be persuaded. Aristotle’s critique of the sophists is pertinent: he does not condemn their love and use of rhetoric, since persuasion is necessary in things that cannot be proved certain. Instead, his critique is that they are people of bad character. Rhetoric is a tool which can be wielded to enact great good or great harm dependent on who is using it and how they wield it: by using the power of words “justly, one would do the greatest good and unjustly, the greatest harm.”\textsuperscript{87} Whether one is attempting to persuade another to convert to Christianity, or persuade another to reject conversion and embrace

\textsuperscript{87} Aristotle, I.1.13.
dialogue, ethical issues may emerge because the one persuading is of a bad moral character. There is no communicative context that safeguards the power of words from their unjust use.

Persuasion is Unavoidable, So Proclamation Entails Risks on the Part of the Missionary

The belief that persuasion is to an extent inevitable entails a correlate: that the one engaged in intentional persuasion open themselves up to being persuaded. The mission as dialogue paradigm is right in asserting that a conversion may occur in the self after engaging in interreligious dialogue. What it fails to acknowledge is that a conversion of the self may also occur through intentional acts of persuasion. Just because someone intends to convince another of a belief does not mean that they themselves are closed off from change. Cobb makes this false assumption: the more ‘conservative’ Christians will be less open to change than the more ‘progressive’ Christians.88

Sanneh’s monograph Translating the Message gives an historical account and assessment of Christian mission that highlights the complex ways in which the missionary enterprise shaped both the missionary and the mission. While not denying the cases in which missionaries colluded with oppressive imperialist regimes, Sanneh emphasizes the ways in which missionaries, through introducing the Gospel message, helped foster significant benefits for local cultures. At the same time, he also showcases the ways in which many missionaries became more critical of their home churches as a result of spreading the Gospel: “Missionaries accepted the indigenous culture as the final destination of the message, and they were prepared to go to similar lengths in renouncing Western culture as the normative pattern for all peoples.”89 Such a critique of Western culture was done in part in order to advance the success of the missionary venture. For

88 Cobb, "Beyond "Pluralism"," 87-88.
89 Sanneh, 93.
instance, Sanneh cites the missionary work of Alexandro Vilignano in sixteenth century Japan, tracing the changes in his views of Japanese culture as a result of his work. Vilignano arrives convinced of European superiority, “however, as field experience mellowed him, Valignano adopted a different course, still critical, but this time toward the Western cultural assumptions of Christian mission.”\textsuperscript{90} Hence the missionary, in their attempts to intentionally convert others, experienced a conversion themselves. Significantly for reflecting on Cobb’s critique of conversion is that this change did not take place through a radical open dialogue but through the intentional proclamation of the Gospel. The type of mutual conversion so desired by the dialogist was achieved through a method of intentional proclamation they reject. Chapter five will take up this issue more fully in showing how the work of the Holy Spirit in prayer and the desire to discover the available means of persuasion in the acts of proclamation effect a change in the life of the missionary.

\textbf{Conclusion}

The conception of mission as dialogue sets out to address the seemingly ethnocentric and coercive aspects of Christian mission by conceiving of it as the process of engaging in interreligious dialogue that is non-persuasive, the goal of which is the conversion of the self rather than the other. While it may have failed in many of its objectives, it does provide for a missiology that is morally reflective, as well as press the point regarding the alleged coerciveness lurking behind the missionary enterprise as a whole. It has brought the problem of persuasion to the forefront of discussions concerning mission, yet it has failed to adequately address these issues. The ensuing chapter on proclamation will address the issue of persuasion head on, but

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 96.
first we must establish a way of speaking about mission that takes seriously the moral actions of
the missionary.
Chapter 4: Mission as Virtuous Practice

Section I of this dissertation utilized theological ethics to critically assess three rival versions of mission in order to better understand their philosophical and theological underpinnings, as well as their strengths and weaknesses. What emerged from these discussions were three perpetual challenges, what I have called the problems of distinction, agency, and persuasion. While each of the three previous chapters has included an extended analysis of one of these problems, it has been shown that such challenges are not limited to that specific model. Indeed, each of these models bears traces of all three of these perpetual issues.

In highlighting the ways in which the problems of distinction, persuasion, and agency perpetually recur throughout these various models of mission, I am suggesting that the potential solutions to these issues may lay outside of dogmatic and anthropological approaches to mission, and that the field of missiology lacks the resources to adequately solve them. While the discipline of theological ethics has provided the primarily critical tools for identifying the perpetual problems of mission, it also provides the resources for solutions. In the next section of this dissertation, historical and recent scholarship in ethics, drawn both from virtue ethics and communication ethics, will help forge a model of mission that better addresses these challenges. As Aquinas and MacIntyre have been aids in the critical task, so they will also aid the constructive task.

This chapter begins by setting forth the goals of this constructive part of the dissertation, which centers on the ways in which my casting of mission through the lens of virtue ethics better addresses the problems generated in the critical section of the dissertation. Following this will be the articulation of my conception of mission, beginning with this thesis: *Christian mission is best construed as specific activities (proclamation and gathering) that develop virtue in its*
practitioners, moving them toward their ultimate goal of partaking in the glory of God. The remainder of the chapter will then be spent tracing the key lines of thought inherent in this statement.

**Why Virtue? The Goals of this Conception of Mission**

Before expanding on my conception of mission as virtuous practice, it is imperative to understand the purposes of such a construal: Why virtue? What do I hope to accomplish? What are the goals to which this conception of mission aspires?

**Addressing the Problems of Distinction, Agency, and Persuasion**

The assertion that mission is best construed as virtuous practices comes with three primary goals. First, such a theory aims to address the three perpetual issues involved in the study of mission—what I have codified as the problems of distinction, agency, and persuasion. But the goal is not simply to address these problems adequately, but to do so in such a way that the answers to these problems are intelligible within the logic of the aforementioned models. Here I am appropriating from Alasdair MacIntyre his understanding of competing moral traditions and how the conflicts between such traditions might be resolved, and showing how a similar adjudication might take place amidst rival conceptions of mission. In his book *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry*, MacIntyre elucidates how particular moral traditions can supersede their rivals through integration rather than domination. This happens when a particular tradition can be shown to better address the problems of their rivals, yet in a way that is intelligible from within their rival’s tradition.¹ For instance, in his analysis of Thomas Aquinas, Alasdair MacIntyre describes how Thomas was able to integrate Aristotelian and

Augustinian epistemologies into a coherent whole. The importance of Aquinas’s system was not that it fit perfectly together, as if Thomas split the difference between the two systems, but rather that Thomas’ system of thought was better able to answer the concerns of each system better than that system could on its own terms: “Aquinas integrated both rival schemes of concepts and beliefs in such a way as both to correct in each that which he took by its own standards could be shown to be defective or unsound and to remove from each, in a way justified by that correction, that which barred them from reconciliation.”

A similar methodology is advocated by Jeffrey Stout: “All great works of creative ethical thought (and some not so great)…start off by taking stock of problems that need solving and available conceptual resources for solving them. Then, they proceed by taking apart, putting together, reordering, weighting, weeding out, and filling in.” This approach, which Stout calls *bricolage*, is a more chaotic and unsystematic methodology when compared to MacIntyre. However, it does share with MacIntyre the assertion that moral enquiry begins with problems and proceeds by drawing from and reordering available conceptual resources in order to better address such problems. Similarly for Stout, Thomas Aquinas is an example of such an approach, as he weaved together Aristotelian virtue, Platonic-Augustinian cosmology, and natural law theory into a coherent whole.

My portrayal of mission as virtuous practice attempts to redress the problematic areas of the *missio Dei* consensus and models of mission based on growth or based upon dialogue, with the hope that such attempts may be intelligible to the adherents of each. It should be noted that what is attempted is not a type of Hegelian synthesis of opposing missiologies. It is tempting to

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2 Ibid., 123.
4 Ibid., 74-77.
simply categorize mission as growth and mission as dialogue as conservative and liberal binaries, with a third way magically striking a golden mean. To do so would ignore deficiencies, particularly in the realm of human agency, that belie both. This is the second key assertion that MacIntyre makes regarding the development of Thomas’ moral system. While Aquinas attempted to answer the concerns internal to each rival view, he was not beholden to either view: “If one is compelled to enquire where the truth lies between alternative, rival, and incommensurable overall points of view, one cannot but entertain the possibility that either or both of these points of view is systematically false, false as a whole in its overall claims.” 5 While one can attempt to address internal concerns to systems of belief, the judgments made on the truth or falsity of these systems are judgments that are made outside of these systems: “Hence in judging of truth and falsity there is always some ineliminable reference beyond the scheme within which those judgements are made and beyond the criteria which provide the warrants for assertibility within that scheme.” 6 The goal of this model of mission is thus to better address the aforementioned problems of distinction, agency, and persuasion in the field of Christian mission, drawing upon conceptual resources within the fields of missiology, moral theology, philosophy, and rhetorical studies, while reserving the right to pronounce judgment on parts of each system that are not in harmony with what God has revealed in scripture. 7

5 MacIntyre, Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition, 121.
6 Ibid., 122. It should be noted here that MacIntyre embraces a Thomistic notion of the natural law, which he sees as providing the framework through which individuals are able to properly pursue the good in community. Natural law in this rendering are first principles that provide the norms for shared rational enquiry and an objective standard through which such inquiry can take place. Alasdair C. MacIntyre, “Intractable Moral Disagreements,” in Intractable Disputes About the Natural Law: Alasdair Macintyre and Critics, ed. Lawrence S. Cunningham (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 24-25.
7 This assertion that the judgments of models of mission is predicated on scripture departs from MacIntyre’s notion of the natural law as the objective standard of moral enquiry. In this regard, my approach is more akin to Oliver O’Donovan. For O’Donovan, there is a rationality inherent in the created order that can be discerned by human beings, yet sin has the effect not only of making such rationality difficult for human beings to discern, but also involves a rupture in the rationality of the created order itself. The resurrection of Jesus Christ thus becomes the way through which created order is restored, and provides Christians the opportunity to become a moral agents, “involved in deciding what a situation is and demands in the light of the moral order,” provided they do so through
Fittingness with the New Testament Depiction of Mission

This leads to the second goal, to present a way of construing mission that fits the New Testament witness. I am committed to the historical affirmation in Anglicanism that scripture is God’s written word and contains all things necessary for salvation, articulated clearly in Article Six of the Thirty-Nine Articles:

Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.

Such a statement asserts both the necessity and sufficiency of the Bible for salvation. Oliver Crisp codifies this belief in Scripture as “the norma normans non normata—that is, the norming norm that is not normed by anything else.” Because of this belief, it is imperative that an account of mission remain faithful to scripture as God’s word writ.

An affirmation of scripture as God’s word written only begs the question of how it should be interpreted, an issue whose importance and contentiousness is evidenced by the fact of entire academic journals devoted to it. As far as my own commitments, the aforementioned statement

While such an approach is perhaps distinctly protestant, it does have similarities with some Catholic theologians. Gerald McKenney argues that Josef Ratzinger grounds moral truth in the Christian historical tradition. While such a tradition is only accessible by faith, its embodiment in the Church provides evidence for its truth claims that can be acknowledged even by nonbelievers. See Gerald P. McKenny, "Moral Disagreements and the Limits of Reason: Reflections on Macintyre and Ratzinger," in Intractable Disputes About the Natural Law: Alasdair Macintyre and Critics, ed. Lawrence S. Cunningham (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 219.

My own approach is particularly suitable for rendering judgments on models of Christian mission. MacIntyre’s depiction of rival traditions is concerned primarily with models of moral enquiry, not rival theologies nor rival Christianities. Appeals to scripture are thus not authoritative. An assessment of Christian mission, however, is distinctly Christian, and the practice of mission is largely defined by the initial missional activity of the apostles as depicted in the Book of Acts. Thus in this case the use of scripture as a criterion for judgment is highly warranted. This will be addressed in the ensuing paragraphs.

8 Oliver Crisp, Deviant Calvinism: Broadening Reformed Theology (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), 17. This term is used summarily to denote the relationship between the authority of scripture, of confessions and creeds, and the church, particularly as it developed in the Lutheran tradition and Matthias Flacius Illyricus’s 1567 work Clavis scripturae sacrae. See Richard A. Muller, Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006).
regarding scripture as the norming norm, as well as my particular ecclesial commitments as an ordained clergyman, provide boundaries for my interpretations. Novel scriptural proposals that violate the doctrine and discipline of the church are out of bounds. However, I do not believe such boundaries are meant to stymie creativity—G. K. Chesterton’s statement on the boundaries of the church being less like the walls of a prison and more like the fencing of a playground is adroit.\(^9\) Just as a creative child can venture throughout a playground seeing such fencing but having no desire to breach it, so too can creative scriptural interpretation reside joyfully within the boundaries of doctrine.

Chapter two raised the issue of interpretation, and there I mentioned the work of David Kelsey and his evaluation of the ways in which theologians construe the texts of scripture. Richard Hays’ *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* contains a detailed explanation of the ways in which this might be done particularly when using the New Testament to make ethical claims. Hays lists four types of appeals that theologians make when using scripture as a source of ethical reflection: rules, principles, paradigms, and the symbolic world.\(^10\) For Hays, “each of these modes of discourse may be found within Scripture as well as in secondary theological reflection about Scriptures’ ethical import.”\(^11\) Since all of these types of appeals are present in scripture, they are all legitimate for making ethical claims. The task of theologians is the “task of rightly correlating our ethical norms with the modes of Scripture’s speech.”\(^12\)

Following this framework, my own approach to scripture will seek an imaginative construal of the pertinent texts related to mission, particularly in the New Testament, being

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\(^11\) Ibid.
\(^12\) Ibid.
sensitive to scripture’s own appeals to rules, principles, paradigms, and the symbolic world. An area of emphasis will be on paradigms, which Hays states are “stories or summary accounts of characters who model exemplary conduct.” While I will at points appeal to various parts of scripture, the interpretative focus will be this: The words and actions of the apostles, as well as the depiction of their character, demonstrated principally in the Book of Acts, are meant to model exemplary conduct for missionaries today.

Part of the critiques in the aforementioned chapters centered upon the ways in which conceptions of mission both misconstrue scripture and fail to sufficiently account for the wide range of missional activity of the apostles as depicted in the Book of Acts. For instance, Alan Hirsch’s construal of scripture as possessing the keys to unlocking replicable church growth conflicted with the clear depictions of the rejection of the gospel message in the Book of Acts. Furthermore, Paul Knitter’s conception of mission as dialogue ignores passages in the New Testament that depict intentional persuasion meant to encourage conversion. Neither of these approaches adequately attends to the complex ways in which the disciples engage in persuasive activity while at the same time remaining relatively unconcerned when such persuasion is met with failure and hostility.

What is needed is a fitting account of mission, one which accounts for the complex ways in which the proclamation of Jesus as Lord and the expansion of the Christian church is displayed in the biblical text. The term fittingness has its roots in theological aesthetics, as it refers to the “due proportion or consonance” that a person or object has to itself. For Aquinas, this is one aspect of beauty—that something is perfectly in harmony with what it ought to be. Hence, the Son is beautiful because He is the perfect image of the Father. Kevin Vanhoozer

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13 Ibid.
appropriates this conception of fittingness to express the relationship between theological
concepts and scripture. A theological concept “depends for theology not only on whether it
seems to fit experience, but on whether it illuminates, and is illuminated by, the scriptural text.”
Fitness is not, however, a mere static equivalence between dogma and scripture, but rather the
beautiful and harmonious ways in which such concepts cohere with the drama of scripture, with
Jesus Christ as the center.

Furthermore, a concept is fitting not just because it is in accordance with a large
collection of Biblical texts, but also because it better aids those who see themselves as continuing
the Biblical story. The goal of formulating doctrine is to aid in the dramatic performance of the
Biblical canon by the church today:

Fittingness involves more than conceptual consistency. The criterion for correct
document is not simply logical but dramatic consistency: performing the same kind
of communicative action—a matter of being constant in word, thought, and
deed…Doctrines help us discern what, in light of the drama of redemption, is
fitting language and action for Christian disciples.

Vanhoozer’s concept of fittingness bears resemblance to what Frances Young describes as the
exercise of ‘mimetic exegesis’ in the ancient church. Young describes how early Christian
theologians appropriated the ancient practice of dramatically performing texts for the purpose of
pedagogy. Exegesis here “assumes the replay of a drama—an act or plot—and so had a place in
forming ethics, lifestyle, and liturgy.” One of the focuses of such mimetic exegesis was on the

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15 While Vanhoozer’s appropriation of the term fittingness has not been specifically appropriated by other
contemporary theologians, the concept resonates with the work of other modern theologians, most notably Hans Urs
Von Balthasar, whose casting of Christian action through the lens of dramatic performance was an important
influence on Vanhoozer’s work.
17 Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology*
18 Ibid., 109.
19 Frances Margaret Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 2007), 209.
way specific characters in the Bible assumed the role of literary heroes: paragons of virtue who model how Christians ought to live their lives. Thus “a character like Job came to embody patience, and Christ’s life and death were set forth as a way to be imitated.”

What is aimed at in this study is a conception of mission that both draws from the Biblical witness and one that helps better shed light on the biblical witness. The point of developing concepts of mission that fit with the Biblical narrative is not just to provide terms that are logically coherent with the complex ways in which mission is displayed in the Bible, it is also to provide better opportunities for the church to carry on the task of mission today in a way that is pleasing to God. In this sense, fittingness is as much an aesthetic term, as noted above, as it is a scientific one. To say that a concept of mission that aids in a fitting performance of the Biblical narrative is to say that such performances are beautiful, as one might call a contemporary performance of Beethoven’s 9th by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra a fitting performance of the composer’s score.

This touches upon what St. Paul describes as the sacrifices of the people—“Holy and Pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship (Romans 12:1).” The offering of our bodies as spiritual sacrifices to God—to perform the Biblical narrative—is an act that calls forth holiness, but is in turn pleasing to God.

To this end, the book will draw largely upon biblical accounts of mission, focusing primarily on the preeminent missiological text in scripture: The Book of Acts. One particular area of emphasis will be on a kind of mimetic exegesis of the Book of Acts, where the characters

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20 Ibid.
21 Ellen Davis and Robert Hays make a similar point in regards to the collective activity of the church: “Scripture is like a musical score that must be played or sung in order to be understood; therefore, the church interprets Scripture by forming communities of prayer, service, and faithful witness. The Psalms, for example, or ‘scores’ awaiting performance by the community of faith.” Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, "Nine Theses on the Interpretation of Scripture," in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 2010), 3-4.
22 According to Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, for instance, “Acts, it is generally acknowledged, constitutes a principal source of information on the origins of Christian mission.” Bevans and Schroeder, 11.
of the Biblical drama—specifically Peter, Paul, and Stephen, are paragons of virtue who teach missionaries how to perform their task in a way that is holy and pleasing to God. The hope is that my account of mission will be illuminated by the witness of Holy Scripture, and that my account will better enable readers to glean new insights from scripture as a result.

*Moral Reflection on the Performance of Mission*

Furthermore, the hope is that this characterization mission will aid in the practical performance of mission. This leads to the third goal of the mission as virtuous practice model: that those engaged in mission will be better equipped to morally reflect on their actions. Moral reflection is the process of thinking about our doing, both our past actions and our immediate future actions. It is “how we think what we are to do, which is to say, how we act.”\(^{23}\) This is an important assertion, since a common misperception of ethics and moral theology is that it is simply the listing of dos and don’ts, with the presentation of increasingly complex (and obscure) scenarios in which the ethicist renders definitive judgment. Instead, the task of moral reflection is the discernment of what is good and right in accordance with God’s goodness. Although such moral reflection may not be immediately practical, it does have practical import, since by such reflection persons will become a people through which the goodness of God flows. We don’t love God because of God’s effects, but loving God necessarily affects us. Moral reflection thus “generates and supports useful goods of deliberative thought toward action.”\(^{24}\)

This book carries with it the very basic desire to help those engaged in Christian mission to be better missionaries. By reflecting on the missionary task, one can better discern what is

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good and right about it, and such reflection will support good a right deliberative thought toward further action.

The remainder of this dissertation will develop my conception of mission, with this chapter unpacking my thesis statement, the following chapter developing my concept of proclamation as a virtuous practice, and the concluding chapter discussing briefly how such practices are involved in a life lived well. In so doing I will demonstrate how this conception of mission meets the aforementioned goals.

Each of these chapters emphasize specific portions of these goals: the reframing of mission in relation to Aquinas’ moral theology and the utilization of Alasdair MacIntyre’s concept of a virtuous practice are meant to specifically address the problems of distinction and agency in mission. The following chapter on proclamation is meant to address the problem of persuasion, as well as highlight how a conception of proclamation as a virtuous practice fits with the portrayals of mission in scripture. That chapter, together with the conclusion, highlight how this approach to mission encourages moral reflection both on the performance of mission and its place in a life lived for the glory of God.

**Thesis Statement: Key Lines of Thought**

Now that the critiques of mission of been articulated and the goals of my conception of mission established, I will elucidate my construal of mission as virtuous practice, demonstrating how this approach offers a better way for addressing the challenges within mission and meets the aforementioned goals. The proposal is this: *Christian mission is best construed as specific activities (proclamation and gathering) that develop virtue in its practitioners, moving them toward their ultimate goal of partaking in the glory of God.*
The remainder of this chapter traces the key lines of thought related to my thesis, the discussion of which will aid in further defining and clarifying its key terms and assertions. It begins first by using Thomas Aquinas’ moral theology to build a foundation which will provide a way of speaking of mission that best meets the aforementioned goals. This foundation involves first a discussion of the relationship between God, creation, and agency, followed by an examination of how a theory of action and virtue fits into this relationship. Then, I will demonstrate how this foundation provides an appropriate grammar for speaking of mission.

The chapter then moves from more doctrinal and theoretical considerations to more practical ones, beginning with an examination of Alasdair MacIntyre’s notion of a virtuous practice, how mission can be construed as the virtuous practices of proclamation and gathering, and finally how the engagement in these activities promote specific virtues.

The structure of this chapter runs roughly along the same progression of the *Summa Theologica*. It starts first by discussing the relationships within the triune God and between God and creation, followed by an account of human agency. This follows the progression of the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa*. From here, I progress to discuss humankind’s ultimate end, the vision of God, how human beings move towards this end through deliberate action, and how human beings cultivate virtue towards this end. This corresponds with the *Pars Prima-Secundae* of the *Summa*. Following this section, I will proceed to discuss Alasdair MacIntyre’s conception of virtuous practices, which is akin to what Aquinas calls habits, also covered in the *Pars Prima-Secundae*. Following this section, I will discuss how mission fosters specific virtues, drawing from the *Pars Secunda-Secundae* of the *Summa*.

The reason for such structuring is partly due to my reliance on Aquinas for many of the theological foundations for my concept of mission, though my use of Aquinas is by no means
exclusive. The section on virtuous practices, for instance, is highly indebted to Alasdair MacIntyre. The ensuing chapters will expand on various aspects of my model of mission with the aid of Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Henry Newman. Other theologians such as Oliver O’Donovan also provide insight. Another reason for structuring this chapter in such a way is for heuristic purposes. The first two parts of the *Summa* take the reader from lofty considerations of God and creation, to an understanding of human action within this relationship with God, to the particular details of how human beings cultivate virtue. The hope is that tracing my concept of mission along these same lines will enable a more comprehensive view of what mission is and what role human beings might play in it.

*Moral Theology and Mission: Building a Foundation*

Chapter one traced the breakdown of ruled language concerning God’s transcendence and immanence and between human and divine agency, showing how the loss of these careful distinctions have muddled the distinctive aspects of Christian mission and created confusion as to the workings of human agency within the activities of mission. In order to redress these issues, it is imperative to set mission on a more solid foundation. This section turns to Thomas Aquinas’ moral theology to build such a foundation.\(^{25}\)

\(^{25}\) My use of the term “Aquinas’ moral theology” is meant to be broad, as it includes aspects, such as the relationships within the Trinity, that are typically considered part of dogmatics. However, the distinctions between dogmatics and moral theology are not clear cut, and my examination of Aquinas’ understanding of the relationships between God, creation, and agency are crucial for understanding how Aquinas believes human beings can grow in virtue. Furthermore, as mentioned in the introduction, my reading of Aquinas on these issues is as one who is largely consistent with the Christian tradition. To appropriate Tanner’s words, Aquinas stands within a broad category of orthodox, pre-modern theologians whose language of God affirms both God’s radical transcendence and radical immanence. See Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment*, 56-80. It is my own assertion that Aquinas provides the most astute articulation of these relationships, and that Aquinas stands largely, though not completely, in harmony with the tradition, most notably Augustine. As such I will at times refer also to Augustine, as well as the contemporary Trinitarian scholar Giles Emery’s assessment of the traditional articulation of the Trinity.
God, Creation, and Agency

Conceptualizing mission in relation to Aquinas’ moral theology begins by first affirming key distinctions between God and creation within classical Trinitarian theology as articulated by Thomas Aquinas, with the hope that such affirmations can help alleviate the problems of distinction and agency that have plagued the study of mission.

