

Critically analyse the concept of *missio Dei* and its significance for contemporary mission.

MAE 3245

MAE 3 Best Practices in Mission and Evangelism

Abstract

More commonly understood as the Mission of God, *missio Dei* has been greatly influential on the understanding of Mission within Europe in the last 70 years. This paper is a critique of *missio Dei*, in the particular context of contemporary Britain. Found among three models of 20th century mission, the *missio Dei* as a trinitarian model of mission is highly influential on all three major Church denominations; Orthodox, Roman catholic and Protestant Churches. Themes of God's mission; a sending love, from creation, to the exodus, to Jesus, to the Holy Spirit to the apostles to the Church; traceable throughout scripture. Some theologians have interpreted the *missio Dei* as a dismissal of the church from mission whilst others have looked at mission as something to unite for. Ecclesiological models of mission continue to influence the Church's efforts, secular consumerism appears to be a more attractive direction for Britons. The Kingdom reign of God holistically completes the picture of *the missio Dei* concept, as believers reveal ever growing holistic relationships with their loving creator which simultaneously brings them together as one body of believers, participating in one mission, *the missio Dei*; where the triune God is eternally glorified.

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Introduction

‘Mission has its origin in the Heart of God. God is a fountain of sending love. This is the deepest source of Mission.’¹

For such an influential stream of thinking, *missio Dei* is a relatively recent concept. It was not until the 20th century that theologians entertained the notion that Mission is God’s mission, and his people are merely partners in what he is already active in. An institution once revered and of great influence on thought², the Church in Western Europe is declining significantly; consumerism has largely substituted God in the thinking and priorities of people.³ By analysing *missio Dei* as a paradigm of missiological thought, contextualised in the consumerist society of Britain; whilst *the missio Dei* is a concept attributed to the singular mission of God, this paper will focus primarily on British society.

This paper will briefly outline three key directions within Mission theology ‘Three models of mission in the late twentieth century’: the first; ‘...the church’s mission in the overflowing communion of the *trinitarian God*’, second; liberation and justice ‘...establishing *God’s reign* among human beings...’, thirdly; Christ’s revelation of God’s truth amongst humankind.⁴

Then, through the lens of *missio Dei* and expanding the theological perspective of mission; that the bible is a document of God’s mission, this paper will explore; the ecumenical and conversely, the secular interpretations that the concept has enabled. Whilst exploring the effects of ecclesiastical mission, it will critically analyse why *missio Dei* is still influential within contemporary theological thought.

¹ D.J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), p. 392.

² W.R. McAlpine, *Sacred Space for the Missional Church: Engaging Culture Through the Built Environment* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011)

³ McAlpine, *Sacred Space*

⁴ S.B. Bevans & R.P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), pp. 283-284.

Finally, it will build a critique of *the missio Dei* concept; both in its expression through the ecumenical unity of believers, and through radical submission to the will of the triune God (*missio Dei triunius*)⁵ against the backdrop of consumerist British society.

Chapter 1 A time to realise *the missio Dei*

Point 1- What is *the missio Dei*?

The focus of this paper; *the missio Dei* concept is of Bevans and Schroeder's first model; mission born out of the missional heart of the trinity. It is particularly described as being the Activity of God; something that is out of the very nature of God.⁶ It encompasses all three figures of the trinity; not previously emphasised in missiology. Bosch indicates *missio Dei* as a new (20th Century) paradigm that has all but superseded its previously defining features as the saving souls or the emancipation of humankind in the Global East and South.⁷

Setting the historical, sociological and ecclesiological scene for the concept of mission Dei is important here, since these dynamics have been influential on the concept. During the Brandenburg Missionary Conference in 1932, Karl Barth, a biblical and systematic Theologian, acquainted those present with mission as 'an activity of God himself'⁸. Barth was instrumental in drawing the doctrine of the Trinity into the field of mission.⁹ In 1938, the International Missionary Council (IMC) issued a warning that the Church must understand God's creative

⁵W. Richebacher, 'missio Dei: The Basis of Theological Mission or a Wrong Path? *International Review of Mission* (October 2003), pp. 558-605

⁶ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*

⁷ Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, p. 389.

⁸ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 389.

⁹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*

steering if it is to avoid secularisation.¹⁰ Then in 1947, consensus was to approach mission with humility, delegates saw missionary activity as being “partners in mission”.¹¹

Still recovering from the effects of World War II not only are societies beginning to reconcile, denominations are communicating and searching for ways to respond to their changing societies whilst their colonial powers are diminishing.¹² Though *missio Dei*, had already entered theological thought, the term was Karl Hartenstein’s response to the work of Barth.

