

Worldwide Mission: The Work of the Triune God

by Paul Peters

[Dr. Paul Peters was professor of Old Testament interpretation and of church history at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary from 1939 to 1966, the year of his retirement. During many of those years he served also as Managing Editor of this Quarterly.]

On the occasion of a mission-festival, when preaching on Isaiah 28:23–29, a text that speaks to us of God’s dealings with His people, I began with the theme: *Mission is the Work of God*. Since the forenoon preacher had emphasized that mission is the work of the church, I had to tell the congregation, as I have to tell my readers in this article, that there is no contradiction between the two themes. When I got back to my theme, I spoke on the basis of my text of the threefold mission work of God as plowman, as sower, and as thresher. I was not aware at the time of the emphasis laid by many mission-minded theologians on mission work as “The Mission of God,”¹ but soon after was made conscious of the need of sermons on this theme, when a missionary’s wife, whose husband’s mission, humanly speaking, had few prospects, thanked me for these words.

As God dealt with His chosen people because of their sins, thus the Triune God dealt and deals with the sinful world. As plowman God has concluded all mankind under sin and in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all (Rom. 11:32; Gal. 3:22). As sower, “the Son of man is He that soweth the good seed,” while “the field is the world” (Matt. 13:37). And as a thresher, separating the wheat from the chaff, “the gift of the Holy Ghost, which follows the remission of sins ... daily cleanses and sweeps out the remaining sins, and works so as to render man truly pure and holy,”² until the Son of man purges His floor and gathers His wheat into the garner (Matt. 3:12; Luke 3:17). This is the worldwide mission work of the Triune God, who prepares the mission field by plowing it with the plowshare of His Law, by sowing the plowed field with the seed of the Gospel of the Kingdom and by harvesting the fields “white already to harvest” (John 4:36). The Holy Spirit does this by *gathering*³ “the whole Christian Church on earth,” by *raising* “all the dead,” and by *giving* “all believers in Christ everlasting life” (*Triglotta*, p. 545).

This is a brief summary on the basis of one text of the Scriptures of the Triune God’s worldwide mission. It invites us to deal at greater length on the basis of more of the Scriptures with this His work as the *missio Dei*. Only as we grow more and more conscious of mission as God’s work, do we gain the necessary missionary impulse, of which we are always much in need. The following five parts, the mystery, the revelation, the perfection, the promulgation, and the consummation of God’s worldwide mission may serve to guide us in gaining various viewpoints of the *missio Dei*.

The Mystery of the Missio Dei

Missio Dei is the work of the Triune God. Both the mission and the church is God’s very own work. Now it is worthy of note that the word for “mission” or “missions,” as we use and understand the term today,

¹ Georg F. Vicedom, *The Mission of God*, An Introduction to a Theology of Mission, trans. by Gilbert A. Thiele and Dennis Hilgendorf (St. Louis: Concordia, 1965).

² *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1921), p. 895.

³ Our Authorized Version (AV) uses “gather” to translate the Old Testament harvest terms (קָטַף and גָּבַר - Exod. 23:10; Lev. 25:3; Mic. 2:12; Isa. 11:12). Likewise it employs this word for the New Testament harvest terms (συνάγεις, συλλέγειν, Matt. 3:12; Luke 3:17; Matt. 13:30; Luke 6:44). Both of the Old Testament terms are applied to the remnant and the dispersed of Judah, which the Lord “will surely gather” (Mic. 2:12; Isa. 11:12), while the New Testament has ἐπισυνάγειν for the “gathering together” of the elect (Mark 13:27).

does not at all occur in the New Testament. The concept of “mission,” i.e., “the sending,” is, of course, derived from the New Testament words for “sending” (πέμπειν, ἀποστέλλειν and its derivatives), which will be given due consideration in the course of the article. But there was no specific reason for the use of the word for “mission” as a separate work of the church, since the matter for which the word stands is identical with what is understood by church. To speak of a “missionary church” is really a tautology. The church as such is a mission and would lose its identity if it did not carry on mission work. But what this mission work really is can only be ascertained when we begin to speak of *missio Dei* as the work of the Triune God on the basis of Scripture.