Aquinas’ conception of moral agency is grounded in his broader articulation of the Trinity and the relationship between God and creation. For Aquinas, the relations within God’s very self, the relations among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are different from God’s relations to his creation. Within God’s self there are “real relations,” relationships that involve procession within persons of the same nature:

When something proceeds from a principle of the same nature as itself, then both of them—viz., what proceeds and what it proceeds from—must belong to the same ordering, and so they must have real relations with respect to one another. Therefore, since, as has been shown (q. 27, a. 3), the processions in God involve an identity of nature, the relations associated with the divine processions must be real relations.26

The relationships within the Trinity “imply ontological similarity and dependence.”27 This ontological similarity and dependence aids in a Trinitarian grammar that enables human beings to speak of one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The difference in the persons are differences of relation and not substance. The relationship between God and creation, however, cannot be spoken of in such terms. To make the relationship between God and creation interdependent and ontologically similar would be to make God dependent upon creation, which would either “divinize creation or mythologize God by turning God into a creature.”28 God’s relationship to creation is instead referred to as “logical,” meaning that the relationship does not

26 Summa Theologica I. 28.1
27 Long, The Perfectly Simple Triune God: Aquinas and His Legacy, 57.
28 Ibid.
imply dependence or change.\textsuperscript{29} Aquinas sees the relationship between God and creation as asymmetrical:

God is outside the order of all creatures and does not by His nature have a relation to creatures. For, as was explained above, He produces creatures not by a necessity of nature, but through His intellect and will. And this is why in God there are no real relations to creatures. However, in the creatures there is a real relation to God, since creatures are contained under God’s ordering and by their nature depend on God.\textsuperscript{30}

Human beings have a real relation to God, since they exist under God and are dependent on God as the source of their existence. Yet God relates to creation in a way that does not change God.\textsuperscript{31}

To speak of the relationships within God’s self is to speak analogously, since human beings are not God.

This principle of analogy when speaking of the relationships within God’s self and the relationship between God and humanity is particularly important in regards to the language of agency. God exercises divine agency in a way that is different from and only analogous to human agency. For Aquinas, God exists in all things: “God exists within all things and intimately so.”\textsuperscript{32} God acts as the “donating source” of all that exists, operating in a way that neither changes

\textsuperscript{29} An assertion that God is not in real relation to creation does not necessitate a belief in a God that is distant or uncaring. Robert Sokolowski describes how Aquinas’ formulation of the traditional understanding that God is not dependent upon the world means that creation is the result of the sheer goodness and generosity of God: “And the world is not diminished in its own excellence, it is not somehow slighted because God is not related by a real relation to it; rather the world is now understood as not having had to be. If it did not have to be, it is there out of a choice. And if the choice was not motivated by any need of completion in the one who let it be, and not even motivated by the need for “there” to be more perfection and greatness, then the world is there through an incomparable generosity. The world exists simply for the glory of God.” Robert Sokolowski, \textit{The God of Faith and Reason: Foundations of Christian Theology} (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 34.

\textsuperscript{30} Summa Theologica I. 28.1

\textsuperscript{31} Aquinas parses this distinction even further, stating that, although God does not have a real relationship to creation, creation does have a real relationship to God: “And this is why in God there are no real relations to creatures. However, in the creatures there is a real relation to God, since creatures are contained under God’s ordering and by their nature depend on God (I.28.1).” Creatures depend on God, but God does not depend on creatures. Aquinas posits a third type of relationship, one that is mixed, which is evidenced in the Incarnation, which “effects a real change in humanity without changing God.” Long, \textit{The Perfectly Simple Triune God: Aquinas and His Legacy}, 57.

\textsuperscript{32} I.8.1
God nor displaces human agency. D. Stephen Long sees Aquinas’ notion of infinity as key to understanding how divine agency differs from human agency:

God is the donating source of everything in creation such that it is both like and unlike God, which is how a term like infinity functions. It allows for God to be “in all things” without displacing them or being composite with them…Infinity is God’s lack of limitation so that God and creatures can inhabit the same space and time because God’s essence is not in space or time.33

God is not in space or time, and as such can act in created things without displacing created things. God’s agency is thus not competitive with human agency: “Because of God’s infinity, the two agencies are not competitive, as if God acts 75 percent and the creature 25 percent.”34 The activity of God is differentiated from the activity of human beings: God is able to send himself in ways that human beings cannot.35 God’s agency functions in a way that human agency cannot. God can go to where he already exists, humans go to where they do not exist. God can act without displacement, human beings act through displacement.

*The Vision of God, Action, and Virtue*

The Prima Pars of the *Summa* is focused on God and God’s relation to creation. In the Second Pars, Aquinas shifts his focus from God to humankind. Roughly speaking, the first part is about God and how God relates to creation, the second part involves how creation relates to God. This section will thus focus specifically on how human beings relate to God, first by defining the

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34 Ibid., 26.
35 Sokolowski shows how this understanding of divine agency is critical for understanding the Chalcedonian assertion of the full humanity and full divinity of Christ. Since God is not dependent upon creation, he is capable of involvement with creation without abolishing or displacing it: “God does not destroy the natural necessities of things he becomes involved with, even in the intimate union of the incarnation. What is according to nature, and what reason can disclose in nature, retains its integrity before the Christian God…If the incarnation could not take place without a truncation of human nature, it would mean that God was one of the natures in the world that somehow was defined by not being the other natures; it would mean that his presence in one of these other natures, human nature, would involve a conflict and a need to exclude some part of what he is united with.” Sokolowski, 35-36.
ultimate goal of human life, then proceed to how human beings might act so as to move towards this goal, and finally how they might develop virtues through such actions.

One of the potentially problematic aspects of the asymmetrical relationship between God and creation, at least on the surface, resides in the description of the relationship between God and creation as logical, since this would seem to imply remoteness and distance. However, the fact that God does not exist in a dependent relationship with creation entails that God does not create out of necessity, but out of love: “God produced creatures not because of any need on His part or because of any other extrinsic cause, but because of the love of His own goodness.”36 Because God creates out of the love of His own goodness, human beings have as their end goal the entering into this love in the beatific vision: “our end is not found in ourselves, but God alone.”37 It is towards this end, entering fully into God’s glory and His love, that human beings are given the possibility of moving.

A key assertion by Aquinas is that the ultimate goal, or telos, of the human being is the vision of God. God is the greatest good, and since the good is that which is desirable and the terminus of desire, God is what human beings are created to desire, as well as where their desires terminate: “Final and perfect happiness (in Latin beatitudo) can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence.”38 Aquinas here quotes St. John, "When He shall appear, we shall be like to Him; and we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:2)." The term vision of God can be difficult to understand in modern parlance. By vision of God, Aquinas means “knowing and loving God.”39 Sight in this case can be thought of both as a ‘seeing’ of the mind’s eye in the act

36 I. 32.1
37 Long, The Perfectly Simple Triune God: Aquinas and His Legacy, 60.
39 I-II, 1, 8
of knowing, as well as the actual visual perception of Jesus that scripture states will occur in the eschaton:

Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22:4-6).

Paired with the vision of Jesus in Revelation is the partaking of the glory of God—the glory of God in the heavenly temple so radiant as to not require any other source of light. Hence the goal of human beings is conterminously that of seeing God and partaking in His glory.

Aquinas’ likewise speaks of the glory of God as humanity’s created end in his explanation of the Transfiguration: “Now in order that anyone go straight along a road, he must have some knowledge of the end: thus an archer will not shoot the arrow straight unless he first see the target...Therefore it was fitting that He should show His disciples the glory of His clarity (which is to be transfigured), to which He will configure those who are His;” 40

Another way that this ultimate end is described is as friendship with God, since friendship is a kind of shared knowledge and loving. Expanding on John 15:15 (where Jesus says “I no longer call you servants, but my friends”), Aquinas states that “since man shares something in common with God insofar as God communicates His own beatitude to us, it must be the case that some sort of friendship is founded upon this sharing...But the sort of love built on this sharing is charity. Hence, it is clear that charity is a certain sort of friendship of man with God.” 41 Gregory of Nyssa states similarly that the goal of the virtuous life is “to be known by

40 III.45.1 newadvent.com
41 II-II.23.1. Aquinas’ codification of happiness, defined as the beatific vision of God, as the ultimate telos of humankind provides a corrective to some of the deficiencies in other ancient accounts of virtue. Julia Annas sees in ancient accounts a definition happiness (eudaimonia) that is to extent platitudeal, a kind of place holder for stating the final good of a person: “Happiness is stable, active and objective just because the final good is. In saying that the final good is happiness we are thus adding very little. But that is just what Aristotle says: what we have really done
God and to become his friend.” As Aquinas uses at various points vision, glory, and friendship to describe the one and same end of humankind, so will my conception of mission, with a particular emphasis on glory in the ensuing chapter.

Aquinas’ account of humanity’s ultimate end as the vision of God is grounded in the work of God Himself in divine revelation. Not only is the ultimate goal the vision of God, such a goal is not the product of human reason, but is revealed by God in Holy Scripture:

It was necessary for human salvation that, over and beyond the philosophical disciplines devised by human reason, there should be a doctrine conformable with divine revelation. For, first of all, according to Isaiah 64:4 (“The eye has not seen, O God, apart from You, what things You have prepared for them that wait for You”), man is ordered toward God as an end who exceeds the comprehension of reason. But the end must first be known to men, since they have to order their intentions and actions toward the end. Hence, it was necessary for man’s salvation that certain things exceeding human reason should be made known to him through divine revelation.

This is the openly salvo of the *Summa Theologica*, and the Biblical underpinnings of the work are not to be taken lightly. God’s revelation of himself to humanity is necessary for their salvation. Human beings are ordered toward God as their end, and since this end is supernatural,

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43 Aquinas, I., Q.1, Art. 1.
it can only be obtained through the work of God. However, the gift of God's revelation to humanity is not to be simply passively received, but instead, Aquinas asserts, that it has been given so that human beings might order their actions towards that end.

And so, Aquinas’ discussion of the ultimate goal of human life is I-II.1 is coterminous with an elucidation of how human beings might progress towards this goal through actions. In order to understand how this is possible, one first has to understand what Aquinas means by good, and goodness in general.

For Aquinas, goodness and being are integrally related, they are “the same in reality and differ only conceptually.” Goodness is perfection of being, so, to say that something exists is to say that we can know it and describe what it would be like to be perfected. To call something good means that it is desirable—it draws someone towards their perfection: “For something is good insofar as it is desirable and is the terminus of a movement of desire.” This eradicates the chasm between ought and is that plagues much moral theology and philosophy, as has been addressed in chapter two. For Aquinas, Porter explains, to know what something is, is to know what it ought to be. This connection between goodness and desire is meant as well to show that the point of moving towards the end is not simply one of rote accomplishment. One apprehends

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44 Thomas O’Meara points out that Aquinas’ prioritization of divine revelation and the necessity of divine grace are often missed in contemporary revivals of virtue. According to O’Meara, “Aquinas's theology is not an Aristotelian psychology grafted onto some phrases about Christ. Aquinas employs an Aristotelian philosophy of nature to explain aspects of Christian revelation, a revelation that is, as he sees it, of realities believed and not just of beliefs.” Thomas F. O'Meara, "Virtues in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas," Theological Studies 58, no. 2 (1997): 258.

Aquinas’ theory of virtue is not a kind of natural/supernatural, Aristotle/Scripture layer cake. Aristotelianism is instead used as a kind of explanatory tool used to help unpack and elucidate the revelation of God through Jesus Christ.

45 I-5-1
46 I-5-6
48 Gregory of Nyssa makes this point clearly: “This is true perfection: not to avoid a wicked life because like slaves we servilely fear punishment, nor to do good because we hope for rewards, as if cashing in on the virtuous life by some business-like and contractual arrangement. On the contrary, disregarding all those things for which we hope
the good, sees that it is beautiful and desirable, and thus moves towards it: the end is “not first set before us as an object to attain, but as a model to admire.”

To the extent to which human beings comprehend the good and act rightly, they are able to progress towards their final end. Aquinas states that those actions that are distinctively human are those which are done deliberately: “Therefore, the actions that are properly called human actions are those that proceed from a deliberate act of willing (I-II.1.1).” Human actions in this case are distinguished from acts of man, which are actions without deliberation. Such actions of this type are those that human beings share with non-rational animals, such as scratching one’s face. Furthermore, for Aquinas, those actions that are distinctly human are also called moral actions. All activity that is deliberate bears a moral character, providing the opportunity for human beings to act according to their good and move towards their final end. Charles Pinches summarizes this relationship between action, morality, and ultimate ends in Aquinas:

The description of all human acts is essentially related to the fact that they proceed from a human being who is, distinctively, capable of deliberation and choice. This makes all human acts moral...choice, deliberation and action all have their place in relation to the final end of human beings, happiness, and so ultimately to God. Human acts, then, have their meaning in terms of this final end to which all other ends are subordinate. "Morality" or the "moral life" is a way of speaking about our journey to this end; it encompasses our life in all of its human aspects.

and which have been reserved by promise, we regard falling from God’s friendship as the only thing dreadful and we consider becoming God’s friend the only thing worthy of honor and desire.” Life of Moses 137

O’Donovan, Finding and Seeking, 89.

50 Charles Robert Pinches, "Human Action and the Meaning of Morality: A Critique of Jean Porter on Action and Aquinas,” Pro Ecclesia 12, no. 2 (2003): 143. Pinches’ description of moral action is meant to challenge a portion of Jean Porter’s work, which Pinches sees as attempting to block off certain deliberate actions as moral from those that are morally neutral. This leads to an incessant debate over what constitutes moral action and interminable attempts to breakdown actions into constituent parts in order to demarcate the moral from the amoral. What Aquinas offers is instead a simplified account of moral action, since it is all action that is deliberate. This places the emphasis then on describing individual actions (rather than action in general) and attempting to understand how such actions accord with the good. I think Pinches is right in his assessment of Aquinas here, and his argument is strengthened when one takes into account Aquinas’ assertion of the necessity of the exercise of prudence for the development of all of the virtues. Prudence seems to have a near ubiquitous role in Aquinas’ moral theology, which indicates the need for its exercise in all human activity in order for such activity to be properly moral.
The assertion that all deliberate activity is moral will be important in the next section, as it will be my claim that mission involves deliberate activity, and thus such actions should be considered moral.

It is within this broader framework of goodness, happiness, and action that one can begin to unpack Aquinas’ theory of virtue. Through the engagement in deliberative activity, human beings have the ability to develop habits that incline them to either move closer towards, or further away from, their ultimate end. Those habits that incline one to their ultimate end are called virtues. When human beings develop virtue through the cultivation of good habits, they are to an extent actualizing their natural potential. The development of these habits both strengthen our ability to do good, but also cause good in their performance. Herbert McCabe puts it best: “Virtues are dispositions to make choices which will make you better able to make choices.”

The cultivation of these habits have a real effect on the character of the individual, yet it is important to note even here that such activities are not done completely apart from God. God still remains the first cause of all human activity, since God is the source of both the existence of humanity and the one who creates the ability to choose in the first place.  

In Aquinas there is a hierarchy of the virtues, beginning with the individual virtues that control and direct the passions (temperance and fortitude), followed by the way in which one acts towards the benefit of others (justice). Prudence is the pinnacle of the cardinal virtues, as it is the way in which the individual discerns proper action in that both integrates the lower virtues and

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52 This is made explicit in Aquinas’ account of free choice in I-83: “Free choice is a cause of its own movement in the sense that through free choice a man moves himself to act. However, freedom does not require that what is free should be the first cause of itself—just as, in order for something to be a cause of another, it is not required that it be the first cause of that thing. Therefore, God is the first cause and moves both natural causes and voluntary causes. And just as, in the case of natural causes, He does not, by moving them, deprive their acts of being natural, so too He does not, by moving voluntary causes, deprive their actions of being voluntary, but instead He brings this very thing about in them.” I.83.1.
continues to build virtuous character in the individual.53 These cardinal virtues, however, are not enough for lasting peace, which ultimately comes through the principle theological virtue of charity. Charity is the greatest virtue, as it unites us to God and aligns and encompasses (but does not abrogate) the other virtues.54 Jean Porter sees this system as addressing both the complexities of the individual as well as relationship between the individual and the community, since, for Aquinas, both the common good and the individual good are mutually interdependent.55

The necessity of divine grace for the perfection of all of the virtues is key to understanding how Aquinas can speak of both the development of habits by human beings that promote virtue, while also insisting that their final end cannot be obtained by such efforts. On the one hand, human beings have in their nature the aptitude of certain virtues: “Accordingly, one man has a natural aptitude for scientific knowledge, another for fortitude, another for temperance. And it is in these ways that both the intellectual virtues and the moral virtues exist in us by nature because of a certain initial aptitude.”56 While human beings can work to cultivate virtues, none can be perfected without the infusion of grace that is a supernatural gift of God. The cardinal virtues of temperance, fortitude, justice, and prudence can only be perfected by those who receive the Holy Spirit. The cardinal virtues are thus, for the justified, infused virtues.57

In order to further understand this relationship, it is helpful to understand the relationship between nature and grace in Aquinas’ thought. For Aquinas, nature and grace are not polar

53 Porter, 155.
54 Ibid., 170-71.
55 Ibid., 124-25.
56 I-2-63
57 Jean Porter, "The Subversion of Virtue: Acquired and Infused Virtues in the Summa Theologicae," The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics (1992): 41. This is another example of how Aristotle’s theory of virtue remains helpful for providing “categories of thought derived from human reason” to aid in the reception and appropriation of divine revelation.
opposites to be held in dialectical tension. Instead, human beings are ordered by their very nature towards a supernatural end, the beatific vision, that can only be obtained through God’s grace. According to Hans Urs von Balthasar, Aquinas’ views on nature and grace are in accordance with the Church Fathers in its insistence that there is “one, indivisible world order, which nature and grace together form a unity: nature exists for the sake of grace and is ordered to it, having its ultimate finality in it…the nature of created spirit is directed beyond itself.”  

This relationship between nature and grace is vital for understanding how human beings can both grow and develop their created potential while maintaining their reliance on God’s grace as the source of their existence and the necessity of God’s grace to bring individuals to the supernatural end in which they were created for. As this applies to the infused virtues, those that are filled with the Holy Spirit do not possess separate natural and supernatural virtues, but rather one virtue that is a unity of nature and grace. Josef Pieper enunciates Aquinas’ notion of prudence in this way: infused prudence does not mean “a pre-eminence of natural and ‘acquired’ prudence over supernatural and ‘infused’ prudence; rather, he means the pre-eminence of that ‘fuller’ prudence in which the natural and the supernatural, the acquired and the given, are combined in a felicitous, in a literally ‘graced’ unity.”

The notion that virtue may be acquired through natural habituation yet perfected only through supernatural infusion is vitally important for affirming both the real exercise of agency by individuals while maintaining their reliance and dependence on God. This safeguards

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58 Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, 268. Balthasar here quotes Aquinas: “The beatific vision and knowledge are to some extent above the nature of the rational soul, inasmuch as it cannot reach it of its own strength; but in another way it is in accordance with its nature, inasmuch as it is capable of it by nature, having been made to the likeness of God, as stated above. But the uncreated knowledge is in every way above the nature of the human soul.” III-9-2 (newadvent.org).


60 Jennifer Herdt draws the connection between Aquinas’ conception of virtue and the assertion of the non-competitive workings of divine agency. She concludes her assessment of Aquinas’ theory of virtue by stating that “there is no competition between divine and human agency here, such that if human beings are moved by God they
against any notion that human achievement can be grounds for salvation and perfection: “God’s saving agency directly issues in a new created habitus: an infused created habit sufficient for further increases in the gifts of God’s grace heads off the idea that God’s power becomes the creature’s own, and makes clear that human free will unrevised by grace is not a principle factor in God’s salvation of us.” Aquinas’ asserts a supernatural telos while affirming that such a supernatural end is at least partially advanced through participation in the material world. The insistence on the cultivation of virtue to further one on toward their goal of the divine vision prevents Christians from falling into a kind of overly contemplative retreat from the material world. His insistence on the need of God’s grace to infuse such labors prevents the Church from falling into Pelagianism.

**Mission and Virtue**

The previous sections laid a theological foundation from which to build an account of mission. Now it is imperative to begin to situate mission within this foundation, as well as to show why doing so best addresses the stated goals of this project.

First, Aquinas’ moral theology provides a grammar to speak of the exercise of human agency in a way that gives it real value while also delineating it from the exercise of divine agency. Chapter one highlighted the problems in missiology resulting from a collapse of the distinctions between human and divine agency. This loss of distinct language rendered the

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61 Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment*, 118.
62 We see this in Aquinas’ distinction between virtues and gifts of the Spirit. Both move the person toward their end, and spur movement and participation in the material world, yet only through the exterior gift of the Spirit can one achieve their supernatural end: “Now inspiration denotes motion from without. For it must be noted that in man there is a twofold principle of movement, one within him, viz. the reason; the other extrinsic to him, viz. God.” Aquinas, I-II, Q.68, Art. 1.
relationship between human beings and God as competitive and contrastive, with human beings either competing with God or ceding their agency to the God. The result is a kind of missional occasionalism, where the activities of the missionary are simply the occasion for God to show up in history.

Casting mission in the key of Aquinas’ moral theory restores a proper distinction between God and creation, one that affirms real relationships within the triune God and an asymmetrical and loving relationship between God and creation. To speak of the relationships within God’s self is thus for human beings to speak analogously. To speak then of the mission of God and the missionary activities of human beings is to speak of actions that are similar yet different.

We see this at work in Aquinas’ definition of mission itself, where he describes how the term mission can denote two different types of sending:

the concept mission implies that the one who is sent either (a) begins to exist where he previously did not exist, as happens with created things, or (b) begins to exist, but in a new mode, where he previously existed—and it is in this latter sense that missions are attributed to the divine persons. 63

Mission, for Aquinas, relates to sending, and the preeminent act of sending is that which occurs within the Trinity. The Father sends the Son, the Father and Son send the Holy Spirit. To be sent is to bear the authority of the one who sends, and entails “exclusive origin and close intimacy.” 64 This sending which occurs within the Trinity is unique in that it involves a sending of God to where God already exists. 65 Aquinas draws here on Augustine’s explanation of Old Testament missions—the Son and the Spirit are sent to the Old Testament patriarchs, and yet

63 I.43.6
64 Emery, 25.
65 Augustine highlights the ability of the Father to send the Son in a way that nevertheless maintains their unity and equally: “If however the reason why the Son is said to have been sent by the Father is simply that the one is the Father and the other the Son, then there is nothing at all to stop us believing that the Son is equal to the Father and consubstantial and co-eternal, and yet the that Son is sent by the Father. Not because one is greater and the other less, but because one is the Father and the other the Son.” Augustine, The Trinity, trans. Edmund Hill (1991), 179.
with the sending of the Son in the Incarnation, God exists in a new mode where he previous has existed. This distinction is crucial for understanding how God works in new ways while still being the same God; to mistake God’s missions as the sending of God to places where God did not previously exist is to fall into Arianism.

For human beings, the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit reveal the identity of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as well as provide the way through which they may enter into the divine life of God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We may call this, at least from human perspective, the purpose of the Trinitarian missions: the revelation of God and the salvation of humankind.

The mission of the church is an extension of this sending, and it is Aquinas’ detailed account of the relationships between God, creation, agency that helps parse the similarities and differences between the church’s mission and Trinitarian missions. In terms of similarity, the church is sent by God the Son on mission, and thus is given the authority of Jesus as the one that sends them. As the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit both reveal God as Trinitarian and enable salvation, the church likewise is sent to testify to this revelation and gather those who receive this salvific message. We see this displayed most vividly in the last farewell discourse in John 17. Here, Jesus reveals himself as the one sent by Father and one with the Father (“All mine are yours, and yours are mine (v. 10)”), and in turn sends the disciples to reveal this truth to the world: “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth. (v. 17-19).” According to Raymond Brown, John is here describing two fundamental beliefs of Christians—that they believe in “at least one christological dogma,

66 Ibid., 182-83.
67 Emery, 26.
namely, the relationship of the Son to the Father,”68 and that they come to these beliefs through the testimony of the disciples: “It is taken for granted that the disciples who were with Jesus were commissioned to preach to me and that faith came through hearing them.”69

Furthermore, the sending of the disciples is linked as well to their unity, just as the sending of the Son reveals the essential unity of the Father and the Son: “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me (John 17:20-21).” So in addition to being sent to preach, the disciples are also commissioned to remain as one, and that such unity must be visible to the world.70 Hence the gathering of Christians becomes an essential task of the Church’s mission, as such gatherings become visible signs of the unity of Church, and hence the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The mission of the church is thus integrally related to the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit, but it is not identical to it. Human beings are sent on mission in a way that is analogous to the mission of God. God moves to where God already exists, human beings can only be sent to where they have not existed. The reintegration of the distinctions between human and divine mission is vital to understanding what is being described when one is discussing mission. We can speak of the discreet actions of missionaries, of proclaiming the Gospel and starting churches, while also acknowledging that God can and does work both through these actions and above and beyond these actions.

69 Ibid.
70 Ibid., 776. Augustine makes a similar point in regards to John 17:22: “Just as Father and Son are one not only by equality of substance but also by identity of will, so these men, for whom the Son is mediator with God, might be one not only by being of the same nature, but also by being bound in the fellowship of the same love.” Augustine, 166.
Human beings cooperate, rather than compete with God in their mission activities. Since God is the donating source of all being, because God is not in space or time, God can work through human beings without displacing or being composite with them. Human beings are free to act, knowing that their actions truly matter, while also affirming that all good that is accomplished through their endeavors is at the same time attributable to God as the source of all being, and all that is good. Human beings are in control of their deliberation and their actions, yet the source of their deliberation is ultimately God:

A man is the master of his own acts, of both his willing and his not willing, because of reason’s deliberation, which can be turned toward one part [of a contradiction] or the other. But if he is likewise the master of whether or not he deliberates, this must be because of a previous deliberation. And since there is no infinite regress here, one must in the end arrive at the point at which the man’s free choice is moved by some exterior principle that lies beyond the human mind, viz., God.71

Aquinas goes on to give an example of a soldier being moved to seek victory by the motions of the leader and the flag bearer. The soldier both decides to step forward in battle while also being caused to move by the actions of the leader. For those who engage in proclamation and gathering, we can say that they freely engage in these practices while acknowledging that the source of these missional movements is from God.