¹³ 1948 saw the establishment of the World Council of Churches (WCC) at a time when mission-centred church succeeds church-centred mission as a dominant paradigm¹⁴. His work on the mission Dei purified the motives of mission.¹⁵ Missiologists widely recognise the Willingen Conference as when mission started to be seen an activity the church participated in rather than initiated.¹⁶ Though the conference’s original theme was ‘The Missionary Obligation of the Church’¹⁷, a decisive shift in missiological thinking had begun across denominations. By the church resigning mission to God, not asserting ownership, there is an inclusive dynamic evident in *the missio Dei*.

Further development of this thinking continued; accepting mission as Christ’s mission, not the Church’s,¹⁸ and subsequently, Evangelism came in account as the Church realising mission was no longer from the West to the rest but from anywhere to everywhere.¹⁹ The social and political context of post-war Europe marked a shift in societal attitudes toward faith and a

¹⁰ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 390.

¹¹ K. Kim, *Joining in with the Spirit: Connecting the World Church and Local Mission* (London: SCM, 2012). p. 24. IMC, Whitby, Canada

¹² Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in Context*

¹³ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*

¹⁴ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 370.

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

¹⁶ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*., Kim, *Joining in*

¹⁷ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 390.

¹⁸ Kim, *Joining in*., Conference of Achimota, Ghana, 1957/8

¹⁹ Kim, *Joining in*., WCC meeting, Mexico City, 1963

humbling of believers; this is significant to how conferences and meetings witness the many developments and dimensions *the missio Dei* has taken²⁰; it is a versatile concept of mission and can apply to many fields of theological thought without becoming confounded by them. To critically analyse *the missio Dei* it is important to locate its position within missional approaches; this next point will look at what Bevans and Schroeder refer to as the three mission approaches of the 20th Century ²¹

Point 2 Three approaches to mission; Trinitarian, Liberating Service and Reign of God, Christ as saviour.

In his book 'Transforming Mission' David Bosch offers his definition of Mission. Whilst recognising that a resolute conclusion is impossible, he highlights that mission not only comes from a 'perspective of commitment to the Christian faith'; it also 'gives expression to the dynamic relationship between God and the world'²². This, he states, is found throughout the Bible; from the Israelites to Jesus. Perhaps the most significant assertion he makes here is that mission is not to be confused with missions; the singular in fact largely refers to *the missio Dei* whereas the plural is more commonly associated with the 'missions ecclesiae: the missionary ventures of the church'.²³

Theologians and Missiologists have asserted definitions of what they believe Mission to be; this paper will highlight several models of the late 20th Century. The models are; as outlined by Bevans & Schroeder, firstly; 'the church's mission in the overflowing communion of the

²⁰ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*

Kim, *Joining in*

Bevan & Schroeder, *Constants in Context*

²¹ Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in Context*

²² Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 9.

²³ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 10.

trinitarian God' traced in the Vatican II's *Ad Gentes*²⁴ and the Orthodox churches' 'Go Forth in peace' document²⁵, second; the mission of a patient God establishing His reign through freedom and justice, a model introduced through pope Paul VI's office and through the World Council of Churches, third; a Christological model of mission developed by pope Jean-Paul II.

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Bevans and Schroeder appraise trinitarian mission as 'most promising' and 'in tune' with current theologies applying to these three models,²⁷ this is because trinitarian mission incorporates two of the three theologies; Mission as Discovery of truth or public witness and mission as commitment to liberation and transformation or social action. The third theology is saving souls and church growth.²⁸ Further, within a 21st century context Bevans and Schroeder suggest a new theology for today; 'mission as prophetic dialogue.'²⁹

The former, western-led, evangelising and church planting in foreign lands, has, according to Kirk, been 'redefined to cover the calling of the church, at every level and in every place, to be part of God's mission in the world.'³⁰ Whilst this is a popular understanding of mission, Bosch's notion that definitions of missions will always develop and change³¹ is much more coherent and justified.

²⁴ <http://www.ewtn.com/library/councils/v2miss.htm> accessed on 15 November 2013.

²⁵ A.I. Keshishian, *Orthodox Perspectives on Mission* (Oxford: Regnum Books & Lynx Communications, 1992)

²⁶ Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, pp. 283-4.

²⁷ Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in context*, p. 303.

²⁸ S. Spencer, *Christian Mission: Historic Types and Contemporary Expressions*. (London, SCM press, 2007) Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in context*, p. V.

²⁹ Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in context*, p. 384; this will be studied later in this paper.

³⁰ Kirk, *what is mission?* P. 24.

³¹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*

Point 3 Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches' documents.

A shift in the missiological thought paradigm became evident in both Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches following developments from WCC conferences; The Willingen conference had already served to expand *the missio Dei* within its Trinitarian doctrine; '...God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the son sending the [Holy] Spirit ...Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world'.³²

Bosch attests that the second Vatican council's (Vatican II) *Ad Gentes*, of 1965 displayed a coming together of Catholic and Protestant perspectives on the church's missionary nature.³³

It prompted the Roman Catholic Church to view mission as Trinitarian. *Ad Gentes*, according to Bevans and Schroeder, was key here because it gave Trinitarian basis of God stirring up a mission for his people to come into relationship with him and for his church to cohesively cooperate. This incarnational and practical mission to share and suffer within different contexts is all part of the communion with the triune God.