“My Father worketh hitherto, and I work” (John 5:17). With these words Jesus speaks of the work of the Triune God as having been done “hitherto,” “till now.” It is God’s work unrestricted since creation, including all the Sabbaths even to the Sabbath when Jesus healed the man who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. Therefore Jesus added: “And I work.” He is making Himself, as the Jews correctly conclude, “equal with God,” so that all that He does, He does as if the Father did it. For the Father shows the Son all things that He Himself does (v. 20) and the Son can do nothing of Himself but what He sees the Father do (v. 19). These words express the close union of the Father and the Son in the creation and government of the world. The Father has “sent” the Son (v. 23: πέμψαντα, v. 36: ἀπέσταλκεν). Therefore we are to “consider” Jesus “the Apostle” (Heb. 3:1), the One sent forth (τὸν ἀπόστολον). The purpose of this sending is that he that believes in the Father that sent Him has everlasting life and is passed from death into life (John 5:24). This is in essence the work of the Triune God, which includes all that pertains to one’s salvation and includes all who will partake of this salvation by faith. Although the Holy Ghost is not mentioned in our chapter as a participant of this work, John tells us why in chapter seven, where Jesus already speaks of the work of the Spirit in the believer’s heart without making mention of His name. Therefore John has to add: “But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (7:39). In the trinitarian nature of God’s sending we have the source of the mystery of the *missio Dei*. The Father sends His Son (cf. 5:23; 7:18); Father and Son send the Holy Ghost (cf. 14:26; 16:7). But this trinitarian sending does not only tell us that God is the Sender. It also conveys the meaning that God is the content of the Sending. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son” (3:16); the Son glorifies the Father, who sent Him, by delivering His message (8:26, 40) and by finishing His work (cf. 4:34; 5:36; 17:4); the Holy Ghost glorifies the Son by taking of His and showing it unto His disciples (16:14f.). This is the *missio Dei*, the work of the Triune God, in which “every sending of one Person results in the presence of the Other,” and “in every Person of the Deity God works in His entirety.”⁴

It is a worldwide mission, for the sending of the Son by the Father is a sending into the world “that the world through him might be saved” (8:17). This is why we may and must speak of the *missio Dei* as a worldwide mission. The Son, whom God sent, is “indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world” (4:42), for He “came not to judge the world, but to save the world” (12:47). Even when Jesus in His high-priestly prayer prays for all who shall finally believe in Him, He does not lose sight of the world but adds: “That the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (17:21), and again “that the world may know that thou hast sent me” (v. 23).

This *missio Dei* is characterized by the Apostle Paul as “a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory” (I Cor. 2:7). It is “the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph. 3:10f.). As such it is simply designated as “the mystery of Christ” (v. 4) or as “the mystery of the gospel” (6:19). This mystery is of great missionary significance, since “the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel” (3:6). The Apostle designates it as “a great mystery,” since it concerns “Christ and the

⁴ Georg F. Vicedom, op. cit., pp. 7f. The author quotes hymns 387, v. 5, and 142, vv. 2, 3, from *The Lutheran Hymnal* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1941), which “have kept alive in the evangelical Christian an appreciation of the trinitarian nature of God’s sending” (p. 7). The words “Him God the Father chose to send” and “Go forth my Son, the Father says” will remind us of the opening words of hymn 142: “A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth.” We may add the words of verse 9 of hymn 387: “Dear Christians, one and all, rejoice,” which include a reference to the Holy Spirit: “Now to my Father I depart, The Holy Spirit sending And, heavenly wisdom to impart, My help to thee extending.”

church” (5:32). He speaks of “the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). It is the call of all men to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles. The Apostle did not have to include Israel with so many words in the above passages, because this mystery had been made known to Israel by its prophets and preached to the Jews in their synagogues by the apostles. In Romans 11:25, 26, however, both Israel and the Gentiles are embodied in “this mystery ... that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved.” This is the mystery of the *missio Dei*, “of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, ... which things the angels desired to look into” (I Pet. 1:10–12).