Situating mission within Aquinas’ understanding of God, creation, and agency helps to parse the differences and relationships between the missional activity of God and missional actions of human beings. From here, we can situate mission within Aquinas’ description of the ultimate end of human beings and their growth towards that end in order to better understand the purpose behind the performance of these human actions and specify the ways in which such actions should be conducted.

71 I-II, 109.2
Aquinas’ states that human beings can move towards their natural and supernatural end through the engagement in specific activities that promote virtues. While complete happiness can only be found in the beatific vision of God, and such a vision is ultimately possible only through an act of divine grace, human beings nevertheless can participate in God’s goodness through the development of virtues towards their final end. Thus what is required is a life that “calls for deliberate activity guided by knowledge of what is truly good for human beings.” The acts of mission, the act of bearing witness to the resurrected Christ, the act of gathering Christians for worship of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are just such deliberate activities. In performing such activities well, human beings actualize their potential and move toward their goal of partaking in the glory of God.

Setting the goal of mission activity as the glory of God remedies the major issues in both the mission as growth and mission as dialogue models. One of the problems in these approaches is that their goals are partially dependent on the reaction of their audiences. Chapter three examined how the centering of mission around dialogue fails to adequately account for the multitude of persuasive speeches in the book of Acts, nor account for the ways in which the activities of the apostles offended the sensibilities of their interlocutors. The temptation in the mission as dialogue model is thus to modify the Christian message with the aim of being inoffensive, in the process adapting the Gospel in ways that no longer accord with scripture.

On the other hand, if the goals of mission are tethered to specific numerical outcomes, then there will always be an element of successful mission that is dependent on the decisions of others. As noted in chapter two, human beings cannot completely control their environment, and cannot master other human beings. For this reason, even the best gospel proclamations, and the

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most skilled church plants, may in the end fail to achieve numerical success because individuals
decide not to respond.

If the goal of mission is, however, the glory of God, it places limits on the extent to
which the content of its activity can be adapted. Aquinas notes, for instance, that there are certain
times and places that obligate a Christian to publicly confess their faith, in particular when
“honor is due to God.” This would include times in which such confessions may be deemed
offensive by one’s audience, as well as times in which such a confession may not lead to
numerical success. However, the benefit of such a goal is that its’ attainment is not dependent on
the capricious responses of others. One can glorify God simply in the activity of mission itself.

Furthermore, interpreting the goal of mission as the glory of God helps to address the
problematic aspect of agency in regards the recipients of these missional activities. Chapter two
focused on the ways in which missionaries attempt to manipulate their audiences by presuming
to predict the responses of individuals with objective scrutiny. The only individual reasons that
one may give for accepting or rejecting the Christian faith are those reasons that can be described
in such a way so as to be controlled by the missionary in order to maximize numerical growth
and efficiency. Placing the glory of God as the telos of mission places the burden of mission
activity on honoring God, rendering all attempts at manipulation, no matter how successful, as
off limits, thus affirming the agency of recipients to accept or reject their message. This issue
will be taken up further below with MacIntyre’s understanding of internal goods and virtuous
practices, as well as in the ensuing chapter on proclamation.

To state that the goal of mission is the glory of God, and that mission is not dependent on
the response of others for its successful performance, would seem on the surface to render the

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73 I-32
quality of such performances immaterial. However, placing mission within Aquinas’ moral theology implies both that such activities can be performed well, and that such activities have the real ability to promote virtue in the individual. For Aquinas, all deliberate action is moral action. Every deliberate action taken is an opportunity to act in accordance what is good, and hence is an opportunity to grow towards our ultimate end. Put simply, placing mission within this context asserts that all missional activities are intrinsically moral activities. There is not a bifurcation between the moral, ‘spiritual’ activities and the amoral, ‘practical’ activities.

This imbues all activity with a greater importance—it is not just the big decisions that matter, and it is not just the ethical dilemmas that require moral enquiry. To adopt the glory of God, rather than growth, as the telos of mission means that one cannot be inattentive to the day to day details of ministry. As Jonathan Edwards puts it, to have the glory of God as one’s end is not to abandon our activities, but instead to use all members of our bodies in activity that glorifies God.74 Events still need to be planned, Bible studies scheduled, relationships developed. And for these activities, the cardinal virtues need to be honed. To be on mission means that one has to make choices—who to speak to, how to run a Bible study, when to gather for worship, and the development of virtue aids in this basic decision making ability. These seemingly mundane decisions that a missionary makes each day are not irrelevant or amoral, but instead afford the missionary the possibility of honoring God, developing virtue, and growing toward their final end of partaking in God’s glory. The last section of this chapter will expand on this, by showing how the engagement in mission can promote the specific virtues of temperance, prudence, and faith.

Aquinas asserts that all deliberate activity is moral, granting a degree of importance to the smaller day to day decisions of one’s life. However, a potential problem exists with this affirmation, as this could seem to imply that there is no real difference between small actions and more complex ones. If this were the case, it could encourage a kind of punctilious existence—life becomes simply a string of small, unconnected events that afford opportunities for good decision making. This is not, however, what Aquinas means by stating that all human action is moral action. He does, for instance, state that there are certain activities that require less deliberation than others, such as actions that require a relatively fixed means and end in order to be accomplished. It follows from this that the development of prudence, that virtue of good deliberation, would be more greatly developed through the engagement in more complex activities. Aquinas, however, does not spend much more time developing this train of thought. This leaves my conception of mission somewhat incomplete—what is needed is both a description of the complex activities involved in mission, and why it is important and helpful that such activities be performed well.

**Virtuous Practices**

The previous section sought to situate mission within the broader context of Thomas Aquinas’ moral theology. However, several questions remain: what are the specific missional activities that promote virtue? How does the performance of such activities develop virtue? How does one get better at these missional activities? What specific virtues are developed through their performance?

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75 I-II, 14, 4. Charles Pinches summarizes Aquinas’ view as follows: “As his logic goes, there are some individual acts of which, while necessarily either good or bad, it makes little sense to inquire or deliberate about their goodness or badness.” Pinches, 154.
It is thus imperative to flesh out my conception of mission, examining with greater specificity the types of activities that constitute mission, and how the engagement in such activities hold the potential to glorify God and promote virtue. To do this, we turn to a notion of mission as virtuous practice.

_Alasdair MacIntyre’s Definition of a Virtuous Practice_

Aquinas’ moral theology does a great deal in articulating the distinctiveness of God and creation, of clarifying the supernatural end of human life, and of understanding the role of actions in developing virtue. However, there remains large terrain to still be covered. We have the ends clarified, and the path to virtue for human beings spelled out, but what remains to be explored is the type of activities in which human beings engage that further this growth, as well as the ways in which individuals may draw connections between these activities to form a coherent understanding of their life as a whole. Virtue is developed through habitual actions, which prompts a desire to clarify the kinds of activities that promote flourishing, and the ways in which such activities are performed well. Alasdair MacIntyre’s conception of a virtuous practice, and the connection between the engagement in such practices and the life well lived, provides the tools for sufficiently addressing such concerns.

MacIntyre develops his notion of a virtuous practice first in *After Virtue*, further developing the concept through his ensuing works *Three Rival Versions* and *Ethics in the Conflict of Modernity*. In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre describes a practice as:

Any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definite of, that form of activity...  

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For MacIntyre, a practice is a cooperative activity which contains goods that can be only realized through the performance of that activity. There are several salient features of MacIntyre’s definition.

First, a practice is both complex and coherent. These two adjectives form a kind of loose boundary for what denotes a practice and what doesn’t. Defining a practice as complex means that it is something that cannot be easily mastered. Landscaping could be considered a practice, but perhaps not mowing the lawn. Chess a practice, and not Candyland.\(^{77}\) Coherence, on the other hand, ensures that one can define a practice as a discernable and unique activity with a beginning and endpoint. As stated above, the aid in using the term practice is to help provide concrete and discernable ways of defining a particular activity so that one can in turn better define what makes a good or poor performance of such an activity.

Second, it has internally realized goods. In *After Virtue* MacIntyre distinguishes between internal and external goods inherent in sustained activities. External goods are those that can be achieved through other activities, or goods that are attached to a practice through social circumstance. MacIntyre cites a few examples of external goods, such as prestige, status, and money, that can be acquired through numerous activities, and are in many cases the product of external happenstance.\(^ {78}\) Internal goods, however, are unique to a particular practice, and they can only be “recognized by the experience of participating in the practice in question.”\(^ {79}\) The discovery of the internal goods of such practices comes as one begins the process of learning such activities. As one learns to play chess, for instance, one also learns what is uniquely good about playing chess, and how such good cannot be derived through other activities. In so doing,

\(^{77}\) For a further examination of particular activities that constitute practices according the MacIntyre, see ibid., 188.
\(^{78}\) Ibid.
\(^{79}\) Ibid., 189.
they learn to enjoy this practice ‘for its own sake.’ As we will see, this distinction between internal and external goods will be particularly important in the development of specific missional practices, since the goal is to define practices that cannot be performed through other avenues, and are not determined wholly upon worldly success.

The development of excellences in such activities is twofold: First one must be initiated into a process of life-long learning. One must have teachers who are able to impart the basic knowledge and skills of such practices, and the learner thus begins to discern with greater clarity how to apply such knowledge and skills in their particular circumstances. This first step highlights the complexity of a practice—it is sufficiently complex as to require some kind of training. Added to this definition is that practices are non-repeatable. These activities are sufficiently complex that their ends cannot “be adequately specifiable by us in advance of and independently of our involvement in those activities through which we try to realize them.” What is required by the practitioner of these activities is the enactment of prudence, good judgment, to be exercised afresh in each situation in order to be performed well. At the heart of practices is that they are performative, and as such are not merely a matter of copying what has been done in the past. To elaborate on MacIntyre’s own example of chess—one begins the art of mastering chess by learning from other masters. While such a learning process may begin with learning to copy specific moves and countermoves, in order for the student to become a master they must go beyond copying to learning how to judge within specific games which moves are best utilized. Or, for example, the process of becoming a master painter may begin with copying

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82 *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning, and Narrative*, 50. This performative aspect of practices is something that is only implicit in MacIntyre’s definition in *After Virtue*, but is made explicit in this most recent work.
specific styles or works, but the goal of such learning is to enable new creative works. As we will see, such skilled performances or at the heart of mission activities: each instance of Gospel dissemination is new, since the recipients of the message are unique individuals.

The second major step in the development of a practice is the necessity of the learner to develop not only the skills and discernment necessary for a good performance, but also the ability to discern what is good and right in regards to their overarching telos. “The apprentice has to learn to distinguish between the kind of excellence which both others and he or she can expect of him or herself here and now and that ultimate excellence which furnishes both apprentices and master craftsmen with their telos.” Hence the need to develop the virtues. The virtues both help the learner grow in their particular craft, but also help them discern how such crafts fit into the broader picture of the life lived well. MacIntyre believes that the initiation into this process of developing a practice can lead the learner to develop virtue. This is perhaps the genius of MacIntyre’s term—while practices possess unique, internal goods, the practitioner must develop and exercise the virtues (temperance, fortitude, etc.) in order to master such practices. These virtues become sedimented in the character of the individual, thus enabling them to exercise these virtues in the performance of other activities as well. Here MacIntyre is assuming, alongside Aquinas and the majority of Ancient philosophers, on the unity of the virtues. The development of a particular virtue leads the individual to think of both the place that virtue has in their life as a whole, but also how that virtue might be exercised in other situations.

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84 Julia Annas makes a similar point in regards to the intelligibility of actions. The mastering of particular practices in part requires the individual to articulate what they are doing and why. This articulation extends to the broader question of how such practices fit within a life lived well: “Your actions fit into structured patterns in your life; a snapshot of what you are doing at one time turns out to reveal, when you think about these structures, what your broader aims and goals in life are.” Julia Annas, Intelligent Virtue (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 122.
85 For a fuller examination of ancient accounts of the unity of the virtues, see The Morality of Happiness, 67-84.
86 Ibid., 75.
The development of virtue will thus lead to a discernment on the part of the individual as to how such practices fit within the broader context of the good life. This means also the discernment of when and where to engage in such activities as opposed to others. Competing responsibilities—to one’s spouse, children, church—may require the discernment to postpone the development of practices in other areas of life. In these cases, the life well lived is good yet tragic. The finitude of corporeal existence means that one often cannot achieve excellency in multiple areas of life. But such tragedy does not mean one has not lived a good or virtuous life. We call the devoted artist but terrible father a flawed individual—we call the talented artist who gives up his craft to care for their father a good yet tragic individual.

**Missional Practices: Proclamation and Gathering**

The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to developing an understanding of mission as constituted by two specific virtuous practices: proclamation and gathering. While the following chapter will further expound these terms, it is important to provide a brief definition before continuing. By proclamation, I mean the persuasive communication of the Christian message and invitation to assent to the contents of this message. By gathering, I mean the formation of a community of persons who have assented to this message. These two specific actions are chosen because they fit best with MacIntyre’s notion of a practice, and accord best with the particularities of mission as expressed in the New Testament.

How do the practices of proclamation and gathering fit with MacIntyre’s notion of practice? First, proclamation and gathering are both complex and coherent activities. Their coherence comes with their ability to be described as particular events taking place in time. A conversation in which a missionary speaks about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, persuading and inviting another person to receive this information and make a profession of
faith, has a clear-cut beginning and end point. The gathering of individuals for public worship of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit also has a discernable beginning and end—from the opening prayer to the closing benediction. In addition, they are both complex activities. Proclamation of the Gospel requires a degree of knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith, the ability to understand the particular beliefs of the interlocuter, and the ability to creatively present the faith in particular instances in a way that both remains faithful to the Gospel message and accords with its intrinsic persuasiveness. The gathering of Christians into a new Church congregation involves a similarly complex set of tasks—from catechizing new believers, helping them develop relationships with others in the community, and enabling their gifts for the benefit of the community as a whole. Such activities require the creative application of specific skills. The complexity and coherence of such practices help to prevent mission from dissolving into ambiguity.

Proclamation and gathering contain unique internal goods that can only be obtained through their performance. These goods are the participation of the individual in the mission of God. The missionary becomes ‘caught up’ in the salvific mission of God. Jesus’s commissioning of the disciples in John 20 becomes axiomatic: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you (John 20:21).” It is through the engagement in the practices of mission that one begins to understand the unique good of participation in the mission of God, learning to enjoy such activity for its own sake.

This assertion helps draw a distinction between my conception of mission as virtuous practices and a construal of mission based upon growth, since the goal of growth, numerical success, is an external good. Success can be achieved through a whole host of practices that have little or nothing to do with mission. Event planning for instance, is another type of activity in
which one may strive to obtain increase in attendance figures. Furthermore, the drive for the obtainment of such external goods opens mission to the temptation of seeking methods and procedures to achieve success that compromise the activity itself. In contrast, mission as virtuous practice focuses on cultivating internal goods that enable one to grow in character and glorify God despite the fruits of their labors not yielding the external numerical growth. For MacIntyre, the acquisition of internal goods requires the development of the virtues, and that such virtues be “exercised without regards to consequences.” This is important, as the acquisition of external goods, such as worldly success, can be obtained through the subversion of virtue. The Book of Acts shows how the disciples engage in proclamation as a kind of virtuous practice, obtaining the internal good of participation in God’s mission through the exercise of such virtues as prudence and fortitude. These virtues are exercised even when it might entail a diminishment of external goods, for instance in the persistence in proclaiming the gospel even when such attempts have yielded little numerical success, or when such persistence threatens one’s own life. Acts 5, for instance, depicts in an almost comical way how the apostles are arrested, told not to proclaim the Gospel, and nevertheless continue to do so:

and when they had called in the apostles, they had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. As they left the council, they rejoiced that they were considered worth to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name. And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease to teach and proclaim Jesus as the Messiah. (Acts 5:40-42)

This illustration leads to a final point, that the codification of proclamation and gathering as missional practices best accords with the presentation of Christian mission in the Bible,

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87 This is not to say that the obtainment of such external goods should not be welcomed. They are, in fact, goods. This will be noted in the next chapter as well: when large numbers of people assent to the Gospel proclamation of a missionary, such conversion can certainly be celebrated. However, the setting of such external goods as the telos of mission leads to a host of issues, as has already been noted.

88 MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, 198.
particularly the book devoted to the mission of the disciples, the Book of Acts. In his monograph *World Upside Down*, Kavin Rowe identifies three core practices performed by the disciples in the Book of Acts: confession of Jesus as Lord, active mission to the end of the earth, and assembly of the “Christians.” These three practices correlate well to my construal of two core missional practices—mission is proclamation with the hope of confession of Jesus as Lord, and mission is the gathering of those who confess into Christian community. The mission of the Church “to the ends of the earth” is done with these goals in mind. Furthermore, a key assertion from Rowe is that the other important actions performed by the church, such as economic redistribution, can be traced to these core practices. For Rowe, these practices constitute the narrative center of the book, and the removal of any of them would render it incoherent. While other activities in the life of the church are important, they can be bracketed without compromising the narrative structure of Acts as a whole: “One cannot conceive of an Acts-like narrative without mission. Nor can one conceive of Acts’ narration of cultural disruption…without the formation of concrete communities with noticeably different patterns of

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Rowe states in response that Luke’s omission of specific details of much of these communities in many ways proves that Luke’s intention is to give a narrative account of the early Church rather than a comprehensive sociological study: “On the one hand, the claim for a new culture would obviously benefit from local illustrations thereof. On the other hand, Acts itself does not seem so concerned to provide us with the information on which to speculate. At this point at least, my reading may simply reflect the narrative foreground more so than the modern concern to illumine the sociological gaps in the story’s detail. But the point is nevertheless an important one.” Christopher Kavin Rowe, "Reading World Upside Down: A Response to Matthew Sleeman and John Barclay," ibid.: 337.

These controversies aside, the list of core practices listed by Rowe are not too dissimilar from the lists of the core themes of Acts listed by other scholars, though such lists are complicated by the fact that many commentaries group the discussion of the core themes of Acts together with the Gospel of Luke. Luke Timothy Johnson lists several themes in Acts that he joins to a broader list of themes characteristic of Luke-Acts as a whole. These themes include the life of the church and universality of the apostle’s mission to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Johnson, 15-17.
Rowe’s identification of core practices as essential to defining the overall narrative of Acts has parallels to MacIntyre’s definition of virtuous practices as those that have internally realized goods. My assertion is that proclamation and gathering are the two essential missional practices because the removal of either renders mission (particularly as it is portrayed in Acts) incoherent.

This leads to an important, and perhaps controversial, conclusion: activities such as caring for the poor, economic redistribution, and other social works are not core missional practices. This is not to say that such activities are not essential to the life of the Church, but simply that they are not constitutive of mission. To put it in MacIntyrean terms, such social works are externally realized goods: one can serve the poor and not be a Christian, one cannot proclaim Christ’s resurrection as Good News without being a Christian. One can assemble a gathering of people, say a nonprofit organization, with some particular social good in mind. However, the gathering of the church around the Eucharist table is a specifically Christian gathering. The missional practices of proclamation and gathering are exclusively Christian activities that cannot be performed outside of the Christian faith.

In addition, we see this distinction between core mission activities and the care of the poor played out in the Book of Acts itself in the inauguration of the diaconate:

Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.” What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of

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90 Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age*, 103.
Antioch. They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them (Acts 6:1-6).

The establishment of the first deacons occurs both because of the pressing needs of the local church, in this case for the feeding of widows, coupled with the desire for the division of labor so that the mission of the church could be strengthened. There is no indication that such a division is hierarchical—it is simply part of the ordering of the church so that it may thrive both in the spreading of the gospel and in its service to those in need.91 In this way it resonates with St. Paul’s discussion concerning the gifts of the Spirit and the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 13: all teach, but some are appointed specifically for the task of teaching. All are prophets, yet God appoints specific people to the prophetic office. Here we see the appointment of people with the specific vocations of spreading the Gospel and serving the poor, yet, this does not preclude all Christians from doing likewise. This is one of the more intriguing parts of Acts 6: Stephen is set aside as the first deacon, yet is quickly depicted proclaiming the Gospel.

This matter will be addressed further in the next chapter. However, it should be stressed here that the soft division of labor in Acts 6 between those focused upon proclamation (apostles) and those focused upon the needs of widows (deacons) is done so that each of these activities could be better performed. The demarcating of such activities as discreet need not diminish the importance of either. The church should proclaim Christ and sacrifice as Christ did for the sake of the poor. Placing these activities under the one umbrella of mission only creates a false competition between such essential Christian practices.

91 Furthermore, this soft division of labor does not entail that proclamation and service to the poor are completely unrelated. Indeed, the proclamation of the Gospel is Good News to the poor and oppressed, and service to the poor does bear witness to Christ. Calling a practice distinct does not mean that it shares nothing in common with other practices.
As mentioned in chapter one, the subsuming of all activity under the *missio Dei* helped to create such a precarious position for the term mission. Mission here becomes used as a label to stress the importance of an activity. My assertion here is that, by limiting the scope of the term mission, mission does not have to be synonymous with ‘important.’ To state that proclaiming the gospel is an act of mission and feeding the hungry is an act of service does not need to spark an instantaneous debate over the relative importance of each to the life of the Christian and the life of the church.

My desire to limit mission to the practices of proclamation and gathering is in keeping with the desire to address the perpetual problem of definition with missiology. It is not to say that the various other practices of the church are unimportant, but rather that there is merit in examining the essential aspects of mission and how these activities can help shape a virtuous Christian existence.

*Mission and the Development of Specific Virtues*

My conception of mission states that the practices of proclamation and gathering have the potential to develop virtue in missionaries, but as of yet the specific ways in which such missional practices might promote specific virtues has been understated. As Aquinas’ moral theology moves from developing the relationship between ends, actions, and virtues in I-II to an examination of specific virtues in II-II, this chapter ends with a brief examination of how the engagement in the missional practices of proclamation and gathering might promote the specific virtues of temperance, prudence, and faith. The choice of these three virtues is by no means meant to be exhaustive. Time, location, and the personal characteristics of the individual all may determine which virtues may be more or less needed in specific instances of the practice of
mission. In this way, “the differentiated nature of the virtues reflects the differentiated character of the world and its events.”

Temperance

Temperance is the virtue by which the individual moderates their passions so as to desire what is truly best for themselves. Temperance is not abstention from material things but rather the moderation of appetite whereby one orders their desires to conform with their specific good. For Aquinas, food, clothing, and sex are all goods that, when inordinately indulged, obscure one’s desires for higher goods, most specifically the good of union with God. However, temperance is not simply a virtue regarding food, clothing, and sex, but is best seen as the ways in which one tames and directs all of one’s passions so that their desires are properly ordered. This includes desires for leisure, travel, and hobbies.

There are a host of virtuous practices which promote temperance. The athlete must learn to check their appetite as part of their conditioning. The violinist must learn to deny their desires to watch tv and devote that time to the practicing of scales and arpeggios. The missional practices of proclamation and gathering also aim to promote the virtue of temperance through the development of similar mundane habits. In order to proclaim the Gospel well, one must engage in prayer, in the study of effective communication, in the devotion to understanding the Gospel which they intend to proclaim. Such exercises require time and energy, and hence the need to reign in inordinate desires for more frivolous pursuits.

While the virtue of fortitude is perhaps more needed for those missionaries who endeavor under the threat of persecution and martyrdom, the virtue of temperance is particularly needed

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92 O'Donovan, Finding and Seeking, 95.
for those who pursue mission in an age of comfort, security, and extravagance. The particular vice of the modern West is that which Aquinas called curiosity (*curiositas*): the pursuit of knowledge and experience simply for their own sake, which keeps a person from pursuing higher goods.\(^{94}\) Similarly for Augustine, the pursuit of knowledge is one that must be tempered, since the desire to know about frivolous things can divert one from their pursuit of God. At its worst, such pursuits can be a kind of lust of the mind’s eye, “a cupidity which does not take delight in carnal pleasure but in perceptions acquired through the flesh. It is a vain inquisitiveness dignified with the title of knowledge and science.”\(^{95}\) Gilbert Meilaender understands Augustine as indicating that such desires are simply a “greedy longing for a new kind of experience.”\(^{96}\) The danger for missionaries, as with the danger for those who wish to excel in a host of other practices, is that of dissipation. The dissipated man of Victorian literature, exemplified best by Jane Austen’s Mr. Willoughby, is the man who travels to London and expends copious amounts of time and wealth on frivolous pursuits, winding up with very little. They become dissolved, hallow, and empty. C. S. Lewis calls this pursuit the desire for nothing:

> And Nothing is very strong: strong enough to steal away a man’s best years not in sweet sins but in a dreary flickering of the mind over it knows not what and knows not why, in the gratification of curiosities so feeble that the man is only half aware of them, in drumming of fingers and kicking of heels, in whistling tunes that he does not like, or in the long, dim labyrinth of reveries that have not even lust or ambition to give them a relish, but which once chance association has started them, the creature is too weak and fuddled to shake off.\(^{97}\)

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\(^{94}\) II-II, 167, 1. Aquinas lists several ways in which the pursuit of knowledge can be evil, including “when a man desires to know the truth about creatures, without referring his knowledge to its due end, namely, the knowledge of God.” Newadvent.com


\(^{96}\) Gilbert C. Meilaender, *The Theory and Practice of Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 139.