Go forth in Peace, 1986, also pertains to a Trinitarian basis for mission, and Jesus as a conduit of God's mission to introduce humanity to His way of life.³⁴ Once part of Christ's body, believers are part of God's life and partners in His mission. It recognised the mission of God as an overflowing communion and through renewal and recreation God's community engages with the need of His world'; here the Orthodox Churches focus on John 14v26 and 1 Corinthians 13:13; as the spirit is sent so are we.³⁵

³² Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 390.

³³ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 372.

Kim, *Joining in*

³⁴ Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in Context*

³⁵ Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in Context*

Further still Bevans and Schroeder have drawn the “Go forth in Peace” document from the Orthodox Churches in contextualising *the missio Dei* concept as one found across the spectrum of churches and their missiology.³⁶ Kim appraises Bosch’s work in *Transforming Mission: paradigm shifts in Theology of Mission*; for the wide audience it has received and the multidimensional and evolving nature of Mission.³⁷

This model has shaped and continues to shape missiology today³⁸ the next section of this paper will examine the missiological grounding for *the missio Dei* as a concept.

Chapter 2 *Missio Dei* as a model of Mission.

Point 1- The Purposes of God’s Activity.

The missio Dei has a unique position on theology as it begins with God; referring to scripture in order to understand the activity and purposes of God. Stuart Murray, in his book, *Church after Christendom*, focuses on mission from the concept of *the Missio Dei*, asserting that missional theology must come before ecclesiology and missiology,³⁹ and that scripture needs to be interpreted with a missional hermeneutic; this is key to understanding *the missio Dei*.

‘[T]he church is not the sender but the one being sent. ...[this] mission is not secondary to it’s being; the church exists in being sent and building up itself for the sake of its mission’⁴⁰ It is implied here that church and mission cannot be separated. Further to this, God’s mission is both to the church and the world. The participatory potential for the church is an outcome of God’s communion as Father, Son and Spirit loving and caring for all elements of His creation.

³⁶ Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in Context*

³⁷ Kim, *Joining in*, p. 26.

³⁸ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*

³⁹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*

⁴⁰ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*

⁴¹ 'Mission is God's turning to the world in respect of creation, care, redemption and consummation'.⁴² Within this development, there is the understanding that the Holy Spirit is free to enact mission where the church has not necessarily.

Indeed as Irenaeus asserted, the Mission of God is the Son and Holy Spirit as the arms of the Heavenly Father reaching down to embrace the earth.⁴³ Kim points out that the two arms of the father may not know what the other is doing and even that this may not be a concern to the Father; though the Christian theologian may criticise the secular or⁴⁴ pluralism prompted by this, it could still be part of the mission of God.

Missio Dei is understood to be the purposes and activities of God in and for the whole universe;⁴⁵ There is debate over whether Dei refers to the God of all religions or the triune God⁴⁶ Lesslie Newbigin in his *Theology of Mission; The Open Secret*, does not use '*the missio Dei*' term to explore what he refers to as the Mission of the Triune God⁴⁷. He makes no attempt to clarify criticism of *the missio Dei*; the secularised use of *the missio Dei* has tainted the concept for Newbigin. For Newbigin, the mission of God is a Trinitarian grounding for the people of God to share the gospel, for a mission outside of the church is civil rights movement not *missio dei*.⁴⁸ Though there is confusion as who carries out God's mission, Kirk suggests that

⁴¹ H.H. Rosin, 'Missio Dei: An Examination of the Origin, Content, and Function of the Term in Protestant Missiological Discussion' (Leiden: Interuniversity Institute, 1972)

⁴² Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 391.

⁴³ As cited by Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in Context.*, Kim, *Joining in*

⁴⁴ R. Bowen, *So I send you* (London: SPCK, 1996)

⁴⁵ Kirk, *What is Mission*, p. 25.

⁴⁶ S. Nussbaum, *A Reader's Guide to Transforming Mission: A Concise Companion to David Bosch's Classic Book* (MaryKnoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005)

⁴⁷ Newbigin, L. *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995)

⁴⁸ L. Newbigin, *A Word in Season: Perspectives on Christian World Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1994)

whilst he believes both the church and the world are agents of *missio Dei*, it is carried out to a greater degree by those who believe and obey the gospel.