The temptation to dissipation is only amplified through the internet, which creates what Bradford Littlejohn calls a “restless seeking.” Such seeking is:

an increasingly pervasive feature of our increasingly digital lives. Hence the compulsive urges to open emails or web pages for no particular reason, to pursue long periods of mindless browsing, particularly of images, following link after link of “clickbait,” as we now call it, even when we neither really expect nor really experience pleasure in the process are obvious enough.98

The danger of dissipation is no longer restricted, as it may have been in Austen’s time, to wealthy nobility traveling to London, but is now open to seemingly anyone with access to the internet. Those missionaries who bemoan the difficulty of proclaiming Christ in the West are often quick to blame the so called ‘secular culture,’ but are remiss in acknowledging the barriers which emerge not from external institutions but rather from their own internal desires. Here, the passionate flames of mission are tamed one frivolous click at a time.

Hence, those who wish to become experts at proclamation and gathering must first begin by moderating their desires. They must spend less time on lesser things—on television, video games, and social media, and devote more time to prayer and the study of scripture. In so doing they begin to grow—from people of incontinence to continence, from continence to temperance.

Prudence

Prudence is the “application of right reason to an act.”99 It is the virtue by which one decides how to act in a specific situation. For Aquinas, prudence is both an intellectual and moral virtue—intellectual, in that it requires proper deliberation of the specific situation, and moral, in that it ends with an action. The prudent person deliberates, makes judgements on their information, and finally commands an action that is in accordance with their ultimate good.

98 190.
99 II-II, 47
Prudence is the virtue required for the contingencies of life. Each life is unique, and consists of various decisions that must take into account a whole host of contingent factors. The prudent person is one who has perfected the ability to make the right choices in any and all of these unique situations. This is one of the reasons why Aquinas considers prudence to be the most important of the cardinal virtues, since temperance, fortitude, and justice all require prudence for their proper exercise in new and unique situations. Prudence is thus required to instantiate the other virtues in particular situations.

For the Christian infused with the Holy Spirit, the ends to which prudence commands become the ultimate good of the glory of God. This is a crucial distinction to note, as prudence can be misconstrued as a utilitarian means to an end. For the Christian, the end to which prudence commands is eschatological, and as such the goal of action is not simply the effects which it brings about in the world, but rather its effect on the character of the one who commands.

Prudence is a virtue that is both required and honed through the missional practices of proclamation and gathering. As mentioned above, both of these practices are performative: each situation in which one proclaims the Gospel is unique, as is each community that is gathered in

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100 It is also important to note here that the exercise of prudence for the Christian does not entail an abandonment of scripture or its sidelining in favor of consequentialist calculation. The insistence of divine revelation for Aquinas already speaks to this, as well as the fact that his discussion of the virtues includes various discussions on sins (such as theft and gossiping) from which scripture is cited as the final authoritative word. To state that the goal of human life is the beatific vision does not mean that the laws in scripture are abrogated by the exercise of prudence. Oliver O’Donovan makes the point that consequentialism, particularly in Christian forms that seek to subsume all ethics to a command of love, miss the essential interconnectedness of the laws in scripture. Jesus’ summation of the Law as loving God and loving one’s neighbor as yourself, is just that, a summation. The sum “is not totaled without its constituent elements.” O’Donovan, Finding and Seeking, 200. This does not absolve the individual from discernment, since the unique situations in which they are presented require faithful deliberation as to how to love God and neighbor, given its elaboration in the various laws in scripture, at this particular moment. This is nowhere more evident than in contemporary bioethics, where the seemingly straightforward commandment forbidding murder is complicated by various reproductive technologies. The virtue of prudence is thus necessary to make such discernments in accordance with the good of humankind. Hence O’Donovan remarks about the “interdependence of law, prudence, and the quest for wisdom” that permeates the Old Testament Wisdom literature. Ibid., 197.

101 Ibid., 195.
response to this proclamation. Thus what is required is first the acquisition of knowledge—the content of the Gospel which is being proclaimed, the types of structures needed for a church to be gathered, etc. When presented with situations which require action, such information is then deliberated upon in prayer, a judgment is made, and an action is commanded. The contingencies of the missionary, their audience, and their specific place and time ensure that such decisions will need to be made anew in each given situation. Each moment in which the missionary is called to proclaim the Christian message thus becomes an opportunity to exercise prudence. The termination of such proclamative acts affords the opportunity for reflection upon such decisions as one discovers how they were (or were not) in accordance with the ultimate good of partaking in the glory of God.

The failure to exercise prudence in the practice of mission may manifest itself in a variety of maladies. First, there can be mission that is performed without a crucial component of prudence which Aquinas calls docilitas. Josef Pieper describes Aquinas’ notion of docilitas as “a kind of open-mindedness which recognizes the true variety of things and situations to be experienced and does not cage itself in any presumption of deceptive knowledge.”102 It is the perfection of deliberation in the course of the exercise of prudence. One can characterize some of the issues with the mission as growth model as the lack of docilitas. Here, there is a type of direct correlation between knowledge and action that forgoes deliberation and judgment. One reads a book which gives the steps to church planting success, and one simply acts upon such prefabricated plans with the expectation of the achievement of the promised results. A lack of deliberation sets up the missionary for failure, since the contingencies of the moment necessarily require more than the simple enactment of a program, while also ensuring that the engagement in

102 Pieper, 34.
such activity will not lead to any growth in virtue on the part of the missionary. There should be no surprise then at the various scandals surrounding popular North American church planters. If what it takes to build a large church is more a matter of technical efficiency instead of the development and exercise of prudence, than the character of the pastor is no more necessary to success than the character of a mechanic is necessary to the successful repair of a transmission. Such is the case when results are honored above rectitude.

There is another aspect of prudence that is necessary to the effective engagement in mission, and that is what Aquinas refers to as solertia. Solertia, often translated as “shrewdness” is for Aquinas the application of a quick wit to matters which require prudent action. It is the ability to engage in swift decision making that is nevertheless prudent—it is the perfection of the command aspect of prudence. Mission is, as codified here, a practice which requires that deliberation and judgment upon a specific action which concludes in a command to act. Mission is not merely an intellectual or theoretical activity. Those who have solertia are able to quickly and appropriately make the right decisions to act in new and differing situations. Those lacking in solertia plunge into the vice of irresoluteness, with “deliberation and judgment tumbling uselessly into futility instead of pouring usefully into the finality of a decision.”

If the danger in the mission as growth model is thoughtlessness, of action without deliberation, the danger of the missio Dei model is irresoluteness, of deliberation without command. It is the treatment of mission as a mere theoretical activity, capable of criticizing the actions of missionaries but never itself terminating in missionary activity. The failure to see mission as a discrete activity enables and perhaps encourages endless discussion and critique, but does not require action.

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103 II-II, 49.4
104 Pieper, 29.
The exercise of prudence as something that is required and developed by the practice of missions will be demonstrated in the ensuing chapter on proclamation. What will be seen is necessity of the intellect in the discovery of the available means of persuasion, an evaluation of the appropriateness of such means in the act of prayer, and command to engage in the act of persuasive dialogue.

**Faith**

Averring that faith might be developed through the virtuous practices of proclamation and gathering requires first an insistence on the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity as those which, following Aquinas, cannot be obtained by human effort, but can only be acquired through a supernatural infusion of the Holy Spirit: “And so as regards the assent, which is the principal act of faith, faith is from God moving the man interiorly through grace.”

For Aquinas, faith is a movement in the will of believers, but such a movement of the will is itself a movement of the Holy Spirit working within the individual: “The act of faith exists in the will of believers, but, as has been explained, a man’s will has to be prepared by God through grace in order that it might be elevated to those things that lie above its nature.” This statement is an accord with Augustine’s explanation of the movement of the will in the act of faith, whereas “the whole work belongs to God, who both makes the will of the man righteous, and thus prepares it for assistance, and assists it when it is prepared.”

Given that faith is a work of God in the human heart, how can it also be a virtue that can be nurtured? Aquinas makes a key distinction regarding exterior and interior causes of assent to

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105 II-II, 6
106 II-II, 6
the Christian faith. While we might be convinced in part by exterior persuasions—miracles, the arguments of others, for example—no exterior acts are sufficient to bring about faith. Instead, what is necessary is the interior assent to faith that can only come through the workings of God. However, these exterior acts are helpful for bringing about faith, and, as Aquinas argues, sustaining and nurturing the faith of the believer. For Aquinas, confessing is the external act that is intrinsically related to the interior acts of faith:

Now confessing what belongs to the Faith is by its species ordered, as to an end, toward what belongs to the Faith—this according to 2 Corinthians 4:13 (“Having the same spirit of faith, we have faith and, because of this, we speak”). For exterior speaking is ordered toward signifying what is conceived in the heart. Hence, just as the interior conceiving of what belongs to the Faith is properly an act of faith, so, too, the exterior confessing is likewise an act of faith.108

Confession is thus an act of faith, confirming and strengthening the work of God in the heart of the Christian. The principle act of confession is the confessing of what belongs to faith, which Christians do when they share their faith with others.109

The practice of proclamation is the preeminent exterior act of faith. It is at once persuasive speech meant to encourage assent to faith, as well as a confession of the very content of the faith. In confessing their faith, the missionary declares externally what they believe internally, strengthening that very belief.

The oft used speech act example of marriage is illustrative of this point. The married couple professes their love and commitment to each other, and the words of the ceremony bring about a change in the life of the couple. However, the ceremony itself is not the only instance in which love if professed in words. The thousands of “I love yous” exchanged over the course of

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108 II-II, 3
109 Aquinas also lists two other exterior acts of faith: confession of thanksgiving or praise and confessing one’s sins. While not the focus of this dissertation, the practice of gathering can be said to develop the virtue of faith in that it provides the context through which both confession of the content of faith (in the creeds), and the confession of thanksgiving (in common worship) are instantiated.
the marriage are actions that do not bring about something new, but rather strengthen and nurture the initial bond forged in the marriage ceremony. The verbal confession of faith in the proclamation of the Gospel is akin to these “I love yous” uttered throughout a marriage. Such confessions do not bring about new faith, but rather strengthen the initial assent of faith on the part of the missionary.

Alistair McFadyen’s notion of sedimentation is helpful for understanding this process. For McFadyen, one’s identity is developed in part through a history of communicative actions, between others and God: “personal identity is a sedimentary history of response, that which endures through time.”110 Just as a farmer’s body will adapt itself in accordance to its history of bodily movements—say, their hands will become calloused from physical labor—so the identity of individuals can be molded through a history of their communicative actions. The practice of proclamation, exercised over time, has just such an effect. In performing one’s faith in a communicative action before others and God, one’s identity is sedimented, molded by that very same faith.

Goals (Partially) Addressed

The beginning of this chapter set forth three goals regarding my conception of mission as virtuous practice: first, that it sufficiently addresses the problems of distinction, agency, and persuasion, second, that it fits with the New Testament depictions of mission, and third, that it calls forth moral reflection on the performance of mission. At various points in the preceding sections I have indicated how my conception has met these goals. While not all of these issues

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are completely addressed in this chapter, this section will draw together and summarize the various ways in which these goals have been addressed so far.

First, situating mission within the broader framework of Aquinas’ moral theology reestablishes traditional language concerning the transcendence and immanence of God and the distinctions between God and creation and human and divine agency. Since God is not defined within the horizon of creation, he is able to be “present and interior to things and yet beyond them,” capable of working within human nature without violating human nature. This in turn enables the parsing out of the distinct ways in which human beings participate in mission and the ways in which their work is distinguished from and superseded by God.

Furthermore, the adoption of MacIntyre’s concept of a virtuous practice also addresses the problems of distinction and agency. Practices involve discreet activities that can be identified, and which can be performed with varying degrees of excellence. By conceiving of mission as virtuous practices, I am describing distinct activities which can be identified, and which can be performed well or poorly. This coheres with the contribution of the mission as growth paradigm, which takes seriously the desire to improve upon the tasks of mission by identifying specific actions that are mission and attempting to discern the ways in which these actions might be better performed.

The second goal, the fitness of my conception of mission with the New Testament witness, is partially addressed through the demonstration of the ways in which human missions are related to, yet distinct from, the Trinitarian missions as depicted by Jesus in the farewell discourse of John 17. In addition, I have shown how the codification of proclamation and gathering as virtuous practices cohere with the essential activities of the apostles in the Book of

111 Sokolowski, 33.
Acts, and have begun to show how the codification of these activities as virtuous practices might capture an intriguing aspect of Luke’s portrayal of the apostles: that the superior performance of their mission work does not seem to be dependent upon the reactions of their audiences, but instead on their fidelity to the message in which they are presenting. This will be taken up more fully in the ensuing chapter.

The last goal, moral reflection, is demonstrated through the situating of missional practices within Aquinas’ moral theology and in the examination of the virtue of prudence. Mission involves deliberate activity and is thus, according to Aquinas, moral activity. All actions performed by missionaries carry possibility of furthering them toward their goal of partaking in God’s glory. Proclamation and gathering are practices which require the development of the virtues. The ultimate good of these practices are not the external ones of numerical increase, but the unique and internal good of delighting in participating in the mission of God and delighting in God’s glory. This provides the opportunity for missionaries to reflect upon their actions, discerning whether virtues such as fortitude, temperance, or prudence might need to be further honed for the perfection of such actions, as well as assess whether these actions were performed for the glory of God or the glory of self.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to show how a conception of mission as virtuous practice better addresses the perpetual problems in mission, that encourages moral reflection, and that accords with the conception of mission particularly evidenced in the Book of Acts. These goals are only partially achieved, however, and a more complete picture is required. The reader will notice that the particular problem of persuasion is yet to be adequately assessed, and that more of the practical implications for this approach to mission need to be fleshed out. For this reason, it is
imperative to give a more robust account of mission and virtue by examining one of its key practices, proclamation.

The remainder of this dissertation will be devoted to unpacking the content and shape of the virtuous practice of proclamation, and understanding how this practice fits into the broader context of the Christian life.
Chapter 5: Proclamation

Introduction

The proclamation of the Gospel is the preeminent missionary activity in the New Testament. Jesus’ exhortation at the end of Mark: “Go into all the world and proclaim (kērussō) the good news to the whole creation (Mark 16:15),” echoed at the end of Matthew’s Gospel, sets forth an imperative to go throughout the world and proclaim the resurrection of Christ. There is a connection between the sending of the disciples and the purpose of this sending, which is the act of proclamation. This connection is exemplified in the book of Acts with the linking of the apostles (those sent) with the vocational activity of preaching the word of God (Acts 6:2). Likewise, nearly all of Peter and Paul’s activity in the Book of Acts involves proclamation (kerygo) cf. Acts 8:35) or a similar verb such as preaching (euangelizō, Acts 8:35, 11:20) or testifying (martureō, Acts 2:40).

That mission should involve some form of proclamation is relatively uncontroversial. Bevans and Schroeder’s influential work Constants in Context asserts its preeminence in mission: “The explicit proclamation of the person and message of Jesus Christ, or at least the burning intention to do so, is what ultimately makes mission mission.”\(^1\) However, as seen in earlier chapters, the ways in which it should be conducted are highly contested. Rival conceptions of proclamation threaten to render the term indistinct, morally unreflective, or non-persuasive. The ensuing chapter will rehabilitate proclamation as a virtuous missional practice whose telos is the glory of God, in the process addressing many of the aforementioned critiques. In line with the previous chapter’s discussion concerning virtue and mission, this conception has three key dimensions.

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\(^1\) Bevans and Schroeder, 358.
First, in keeping with Alasdair MacIntyre’s conception of a virtuous practice, this construal of proclamation will be distinct, complex, coherent, and performative. It will be distinct enough to define it as a discrete activity separate from other actions, coherent enough to function as a skill in which one can improve upon, and complex enough to clarify that such skills cannot be easily mastered. Furthermore, it will be performative—the engagement in the activity of proclamation is non-repeatable, creatively performed anew by the missionary in each instantiation.

Second, as a virtuous practice, it will take seriously the ethical implications of such performances. Because proclamation is a distinct, complex, and coherent activity, the completion of individual performances of such activities enable the possibility for such performances to be evaluated by the missionary. Proclamation, like other practices, is an activity that can be performed well or poorly, and the missionary is afforded the opportunity to reflect on previous performances in order to discern the good from the bad. In addition, the definition of proclamation as a practice that gives glory to God implies that there are moral as well as performative standards with which the missionary should evaluate their actions. The missionary reflects not just upon the ways in which their actions are in accordance with the mastery of some skill, but also whether their actions honor God and fit with the ways in which mission is performed in God’s word. As Kevin Vanhoozer states, what is reflected on is whether such acts of proclamation are *faithful* performances.²

Relatedly, this development of proclamation will seek to fit with the ways in which such activities are carried out in scripture, particularly in the Book of Acts. As mentioned above, Luke describes in great detail the manifold ways in which the disciples proclaim the Gospel in varying

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² Vanhoozer, 183.
contexts. This chapter will attempt to construct a notion of proclamation that is in accord with such descriptions. In keeping with the previous chapter’s discussion concerning scripture, particular attention will be paid to the words and actions of the apostles as moral exemplars for missionaries. Peter, Paul, and Stephen are paragons of virtue who model the ways in which proclamation is beautifully performed and set examples for contemporary missionaries as to how they might faithfully proclaim the Gospel in vastly different circumstances.

This chapter will proceed first by defining the penultimate goal of proclamation through an extended examination of Christian conversion. This section will draw heavily on John Henry Newman’s conception of conversion as a uniquely personal act of assent which is predicated upon an accumulation of ‘antecedent probabilities’ and is thus essentially non-syllogistic. This elaboration of conversion is meant to show how Christian proclamation can be conceived of as an intentional act of persuasion that respects both the desire of missionaries to persuade well and the ability of individuals to exert their agency in accepting, rejecting, or modifying the missionary’s message.

From there, it will proceed to examine the four interrelated activities that together make up the discreet practice of proclamation, progressing linearly beginning with prayer, to preparation and communication, and returning to prayer after completion of the communicative act. The final part of this chapter will demonstrate how this depiction of proclamation aligns with MacIntryre’s notion of a virtuous practice and helps to meet the overall goals of my conception of mission and virtue.

**Conversion: The Penultimate Goal of Proclamation**

Within MacIntyre’s definition of a virtuous practice there is a distinction between the activity performed and the unique goods internal to that activity: the unique, internal goods are
achieved through a striving for excellence while engaged in said activity. It is perhaps best to clarify this distinction by speaking of penultimate and ultimate goals. The penultimate goal of a practice is what is typically achieved through the performance of such activity, while the ultimate goal are the internal goods realized. For instance, the penultimate goal of chess is winning a single game of chess, while the ultimate goal would be acquisition of the unique joys of being a master at chess.³

Before the missionary engages in the virtuous practice of proclamation, they must have some understanding of the penultimate goal of such activity, which is the conversion of their interlocutors to Christianity. While the ultimate goal of proclamation is partaking in the glory of God, the penultimate goal, that which is aimed at by the performance of proclamation, is the assent to Christianity from someone who was previously not a Christian. An understanding of conversion is imperative for addressing many of the issues raised in the examination of the various models of Christian mission, particularly the problem of persuasion: to understand the problem of persuasion, it is important to examine what happens when someone is persuaded.

*Newman on Conversion as a Uniquely Personal Event*

We have already seen above in chapter three how individuals exert agency in response to intentional acts of persuasion on the part of missionaries by either accepting, rejecting, or

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³ For MacIntyre, the success gained from winning a game of chess would be an example of an external good, since one can experience the joys of winning through various other types of competitions. My use of the language of penultimate and ultimate goals, is meant to provide greater clarity on the specific external goods that are aimed at in the process of engaging in a practice. MacIntyre refers to a whole host of external goods that one could receive in various practices, such as wealth, success, and prestige. Such a broad conception of external goods is helpful for understanding the difference between such goods and the internal joys of activities, but it does not further distinguish between the kind of external goods that are nevertheless aimed at in the performance of a practice. For instance, one aims at winning when they play a game of chess, though they may also receive other external goods such as wealth. Though winning is an external good, it still shapes how the player goes about learning how to play chess well. In terms of proclamation, one aims at conversion, though they may receive other external goods in the process. This penultimate goal lends shape to how one learns how to proclaim the gospel well, even if the ultimate goal is beyond it.
modifying the Christian message. The exercise of agency on the part of individuals in response to intentional acts of persuasion indicates the deeply personal nature of conversion. A key text for understanding what happens in such personal acts of conversion and the interplay between persuasion and agency in these acts is John Henry Newman’s *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*. The book, written late in life, is both a systematic treatment of assent as well as an examination of the particular case of assent to Christian propositions in the act of conversion.\(^4\)

In *Grammar of Assent*, Newman is trying to answer a seeming paradox: how does one come to give unconditional assent to propositions that are grounded in conditional propositions? How does one believe in something to be true even though it is based on claims that are fundamentally unprovable? Newman gives as an example the proposition ‘I shall die:’ such a proposition is intrinsically unprovable—it will only be proved true if we actually die.\(^5\) In terms of mission, the question can be formulated thusly: how does one come to confess a faith in Christ even though such beliefs cannot be proven for certain?

For Newman, one comes to assent to such propositions through an accumulation of “antecedent probabilities.” We are convinced by a whole host of influences that, at some moment, bring us to a decision of belief. There are two key facets to Newman’s approach. First, there are a profundity of such probabilities accumulated, and as such they are incapable of being quantifiable:

> It is the cumulation of probabilities, independent of each other, arising out of the nature and circumstances of a particular case which is under review; probabilities too fine to avail separately, too subtle and circuitous to be convertible into


\(^5\) Ibid., 157. Newman’s example is important for demonstrating the ubiquity with which people hold certain beliefs with certainty even though they are fundamentally unprovable.
syllogisms, too numerous and various for such conversion, even were they convertible. 

This is in line with the statement that persuasion is inevitable and pluriform. We are persuaded by a whole host of intentional and unintentional words and non-verbal communications, and such communicative acts are impossible to disentangle. In mission terms, the process through which one is converted is impossible to codify in simple logical progressions or syllogisms. One may be persuaded through specific arguments, through the character of the missionary, through the actions of a Christian community, through the beliefs of their friends and family.

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6 Ibid., 187.

7 The assertion that there exists a pluriform of avenues through which one may assent to belief in Christianity helps to mitigate the differences between those who construe such assent as coming either purely through rational discourse and those who see such assent as coming principally through rhetorical persuasion. The difference between these two positions is articulated most clearly by John Milbank’s critique of Alasdair MacIntyre in his monograph *Theology and Social Theory*. When confronted with rival incommensurable traditions, MacIntyre sees the need for figures to emerge who will be able to successfully reason for the superiority of one tradition over the other, in terms that are both intelligible to adherents of that rival tradition, and in ways that better address the internal issues within that rival tradition. MacIntyre’s paradigmatic example is Aquinas, whose work was able to mitigate the differences between rival Augustinian and Aristotelian moral traditions, yet do so in a way that better addressed the recurring issues within each of these traditions. MacIntyre thus advocates for a return of the contemporary University to a system that resembles Aquinas’ University of Paris: one where rival traditions are able to both simultaneously advance their claims and continually engage in conflict with their rivals. See MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition*, 230-32.

Milbank, on the other hand, believes that rational dialogue is ultimately insufficient in the face of rival traditions. For Milbank, “decisive shifts within traditions, or from one tradition to another, have to be interpreted as essentially ‘rhetorical victories’ (347). The argument for a particular tradition is the various stories, sermons, histories, saints, miracles, etc. that make up that tradition. What wins people over is the adoption of a new mythos, a new way of life that is appealing enough to evoke a rejection of their old tradition. For Milbank, this is crucially important for Christianity, which offers not a better rationality, but the adoption of a new mythos that is established through non-violence. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 376. This is also the position adopted by Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches in their assessment of Milbank’s critique of MacIntyre. They see MacIntyre as starting with the virtues and presenting a case for the rationality of Christianity. “We cannot…as Christians, defend virtue first and Christianity later.” Hauerwas and Pinches, 68.

The conception of conversion I am advocating here, one that relies heavily on Newman, would seem to give preference, to some extent, to Milbank’s approach. However, Newman’s assertion concerning the pluriform and complex ways in which one comes to assent does not entail that such assent cannot be brought about through rational discourse. Conversion is a unique and personal event, and the contribution of rational discourse to such conversions can range from the substantial to the insignificant.

It is also important to note however that MacIntyre’s discussion concerning rival traditions is principally concerning rival philosophies, not rival religions. MacIntyre does not give an account of Christian conversion, so it is not entirely clear whether MacIntyre himself would disagree with my assessment of the role of rationality in conversions to Christianity. MacIntyre’s assessment of the arbitration between rival traditions is helpful for understanding a way to approach rational discourse, and my use of MacIntyre in chapter four is meant to highlight how this can be helpful for critiquing various rival conceptions of mission. However, when it comes to the
Related to this assertion is that the act of assent is deeply personal. The complex and intricate web of probabilities that influence a person are hyper contextual—the individual is uniquely convinced, and thus exercises their agency in a unique act of assent:

As a man’s portrait differs from a sketch of him, in having, not merely a continuous outline, but all its details filled in, and shades and colours laid on and harmonized together, such is the multiform and intricate process of ratiocination, necessary for our reaching him as a concrete fact, compared with the rude operation of syllogistic treatment.\(^8\)

That such conversions defy “syllogistic treatment” means that the process by which someone is converted cannot be broken down into a replicable stages. For Newman, the actual moment of assent is unique, and although it comes through the accumulation of probabilities, that accumulation is not a linear progression: one does not advance from being 10% to 20% converted. Instead, one is influenced in a whole host of ways up until the point in which they go from unbelief to belief.\(^9\) This is crucial, since if assent were a linear process, it could be susceptible to manipulation. This complements the aforementioned critiques of the mission as growth model—the means through which one assents to the Christian faith cannot be converted into a simple syllogistic process, and are thus resistant to being manipulated: conversion is never as simple as the sharing of the 4 spiritual laws, or the recitation of the sinner’s prayer.

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\(^8\) Newman, 187.
\(^9\) This conception of conversion shares certain affinities with those of prominent Protestant thinkers, including Martin Luther, John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards. Elizabeth Cochran describes how these thinkers share a conception of conversion as “an occurrence that radically transforms one’s identity,” and that such a dramatic shift, similar to Stoic accounts of virtue, defy “overly mechanistic or casual accounts of moral formation, so that one cannot strictly prescribe or predict conditions what will make someone virtuous.” Elizabeth Agnew Cochran, Protestant Virtue and Stoic Ethics (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2018), 114-15. As will be discussed below, these Protestant thinkers differ, often within their own writings, over the extent to which such a dramatic shift can still be predicated on a host of other influences which precede such a shift.
This also suggests that individual agency is exerted in the act of assent. It is not that any one argument is incontrovertibly persuasive for all people at all times in all places, it is that certain aspects are deemed persuasive for that individual. This is why, when asked to give an account of one’s conversion, one gives a narrative. Such stories may involve accounts of certain arguments that they find persuasive, certain people who were influential, certain actions on the part of Christian communities that were impactful. The act of assent may acknowledge these exterior influences while affirming the personal nature of the act.

This also helps to mitigate the perpetual debate between event oriented and process oriented conceptions of conversion. Elizabeth Cochran describes the ways in which Luther, Calvin, and Edwards seemed to vacillate between emphasizing a radical event of conversion and a conversion that develops over time. A way out of this impasse is to simply assert that the uniquely personal aspect of conversion means that the trajectory of such conversions will vary based on both the person and that person’s narrative rendering of their conversion. The Christian may reflect upon their conversion, discerning the point at which they went from unbelief to belief, yet the events leading up to this point may be either gradual or dramatic, or both. For instance, one may grow up going to church while also having a dramatic conversion experience in their teenage years. Hindsight may demarcate a particular point in which allegiances shift while simultaneously acknowledging an indebtedness to the ways in which childhood experiences in church contributed to this shift. Cochran’s description of the controversy over Luther’s conversion is illustrative of this point. Luther’s famous “tower experience” of conversion while reading Romans is posited by many scholars to be a retroactive condensing of

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10 It is important to note that the recitation of such conversion stories rarely involve a simple recitation of the Apostles’ Creed—the creeds describe the content of the Christian faith, but the act of coming to profess this faith is not so easily codified.
11 Cochran, 116-20.
various events by Luther “so that he is representing the date and precise details of this moment poetically.”¹² The “tower experience” marks for Luther this decisive shift in belief, yet it may also mark the culmination of a large series of events which gradually prepared the way for such an event.

It may be added that the act of assent, being unique to the individual and typically enunciated narratively, may help to explain that phenomena that heretofore perplexes the missionary dialogist: the happy convert. The dialogist must view such cases as the products of exterior persuasion that are intrinsically coercive, and thus the convert is manipulated, or perhaps delusional. The individual convert, however, sees their conversion as an individual choice that is nevertheless influenced by a whole host of people, arguments, and observations. Here, the recipient receives the message as a gift which is received with great happiness,¹³ with the convert expressing gratitude for the individuals who helped persuade them to make such a choice.¹⁴

Christian Conversion, Logic and Excess

In addition to being a unique personal event that is described narratively by the individual, assent specifically to the Christian faith exceeds such descriptions. This act of assent, though predicated in part on the arguments of the missionary, goes far beyond them. Such acts can be conceived of as what Jean-Luc Marion calls “saturated phenomena.” They are experiences that flood the senses, making themselves so overabundantly present that they defy

¹³ For Jean-Luc Marion, the reception of the gift as the free decision of the recipient is what makes the gift a gift: “The gift consists ultimately in the fact of self-decision, exactly as from the perspective of the giver.” For one who proclaims the Gospel, such proclamation may only be considered a gift by the one who assents. Others may ignore it, or see such proclamation as offensive. The free decision to receive is what renders it a gift and not a nuisance. See Jean-Luc Marion, The Visible and the Revealed (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2008), 92-93.
¹⁴ David Cunningham notes how the Greek term used for faith, pistis, is also the word for persuasion. The suggestion is that the confession of faith may have persuasive and rhetorical overtones: the statement “I believe” may be akin to “I have been persuaded.” Cunningham, 39.
complete description: “To define the saturated phenomenon as incapable of being looked at amounts to envisioning the possibility of a phenomenon imposing itself with an excess of intuition that it could neither be reduced to conditions of experience, and thus to the I who sets them, nor thereby forego appearing.”15

Such assents are so deeply complex and personal that to describe it through logical means is to merely scratch the surface of its meaning. The love between two people may be described logically and intelligibly, but never exhaustively. And so it is for the one who assents to Christ. As Newman puts it:

And so of the great fundamental truths of religion, natural and revealed, and as regards the mass of religious men: these truths, doubtless, may be proved and defended by an array of invincible logical arguments, but such is not commonly the method in which those same logical arguments make their way into our minds. The grounds, on which we hold the divine origin of the Church, and the previous truths which are taught us by nature—the being of a God, and the immortality of the soul—are felt by most men to be recondite and impalpable, in proportion to their depth and reality. As we cannot see ourselves, so we cannot well see intellectual motives which are so intimately ours, and which spring up from the very constitution of our minds; and while we refuse to admit the notion that religion has not irrefragable arguments in its behalf, still the attempts to argue, on the part of an individual hic et nunc, will sometimes only confuse his apprehension of sacred objects, and subtracts from his devotion quite as much as it adds to his knowledge.16

The convert may point to the array of arguments proclaimed by the missionary as having a part to play in their conversion, but the description of the act itself far exceeds such arguments. Indeed, as Newman suggests, the convert may prefer not to attempt a deep analysis of their conversion, as such an act is an attempt to reduce the irreducible.

What Newman is suggesting is that although Christian truth is defended with arguments that are logical, these logical arguments are rarely those that convince the unbeliever.

15 Marion, 43.
16 Newman, 217.
Furthermore, Newman asserts that the pursuit of such logical arguments by believers is not necessary—some may be content with the wonder of belief. Newman’s understanding of the logic of faith anticipates that of Paul Ricoeur, who insists that there is no way out of the hermeneutic circle: to express any belief requires language, and as such is imbedded in preconceptions of thought and meaning. However, if one acknowledges these presuppositions, this may be a starting point through which belief may be explored, with the hope of both a greater depth and coherence of belief. For Ricoeur, one “wagers” a better understanding, which becomes itself “the task of verifying my wager and saturating it.”

Amalgamating these strands of thought in Newman, Marion, and Ricoeur, we arrive at the conclusion that the process of conversion, though it may begin through a cumulation of probabilities, is not necessarily a logical process. Yet, the act of assent saturates our understanding. We may (if we are inclined) proceed to grasp the logical underpinnings of such belief, knowing that, while such endeavors may provide greater coherence, they will never exhaust the significance of belief. The Nicene Creed, for instance, can be seen as the development, post-belief, of a greater coherence of Christian thought regarding the Trinity and the nature of Christ. The creed, however, is not the starting point for Christian proclamation, nor does it exhaust its content. Indeed, it becomes the grounds for further exploration of the divine mysteries, as evidenced in so many of the Greek Fathers. Perhaps not only *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi*, but also *Lex Credendi, Lex Orandi*.

Likewise, the missionary gives arguments in favor of a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. They extol the virtues of such a life, give arguments in its favor, and an invitation to

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encounter. If successful, the arguments may be described later by the convert as contributing to such a conversion, yet the relationship established with God will far exceed them.

**The Act of Proclamation**

With this penultimate goal of conversion in mind, the missionary partakes in the act of proclamation. This complex virtuous practice is composed of four discernible actions: it begins with prayer, proceeds through preparation and communication, and ends with a return to prayer. Such actions are quasi-linear, highlighting a discernable progression in the process of proclaiming the gospel, while acknowledging that, particularly in the case of prayer, such actions may be performed contiguously. What follows is an examination of each of these actions, highlighting particularly the ways in which these actions contribute to an understanding of proclamation as a virtuous practice, how such actions enable critical and moral reflection, and how these actions are exemplified in the Book of Acts. It will conclude with a description of proclamation’s ultimate goal, the partaking in the glory of God, followed by a summary of how this examination as a whole is an accord with the three key dimensions described in the beginning of this chapter.

**Prayer**

Prayer is an integral part of the missionary actions of the disciples. It is in prayer that Luke portrays the reception of the Holy Spirit and the identification of the audience to which the gospel should be proclaimed. This is seen most vividly in Acts 4: “When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness (Acts 4:31).” As such it can be seen as an

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integral part of the practice of proclamation—not simply a pre-evangelistic act, but something that inaugurates and undergirds the entirety of the act, perhaps akin to the way that running may be said to be a fundamental action within certain sports, such as soccer.

The emphasis on prayer as both the beginning of oration and undergirding the entire act of oration is a key distinction between classical rhetoric and Augustine’s Christian rhetoric. What sets the Christian speaker apart is not that they strive to be people of good character (for that is a key component of Aristotle’s rhetoric), nor even that they should be people who are humble (for Cicero acknowledges this), but instead that they should be people who pray. For it is in prayer that one receives the teaching they wish to proclaim and give their own assent to such teaching: “When he is going to preach, before he loosens his tongue to speak, he should lift up his thirsting soul to God, in order to give forth what he will drink in, and to pour out what he will be filled with.” ¹⁹ What follows is thus an examination of the key aspects of prayer in relation to proclamation, focusing on how it forms both the rhetor and his or her message.

Prayer as Persuasion

Prayer is dialogue with God. It is an event in which the individual acknowledges the presence of God and their dependence on Him. We are born into a world of relationships, and realize ourselves as individuals through our relational communications, whether those communications be material or verbal. ²⁰ Preeminently, human beings are created in relationship

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²⁰ Louis-Marie Chauvet stresses this point in regards to language. Human beings are born into a symbolic world mediated by language. “Like the body, language is not an instrument but a mediation; it is in language that humans as subjects come to be. Humans do not preexist language; they are formed in its womb.” Human beings encounter their world through communications—human beings speaking to other human beings. Louis-Marie Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 87. Herbert McCabe makes a similar point by insisting that speech is not ad extra to human actions, but is intertwined in the meaning and significance of all human action: “Man does not just add speech on to such things as
to God, and are given freedom to engage within this relationship in communication with God. As Alistair McFadyen states, “We live and breath within the parameters set by the divine intention in communication of dialogue-partnership with God as a more or less distorted image of and response to God. We can refuse to enter into dialogue: we cannot, however, avoid being in relation with God.”21 This is echoed in Augustine’s famous assertion that human beings cannot hide from God, and as a result should turn to God and ‘make confession.’ In light of the ever presence of God, human beings should respond by engaging in speech before God.22

In prayer, one acknowledges their relation to God and accepts the invitation to dialogue with God. By accepting this invitation, they accede to the possibility of being changed by God as a result of these dialogical encounters. For the missionary, this means that, before they may begin to persuade others of the Good News, they themselves must be persuaded by God: “Prayer is aligning oneself with God’s purposes in the world; it is opening ourselves up so that God’s will may be done in us and in God’s creation.”23 The Christian rhetor must thus be a “petitioner before a speaker.”24 To be a petitioner is to acknowledge a need, and to be open to change.

To enter into discourse is to open oneself up to the possibility of change. Lloyd Bitzer describes what he calls rhetorical situations, which are contexts of persons, places, and objects that invite utterance, and the possibility of change from those involved in such utterances.25 Thus for Bitzer, “rhetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and

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21 McFadyen, 22.
22 Augustine, Confessions, 73.
23 Bevans and Schroeder, 367.
action.” The key advancement made by Augustine is to acknowledge that prayer itself is as much a rhetorical situation as the act of verbal communication intent upon convincing others of the Gospel. Prayer can be considered the creation of such discourse by the missionary, or rather it is the acknowledgement that God has *already* created this discourse situation. In prayer one risks being changed through the mediation of thought with God.

This account of prayer as a starting point for proclamation has profound implications for the way in which the proclamation of the Gospel with others will proceed. The practice of proclamation includes activity meant to acknowledge need and dependence. The missionary must begin as a learner, listening to God for the content of their proclamation, and acknowledging the ways in which they are invited to assent anew to this content. Psalm 19 provides the most vivid example of how such prayers may take form: there is a declaration of the goodness of God’s statutes, which “give light to the eyes (19:8),” followed by a supplication for the strength to keep such commands (19:11-12), and last a prayer that one’s speech may be in line with what God has communicated: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my strength and my redeemer (19:14).”

This plea for the acceptability of one’s speech shows how prayer may provide a check on the proclamations of the missionary. Before engaging in persuasion with others, one asks that the words that they are about to share are deemed acceptable to God. It is an acknowledgement that the audience of one’s evangelization efforts includes God. While this may not guarantee that such speech avoids becoming manipulative, it does set forth a precedent that missionary speech should be morally aware—it is open to judgment by God.

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26 Ibid., 4.
Prayer and Ethos

A practice of proclamation that begins in prayer establishes itself as an act that begins with the conformity of the missionary to the message which they will communicate. An added benefit is that such conformity helps to establish character on the part of the missionary. If God’s words are just and good, then the missionary who conforms to these words will, over time, conform to this goodness. This growth in character will lend a degree of gravity and authority to the words in which they proclaim to others.

For Aristotle, a person who seems to possess practical wisdom, virtue, and good will is “necessarily persuasive to the hearers.” Aristotle, however, believes that such character, or ethos, must be constructed by the speaker: it is the perception of character that is important, leaving open the possibility that the rhetor may not actually be of good character. There is thus the possibility for hypocrisy within Aristotle’s rhetoric.

A Christian view of rhetoric asserts that character is persuasive, but that such character should not be an artificial construction of the speaker, but rather constructed by God in prayer. Gregory the Great draws this relationship between character and speech in The Book of Pastoral Rule: before speaking, the preacher “strikes themselves with the wings of their thoughts,”

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28 While Christian rhetoric would reject the construction of a false ethos on behalf of the promotion of Christian proclamation, this does not necessarily mean that God may not use such hypocrisy for His aims. As Paul notes, God may still use the duplicitous person to bring about his will: “Some proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. These proclaim Christ out of love, knowing that I have been put here for the defense of the gospel; the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but intending to increase my suffering in my imprisonment. What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I rejoice (Phil 1:15-18).” Augustine reiterates this assertion by Paul, stating that the formation of genuine character is important for the Christian rhetor, while acknowledging at the same time that God can still use those of poor character. In these situations, God works through the listeners, who, in their own obedience, are able to hear not the voice of the deceitful teacher, but the voice of their Lord. Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, 142.
29 In this regard, a Christian understanding of rhetoric in relation to truth and character is more akin to that advocated by Socrates at the end of *Gorgias*. Human beings should not strive to be persuasive by creating a semblance of goodness, but by striving to actually be good, in both their private and public lives. Rhetoric should thus be used not for any type of persuasion, but only for “pointing to what is just.” Plato, "Gorgias," 112.
examining themselves before God to see if their deeds align with the content of their speech.\textsuperscript{30} It is God that forms one in the image and likeness of Christ, a likeness which holds the potential to help authorize the Gospel proclamation: the goodness of the missionary bolsters their claim that the information they are imparting is not from them, but from God. Paul draws out this connection between his own character and the reception of the gospel by the church in Thessalonica:

You remember our labor and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was toward you believers. As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God’s word, which is also at work in you believers (1 Thessalonians 2:9-13).

Paul sees the reception of the gospel as clearly bolstered by his own conduct amongst those in Thessalonica. Yet, for Paul, this conduct bolsters not his own claims to be a master orator, nor to peddle his own philosophy. Instead, his conduct bolsters his belief that he has actually communicated the word of God.\textsuperscript{31}

The development of character aids in the ability of the missionary to persuade their audience. Because the proclamation of the Gospel involves an invitation to assent to a belief that cannot be proven with analytic precision, because it involves an invitation to believe amidst a host of competing worldviews and ideologies, the listener must adjudicate among a host of

\textsuperscript{30} Gregory the Great, \textit{The Book of Pastoral Rule} (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007), 207.

\textsuperscript{31} For Augustine, the confluence of prayerful speech is that the audience is effected by God. The human agency exerted by such speech is utilized by God towards God’s purposes: “So the benefits of teaching, applied to the soul through human agency, are only beneficial when the benefit is effected by God, who could have given the gospel to man even without human authors or intermediaries.” Augustine, \textit{On Christian Teaching}, 123. As will be examined below, this hints at the type of ultimate good derived from the practice of proclamation. The ‘work’ of conversion is ultimately the work of God, the missionary receives the unique joy of having participated in this work, of acting in accordance with God’s will and desire. Prayer is the site in which the missionary asks that their speech remain in accordance with God’s will.
various arguments for and against Christianity. Judgments about the character of the one presenting arguments are one of the ways in which listeners may adjudicate. The ethos of the messenger impacts the effect of the message they are communicating: “consequently, the authority of a particular argument is closely connected to how the audience evaluates the person who offers that argument.”

*Prayer, Imagination, and the Audience*

While prayer begins with a dialogue with God, in which the missionary is persuaded by God and formed by God, it proceeds to extend outward, from dialogue between the self and God to dialogue about the self, others, and God. The missionary begins to pray for others, and to ask God for guidance and direction on where to proclaim the gospel and the audience who will receive the message. In so doing, they imagine themselves engaged in dialogue with specific people.

The imagination plays a central role in the way we craft our discourse, and how we adapt this discourse to an audience. As human beings that inhabit a world of language, we are formed not only through our communicative relationships with others, but also through the conversations we have with others in our minds. Kenneth Burke describes how imaginative discourse shapes both the arguments one crafts, and in turn effects a change in the person crafting the arguments: “In studying the nature of the object, we can in effect speak for it, and in adjusting our conduct to its nature as revealed in the light of our interests, we in effect modify our own assertion in reply to its assertion.”

We imagine an interlocutor, or a group of people, and we have a conversation with them. If it is an argument, we craft arguments that we believe will win over our audience.

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32 Cunningham, 101.
We visualize the assent of such arguments. Such imaginative construals precede all intentional actions, for “one cannot just intend the act without imagining what it might look like as an accomplished fact.”

The assertion here is that this imaginative construal is something that is intentionally performed in prayer by the missionary. According to Gilbert Ryle, imaginative acts are not merely the operation of sense impressions, but are their own discreet activities. As a discreet activity, specific acts of imaging can be performed with better or worse accuracy. Ryle gives the example of humming a tune in one’s mind—such humming is not merely the accessing in the mind of some past musical performance, but its own mental event which can be performed with better or worse accuracy. Part of preparing for a speech or discourse involves such imaginative acts, and one can prepare for such engagements through “giving the speech in their mind.” Those who are new to public speaking, for instance, may be surprised at how much more difficult the speech was to say aloud than it was to speak in their mind. Part of one’s growth will entail the closure of this gap.

In addition, the assertion that such imaginative construals should take place by the missionary in the context of prayer is an affirmation that God is present and at work in such acts. In prayer the Holy Spirit penetrates our cognitive faculties, directing them towards both audience and argument. In prayer, the missionary opens themselves up to an awareness of those around

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35 Ryle believes this common misconception is in part due to language—we use the phrase “one pictures the mountain” to refer to the mental act of imagining a mountain, which leads us to think that one has simply accessed a picture from their memory. The brain in this misconception is rendered akin to a computer hard drive—storing sense data that can be accessed by the individual at any point: “Imaging is not only not any sort of observing of anything; it is also not having a sensation of a special sort. Seeming to hear a very loud noise is not being in any degree deafened, nor is seeming to see a very bright light being in any degree dazzled” Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Hutchinson, 1969), 255.
36 Ibid., 269.
37 This is not to say that the Holy Spirit takes over for us, but rather it restores our agency, creating the opportunity to participate in God’s work. According to Oliver O’Donovan, the Holy Spirit “confirms and restores us as moral
them whom the Holy Spirit may be calling to go and share the gospel. In so doing, they begin to imagine themselves proclaiming the word, convincing others to assent to such proclamation. They imagine their interlocutor’s joyfully receiving this message, and, even though such reception is far from certain, it prompts the missionary to action.

There is in prayer an act of imaginative discourse in the mind of the missionary, in which the missionary attempts to gain an accurate assessment of their audience, discovers and tests arguments, and deciphers how to proclaim the Gospel in a way that honors God and respects their interlocutors. All this is done in prayer, open to the workings of the Holy Spirit. That this process is open to the Holy Spirit means that the missionary is open to Godly intervention into this process. The Spirit may surprise, with ideas and directives heretofore not considered by the missionary.


For Ananias, it is a vision to seek out Paul (Acts 9:10-11), for Paul it is a vision to remain in Corinth to continue proclaiming the Gospel (Acts 18:9-10), and for Peter, as will be shown below, a vision will guide the way in which his proclamation is adapted (Acts 10). Throughout the Book of Acts, Luke portrays the apostles as those who are in tune with and led by the Spirit. The Spirit manifests itself during times of prayer, and at other times unspecified by Luke. Visions are best seen as one of the ways in which the Spirit is manifested, through the activation of the image making faculties of the minds of the disciples. Such activation is meant to further the mission of the Church, directing the disciples to continue proclaiming the Gospel.

agents, which is to say, as the subjects of our actions…in confirming us as subjects, he teaches us how, within this age of eschatological judgment, we may act. To do this he does not take over our subjecthood; he enables us to realize it.” O’Donovan, Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics, 106.

⁴⁸ For Ananias, it is a vision to seek out Paul (Acts 9:10-11), for Paul it is a vision to remain in Corinth to continue proclaiming the Gospel (Acts 18:9-10), and for Peter, as will be shown below, a vision will guide the way in which his proclamation is adapted (Acts 10). Throughout the Book of Acts, Luke portrays the apostles as those who are in tune with and led by the Spirit. The Spirit manifests itself during times of prayer, and at other times unspecified by Luke. Visions are best seen as one of the ways in which the Spirit is manifested, through the activation of the image making faculties of the minds of the disciples. Such activation is meant to further the mission of the Church, directing the disciples to continue proclaiming the Gospel.
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This link between the Holy Spirit, visions and proclamation is rarely commented upon. Yves Congar’s magisterial work on the Holy Spirit, for instance, draws immediate connections between the reception of the Holy Spirit and the mission of the apostles in the Book of Acts. Congar also acknowledges the potential for the Holy Spirit to enable visions, but does not draw the connection between this and mission. The connection is taken up, however, by some Pentecostal theologians, most notably in the sermons and writings of Maria Beulah Woodworth-Etter. For Woodworth-Etter, one of the signs of the Holy Spirit at work within the church is the manifestation of visions and ensuing signs, which include the growth of the church. This connection is used both as a framework to interpret the various visions in the Book of Acts and also as a direct exhortation to her contemporaries to receive the Holy Spirit: “Where there is no vision, the people perish.”

While I would not claim that the kind of ecstatic visions Woodworth-Etter may have in mind are essential to the experience of all Christians, nor essential for the growth and health of the church, her work does highlight the connection between vision, the Holy Spirit, and proclamation. While such visions might be more mundane—it may simply be the imagining of a

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quiet conversation between two friends—they are important for helping to direct both the actions of the missionary and qualify the way they conduct such actions.

Prayer is thus indispensable to the practice of proclamation. Through it both the missionary and their message are molded by God. Through prayer the sharing of this message with particular people is made possible. Through prayer the missionary is given confidence and boldness, trusting that their words may acceptable to God. Such boldness and confidence spurs the missionary to action. But, before, the moment of speech, they must learn more about their interlocutors.

**Preparation**

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the missionary thus proceeds to prepare for their interactions with their audience. The purpose of such preparation is to better understand the intended audience and adapt the message accordingly. This is the logical next step after the missionary’s imaginative encounter: once such an encounter is visualized, care is taken to discern how the imagined audience wrought through prayer might accord with the actual audience in reality.\(^{43}\) As we will see, what will separate the practice of proclamation from other forms of persuasion and argumentation is that the adaptation of the message to the intended audience includes not only the missionary’s human interlocutors, but also God.

**Inventio—Discovering the Available Means of Persuasion**

Rhetorical scholars often affirm the interdependence of arguments and knowledge of the audience to which such arguments are directed. As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca put it, “knowledge of the audience cannot be conceived independently of the knowledge of how to

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\(^{43}\) Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 23.
influence it." As we learn more about a person, we learn about their likes and dislikes, what motivates and moves them. David Zarefsky makes a similar assertion, in that the discernment of the audience in a sense dictates the boundaries through which responsible argumentation may occur.

Thus the missionary begins the process of acquiring knowledge about their intended audience, which, in the process helps to better discern which aspects of the gospel proclamation will resonate more resoundingly. The acquisition of such knowledge will vary based upon the type of audience and the particular situation. If the missionary is moving to another country, they may learn some general information about the people living there: their language, history, prominent religious beliefs, etc. This may be done knowing full well that these are merely generalizations—cultures are a great deal more porous and heterogenous, and hence the missionary must know that their audience is a composite, “embracing people differing in character, loyalties, and functions.” However, such knowledge may provide a helpful starting point in helping to determine which aspects of the Christian message will most resonate with their audience.