In his book, *The Mission of God*, Christopher Wright gives a comprehensive biblical grounding for *the missio Dei* he writes:

The Bible presents to us a portrait of God that is unquestionably purposeful. The God who walks the paths of history through the pages of the Bible pins a mission statement to every signpost on the way. It could be said that the mission of this book is to explore that divine mission and all that lies behind it and flows from it in revelation to God himself, God's people and God's world, insofar as it is revealed to us in God's Word.⁴⁹

For Wright *the missio Dei* is the sending of God from the beginning of creation, the sending of Israel, the sending of Jesus; the sending of the Holy Spirit, the sending of the apostles⁵⁰ until Jesus returns.⁵¹ It holistically includes each figure of the triune God, it is inclusive and involves not only a plan for restored relationship but a serving heart for people whom God loves. When mission starts with the heart it first affects the heart.⁵²

Although Missiologists cite biblical passages to justify *the missio Dei*; The personal God conveyed in Hosea;⁵³ in the Gospel of John, 20:21 just as Jesus was sent by the father, so he sends us;⁵⁴ in the book of Acts⁵⁵; liberation from slavery into the glorious Kingdom of the Father (Romans 8:21)⁵⁶ and Ephesians 5:21 with a community of believers being subject to

⁴⁹ C. J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006), p. 23

⁵⁰ K. Gnanakan, *Kingdom Concerns: A Theology of Mission Today*. (Leicester: Intervarsity, 1989)

⁵¹ Wright, *Mission of God*

⁵² S.B. Bevans & R.P. Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011).

⁵³ Kim, *Joining In*

⁵⁴ <https://www.escholar.manchester.ac.uk/uk-ac-man-scw:166696> visited on 4 December 2013

⁵⁵ Kirk, what is mission?

⁵⁶ Kirk, What is mission?

one another in reverence to Christ. The dilemma of seeking a grand narrative for mission within the canon is that no single verse or book can encapsulates *the Missio Dei*.

The Church's very identity is tied up in mission, if it ceases to be missionary, it has ceased being Church.⁵⁷ Rather it is the mission that makes the Church.⁵⁸ Without a strong conviction of its missionary role; it cannot claim to be catholic or apostolic. Apostolic here, cannot be a miscommunication of god's will under the guise of civilianisation.⁵⁹

Though there is confusion as who carries out God's mission, Kirk suggests that whilst he believes both the church and the world are agents of *missio Dei*, it is carried out to a greater degree by those who believe and obey the gospel.

Point 2- The Missio Dei in Secular Britain.

In understanding of God's mission as God's, there has been the interpretation that this therefore excludes the church from being involved in His mission. This development was contrary to the leniencies of *missio Dei's* founders; Barth and Hartenstein.⁶⁰ However, since *the missio Dei* is God's alone, perhaps something beyond the understanding of anyone but himself. The redundancy of the Church, according to Bevans & Schroeder, implicates that since mission is about God's movement in the world, it must then be the world that guides and influences the church.⁶¹ This appears to be quite a jump, since the church is part of God's creation too; made in his image and united to live out His will.

A key theologian in secular development of *the missio Dei* concept is Hoekendijk, who asserts "church centric missionary thinking is bound to go astray, because it revolves around the

⁵⁷ Bosch, *Transforming Mission.*, Kim, K. *Joining in with the Spirit.*, Kirk, *what is mission?*, S. Murray. *Church after Christendom* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004)

⁵⁸ Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology*

⁵⁹ Kirk, *what is mission?* p. 33.

⁶⁰ Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in Context*

⁶¹ Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in Context*

illegitimate centre'.⁶² Hoekendijk further suggests that the church is a mission field of its own.⁶³ This thinking, according to Bevans & Schroeder, is why the *Ad Gentes* was not more celebrated by Roman Catholic theologians; it assumes 'a messianic kingdom through the processes of secular history';⁶⁴ this is an incomplete gospel since it does not reveal Christ's rule. Hoekendijk, is criticised, along with other theologians of the 1960s, for developing *the missio Dei*, not from the view point of practical theology but 'the missionary structure of the congregation'⁶⁵. His writing communicates a post-war frustration that seems to confuse godliness with human bias.

For a predominantly secular country, Hoekendijk's interpretation may apply to Britain, indeed, Kirk indicates the positive and negative ways in which ecclesiological mission has been perceived. In his chapter 'God's mission and the church's response' he introduces mission, acknowledging the stigma caused by the colonial powers of western Europe conquering and converting indigenous people groups by '[spreading] of Christian civilisation'.⁶⁶ Kirk also draws on the misplaced pride in a celebrated image of mission as the altruistic efforts of passionate believers to humbly sacrifice western comforts to selflessly serve.⁶⁷ Instead he prompts for a theological integration to be sought between the kingdom, the church and the world within the mission of god; arguing that most missiologists have recognised the Church alone as conscious agents of God's mission. Reverence to the Kingship

⁶² J.C. Hoekendijk, (ed.) *The Church Inside Out* (London: SCM, 1967) p. 38.

⁶³ Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in Context*

⁶⁴ J. A. Scherer. *Gospel, Church & Kingdom: Comparative Studies in World Mission Theology*. (Minneapolis MN, 1987), p. 113.