The discovery of the audience presents the missionary with the range of justifications for the Christian faith. This should not be cause for alarm from Christians worried that the selection of justifications may compromise the Christian faith. Choosing one point to emphasize does not

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44 Ibid.
45 David Zarefsky, *Rhetorical Perspectives on Argumentation: Selected Essays* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Press, 2014), xvi.
46 Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 21.
47 As will be explained below, the discovering of the available means of persuasion and the adaptation of the message to the audience is highly contextual, and as such, attempts to give an exact, step by step process risks overgeneralization.
48 There is a parallel here with Christian political discourse within pluralistic societies, like most modern liberal democracies today. Here, the Christian attempts to discover the available arguments through which particular Christian political positions will be persuasive to those who do not share the Christian faith. If one desires such
necessitate a rejection of another. For instance, the Pauline epistles are filled with non-contradictory explanations and images of the significance of the cross (adoption, redemption, salvation, etc.). The uses of various images are context specific to the audience of the epistles.

engagement, a question remains regarding the extent to which the Christian grounds for such positions may be carried into the public square.

Some advocates of political liberalism take the approach that such positions must be scrubbed clean of their religious overtones. A generous reading of such a view is what Christopher Eberle calls ‘justificatory liberalism.’ Eberle construes liberalism here not as the complete privatization of all religiously held beliefs, but rather a liberalism that constrains citizens to “privatize only that subset of his religious convictions constituted by religiously grounded claims for which he lacks a corroboratory public justification (78).” One can make religiously motivated moral claims on society, but only if such claims can be justified using corroborating secular arguments. Such secular arguments should be grounded in secular moral claims, such as freedom, equality, and due process. Christopher J. Eberle, Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Appeals to public religion to politically persuade run counter to the logic of liberal political persuasion, as they are public justifications expressed in religious terms. The fear is that such appeals must at the least disrespect those that don’t hold such religious convictions, and at the worst be the grounds for religious coercion. Public religious appeals are appeals that cannot be shared with those that hold different faith commitments, and thus hold the potential to force citizens to accept beliefs that are beyond common reason.

A different, yet equally negative critique of public religion comes from a large group of contemporary American Protestant theologians. For these theologians, attempts at such political engagements intrinsically cloud Christian moral reasoning and enable the church to take upon themselves a providential rule of history that is only to be possessed by God. The predominance of this view amongst Protestant theologians is due in large part to the impact of John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas on modern political theology. Their work elucidated a specific way in which the church relates to political powers. Both assert that, although Christianity does not advocate a specific political form, it is necessarily compromised when it colludes with empire. Instead, the position of the church is to accept the temporal authority of rulers granted through God’s providence, speaking a corrective voice yet resisting the temptation to take such authority in their own hands: “Christian witness does not provide any foundations for government, either practically or philosophically, but that the Christian rather accepts the powers that be and speaks to them in a corrective way.” Stanley Hauerwas, "Democratic Time: Lessons Learned from Yoder and Wolin," Cross Currents 55, no. 4 (2006): 539.

The position of Yoder and Hauerwas is important for understanding the change that may occur within the person crafting arguments for the public square, and that such changes may bring about the compromise of the Christian faith in the interest of winning political arguments. There are, however, drawbacks to such an approach. First, as to whether such a strict separation of the ecclesial from the governmental powers is actually attainable. We are born already immersed in a web of commitments and influences, both ecclesial and political. An awareness of this entanglement should place a check on any notion that we’ve somehow been successful in establishing a purely prophetic position vis-à-vis the ruling powers and principalities.

Second, their position seems to ignore the ways in which Christian prophetic witness to the political powers has benefited from a public awareness of Christianity. The “corrective voice” that the church is to speak to the powers and principalities can be more resonant to societies that have at least some understanding of the Christian roots of that voice. For instance, Martin Luther King Jr. utilized numerous Biblical references in his “I Have a Dream” speech. Such references were direct persuasive appeals meant to effect public change that were persuasive in part because the audience had an awareness of Christianity, whether they practiced the Christian faith or not. This awareness enabled King to quote directly from scripture without reference, lending an immediacy to his appeals. In this way King’s speech was persuasive in part because it was explicitly Christian.

For a detailed account of the various explanations and images used by Paul, see Alister E. McGrath, What Was God Doing on the Cross? (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002).
In a similar fashion, the missionary may discover which of these images best resonates with their interlocutors, that they may “touch the hearts of his audience with the same common doctrine but by distinct exhortations.” This helps to explain the appropriate emphasis on translation and intercultural studies within the field of missiology. For Andrew Walls, because Jesus the Incarnate Word took on flesh in human history, the spread of the Christian gospel must also be rendered intelligible in specific times and places:

At the heart of the Christian faith is the Incarnate Word—God became human. The divine Word was expressed under the conditions of a particular human society; the divine Word was, as it were, translated. And since the divine Word is for all humanity, he is translated again in terms of every culture where he finds acceptance among its people…The Word has to be translated in terms of specific segments of social reality.

One can view this translation of the gospel message as way of bringing forth certain justifications for the Christin faith in light of new audiences. For Walls, this process of translation can add richness to Christianity. The missionary emphasizes certain images of the cross, or certain justifications for Christianity, and in the process helps to articulate new and noncontradictory expressions of the Christian faith.

Furthermore, discovering the available means of persuasion would lead the person of good character to uncover the ways in which one could be manipulated, and thus discover which arguments may be persuasive and yet off limits. Here lies an important distinction in Aristotle: the definition of rhetoric is not to persuade, but to discover the available means of persuasion, what in Latin would be termed inventio. The goal of rhetoric is not to persuade, as one can do so through a host of immoral means, but rather to better understand how persuasion may occur. If

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50 Great, 88.
52 Ibid., 54.
rhetoric is a tool, then learning how to use this tool is as much about using it effectively as it is using it properly. In learning how to wield an ax properly, I learn both how to more effectively cut wood, and also how to avoid cutting my friend’s hand.

While the discovery of the available means of persuasion may occur in one succinct action, for instance if the missionary is preparing to give a speech, the discovery of the available means of persuasion may occur over a longer period of time, particularly in regards to an ongoing friendship. For instance, a friend self-identifies as a Marxist, which may lead the missionary to be intentional about learning more about Marxism in general. Perhaps the friend experienced tragedy in their life, in which case the missionary may learn more about how the Christian message best speaks to tragedy.

There need not be anything nefarious in the acquisition of such knowledge. Learning more about another person—their beliefs, passions, likes, and dislikes—can be a way of expressing care and interest in them. A loved one may appreciate that that their lover has taken the time to learn about their affection for flowers and built a garden in response to such a discovery. David Zarefsky presses this point further, suggesting that the audience itself imposes a field of acceptable arguments onto the rhetor, constraining and limiting that which can be discussed.  

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Communication

After prayer and a consideration of its audience, the missionary engages in persuasive communication. The desire of the missionary is not simply one of well-wishing. It is not simply to pray for the betterment of another. In prayer, the missionary imagines a conversation, one that ends in their interlocutor professing belief in the risen Christ. This desire, fueled by prayer,

54 Zarefsky, 39.
prompts the moment of action. It is this moment of action that, in many ways, makes mission
mission. The missionary speaks in order to share their faith in Christ, and the justifications for
their faith, with another: “to communicate something is to hold it as a common possession.”
The desire is to impart what has been received by God with another, so that the other might share
in what has been given. Communication is the way in which the invitation to share in such
common possession is offered.

As mentioned above, preparation may aid in the process of discerning how such
communication may proceed, but, because the conversion of each individual is unique, such
preparation must meet the reality of the communicative event. There can be no definitive “pre-
packaged word.” Proclamation involves a performance, and the missionary must develop skills
which allow them to faithfully adapt their proclamation to suit each situation. Here J. L. Austin’s
description of the relationship between illocution and perlocution is helpful. The way we say
something (illocution) impacts what is brought about as a result of our speech (perlocution).

55 As Aquinas asserts, when we love someone, an image of that person is imprinted on our mind, and the love of this
image pushes the lover to act towards the beloved (Summa I. 37). Giles Emery summarizes: “When we love
someone, our beloved is "engraved" in our heart, like a weight of love that pulls us and draws us to our beloved
(152).” Thus in prayer the missionary imagines their interlocutor, loves this image, and is compelled to action to
proclaim the Gospel out of this love. See Emery.
56 It is at this communicative act that the traditional language of Trinitarian Missions coincides the modern definition
of mission, for just as the trinitarian missions refer to the activities of God, in which God is revealed as Father, Son,
and Holy Spirit so that humanity might be rescued, missionaries take the decisive and deliberate action to make this
news known. See ibid., 25-27.
244.
58 While the context in which this act of communication can vary, it is important to note that this conception of
proclamation assumes at least some degree of intentionality. This is not to say that “antecedent probabilities” cannot
be established through other means, just that missionary proclamation involves prayer and preparation for
purposeful persuasion. Amidst ongoing friendships, for instance, the topic of religion and Christianity may arise
naturally, in which case one could hope to be prepared to speak as well as they can. Proclamation involves, however,
the seeking out of intentional conversation, prompted by and at the direction of the Holy Spirit. While such
intentional conversation may be more or less formal, it does require what Douglas Ehninger calls a degree of
“intellectual and moral tension,” a tension that arises due to the acknowledgment that what is being offered by the
missionary requires a change in the worldview of the other. See Douglas Ehninger, "Argument as Method: Its
59 Kevin Vanhoozer points out how Austin’s description of this relationship places an emphasis on the performance
of the speaker in the act of communicating, not simply on the words in which the speaker is uttering: “Austin’s al-
The missionary thus learns the best ways to use the words in order to illicit a response from their interlocutors.

**Adaptation to the Audience**

The adaptation of the gospel proclamation already begins in the discernment of the available means of persuasion. The missionary begins to assess how to present the gospel in a way that will be intelligible, and how to craft the message in a way that will resonate with their audience. Such adaptation proceeds through the actual verbal communication of the gospel message. The speaker refines their message internally up until the moment of communication, and continues to adjust this message based upon the response of their interlocutors.

That missionaries adjust to their circumstances is evident in even a cursory reading of the Book of Acts. Peter and Paul do not give identical speeches to different audiences, but adjust their messages based upon time and place. Paul’s speech before the synagogue in Antioch situates the gospel within the history of Israel, beginning with the exodus out of Egypt (Acts 13:17). His speech before the Areopagus, however, begins with a reference to the altar inscription “To the unknown God,” and makes no reference to Israel (Acts 17:23). Both speeches end with a word concerning impending judgment for those who do not receive the message.

This contextualization is evidence of the need to adapt message to audience. The presentation of the gospel is not the presentation of self-evident truths that necessarily bring one important notion of illocution requires us, I believe, to bring to the fore the speaker’s (or author’s) role in saying or writing something.” Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 209.

I have already mentioned above the need to adapt the message before a proclamative encounter. In noting that this adaptation to the audience continues throughout this encounter is to stress the need for contextualization. Stephen Bevans suggests different models that have been used by missionaries as they encounter people of other faiths and cultural traditions (translation, anthropological, praxis, counter-cultural), while also asserting that such models are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Bevans, for instance, suggests that a modified version (drawing somewhat on the anthropological model) of the counter-cultural model best suits the contemporary North American missional
to assent, but the presentation of justifications that invite acceptance over matters that are inherently uncertain.\textsuperscript{61} Thus interaction with an audience drives the speaker to adapt, for “arguments that in substance and form are appropriate to certain circumstances may appear ridiculous in others.”\textsuperscript{62} An argument that the Christian church is the continuation of the history of God’s people which began in the Israelite patriarchs may seem to the pagan statesman in the Areopagus as odd, inconsequential, or even ridiculous.

In their speech, the missionary attempts to persuade another to assent to a belief in the resurrected Christ and a profession of Jesus as Lord, and because such assent comes about not through demonstration but the “cumulation of probabilities,” the content of the missionary’s proclamation will vary according to circumstance: the goal is to establish “antecedent probabilities,” to set forth a range of justifications for the Christian faith, any number of which may be persuasive to varying degrees.

\textsuperscript{61} Zarefsky, 41. By using the term “inherently uncertain,” I do not mean that the one who assents to the Christian faith experiences something like a radical and perpetual uncertainty about their belief. Rather, the claim is simply that Christianity cannot be “proved” through something akin to a mathematical syllogism. If this were the case, the scope of assent to the Christian message would resemble more the scope of assent to the proposition that $2+2=4$. See the above discussion on Newman and conversion.

\textsuperscript{62} Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 25.

\textsuperscript{63} Newman, 190.
**Testimony**

What sets Christian proclamation apart from some other forms of persuasion that attempt to gain assent through the establishment of antecedent probabilities is the priority it places on testimony. Christian proclamation is tied to a claim of an historical event, the resurrection of Christ. This tethers the desire to gain assent to an event in which one can both hear and experience. Paul Ricoeur states that such testimony has a “quasi-empirical meaning”:

> I say quasi-empirical because testimony is not perception itself but the report, that is, the story, the narration of the event...The witness has seen, but the one who receives his testimony has not seen but hears. It is only by hearing the testimony that he can believe or not believe in the reality of the facts that the witness reports.\(^64\)

For Ricoeur, the fact that such testimony is rooted in a claim to experience an event that the interlocutor can only hear and not see renders said testimony “to the service of judgment.”\(^65\) Testimony must reach out for justifications that promote the validity of the story and the veracity of the one proclaiming it. In short, testimony does not nullify the need to establish antecedent probabilities, but rather strengthens the need for it.

And so the missionary proclaims Christ’s death and resurrection as witnesses who trace their assent back to the testimony of the disciples, and invites an assent to something that may be heard but not seen, but is nevertheless true assent and true belief: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe (John 20:29)” In order to win assent they marshal a host of contextual arguments: evidence of personal change, historical evidence,\(^66\) the life of a community, judgments on evil, etc. in order to win assent to a belief that is rooted in the


\(^{65}\) Ibid.

\(^{66}\) NT Wright’s *The Resurrection of the Son of God* is perhaps the best example of a highly particular argument for the resurrection. Wright does not claim that his book “proves” that the resurrection is correct, but rather that, if one allows for the possibility that God exists and that miracles are possible, than the resurrection rises to the level of probability according to what believes to be the standard of historical accuracy amongst historians.
historical particularly of the resurrection of Christ. While such arguments may take the form of logical arguments (for instance, that extraordinary improbability of a worldwide religious movement spread primarily through non-violence over the course of three centuries), they need not be limited by such justifications. The systematization of belief often comes after assent, not before it. The creeds, for instance, are a response to the reception of the apostle’s testimony, not the primary means of earning assent.

That such persuasion is linked to an historical event also helps to exert a control on acceptable forms of adaptation. The significance of the event may be interpreted in various ways by various audiences (indeed it must be, as the narrative itself must be intelligibly described), but never denied in the interest of conversion. If the missionary can only persuade someone to become a Christian through a modification of the Christian message stripped of the resurrection, then they choose instead to accept the rejection of the message. To modify in such a way would strip Christianity of its meaning: “It is not possible to testify for a meaning without testifying that something has happened which signifies this meaning.” Here lies perhaps the conflation of the Greek term for witness, martyr, with its reference to the Christian who has been murdered for their belief.

Adaptation to God

The adaptation of Christian proclamation is not only limited by its testimony to the historical event of the resurrection, it is also limited by the fact that such proclamation occurs before God as an audience. The missionary is simultaneously speaking to their interlocutors and

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67 “Narrative can never be separated from description. If the proclamation is to be understood and received, its implication for the understanding of world, human life, and action must still be accounted for non-narratively.” Oliver O’Donovan, Entering into Rest (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 175.
68 Ricoeur, 133.
to God, and as such they adjust their speech so that the words on their lips may be acceptable to God.

The missiologist Lesslie Newbigin states that a confession that “Jesus is Lord” is a “claim regarding the entire public life of mankind and the whole created world.” For Newbigin, the missionary who declares this in public appeals to God as authority, and as such it is God who authorizes proclamatory discourse: “I make this confession only because I have been laid hold of by Another and commissioned to do so. It is not primarily or essentially my decision…I am simply the messenger entrusted with this responsibility to deliver the message.” Fealty to this commission opens up the possibility that such a message will clash with other public, universal claims. Hence in adapting their proclamation before God, the missionary must be prepared for this proclamation to be received as a word of judgment. Such words of judgment may take the form of direct prophecy: during his extended proclamation, Stephen appropriates the prophecy of Isaiah in judgment upon the Jewish leaders who have rejected Jesus (Acts 7:49-50). The judgment may also be implicit—the disciples are often persecuted based simply on “reports” of their activity. Paul’s speech before the Areopagus is a particularly compelling example of a speech that is simultaneously highly contextualized for both the audience and God. Paul’s speech is florid, and respectful of pagan piety. Yet, it also blatantly calls for repentance in the face of impending judgment (Acts 17:30-31). The response from the audience, some belief but mostly

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70 Ibid., 17.
71 It is this understanding of proclamation as that which is performed before God that can help navigate the challenges of Christian political discourse in pluralistic societies, as detailed in the footnote above. In proclamation, the missionary presents arguments for the Christian faith, celebrating the times in which such arguments are resonate, and accepting whatever negative consequences may result as a result of its rejection. Christian political witness may take place in a similar manner. The Christian is called to witness to political powers, celebrating the instances in which such powers are responsive and risking persecution when such witness is meant with hostility. It is in this willingness to accept persecution where some of Yoder and Hauerwas’s fears of collusion with empire might be allayed.
scoffing, is perhaps what should be expected from discourse that is at once meant to be highly persuasive yet ultimately unyielding in its central tenants.

While the adaptability of proclamation to suit God as audience may entail a word of judgment being pronounced, the effect may also work in reverse. The missionary may discover in the course of persuasive discourse that their own fealty to the gospel is in question. For instance, in declaring that the gospel is “good news for the poor” they may be convicted of their own lack of charity.

Peter’s proclamation of the gospel to Cornelius in Acts 10-11 is the most vivid example of how the missionary is changed in both prayer before God and discourse before God. Roman centurion and gentile godfearer Cornelius is called by God to send for Peter. On the way from Joppa to Caesarea to proclaim the gospel to Cornelius, Peter stops and prays. In prayerful preparation for this missionary encounter, Peter receives his vision and the command to kill and eat the various four-footed animals. He is perplexed by this vision, yet proceeds to meet with Cornelius, proclaims the gospel, and Cornelius believes. What is so fascinating about this passage is how Peter’s attitude towards the gentiles, and his interpretation of this vision, is effected through this discourse. It is through this discourse that Peter learns the meaning of his vision, that God shows no partiality, and that the Holy Spirit has “been poured out even on the Gentiles (Acts 10:45).” Upon his return to Jerusalem, Peter is questioned regarding his ministry to the Gentiles, and it is here that he is able to recount his vision and the meaning he has discerned through his discourse with Cornelius (Acts 11:1-18).

Thus in the act of intentional persuasion, the missionary themselves become open to change. Their interlocutors may present issues that force the missionary back into prayer and a reassessment of their beliefs, where they might hear a word from God that effects a change in
their own Christianity. Proclamation entails a risk on the part of the rhetor. Douglas Ehninger’s characterization of argument (as opposed to correction) as a “person risking” enterprise is also applicable to Christian proclamation:

By entering into argument in any but a playful mood, a disputant opens the possibility that as a result of the interchange he may be persuaded of his opponent’s view, or, failing that, at least may be forced to make major alterations in his own. In either case, he will emerge from the interchange with a different pattern of conviction, values, and attitudes than he held when he entered it, and to this extent will be a different “self” or “person.”

For the missionary, proclamation is interchange with both God and another, and entails the possibility that either or both may challenge their own view. Whether major changes occur or not, the missionary is left after the exchange as a different person.

Response

The missionary continues to speak, adjusting their message to suit audience and God, until the encounter has ended, which may occur for a number of reasons. For speeches to larger crowds, the speech may simply finish with an invitation to repent and be baptized, which is a natural ending point. For personal discourse, the conversation may be cut short for other reasons—one of the interlocutors must leave for another meeting, the conversation moves to other topics, etc. Such encounters may end with a number of different outcomes: as noted in chapter 3, interlocutors may accept, reject, or modify the message, or the matter is left unresolved.

When proclaiming the Gospel, the missionary invites a response, which reaffirms the aforementioned assertion that the penultimate goal of proclamation is conversion. This is what is “aimed at” by the missionary, and so the missionary gives space for their interlocutor to respond.

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I have already given account of conversion, a response in the affirmative to the act of proclamation, above. It is important to highlight here however those responses to proclamation that do not end in conversion, and relatedly, to stress how the acceptance of these responses by the missionary affirms and validates the personal agency of their interlocutor.

If, as Newman argues, conversion to Christianity is an assent based upon a cumulation of probabilities that is not syllogistic, and if such acts of assent are unique personal events, then it follows that acts of proclamation should not be able to guarantee a response in the affirmative. While the missionary may aim at conversion, the result might be simply an establishment of a probability in the mind of their interlocuter, a probability that may or may not lead to some act of assent in the near or distant future.

The act of proclamation thus invites a response, and while the missionary may hope that this response brings about an adherence to the Christian faith, they must be open to the possibility that it will not. An antecedent probability might be established, one in a host of others that may or may not eventually bring assent. To affirm the possibility of the rejection of their message is to affirm the personal agency of their audience.

Rather than simply reiterating what has been said above concerning conversion, it is appropriate here to emphasize the dynamics of human agency with the context of response. By lending such space to their audience for a response, the missionary allows for what Charles Taylor calls “strong evaluation” to take place.73 According to Taylor, there are certain fundamental evaluations that human beings make that contribute to the core of one’s own identity. Identity is not simply a list of properties or descriptions, such as someone’s family background or capacities, but rather those properties or descriptions that the individual chooses

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73 Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, 1, 28.
to value as part of their identity.\textsuperscript{74} The fact, say, that one is born in the United States does not predetermine one to be patriotic, however the one who passionately identifies as an American has chosen to make this fact a fundamental aspect of their identity.

Taylor makes this assertion in part to rebut both a determinism and a notion of radical choice. Radical choice theorists posit that fundamental decisions, including a decision to believe in a religion, can be purely made in the abstract. However, one cannot purely step out of one’s own background. There is no “disembodied ego” capable of complete removal from circumstance.\textsuperscript{75} On the other hand, background does not determine identity. We are not simply products of material circumstance. Being born in the United States does not mean that one has to identify as an American. Likewise for religious adherence, one can be born into a Catholic or Protestant household, yet choose the degree to which such facts become core parts of one’s identity. The sacrament of Confirmation is meant in part to create such space within individuals born into such households to make core evaluations concerning their religious identity.

As individuals are presented with the Gospel in the act of proclamation, they are thus given space to evaluate the claims and arguments being made. The missionary might have introduced new information to the respondent—of the reported details of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection—or they may have brought up arguments that challenge the respondent to re-evaluation their current commitments.

The respondent thus exerts their own agency in accepting, rejecting, or modifying the claims of the missionary. It has already been mentioned above how the multitude of responses to acts of proclamation evidence the variety of ways in which individuals receive and appropriate

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 34.  
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 35.
the Gospel proclamations, sometimes (in the case of “hybrid identities”) to the dismay of the missionary.

In leaving space for their interlocutor to evaluate and respond to their proclamation, the missionary allows for the possibility for their message to be rejected, or for the matter to be left unresolved. We see in the Book of Acts a range of responses, from a mixture of mild interest and indifference in Paul’s dialogues in Athens (Acts 17), to a harsh rejection in the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7), to a “hybridization” in Acts 14:14-18, with Paul and Barnabas equated with Zeus and Hermes. Such a range of responses testifies to the ways in which personal agency is exerted by the recipients of Gospel proclamation and to the apostle’s willingness to accept this rejection and refrain from more forceful methods of obtaining assent.  

While their interlocutor may respond by rejecting or dismissing their proclamation, there are as well times in which this proclamation results in that which fulfills the vision of the missionary which was birthed in prayer: the reception of the Gospel message and the confession of Jesus as Lord. Here, the labor of the missionary, as much as their proclamation is in and within the Holy Spirit, can be said to contribute to but not cause conversion. Claims to pure causality would render such proclamations as tautologies, and the methods of such conversion discoverable and applied through mechanistic means. However, if proclamation simply

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76 While the apostles accept this rejection, this does not mean that such an acceptance is met with enthusiasm. The missionary’s response to such rejection may be polite, or it may prompt a word of judgment. It should be noted the peculiar action of “shaking the dust of one’s feet,” an action commanded by Jesus and fulfilled by Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:51. Carl Holladay describes this action as “a gesture of mocking contempt, as ‘testimony against one’s detractors (282).’” Jesus’ instructions are to perform this act in the face of rejection, with the assurance that those towns that refuse the disciples face a judgment worse than Sodom (Luke 10:11-12). This gesture is a communicative act of deferred judgment. Jesus comforts the disciples with the exhortation not to take their rejection personally by insisting on a future judgment whose time and place is determined by God. See Carl R. Holladay, Acts: A Commentary (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 282. What makes this judgment different from forms of coercion is that it is unenforceable by the missionary; they cannot issue a fiat demanding acceptance. In this way they are able to both express disappointment, maintain disagreement, yet honor the “principle of free choice that may be properly called ‘assent.’” Ehninger, "Argument as Method: Its Nature, Its Limitations and Its Uses," 103.
establishes probabilities which may contribute to a personal and unique act of assent on the part of the listener, the missionary can delight in having had a part to play in such assent and acknowledge that their place in the story of the convert will be that of a side character. The missionary’s words become the words of John the Baptist: “He must increase, but I must decrease (John 3:30).”

But the work of the missionary does not end there, since the Christian act of assent is simultaneously an assent to a life lived in the body of Christ, the church. Here, Peter’s words are to “repent and be baptized,” and Jesus’ words to go and baptize are significant. As such the missionary gathers those who receive the invitation to follow Christ into the church. While the act of gathering can be considered a virtuous practice in its own right, the practice of proclamation is not complete with the response of the interlocutor: the missionary must finish their act by returning to prayer.

Return to Prayer

It is in prayer where the missionary is first prompted to go and speak, and it is prayer that the missionary must return when they have finished their speaking. In this return to prayer, the missionary continues their discourse with God, this time reflecting upon the proclamative encounter and assessing their actions before God.

\[\text{McFadyen, 114-15.}\]
Humility

Gregory the Great ends his Pastoral Rule with an exhortation for the preacher to turn back to God in humility after they have spoken. The speaker, who has performed their task admirably, suiting sermon to audience, will face a danger if such speech is successful: prideful conceit. The speaker is tempted to confuse the works done by God through them as works done solely by them: "when the mind disregards the supernal Ruler, it seeks praise on its own merits and begins to confer on itself every good that it has received for the purpose of being a herald for the real Giver. Moreover, it desires to spread abroad a good opinion of itself and it desires to be admired for all of its qualities." 78

For the missionary, success brings with it the temptation to take credit for such success at the expense of God. This is particularly dangerous for the practice of proclamation, since its penultimate goal is to persuade another to change their views. If this goal is mistaken as the ultimate goal, proclamation becomes about winning—the achievement of victory due to a mastery of eloquence. If the missionary cedes to this temptation, then the critiques of Foss and Griffin, that the goal of rhetoric is the “rush of power” for the victorious rhetor, 79 are indeed valid.

Throughout the practice of proclamation there is an emphasis on the ways in which the missionary conforms to God—in prayer before they speak, in speech that is directed both to the audience and to God, and finally in reflective prayer.

78 Gregory the Great, 210. John Chrysostom makes a similar point in stating that those charged with teaching the word must strive for both eloquence and a “contempt of praise.” One must strive to develop the skills of eloquence and remain faithful to the Word which they are charged to speak, yet at the same time they must guard against the temptation to become addicted to the applause of their audience. John Chrysostom, Six Books on the Priesthood, trans. Graham Neville (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 128.
79 Foss and Griffin, 3.
So in returning to the cloister of their mind after communicating the gospel, the missionary begins to seek humility in prayer: “Thus, it is necessary that when we are flattered by a wealth of virtues, we must turn the eye of our mind to our infirmity and allow it to humble itself.”80 The purpose of such prayer is to acknowledge one’s indebtedness to God for every good work. The acknowledgement of our own infirmity paves the way for a moral examination of the communicative action just performed (see below), before entering into rest.

The Ultimate Goal of Proclamation: Delight and the Glory of God

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you (1 Thess 5:16-19).” The missionary closes their proclamatory act with a moment of rest and delight. The Sabbath is a time not merely for the cessation of activity but for the active reflection on the goodness of God: God rests on the seventh day not because of exhaustion, but simply to delight in the goodness of his creation. Human sabbath mirrors this rest--it delights in God for what God has done in creating, sustaining, and redeeming life.

And so the missionary actively delights in what God has done through the act of proclaiming the Gospel. They delight in the opportunity to speak about the resurrection, they delight in convincing others of its validity to the best of their ability, they delight in the responses to the affirmative, and they even delight in their fidelity to the Gospel in the face of its rejection.

To participate in God’s mission is to participate in the fullness of God. Delighting in the act of proclamation sediments God’s goodness in the soul of the missionary, and because God’s goodness is an infinite and inexhaustible plenitude,81 it spurs the missionary on to further

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80 Gregory the Great, 211.
proclamatory actions. Gregory of Nyssa draws the connection between the limitlessness of virtue and the continual striving for its attainment: “In the case of virtue we have learned from the Apostle that its one limit of perfection is the fact that it has no limit. For that divine Apostle, great and lofty in understanding, ever running the course of virtue, never ceased straining toward those thing that are still to come.”

According to David Bentley Hart, Gregory believes that the practice of virtue, because it is the participation in the inexhaustible, fosters in the soul an even greater desire to experience God’s beauty:

> And such is the action of every soul that loves beauty: drawn on forever by a desire enkindled always anew by the beauty that lies beyond the beauty already possessed, receiving the visible as an image of God’s transcendent loveliness, but longing all the more to enjoy that beauty face-to-face, the soul experiences ceaseless delight precisely in that its desire can know no final satiety.

In delighting in participation in God’s mission of proclaiming the Gospel to all the ends of the earth, the missionary experiences God’s glory, a glory that, because it is inexhaustible, spurs in the missionary a desire to experience more of it through the continual proclamation of the Gospel. As Herbert McCabe says of a virtuous practice, the discovery of its internal goods leads to “an enlargement of the capacity for experience.” To discover the good of proclamation enlarges our world, creating in us a greater capacity to experience the fullness of life in Christ. The performance of the practice of proclamation thus draws one closer to God and creates a desire to want more of God’s glory in performing this action with greater skill and frequency. The performance itself, not the response, is what spurs this greater desire. In the early chapters of Acts, Luke often narrates the end of proclamative discourse with a statement

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82 Nyssa, 30.


84 According to Jean-Louis Chrétien, the act of witness itself is inexhaustible, and so calls forth continual proclamation: “The uncircumscribable nature of Christ’s self-testimony calls unceasingly for witnesses, not one of whom exhausts it, though this does not make their testimony fragmentary.” Jean-Louis Chrétien, *Under the Gaze of the Bible* (2015), 102.

coupling some form of rejoicing and a continuation of preaching and teaching: after Peter and the apostles are beaten for witnessing Christ, they rejoice and continue to teach and preach Jesus as the Christ without ceasing (Acts 5:42). A similar account follows Peter and John’s release from council inquiry, in which the disciples were “all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness (Acts 4:31).” In both acceptance and rejection of the Christian message, there is rejoicing and a rejoinder to continue spreading the Gospel.

The Practice of Proclamation

This chapter has set out to describe the Christian act of proclamation as a virtuous practice that resonates with its performances as exhibited in the Book of Acts. Throughout I have referred at times to the ways in which this conception of proclamation relates to the three key dimensions stated at the beginning of the chapter. In conclusion I will briefly summarize how this description of proclamation as virtuous practice fulfills each of these three key dimensions.

Proclamation as Distinct, Complex, Coherent, and Performative

Proclamation is a virtuous practice that is distinct, complex, coherent, performative. Intentional persuasive speech has itself been considered a distinct practice for centuries—even the thinnest renderings of rhetoric describe it as speech that can be performed well or poorly. Christian proclamation is further distinguished first by its content—the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the invitation to follow him as Lord—and second by its audience, which is both a human audience and God.

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86 See, for instance, Cunningham’s description of the 19th century low point of rhetorical studies, in which eloquence was the only remaining aspect of the definition of rhetoric. Even in this thin definition of rhetoric as eloquence there is still an emphasis the ability to perform speech with varying levels of skill. Cunningham, 19-24.
Proclamation is also coherent and performative. It begins in prayer, proceeds through the engagement in time in unique communicative encounters with others, and ends in prayer. This means that each engagement in proclamation is a non-replicable event that requires the missionary to artfully adjust to new circumstances, the ability to do so well will in part be due to the skills and virtues which they have developed.

This construal of proclamation is also sufficiently complex. As mentioned in the preceding sections, proclamation entails the performance of several discreet yet interrelated activities—prayer, discernment, communication, that must be coordinated together in order to be effective. Proclamation is a skill which can be performed better or worse, and one in which mastery requires practice and the development of the virtues, such as fortitude, temperance, and prudence. In addition, proclamation is the type of complex practice that is easy to learn yet hard to master. Like soccer, which can be learned by three years olds but mastered only by a select few professionals, proclamation is something that can be performed by new Christians (the woman at the well) and mastered by skilled professionals (St. Paul). This is important, as it shows that proclamation is something that can and should be performed by any Christian regardless of education or length of adherence. The offer to participate in the ongoing mission of God is extended to all, and the gift of experiencing the unique joys of proclaiming the Gospel are offered to all. Yet, for some, proclamation may become part of one’s vocation. For the missionary, proclamation is part of their role in the life of the church, and they are devoted to its mastery. Such mastery affords the missionary the ability to be an authoritative teacher, apprenticing others who seek a similar vocation. In addition, this mastery becomes a source of inspiration for all Christians who, from time to time engage in proclamation. The star basketball player may become a teacher and coach, interacting personally with younger players as they
learn their craft. Yet she may also be an inspiration, her picture adorning the walls of aspiring youth.

This helps to explain the perceived oddity of the inauguration of the diaconate in the Book of Acts. Because of the complexity of the practice of proclamation, the apostles are unable to devote their time to its exercise and still sufficiently tend to the poor. So, deacons are appointed so that the apostles may devote their time to honing their craft, the preaching of the word. The complexity of these activities leads to the emergence of distinct vocations, one devoted to proclamation, the other to service to the poor. Nicholas Afnasiev sees the emergence of these vocations as affirming both the universal ministry of all Christians on account of the Spirit being poured out on the whole church, as well as the work of that same Spirit in calling individuals to perform specific functions within the life of the Church.87 Such specific vocations are necessarily complementary with the various other functions performed within a church in which all have been given the same Spirit. However, there is not a strict division of labor. The Holy Spirit is capable of calling individuals to perform specific tasks at specific times that may not be directly related to their vocation.88 This is evidenced by Luke’s immediate portrayal of the

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88 Ibid., 17. In his assessment of ministry in the New Testament and early Christianity, Nicholas Afnasiev makes several important points in this regard. First, there is the notion the deacons in Acts 6 might have functioned also as the leaders of the church in Jerusalem, in which case the division of labor is more explicitly over the expansion of the church through the mission of the apostles. In this case, the split would be over mission and pastoral ministry. Whether these deacons functioned more as presbyters is still debatable, but in either case there is still evidence of a kind of soft division of labor between mission and other activities in the life of the early church.

Afnasiev further examines the role of ministry as described in the New Testament, arguing that ordination to specific ministries is meant for enactment of specific tasks, rather than the creation of separate class of people within the church: “The difference between a person who has a particular ministry and a person who does not have such a ministry is not ontological but functional…There can be no non-charismatic members in the Church, just as there can be no members who do not minister in it.” Ibid., 16.

According to Afnasiev, there are various ministries performed within the church, and one could classify certain ministries as higher or lower (in the sense that a bishop is ‘above’ the congregation). Yet, “no one can act without or apart from the others” (17). Afnasiev’s description of higher and lower functions could perhaps indicate what will be asserted below: that some may be able to perform their functions better than others, and that there are ways in which those called to perform such functions may improve upon the performance of their Spirit-given tasks.
first deacon, Stephen, engaging in skillful and persuasive oratory. Stephen’s ordination to the deaconate does not preclude the exercise of proclamation, nor does Paul’s apostleship preclude his advocacy for the struggling church in Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{89}

Proclamation and the Book of Acts

As the references to the Book of Acts above have attempted to show, this conception of proclamation fits with the missionary conduct of the disciples in Luke’s second volume. An additional note should be stated in regards to how this conception addresses the strengths and weakness of the construals of mission as growth and dialogue. Proclamation is a practice in which one can improve, and thus there is certainly room for the missionary to attempt to develop skills that help them to better understand their audience and the available means of persuasion. The well-crafted orations of Peter and Stephen, and the clear examples of Paul adapting his message to suit various audiences clearly demonstrate the exercise of missionary skill. Furthermore, Luke’s portrayal of these acts of proclamation clearly show that the numerical success of these ventures is not necessarily dependent upon the excellence of their performance. The results of these acts are varied: mass conversions, modest numerical success, and complete and violent rejection. These examples show that there are limits in how far the disciples are willing to adapt their message, and that they preference martyrdom over coerciveness.

\textsuperscript{89} Here is at least a partial explanation for the selection of proclamation and gathering as preeminent missional practices. Their selection is not meant to deny the legitimacy of the church’s service to the poor, but rather to strengthen it, as it is meant to show that proclamation and service are best thought of as discrete complex practices which may be aided by the demarcation of separate vocations, yet such activities are still basic enough to be engaged in by all Christians.
Proclamation, Moral Reflection, and Ethics

The act of proclamation is a deliberate action—the missionary deliberates before speaking, and deliberates after speaking. In doing both they distinguish proclamation as an intelligible and serious action,\footnote{O'Donovan, \textit{Self, World, and Time}, 33.} one that can be performed well or poorly. Such reflection can be along the lines of practical reflection—did the initial discernment of the various means of persuasion for the audience actually fit with the reality of the situation at hand? Which arguments resonated with the audience? Which responses to questions were incoherent? In such reflection one replays key moments in their mind, imagining better performances: “I should have said this at that moment!” Such reflection may be the grounds through which the preparation for future acts of proclamation will begin. In this way, the missionary hones their skills, learning how to better perform their tasks in future encounters. As a chess player may analyze previous games to learn from their mistakes, as athletes watch game film in order to improve for ensuing contests, the missionary reflects on their act of proclamation, discerning what went wrong, what went right, and the ways in which they may improve.

It is in the context of such practical reflection that limited room may be made for the various skills and techniques of the mission as growth model. The missionary may utilize various fields of research in order to better discover the available means of persuasion that will make their proclamation more resonate in future engagements. For instance, missiological research may aid in understanding some cultural particularities, or testimonies of converts may help the missionary discover which aspects of the Christian message resonated with specific people in specific places. However, such knowledge is chastened by several factors. First, because the process of assent to the Christian faith is not syllogistic, such research should not be seen as

\footnote{O'Donovan, \textit{Self, World, and Time}, 33.}
providing any sort of guarantee of future success. If the presentation of the gospel takes place within unique places, and the process of assent, as Newman contends, is deeply personal and multiform, then such research must be seen only as potential aids. In this way it is similar to athletic training: practice may help with future athletic performances, but it does not guarantee athletic success. Second, such research, when placed within the context of an overall performance of the practice of proclamation which includes prayer, must hold up under moral scrutiny. To discover the available means of persuasion may also include a discovery of which means of persuasion might be inappropriate. Evidence of success in the mission field may be evidence of the discovery of forms of mission practices that the missionary deems inappropriate, compromising either the Christian message of the agency of the other.

This assertion regarding the scrutinizing of proclamative practices suggests that this process of reflection must be both practical and moral. In moral reflection, the missionary assesses whether they were faithful to the message they are proclaiming, and whether such actions bestowed upon the audience the opportunity to clearly understand this message and freely respond in the affirmative or the negative. In this way it acknowledges the reality that proclamation is a moral action, capable of drawing us closer to, or farther away from, God. Darlene Weaver emphasizes Aquinas’ notion that all human action is moral action, as human action involves deliberation and choice. Thus morality cannot be separated from human action: We act for particular ends, which is why “what” we do always involves a “why” and “what for.”91 To say that human actions are moral actions is to deny that morality can be treated as a separable component of human life. There is a temptation to think of proclamation as an intrinsically good act, approved of by God simply because it discloses to the world the reality of

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the resurrection. Here the morality of the act of proclamation is assumed by its performance, neglecting serious reflection upon the way it was conducted. In moral reflection, we examine not only the ends sought in proclamation, but the means taken towards that end. Here, the missionary questions the ways in which they may have been overbearing, or perhaps misconstrued Christianity in the interest of assent.

Finally, reflection affords the missionary an opportunity to reassess their own beliefs, discovering the ways in which this encounter with another may refine their own faith. In the process of presenting the justifications for the Christian faith, questions from their interlocutor may cause a reevaluation of one’s own beliefs: the devout Muslim in the midst of Ramadan may challenge the missionary’s lack of emphasis on fasting, the Marxist may unearth in the missionary’s beliefs unhealthy collusions between their form of Christianity and the market, the care their friend exhibits for their parents may convict the missionary who rarely visits the nursing home. In these ways, the missionary acknowledges the reality that persuasion is a two-way street, and that their dialogue was not simply a pretext for monologue.

**Conclusion—The Ultimate Goal of Proclamation**

MacIntyre’s notion of a virtuous practice involves activities that have unique goods that are internal to their performance. There are unique goods that one obtains through the virtuous practice of proclamation. This is the ultimate goal of those who engage in this practice—the partaking in God’s glory. This end should not be underemphasized. There is unique joy in speaking about Christ and his resurrection, a joy that can fill the soul regardless of its reception. The great sin of the missionary movement in the colonial era was its collusion with empire, a collusion evidenced in forced baptisms that stripped proclamation of its persuasive and invitatory tones. The great sin of the missionary movement today is the rendering of proclamation banal.
On the one side are those that submit proclamation to the powers of market efficiency, with the missionary striving for a managerial effectiveness that rivals corporate CEOs. Here the inspiration is from books such as *Good to Great*, that narrate the market success of companies such as Kimberly-Clark and Gillette. If missionaries seek to draw inspiration from companies that produce shaving cream and bathroom tissue with masterful efficiency, they should not be surprised to find that their endeavors are as equally mundane.

On the other side are those who view proclamation as an uncomfortable action that is either avoided or performed begrudgingly. But there are limits to the degree in which obligations will drive us to action. Our loves are greater drivers of our will, and those who proclaim as an outflow of their love of God and others will find a greater abundance of joy in disclosing the gospel as *good* news, and a greater spur towards future missionary actions.
Conclusion: Entering into the Craft of Mission: Tragedy, Tradition, and Telos

The preceding two chapters developed my conception of mission as practices which promote virtue and further the practitioner towards their final end of partaking in the glory of God. The goals of this conception of mission were to address perpetual problems of mission studies in a way that both accorded with scripture and enabled moral reflection. This view of mission was presented from the top down, beginning with an understanding of the relationship between God and creation, then describing the telos of humankind as the beatific vision, and ending with a description of the various actions involved in the virtuous practice of proclamation. This concluding chapter returns to and builds on these preceding chapters in order to consider how an individual might begin the process of learning the craft of mission, and how this calling fits within the context of a life well-lived. It is meant to give a bottom up perspective on this model of mission, describing the practical steps to enter into mission and the conflicts and challenges that ensue when one enters into this tradition. In so doing it will summarize my conception of mission in way that both recapitulates and enriches its core themes.

The chapter begins by showing how an individual begins their journey towards becoming a skilled missionary craftsmen by entering into the tradition of mission. Second, I will show how one might experience growth in virtue, as well as how they might draw closer to God through the engagement in these missional practices. Such activities necessarily bring about questions regarding ultimate ends and what constitutes a life well-lived, which will be the focus of the third section. However, since mission is but one of many practices that one might partake in, and because there are inevitable conflicts between competing practices in a single life, the fourth section will be devoted to examining the problem of tragedy. The chapter and dissertation will end with a brief examination of three key biblical passages that sum up the work as a whole.
Becoming a Master Missionary—Entering into the Tradition of Mission

The past two chapters have articulated a conception of mission as a virtuous practice and explained in detail the various activities involved in the particular practice of proclamation. The assessment of these various parts highlighted the complexities of proclamation, showing how their exercise requires continual performance and reflection upon past performances. It is meant to show that one can *advance* in their skills and abilities; one can improve upon these practices as one might improve upon other crafts\(^1\) such as chess, woodworking, or soccer.

In examining the virtuous practice of proclamation, I have sought to evaluate each of the various activities involved in this practice as well as provide the justifications for each of these activities. It has concerned what activities are involved, and why they are included within this particular virtuous practice. While this assessment has sought to answer the what and the why, I have intentionally refrained from examining in too much depth the how. The reasons for this are plural: first, it simply lies outside the parameters of this study. To delve deep into the mechanics of public speaking, of prayer and persuasion, would be to greatly expand this dissertation to an unwieldy breadth in the process making it difficult for its core arguments to remain lucid. Second, the lack of ‘how-to’ guidance is also due to the highly contextual nature of mission, which will always be somewhat resistant to a universalizing of ‘best-practices.’ I have mentioned above the profusion of how-to books on mission, evangelism, and church planting. Such books often promise results based on the narrative of success promulgated by their authors, yet such success is rarely replicable. Each individual and each community is unique, and so what should be sought after by the missionary should not first be a book on how to win friends and influence

\(^1\) I use the word craft as synonymous with the term practice, though it is used to evoke more a sense of a kind of practice which has its own historical tradition. MacIntyre uses the terms interchangeably, preferring craft in *Three Rival Versions* and practice in *After Virtue*. 

235
people (with the Gospel), but rather the seeking out of Christ within the particular tradition of mission. This leads to a final and most important assertion, that the way one advances in the craft of mission is not primarily through the obtainment of practical tips and tricks, but by entering into the tradition of mission as an apprentice to a master missionary.

In this regard, the practical advice is quite simple—if someone wants to master the practices of a missionary, they should find one whom has mastered these practices and follow them as their student and apprentice. They should seek to find someone who has mastered the art of proclaiming the Gospel and gathering new Christians into worshiping congregations. They should walk alongside them, imitating their actions, learning from their collected wisdom, accepting their praise and admonishment as they take their first steps in performing the acts of proclamation and gathering.

Such an assertion begs the question: how does one identify a master? By acknowledging their need to be taught, the novice acknowledges in humility their lack of knowledge. But, if they are lacking such knowledge, how could they identify one who has perfected such practices? This question is not new—MacIntyre traces its roots all the way back to Plato’s *Meno*. The answer is twofold: first is the simple assertion that human beings have within them potentialities given to them by their Creator, and such potentialities, if not inordinately damaged by sin, give people the ability to see such potential actualized in other human beings. God has created human beings dynamic, capable of growing and seeing the ways in which they have the potential to grow. Such ability is somewhat intuitive—we can watch a film of a Billy Graham crusade and recognize a gifted proclaimer of the Gospel, even if we can’t necessarily identify why he is a gifted speaker or how he developed into a gifted speaker. The specific work of mission extends this assertion of

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innate capacities, in that there is a belief that the reception of the Holy Spirit fosters in the
convert the innate desire to share their faith with others.

Second, the engagement in such virtuous practices requires a commitment at the outset
that is in many regards a leap of faith. The student does not know for certain that they are in the
company of a master, yet at some point they must commit to following, trusting and hoping that
they are correct. Where the student winds up will in part be determined by this initial
commitment: “A prior commitment is required and the conclusions which emerge as enquiry
progresses will of course have been partially and crucially predetermined by the nature of this
initial commitment.” Since human beings are necessarily dependent upon others, and human life
is constrained by time and place, there can be no purely disengaged vantage point from which
such commitments can be made. Simply put, we don’t have any choice but to start from where
we are. If one wants to master the craft of mission, they must trust that God has created them
with the capacity to advance in such practices, and that their entering into such practices will
yield a greater knowledge of mission that is certain without being complete.

By consenting to tutelage, the student enters into the specific tradition of missions and
mission work. Like other crafts, it is imbedded in a tradition that extends back into a history
which has shaped both the definition of the craft and the standards by which that craft has been
superbly performed. The student thus enters into this tradition and takes their place within this
tradition: “To share in the rationality of a craft requires sharing in the contingencies of its
history, understanding its story as one’s own, and finding a place for oneself as a character in the
enacted dramatic narrative which is that story so far.” The missionary inherits their tradition,
which includes faithful performances from women and men through various centuries and

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3 Ibid., 60.
4 Ibid., 65.
geographies, accepting their contributions to the tradition as well as acknowledging the ways in which they provide helpful examples of such faithful performances in various contexts.

Consequently, an emphasis on the history of missions should be a large part of the education of the missionary novice. The historical sections of Bosch’s *Transforming Mission* and Bevans and Schroeder’s *Constants in Context*, the work of Adrian Hastings, Andrew Walls, Lamin Sanneh, and Scott Sundquist are all vital for understanding the history of specific missions as well as the ways in which various individuals helped to advance this tradition.

The missionary learns from their master through witnessing their actions, receiving their instructions, and, critically, reflecting on their own experiences while engaging in missional practices. In doing so they develop virtues. Chapter four outlined three of the virtues which the missionary might develop. Of particular importance for the advance of mission within a particular tradition is the virtue of prudence, the “application of right reason to act.” The ever-changing temporal and cultural situations through which mission is performed quickly render how-to books obsolete. Prudence is required not only to perform mission well, but also to discern how to act in accordance with one’s ultimate goal. It is developed not only through engaging in activity, but also in reflecting on previous actions. Alasdair MacIntyre situates the exercise of prudence within the context of perfecting a craft:

To become adept at a craft…one has to learn how to apply two kinds of distinction, that between what as activity or product merely seems to me good and what really is good, a distinction always applied retrospectively as part of learning from one’s earlier mistakes and surpassing one’s earlier limitations, and that between what is good and best for me to do here and now given the limitations of my present state of education into the craft and what is good and best as such, unqualifiedly.

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5 II-I.47.4
This dissertation has attempted to show at various points the importance of moral reflection for the task of mission. The purpose of such reflection is to offer up one’s actions to God, assessing their merits and the faithfulness with which they were performed: “The question bears on us whether our acts have constituted ‘good works.’ Are they accomplished? Can we be satisfied in them? May we offer them to God as a service that will acknowledge his working within us?” One advances in the craft of mission through this continual reflection, learning to discern better from poorer practice, humble from selfish practice, faithful from unfaithful practice.

**Growth and Sanctification**

As one engages in practices they learn what is good and best for the exercise of that activity at a particular moment, and eventually begin to learn what is good and best unqualifiedly. Virtuous practices have a transcendent quality to them—they both help the practitioner better discern how to act so as to obtain their ultimate end while developing virtues which help them grow toward this end. In short, one who engages in these practices better understands their final goal and develops character that pushes them towards this goal. So, for instance, one can learn fortitude through practicing a particular sport, thus becoming a person who has the virtue of fortitude, and can exercise this virtue in other activities, including schoolwork.

This is true as well for the virtuous practices of mission. While engaging in proclamation and gathering, the missionary can develop cardinal virtues such as temperance, fortitude and prudence (see chapter four). These virtues, sedimented into the character of the missionary, can then be further exercised in other activities. The missionary who learns to forgo frivolous leisure

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activities to pray for their friends develops temperance, and is thus better equipped to restrain
similar impulses when the practice of parenting demands it. At one level, to conceive of mission
in this way is to acknowledge that they afford the opportunity for individuals to grow, as
Aquinas puts it, towards their natural ends.