⁶⁵ J.A. Scherer, 'Church, Kingdom and Missio Dei: Lutheran and Orthodox Correctives to Recent Ecumenical Mission Theology' C. Van Engen, D.S. Gilliland, P.E. Pierson, & A.F. Glasser (eds.) in *The Good News of the Kingdom: Mission Theology for the Third Millennium*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), p.85

⁶⁶ Kirk, *What is Mission?* p. 35.

⁶⁷ Kirk, *What is Mission?*

of God, and for participants of mission to submit to him; averts the loss of social action and liberational mission to secularisation.⁶⁸ This too evades corruption and counterproductive influences. If spirituality is adapted to be more compatible with 21st Century life, it's participation in *the missio Dei* must draw people into relationship with God rather than merely an introspective, self-serving, new tradition.

In reference to the kingdom of god, Kirk queries the reception of god's rule; concerned that modern thinking does not include kingship. He does not offer justification for this; but merely portrays it negatively.⁶⁹ Perhaps it is the church's understanding of god's kingdom that is incompatible with modern thought not Kingship itself.

Donald Neilsen writes that 'protestant asceticism is the religious root of at least one important component of the spirit of capitalism; capitalism is central to the rise of consumerism and has remained so even after protestant ethics have waned.'⁷⁰ As 'general malaise and disenchantment with the church exists today',⁷¹ many sceptics have turned to non- traditional religions,⁷² the Church in Britain has attempted to reengage the secular community with the gospel by developing more accessible models of church.⁷³ As individuals enjoy the immediacy of self-fulfilment they may be building a church without God.

A dynamic to *missio Dei* holds within this secular interpretation the Trinitarian model of contemporary Christian mission, but will take a lesser part in the direction of this paper.

⁶⁸ Kirk, *What is Mission?*

⁶⁹ Kirk, *What is Mission?*

⁷⁰D. Neilsen 'The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism as a grand narrative: Max weber's history of philosophy' W.H. Swatos & L. Kaebler (eds) in *The Protestant Ethic Turns 100: Essays on the Centenary of the Weber Thesis* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2005), p. 67.

⁷¹ McAlpine, *Sacred Space*, p. 133.

⁷² Gill R, Hadaway C.K. & Marler P.L. 'Is Religious Belief Declining in Britain?' *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 37 (1998)

⁷³ McAlpine, *Sacred Space*

Point 3- Uniting Theologies, Uniting Churches?

Due to loss of established status, 'religious groups are now competing for time, loyalty and money from a limited clientele'; within a commercial, mass appeal context,⁷⁴ moves towards protestant ecumenism, Hammond suggests, from pressures to make churches overheads viable as well as to rationalise competitive market.⁷⁵ However McAlpine offers a more attractive view on ecumenism; there 'is a move toward more porous walls between divergent religious groups'⁷⁶, this had not been the case before due to a rigidity not to change; 'change was not expected or sought'⁷⁷

"The essential disharmony is that traditional Christianity has always advanced the values of altruism, self-sacrifice and community concern, whereas Western Culture is increasingly self-centred, individualistic and egoistic" according to Hunt to accommodate some of the differing values will enable survival of the Christian faith in 21st century.⁷⁸ Yet this seems to allow the world to dictate the Church's mission as Hoekendijk suggested.

The Willingen Conference was key to forging ecumenical relations,⁷⁹ Roman Catholic scholars; Schreiter, Bevans, Arbuckle, Gallagher, have recognised Vatican II as pivotal in facilitating ecumenical 'dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and The world Council of Churches'⁸⁰. Subsequently, this has enabled the critique of prior models of Evangelism. However, although there is greater dialogue between Christian denominations, this ecumenical spirit is not shared among all evangelical denominations.⁸¹ This is arguably

⁷⁴ S. J. Hunt, *Religion*, p. 117.

⁷⁵ P.E. Hammond, (ed) *Making Sense of Modern Times* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1998)

⁷⁶ McAlpine, *Sacred Space*, p. 134.

⁷⁷ McAlpine, *Sacred Space*, p. 135.

⁷⁸ Hunt, *Religion in Western Society*, p. 119.

⁷⁹ Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology*

⁸⁰ McAlpine, *Sacred Space*, p. 135.

⁸¹ McAlpine, *Sacred Space*

connected with lesser interest among certain evangelicals to question existing models mission.

Newbigin criticises ecumenism for being church-centric as has served to build up the church; he defines ecumenism as all who believe and only those who believe,⁸² though it is about collectivism of believers, it also excludes anyone outside that collective. So although having proven fruitful, it may but may need reflection.⁸³

According to Meeking and Stott, missional activity is differently understood between Roman Catholics and Evangelicals. A continual unravelling of mission is not a view held by certain evangelical denominations that, according to McAlpine see no need for further exploration in the discourse of salvation. Orthodox developments however have recognised the potential for denominations to come together for evangelism and to effect world peace.⁸⁴ Kim asserts that I is an essential part of being in mission to cross boundaries and new perspectives come by doing theology ecumenically.⁸⁵

Chapter 3 A Critique of the significance of *the Missio Dei* in Contemporary Mission.

Point 1 God's mission through his Kingdom.

'The Church can be in mission authentically only in obedience to God as *missio*'⁸⁶

As covered earlier in this paper, consensus amongst Missiologists is that the Church must be missional; it is her defining feature, for to not be missional is to not be church.⁸⁷ With this in

⁸² L. Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1988)

⁸³ Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine*

⁸⁴ K.M. George, 'Mission for unity or Unity for mission' P. Vassiliadis, in *Orthodox Perspectives on Mission* (Oxford: Regnum & Lynx, 2013), pp. 107-114.

⁸⁵ K. Kim, 'Mission Theology of the Church'. *International Review of Mission*, 99/1 (2010), pp. 39-55.

⁸⁶ N.E. Thomas, *Classic Texts in Mission and World Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995)

⁸⁷ Kirk, *What is Mission?*

mind, ecclesiological understandings of mission are misled, *the missio Dei* concept however, with its origin at the heart of God, fulfils this.

Kirk describes the kingdom as being 'life where humans are no longer subjected to destructive forces'⁸⁸ By understanding the kingdom as 'double liberation *from* slavery *into* the 'glorious freedom of the children of God' (Romans8:21)⁸⁹ the people of God have an opportunity of sharing the good news of God without the perceived manipulation of seeking conversion. Further to this Verkuyl states that missionaries widespread now 'end up with a kingdom without Jesus' he assures that there is a god given mandate to confess to Jesus in word and deed. In recognising Jesus as the face of the king and he must be exalted.⁹⁰

Though missional thought is often following the life and events effected by Jesus, Verkuyl emphasises themes both in the old and new testaments that '[bring] the kingdom of God to expression and restor[e] his liberating domain of authority'; restoring people not just to God but across sexes and generations, races and to creation.⁹¹ This is a more holistic understanding of humanity's involvement of *the missio Dei*.

Although '[the] church has typically and historically represented where god can be met'⁹² Peter Cruchley- Jones talks of a church in transformative spirituality, he asserts that mission that does not need the church, nor is it easily found within church; but rather is found beyond the church.⁹³ Yet it seems if the Church witnesses in 'Bold Humility'⁹⁴; the boldness is born

⁸⁸ Kirk, *What is Mission?* p. 29.

⁸⁹ Kirk, *What is Mission?* p. 31. Romans, 8:21

⁹⁰ Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology*, p. 198.

⁹¹ Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology*, p. 197.

⁹² McAlpine, *Sacred Space*, p. 133.

⁹³ P. Cruchley-Jones, ' "A Garland in Place of Ashes": 1Transformative Spirituality and Mission in the Post-Modern and Secular Contexts' *International Review of Mission*, 98.2 (2009), pp. 232-244.

⁹⁴ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 489.

out of declaration of the kingdom that is prompted within a people who have first received from God and share the hope they now have.

The Church as the people of God in Britain have the opportunity to partake in *the missio Dei* by either; serving their consumerist communities through developing models of church that are more palatable and attractive, or by living lives that reveal the kingdom. Kirk draws on the relevance of community in the discussion of mission; the scriptures point to Jesus reconciling people to each other, not just God. He speculates over the 'radical consequences' of the church '[submitting] to one another out of reverence for Christ'.⁹⁵

For the church to live the gospel out is, according to Dodds, the power of the church.⁹⁶ It is the foretaste of the Kingdom;⁹⁷ mission is not the renewal of the church, but for serving the needs of humanity. Bowen elaborates by stating that 'Missionary activity without missionary attitude' is selfish; missionary attitude should be at the heart of the church's life and work, just as it is at the heart of God.⁹⁸

The Church in mission is where God's intentions are realised. The living God is present and continually involved in people's lives and that 'each generation discovers a new aspect about him and confesses him in a new manner' ⁹⁹ the Church cannot annex Christ into her own priorities, Mission is therefore evidence of god's presence and the church's submission to His will. Kirk defines the church as 'a community in response to *the missio Dei* bearing witness to God's activity in the world by its communication of the good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed.

⁹⁵ Kirk, *What is Mission?* p. 31., Ephesians, 5:21

⁹⁶ A. Dodds, 'Newbigin's Trinitarian Missiology: The Doctrine of the Trinity as Good News For Western Culture', *International review of Mission*, 99/1 (2010), pp.69-85.

⁹⁷ K, Kim, 'Mission Theology'

⁹⁸ Bowen, *So I send you*, p. 14.

⁹⁹ Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology*, p. 199.