There is however a deeper way of conceiving of mission that goes above and beyond
MacIntyre’s notion of a virtuous practice. This is one of the reasons why my conception of
mission and virtue placed MacIntyre’s concept of practice within a broader Thomistic moral
theology, since the exercise of the practice of mission does not simply develop cardinal virtues
towards a natural end of humankind, but is a distinctly Christian activity that is infused with the
Holy Spirit and thus affords the missionary the opportunity to grow in faith, hope, and love as
they move towards their supernatural end. Chapter four highlighted, for instance, how the act of
proclamation develops the virtue of faith—the missionary proclaims what they believe, and this
external act affirms and strengthens their inward confession of faith.

We can speak of this kind of development in the life of the individual who engages in
mission as sanctification. Chapter four had mentioned that, for Aquinas, God works in human
actions as the source both of their existence and their free decisions. One way that Aquinas
speaks of God’s actions in the work of human actions is that of sanctifying grace.8 Not only does
God’s grace infuse habits so that the cardinal virtues might be perfected, it is also a “constant
presence on the wayfarer’s journey.”9 Human beings have the capacity to act so as to cooperate
with this grace, with God working as the source both of human existence and free-will, and
providing divine assistance in ways that are not competitive with human action. Shawn Colberg
states the implications for Aquinas’ conception of sanctifying grace: “If all salutary human acts

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8 Aquinas defines sanctifying grace as “that through it a man is himself joined to God.” I-II.111.1.
can be associated with God’s presence and movement, the wayfarer’s journey becomes itself an intimate movement into greater union with God.”

To situate mission within Aquinas’ moral theology is to conceive of it as just these sorts of salutary human acts that can draw the missionary into greater union with God. As one enters into the craft of mission, learning from their teachers and the great tradition of missionaries before them, they proclaim the Gospel and gather individuals in worshiping communities. But these actions are performed not just in the interest of becoming expert missionaries, but also as labors through which God might work. As such, they offer such activities up to God and ask retrospectively if these actions were performed so as to be holy and pleasing to God. It is a supplication, offered by the missionary in the hope that God might work through and in them, accomplishing what he will through their actions and sanctifying themselves in the process. “God’s work of sanctification is to reveal his working in the members and communities of the church, through experiences of living and acting in the faith of Christ.”

The purpose of mission when conceived as the partaking in virtuous practices is thus much deeper and richer than what is offered by other models of mission. Mission work is not simply the occasion for God to show up, it is not simply the race to convert as many souls as possible, and it is not simply an opportunity to learn more about ourselves and others. Though it may include all of these facets, it is principally performed as works meant to honor God and move individuals closer to their ultimate end of partaking in his glory.

As one enters into the craft of mission, their progress can be charted to various degrees of tangibility. First, they learn the basics of proclamation and gathering. They learn how to pray for their friends and how to speak so as to testify persuasively to Christ’s death and resurrection.

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10 Ibid.
11 O'Donovan, *Entering into Rest*, 79.
Progress in these areas is relatively easy to see—prayer times can become more frequent and focused, conversations can become more fluid, and the missionary finds themselves less often at a loss for words when sharing the Christian message. While engaging in these practices, the missionary also develops virtues that are perhaps noticed only after longer periods of time. Passions for frivolous pursuits might wane over time. Months or years later the individual may realize that such desires are non-existent, and that their temperate disposition may help them in other practices as well. The missionary may discover over time that their decision-making abilities have improved, and that they are able to effectively receive, deliberate, and act on information with greater alacrity in other areas.

Sanctification, however, can be charted with even less clarity. It is not something that can be mapped out ahead of time—There can be no exercise books for sanctification, as there are for the violin. This is the case because sanctification is a work of the Holy Spirit and cannot be domesticated and controlled by human beings. Egregious maladies have occurred when missionaries are convinced, a priori, that their actions are enacting God’s will. Such claims deny the present reality of sin in the world, which clouds our judgments and obscures the oft-hidden selfish motives behind even the most ardently Christian activities. Moral reflection as it relates to the practices of mission has been stressed throughout the previous chapters, and its necessity in regards to sanctification is equally vital. Oliver O’Donovan sees the particular act of thanksgiving, done in reflecting on our actions, as key to recognizing the ways in which God has worked in and through us: “a thanksgiving that concerns itself with a work of God in our lives and communities is bound to be retrospective, for there is no other angle from which we may

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speak concretely about God’s working within our own work.”  

Such acts of thanksgiving are not meant to paper over the frail inconsistencies in our labors nor our mixed motives. While the act of moral reflection may involve confessing our sins and acknowledging our weakness, it can also acknowledge that God has worked despite our weaknesses: “The whole burden of thanksgiving is that sin, which blasphemes God and resists his working, has not been given the last word in the shaping of our lives. God has drawn our inconsistency under the control of his own consistency.”

My conception of mission embeds prayerful reflection as an integral component of the practice of proclamation. The purpose of including this in the definition of proclamation is to highlight not only the ability for the missionary to consider the ways in which they might improve on their practice, or how they might further develop prudence so as to excel, but also, and most importantly, so that the missionary might give thanks to God. We can trace here three aspects of this act of reflection. First, the missionary repents of the ways in which they have fallen short in their task of mission. Perhaps they exhibited cowardice, shying away from difficult aspects of the Christian message for fear of personal rejection. Or perhaps, as was described in chapter five by Gregory the Great, they have taken undue personal pride in winning over their audience, delighting in a rush of power. Second, the missionary reflects on the ways in which they could improve upon their practice. For instance, questions arise that may prompt the missionary for further study and arguments may need refining. Lastly, they give thanks to God, in so doing acknowledging the possibility that, despite moments of sin, frailty, and inexperience, God might work in and through them in the acts of mission.

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13 O'Donovan, *Entering into Rest*, 79.
14 Ibid., 85.
This process of reflection and thanksgiving are unique acts, which again testifies to the fact that sanctification can never be turned into a replicable program. “Sanctification is a happening in which we are presently caught up, not yet complete and entire. The experience that bears witness to it unfolds from day to day, following life’s unanticipated directions.”\textsuperscript{15} This does not mean however that evidence of sanctification is completely elusive, but rather that one must describe it narratively.\textsuperscript{16} We speak not of people on the path of sanctification, but instead point to the lives of people who are sanctified, or saintly. We speak of sanctifying acts \textit{a posteriori}, and we speak of sanctified lives \textit{a posteriori}.

Because of the unique ways in which God works in individuals, and because such sanctification can only be seen retrospectively, what is needed if one is to enter into the tradition of mission is not a prepackaged plan of holiness, but examples of saintly missionaries. One of the focuses on the study of the tradition of mission thus lies in the lives of the saints, as models not of best practices, but as a way of training the novice to develop an eye for discerning good from bad performances, as well as inspiring them to continue to hone their craft. An appropriation of Augustine’s hagiology in regards to virtue is helpful for illuminating this point. For Augustine, Christ is both the model and pathway to virtue, but he is also uniquely human and divine, sinless, and thus beyond perfect imitation. Human beings need examples whose acquisition of virtue, though partial, is at least attainable. The saints provide this example, but, unlike the hero worship of pagan philosophy, these saints are models precisely because of their humility and repentance before Christ.\textsuperscript{17} They are models because they are sanctified persons.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 73.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
Hence my conception of mission and virtue calls for a recovery of a now faded literary genre, that of the missionary biography. Missionary biographies peaked in the English speaking world in the 19th century, with stories of famous missionaries such as Charles Simeon, Henry Martyn, and William Carey.\(^\text{18}\) The biographies of Henry Martyn in particular were highly influential, being used as influence for literary characters in the works of numerous Victorian era authors such as George Eliot and Charlotte Bronte. These biographies depicted the lives of missionaries as ones of selfless renunciation in pursuit of a higher calling to a life of overseas mission. These works gave a selective history that was meant to inspire those interested in the missionary calling, but were perhaps fearful of the sacrifices in which it entails. John Sargent states such a purpose in the introduction of his biography *The Memoir of Rev. Henry Martyn*:\(^\text{19}\)

> In making a selection from a mass of such valuable matter, it has been my anxious wish and sincere prayer that it might prove subservient to the interests of true religion. One principal object with me has been, to render it beneficial to those disinterested ministers of the Gospel, who, “with the Bible in their hand, and their Savior in their hearts,” devote themselves to the great cause for which Mr. Martyn lived and died; and truly, if the example here delineated should excite any of those servants of Christ in similar exertion, or if it should animate and encourage them amidst the multiplied difficulties of their arduous course, my labor will receive an eminent and abundant recompense.\(^\text{19}\)

Such biographies were meant to model the lives of saintly persons in the craft of mission and inspire other wayfarers. What is needed today are similar types of stories written within contemporary contexts. This should include the lives of masters of mission today. In this case, the definitive biography of Festo Kivengere, the so-called Billy Graham of Africa, might be the most important missiological text yet to be written.\(^\text{20}\) But it should also include lives of saintly

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\(^{20}\) Despite this moniker, only three biographies have been written on Kivengere, one of which is an authorized biography, and one of which is a children’s book. His life and work has remained relatively untouched by the field of missiology.
women and men who have engaged in mission with less notoriety. The purpose of such works, like the lives of the saints throughout Christian history, are meant to show how one can glorify Christ in a variety of different and unique situations.

The parallel to the lives of the saints is important, since the purpose of such texts are not to give accounts of *successful* missionaries, but *saintly* missionaries. The lives of missionary martyrs, like Elisabeth Eliot’s account of Jim Eliot in *Shadow of the Almighty*, give retrospectives on human obedience and God’s sanctification which call not for replication, but rather inspire new and creative performances of mission in new and differing circumstances.

**Mission and the Life Well-Lived**

As one engages in mission, questions arise that go above and beyond the acts of mission themselves, for to reflect on these actions before God is to situate them within the context of one’s overall life. For Alasdair MacIntyre, the engagement in practices become the starting point for an understanding of what it means to live a good life. We grow through engaging in the various practices afforded to us by our particular social and historical location, with the hope that the development of virtues helps both to clarify our conception of the *telos* of life and moves us towards that *telos*:

The virtues therefore are to be understood as those dispositions which not only sustain practices and enable us to achieve the goods internal to practices, but which will also sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good…and which will furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good.21

A Christian conception of the virtues in relationship to a conception of the good must qualify and amend MacIntyre’s description. Stanley Hauerwas and Robert Pinches believe that MacIntyre’s conception of the virtues is still too wedded to pagan conceptions of virtue, and that

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he defends first virtue, then Christianity. The Christian conception of the justification of the sinner through the grace poured out on the cross would seem to counter any assertion that the conception of the good can be discerned purely through human endeavor. For Hauerwas and Pinches, Christianity’s notion of the good is not teleological, but eschatological. The end of the human beings lies in the resurrection, which fosters in the Christian principally the virtue of hope.

I concur with this assessment, as it is in line with the discussion concerning Aquinas’ accounts of agency and the beatific vision as the goal of human beings as addressed in previous chapters. The good of human beings lies in the vision of God, and human beings can only become aware of this as their final end through the grace of God. It is through God’s grace that we receive an awareness of our end and it is through the gift of God’s revelation in Holy Scripture that we can understand the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love. As Hauerwas and Pinches state, a Christian understanding of sin and redemption, and the concomitant virtue of forgiveness, are universal claims about the nature of humanity that are nevertheless made known to the Christian through the particular event of Christ’s death and resurrection.

A Christian conception of virtue and the telos of humanity as eschatological thus qualifies MacIntyre’s statement concerning the unity of the virtues and their relationship to a conception of the good. For Christians, the final end is given, not acquired. The distinctive virtues of the Christian community are not socially constituted, but rather given in Scripture and

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22 Hauerwas and Pinches, 68. It should be noted here again that MacIntyre later rejects a notion of telos that is purely socially determined, insisting instead that the telos of human beings is grounded in their specific nature. Hauerwas and Pinches point is still relevant, however, since their claim is that, for Christians, the revelation of Christ actually reveals to Christians essential aspects of their nature. “There is an essential feature of our nature—a natural fact—that Christians claim is disclosed in a particular history. Ibid., 120.
23 Ibid., 114.
24 Ibid., 120.
socially mediated by the Christian community throughout time. With this in mind, the engagement in virtuous practices does aid one in the development of virtue, and the virtues developed transcend that of the particular practice. Knowledge of the end of humankind may be given through the grace of God, but it is through growth in virtue that this end becomes clarified.

The previous chapter’s discussion of Gregory of Nyssa is vital for understanding how growth in virtue need not conflict with a notion of the good life as given by God. Gregory’s examination of Moses’ ascent on Mount Sinai is a model for growth in virtue. The goal of human life is represented as the cloud on top of Sinai. The cloud represents both the givenness of God—God is present in a particular location—while simultaneously representing the invisible exhaustiveness of God: “The one who is going to associate intimately with God must go beyond all that is visible and (lifting up his own mind, as to a mountaintop, to the invisible and incomprehensible) believe that the divine is there where the understanding does not reach.”

The object of our pursuit of virtue is given as a gift, yet this object transcends our understanding: “When…Moses grew in knowledge, he declared that he had seen God in the darkness, that is, that he had then come to know that what is divine is beyond all knowledge and comprehension.”

Growth in virtue is thus a kind of purification which enables the soul to ascend the mountain and draw near to God as their telos. In so doing, they grow in their love and knowledge of God, which in so doing they discover more clearly the ineffable and exhaustive beauty of God.

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25 As mentioned earlier, Kevin Vanhoozer’s The Drama of Doctrine is written in part to contradict Lindbeck’s conception of doctrine as the product of the church by emphasizing the role of God as one who acts, and continues to act through, Holy Scripture. Doctrine is not embedded in the social practices of the church, but is rather the dramatic and faithful performance of scripture. My assertion here is that a Christian conception of virtue is akin to Vanhoozer’s conception of doctrine. While mediated through the social practices of the church, it ultimately derives from the revelation of God in Christ and God’s divine communication in scripture. See Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology, 83-112.

26 Nyssa, 43.

27 Ibid., 95.
which transcends all understanding. My assertion here is simply that the development of virtuous practices for the Christian, in particular here the missional practices of proclamation and gathering, help to enable this kind of growth in virtue. It provides both a path to growth in virtue, but also clarifies the ends to which the wayfarer strives.

Chapter three highlighted the ways in which the engagement in mission changed the beliefs of missionaries. The persuasive act of proclamation led to a revision of the message which they proclaimed, often causing missionaries to return to their home country with a fresh set of criticisms and challenges to the so-called “mother church.” Another way to describe this phenomenon is that of a clarification of the ends to which mission transcendently points. Vincent Donovan’s aptly titled memoir *Christianity Rediscovered* is a fascinating example of how the proclamation of the Gospel and the gathering of new churches, when performed in humility and obedience to God, hold the potential to become moments in which one’s ultimate end is clarified. A Spiritan priest who spent several years working with the Masai tribe of Tanzania, Donovan became highly critical of much of Western Christianity and their missionary ventures for all too often equating the spread of Christianity with the spread of Western civilization: “we have to admit that Western Christianity has monopolized Christ, and has shackled Christ in the bondage of a single culture to such an extent that the Western Christ has become a stumbling block for the Holy Spirit.”

For Donovan, the missionary must never presume to have the final word on the Christian faith, and must be ready to discover Christianity anew through the responses of those to whom one proclaims Christianity. This willingness to have one’s faith continuing clarified and chastened is endless and unceasing, part of the work of mission itself:

> Never accept and be content with unanalyzed assumptions, assumptions about the work, about the people, about the church or Christianity…The day we are completely satisfied with what we have been doing; the day we have found the

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perfect, unchangeable system of work, the perfect answer, never in need of being
corrected again, on that day we will know that we are wrong, that we have made
the greatest mistake of all.29

To engage in mission in this way is to ascend the mountain of the Lord, growing closer to God as
we climb, purifying our hearts through faithful performances, and clarifying our vision of the
summit to which we strive.

**Tragedy**

As one pursues the craft of mission, one can grow in their love and knowledge of God
and see with greater clarity the end to which they are pursuing. But the practice of mission is but
one of a host of practices in which one partakes. The life lived well, the life aimed toward one’s
telos, is not simply one of solitary vocation. The aforementioned examination of sanctification
and saintliness points to this—we speak narratively, of entire lives lived well in pursuit of God.
Once one situates mission as one of many virtuous practices which one can pursue in the quest to
live a life that is holy and pleasing to God, then the question arises as to how the practice of
mission relates to these other practices.

The relationship between practices is challenged and frustrated by human limitations. We
are historical and socially contingent people, inheriting a whole host of roles and responsibilities
that are at best only partly our making: “We enter upon a stage which we did not design and we
find ourselves part of an action that was not our making.”30 We cannot speak of a missionary in
complete isolation. One can be simultaneously a citizen, a son or daughter, a parent, a pastor, and
a missionary, with each of these roles having their own range of demands and responsibilities.

30 *MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 213.
Because the development of virtues transcends one particular activity, what we do in one practice effects what we do in others.

Because human beings are finite, limited in time and space, they cannot gain expertise in every practice, and because the roles and responsibilities of each individual are not entirely their own making, conflicts between goods can and do arise. The responsibilities of a parent might entail from time to time a scaling back of job-related goals, for example. In making such a determination, one may not be choosing between good and evil, but rather making a determination of the proper ordering of goods. In so doing, they accept that a life well-lived involves tragedy. There are decisions that must be made in life that are not decisions between right and wrong, but one’s in which “both of the alternative courses of action which confront the individual have to be recognized as leading to some authentic and substantial good. By choosing one I do nothing to diminish or derogate from the claim upon me of the other; and therefore, whatever I do, I shall have left undone what I ought to have done.”

For the missionary, this means that there are times in which they might have to settle for poorer performances of proclamation and gathering in the interest of other goods. Family responsibilities are a paradigmatic case in point. Time spent in the hospital tending to an ill spouse is time not spent in the mission field. Such a decision may yield growth in virtue as a result of performing well the responsibilities of a spouse, but it may not yield a growth in one’s mission.

The tragic result of competing vocations that comprise a single life well-lived is perhaps nowhere better displayed than in the character of St. John Rivers in Charlotte Bronte’s Jane Eyre. Rivers is portrayed as a man wholly devoted to God, unwavering in his belief of a near-

\[31\text{Ibid., 224.}\]
future vocation in Christian mission, and a paradigm of Victorian virtue. St. John has carefully cultivated the specific virtue of temperance, for instance, in his rejection of the advances of Rosemund Miller, and fortitude in the maintenance of a vigorous visitation schedule for the region’s destitute. Such virtues prepare him for his calling to take upon himself the practice of Christian mission, and he pursues matrimony with Jane Eyre in the interest of finding a spouse suitable to such a calling. However, St. John refuses to acknowledge that the calling to marriage is as much a vocation as the calling to Christian mission. He sees only a suitable missionary spouse; Jane is but a means to the end of successful mission. His inability to see sincere love and affection as vital to the marital vocation, and his unwillingness to entertain one iota of sacrifice to his missionary calling for the sake of a spouse, ultimately leads Jane to reject his proposal. This rejection is depicted by Bronte as being appropriate for both Jane and St. John—Jane receives an affectionate husband in Mr. Rochester, and St. John indefatigably proclaims the Gospel in India. For Bronte, those unwilling to accept the ways in which the various practices and vocations may hinder each other in a single life should instead seek to be more singularly devoted in their vocation. Taking a spouse may help the missionary, but it may also create situations that require the sacrifice of missional goals. Those unwilling to accept this possibility should remain single.

There is a danger particularly amongst missionaries of denying the tragedy of such decisions. The belief is that in such cases there is a right or wrong decision, and God will reward those who make the right decision with overall material benefit. So the missionary who takes furlough to nurse their ill spouse is rewarded upon their return to the mission field with a greater numerical success for their correct decision. Such thinking unduly binds the workings of God

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32 Rivers is most likely a composite character patterned after the stories of famous missionaries of that time, through whom Bronte would have been acquainted through her Anglican minister father. See Gibson.
and obscures the relatively simple empirical point that mission is often weakened when missionaries are not present. The various lamentations by Paul in his epistles speak to this point. Paul writes often to address issues in the churches that he has gathered that have emerged in his absence. Paul cannot be two places at once, and acknowledges that one of the ramifications of this fact is that the churches he started may be lured by false teachers (see 2 Corinthians 12-13 for example). Should Paul have remained permanently in Corinth to quell that church’s frequent problems, or should he have spent more time, as he did, in Ephesus (1 Cor 16)? Such decisions are decisions between two goods, and that the gathering in Corinth may have been weakened by Paul’s absence speaks to a tragic aspect of his mission.

When the missionary is faced with such decisions, they pray, and make what they discern to be the best decision possible. In so doing, they trust that in so doing they will grow in virtue, grow in their love and knowledge of God, grow as a person created in God’s image, even if this means that some of one’s subordinate desires may wind up being unfulfilled in this earthly life.

However, tragedy is not the defining characteristic of the Christian life, nor the life of the missionary. If the telos of human life is defined by the attainment of earthly goods, then the inevitable destruction of our earthly bodies in death bears an indelible and tragic stamp on human existence in toto. As mentioned above, the ultimate end for Christians, the partaking in the vision of God, is eschatological, given as a promise sealed on the human heart by the Holy Spirit. While tragedy is a mark of all life, it no longer defines the Christian life. Hope in the resurrection of the body and the vision of Jesus in the heavenly temple affirms both the tragedy of earthly life (since this goal is not given in the present) and the assurance that such tragedies will be swallowed up in the end of time. Our earthly sufferings, as Paul puts it, “are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18).”
Conclusion: Three Summative Passages

I will end this dissertation with brief examinations of three passages from Scripture that together summarize the major tenants of my conception of mission as virtuous practice. Rather than extended exegesis of these passages, they are offered as simple illustrations of the key aspects of my conception of mission and what I hope are core takeaways for those who choose to enter into the craft of mission.

Psalm 96

Sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the whole earth.
Sing to the LORD and bless his Name;
proclaim the good news of his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the nations
and his wonders among all peoples.
For great is the LORD and greatly to be praised;
he is more to be feared than all gods.33

In the beginning of this Psalm, intertwined seamlessly with exhortations to sing and declarative statements regarding the greatness of God when compared to idols is the command the proclaim the good news of God’s salvation.

The virtuous practice of proclamation is an act whose goal is to give glory to God through the act itself. Following the lines of the psalm, it is an act of praise. When the missionary proclaims the good news of salvation, they are both persuasively speaking before an audience, while simultaneously praising and honoring God with their words. Far from being a command begrudgingly accepted by Christians, further still from a mechanistic staid program, the proclamation of the Gospel is portrayed with a hymnic quality befit for the psalter, as it punctuates the end of the psalmist’s melodic line. This dissertation has sought to demonstrate the

intrinsic and internal goodness of the missional act of proclamation, and I can see of no better way to accentuate this point than to see proclamation as an activity caught up in a heavenly symphony.

*Luke 10:16-20*

The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!” He said to them, “I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven (Luke 10:16-20).”

Returning to Jesus after their first missionary venture, the seventy report astounding news—that their message has had sway even over the demons. As Jesus notes, their power over demonic forces is due to him—the authority of Jesus is vested in his followers as they faithfully proclaim the good news in His name. One would think that this statement, coupled with Jesus’ first person account of the fall of Satan, would be the key takeaway from this venture. Yet, Jesus states that his followers should not rejoice in such things, but rather that their names are written in heaven.

My conception of mission and virtue has emphasized the effect that engaging in the missional practices has on the one who performs them. These actions hold the potential to promote virtue and allow the individual to draw near to God. This growth in virtue, and this sanctification, can be discerned upon the terminus of mission activity in a moment of reflection. While one can acknowledge the marvels which may occur through performing the acts of mission, and indeed one should expect such marvels to occur for those given authority by Christ, the joy experienced in reflecting upon these actions is centered principally and simply on the fact that God has chosen to work in and through our faithful performances of mission.
Acts 7:51-60

“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are forever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do. Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute? They killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, and now you have become his betrayers and murderers. You are the ones that received the law as ordained by angels, and yet you have not kept it.”

When they heard these things, they became enraged and ground their teeth at Stephen. But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. “Look,” he said, “I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he died (Acts 7:51-60).

We return in closing to the figure who has been something of a near-leitmotiv for this work as a whole. This dissertation is in many ways an attempt to make sense of Stephen as a person whom scripture holds as an exemplar of the missional practice of proclaiming the Gospel. He is ordained to service of the poor so that the apostles might focus on the distinct task of proclaiming the Gospel, and yet he himself engages in the practice of proclamation as well. He gives a well-crafted speech intent on conversion which fails to increase the number of converts to Christianity. He engages in dialogue that is both caustic and persuasive. He is willing both to condemn those who reject the message of Christ as well as forgive those who stone the messenger of Christ.

Yet it is Stephen that it presented by Luke as the first great martyr of the Church. He radiantly displays the virtue of fortitude in refusing to couch his testimony to Christ’s resurrection, the virtue of hope in anticipating his heavenly reward, and the virtue of love in forgiving those who destroy his earthly body. Stephen is given as a reward for his missionary
labors the highest of gifts, the vision of Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father. The only other individuals in scripture who received this gift were the select few who beheld the Taboric glory of Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration.

To enter into the craft of mission is to take one’s place alongside of Stephen. The promise to those who faithfully pursue such practices, directing their efforts towards honoring and pleasing God, is that their lives will also radiantly display virtue, and though those virtues which shine forth may be different from Stephen’s, the reward will be the same.
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