The 'servant body of Christ' is a never stagnating mission that is not just the conversion of non-believers but the conversion of God's people; as indeed the people to God are continually in revelation of the grace of God and the depth of his love.¹⁰⁰ Christ's commissioning of the church is to proclaim; not religious conviction, doctrines or moral commands 'but the coming kingdom' and a full scale reconciliation.¹⁰¹ It is a mission that continually points to the triune God.

Point 2- God's Mission in Prophetic Dialogue

In conclusion to their three models of mission in the 20th century Bevans & Schroeder, recommend 'mission as prophetic dialogue' in contemporary mission, this serves as a development of the trinitarian model of mission. It must be in dialogue and humility showing 'witness and proclamation, liturgical action and contemplation, inculturation, interreligious dialogue, working for justice and commitment to reconciliation. [these ,] all contribute to a prophetic discourse.'¹⁰² In prophetic dialogue, mission is faithful to its context; being sensitive to plurality and traditions, whilst being true to Christian faith and calls to conversion¹⁰³, it does not have the trappings of the impersonal portrayal of a secular mission.

Mission can no longer be church expansion or preoccupied with conversion, nor justified as a 'supporting outreach of colonial powers'¹⁰⁴, nor perceived as the cultural blessings of western civilisation, but something modest that in its belonging to God; it glorifies Him alone.

The reign of God is prominent in the prophetic dialogue Bevans and Schroeder highlight that Jesus as face of the Spirit, embodying the agent par excellence of the spirit's work stirring up

¹⁰⁰ Thomas, *Classic Texts*, p. 115.

¹⁰¹ Vassiliadis, *Reconciliation*

¹⁰² Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, p. 284.

¹⁰³ Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in Context*

¹⁰⁴ Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in Context*

prophecy; recreating; restoring life; and bringing healing, reconciliation and forgiveness’;¹⁰⁵

God is ‘a power that leads patiently and gently to abundant life’¹⁰⁶

Where mission starts with the heart of God, it first affects the heart of the people: effecting changes in them and consumes with a love that brings co-dependency and the interconnectedness of community. The next point will expand the possibilities of mission when there is unity among believers.

Point 3- The Unity and Diversity of God’s People.

In understanding that unity in mission derives from the nature God; first calling the apostles to oneness in him, then to one another; the mission is then shared among the church, revealing His Kingdom gospel.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore Matthey draws on the inter-connectedness of worship, unity and mission in the love of Christ; to lack one of these is to undermine the church’s existence; differences in gifting must not cause disunion. In fact disunity of the churches continues to hinder the fulfilment of the Church’s mission; for the eyes of humanity, fragmentation of the body of Christ contradicts the oneness of the body of believers.¹⁰⁸

Though within an ecclesiological frame work of unity, Nazir –Ali accurately puts that ‘church union should never be at the expense of catholicity’; rather, a united church should be drawing on different traditions which have joined together, embody catholicity more fully, he then offers practical implications of such unity.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, p.297. , Vassiliadis, *Reconciliation*

¹⁰⁶ Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 39

¹⁰⁷ J. Matthey, ‘Missio Dei Revisited: Willingen 1952-2002’ *International Review of Mission*, XCII/367 (2003), pp. 609-610.

¹⁰⁸ Matthey, *Missio Dei Revisited*

¹⁰⁹ Nazir-Ali, *From Everywhere*, p. 202.

Boff traces unity in diversity in the Trinitarian communion with God's action for justice in the World.¹¹⁰ Already, within the sphere of ecumenical relations people demonstrate openness to traditional values and experiences;¹¹¹ showing missional attitude. Additionally, in a context of religious and cultural pluralism there is more scope to: give, receive, proclaim, learn, speak out prophetically, and to self-critique.¹¹² These are kingdom virtues that humbly glorify God and reveal His dominion.

The missional implications of unity in diversity are often drawn upon in the discussion of *the missio Dei*, the following point will explore developments of this concept that are significant to contemporary mission in Britain.

Point 4- Development of *the missio Dei* concept.

The mission Dei concept has no limits or barriers¹¹³ it has been developed, interpreted and even used to advance all kinds of missiological agendas.¹¹⁴ It has proven to be a versatile and popular paradigm of missiological thought. For such a universal concept it has the potential to be significant in any context, culture and era of mission. Kirk recognises that there is much agreement in the theological interpretation of god's purposes, yet there is much disagreement on how Christians are to respond. As Kirk points out the mission dei is more a slogan than a defining phrase.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, p. 291.

¹¹¹ Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, p.285.

¹¹² Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in Context*

¹¹³ T. Engelsviken, 'Missio Dei: The Understanding and Misunderstanding of a Theological Concept in European Churches and Missiology', *International Review of Mission*, 92/367 (2003), pp. 481–497

¹¹⁴ Jkik, *What is Mission?* p. 25.

¹¹⁵ Kirk, *What is Mission?*

Whilst accredited as an authority on the understanding of *the missio Dei* concept,¹¹⁶ Kim also criticises Bosch's *transforming Mission* for being retrospective and dated; not providing enough material on contemporary mission, and for lacking development of the Spirit's part in *the missio Dei*.¹¹⁷ Academics have prompted for further development of the pneumatological relevance to *missio Dei* ¹¹⁸ within missiology; God the Spirit, is the least understood but most present head of the trinity. Unlimited by the bible's account of Jesus, the Spirit reveals the activity of God; traced in both and beyond the Old and New Testaments. Yet mission as prophetic dialogue has overtaken *the missio Dei* in understand the mission of the Holy Spirit. The shape of mission in the 21st century will, according to Matthey et al need to be a holistic response to issues such as; 'justice and peace, poverty and hunger, health and education, and violence and abuse'¹¹⁹... '[striving] at all times to display visible holiness, firm resolve, deep compassion, great urgency, agape love and... righteous anger' ¹²⁰ This sort of mission counters the individualism of secular Britain and prompts people to be mindful of differences and the complimentary giftings¹²¹ that demonstrate a 'spiritual wealth' rather than pressures toward homogeneity.¹²²

The ecclesiological understanding of mission still impacts missiology; it is difficult to approach mission without personal bias. Though he has great insight into the Trinitarian mission of God, Verkuyl warns; '...it would be a sign of sinful sloth and indolence if we were not to attempt in

¹¹⁶ Among others, the following academics cite Bosch; Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in Context*., Kim, *Joining In*., Wright, *The Mission*,

¹¹⁷ K. Kim, 'Post-Modern Mission: A Paradigm Shift in David Bosch's Theology of Mission' T. Yates (ed.) in *Mission: An Invitation to God's Future* (Calver: Cliff College, 2000)

¹¹⁸ Kim, *Joining in*., Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*., Gnanakan, *Kingdom Concerns*

¹¹⁹ Matthey, *Missio Dei Revisited*, p. 614.

¹²⁰ Matthey, *Missio Dei Revisited*, p. 614.

¹²¹ D.S. Cunningham, *These Three are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Malden, MA: Oxford Blackwell Publishers, 1998)

¹²² Richebacher, *Missio Dei*, p. 598.

faith...signs and signals of that which is coming', ¹²³ this implies that believers are leading agents of God's mission.

As Thomas wisely warns people; not to equate the church with the Kingdom of God, our mission is over our thought patterns, not to sacralise traditions and habits but to show concern for the world's questions; as messengers of God. This, he claims moves us 'from communication to communion' ¹²⁴

Newbigin's perspective on trinitarian mission points to *imago dei*; that humanity is made in the image of God. He emphasises the role of the elect in the construction of biblical ecclesiology and missiology. The apostolate prompts mission that new and continuing; pioneering reconciliation to God. It is a choosing that is both; particular and universal, ¹²⁵ both missionising and apostolate¹²⁶; reconciled and reconciling people ¹²⁷. On the other hand, Adam Dodd critiques Newbigin for seeing through a lens of functionality and proclamation and apologetics, ¹²⁸ thus negating the missional heart of *the missio Dei*.

¹²³ Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology*, p. 204

¹²⁴ Thomas, *Classic Texts*, p. 115.

¹²⁵ Dodd, 'Newbigin's Trinitarian Missiology'

¹²⁶ Kirk, *What is mission?*

¹²⁷ L. Newbigin, *The Household God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church*. (New York, NY: Friendship, 1954), p.101.

¹²⁸ Dodd, 'Newbigin's Trinitarian Missiology'

Conclusion

As this new paradigm of mission; being an activity of restoration, reconciliation and revelation that flows out of the triune God, *the missio Dei*, bares great significance to contemporary mission in Britain. It has freed many churches in these societies from the introspection of believing that the fate of their communities' salvation is solely their own responsibility.

This Mission reveals God; continually active in and among His creation from the beginning to the end of time. It is no longer obscured by quantitative research on church attendance or the effectiveness of rallies, nor is it merely social action and civil justice. The triune God is restoring creation to relationship with Himself by revealing His kingdom of hope, healing and abundant love and revealing himself as ruling King.

Theological minds across denominations have developed theories that invite others into dialogue over Barth's revolutionary thinking found within *the missio Dei* concept; hitherto enabling Christians to recognise God's personal three-part community continually sending himself, calling them to unite in humility for His purpose; Mission. The potential for endless directions, evolving interpretations, such as deeper exploration into the mission of the Spirit, *the missio Dei* is significant to all contexts and eras of mission.

God's mission in contemporary Britain is witnessed through believers responding to the ebb and flow of God's heart for his creation; a changed and changing people across denominations, exercising the denial of self, showing compassion, living lives that speak out truth, glorifying a saving God simply because they are caught up in *the missio Dei*.

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