The Revelation of the Missio Dei

In the concluding doxology of Romans Paul speaks of “the revelation of the mystery,” which “now is made manifest” (Rom. 16:25f.), that “mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints” (Col. 1:26). Paul speaks of it as the mystery “made known to all nations for the obedience of faith” (Rom. 16:26). God reveals this mystery by sending His Word to man (Ps. 107:20), “by the Scriptures of the prophets” (Rom. 16:26). In these Old Testament Scriptures we already can behold how the Triune God is going to perform His future work, while in the New Testament Scriptures we see how the *missio Dei* is being perfected.

God as the Creator of man is and remains the Lord of all mankind. As such He is always near to His creatures and in constant relationship to them, whether by way of judgment or salvation. The first eleven chapters of Genesis show us how God is active relevant to mankind. After the Creation and the Fall of Adam and Eve, man ran away from God, endeavored to make himself independent of God and to regard it as his privilege to enter into a relationship to God of his own choosing. Still more, man’s attitude towards God is motivated by his enmity against God. Consequently the history of mankind is that of a constant falling away from and of a turning against God, calling forth God’s judgments. This interchange of man’s apostasy and God’s judgments is summarized for us in the last nine of the first eleven chapters of Genesis. After the Fall of man (Gen. 3) and its dire results, the loss of Paradise (3:23f.), death by sin (3:3; Rom. 5:12), and the cursing of the ground (3:17), preceded by the Protevangelium (3:15), the first revelation of the *missio Dei*,⁵ the Scriptures continue with the generations of Adam and the names of all the patriarchs from Adam to Noah (chap. 5). But the wickedness of man continued (6:1–7), so that the judgment of God, the flood, came on all men and destroyed them with the exception of Noah and his three sons (chap. 6–8). God then made a covenant with Noah and his seed (9:9). In chapter 10 mention is made of the generations of Noah. But these generations also turned against God in the building of the tower of Babel, and God’s judgments followed: the confusion of tongues and the dispersion of nations. Although chapter 11 closes with the descendants of Shem only, leading us to Abraham and God’s covenant with him, still sight is never lost of all the nations. This at once becomes apparent in the blessing Abraham received: “In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (12:3).

Here we are standing on the threshold of the most important event in the Old Testament dispensation. Here the *missio Dei* is being revealed to Abraham and his seed alone as the elect people of God, as God’s “peculiar people” (Deut. 14:2) among men. God’s spiritual blessings are to be concentrated upon this one people (Rom. 9:4f.) as a people chosen for the very purpose to be the bearer of these blessings (Isa. 43:10). Consequently the nations were never lost from view except by the blind Israel (42:19). This blind Israel God had to remind through His prophet Amos (9:7) how He in like manner led other nations as He had led His very own people. As He brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt, thus He brought the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kit. And as God revealed Himself to Israel as a gracious God slow to anger, one who repented Himself of the evil, thus He also showed Himself to the Ninevites in that He spared that great city (Jonah 4:11). Lest we also lose sight of God’s gracious dealings with the nations, we first of all want to review His

⁵ Harry R. Boer in *Pentecost and Missions* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans) designates the Protevangelium as “the first announcement of salvation to fallen man ... an anticipation of the grace that was to be revealed in Christ and given to the church at Pentecost” (p. 86).

relationship to them until their ways again converge with those of God's chosen people, the spiritual Israel, His "inheritance" (Isa. 19:25) and through Abraham "the heir of the world" (Rom. 4:13).

After the last catastrophe, the building of the tower of Babel and the dispersion of the nations, God "suffered all nations to walk their own ways," Paul tells the people in Lystra (Acts 14:16). Although God did not cease "to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity" (Isa. 26:21), nevertheless He left not Himself without witness in that He did good, and gave them rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness (Acts 14:17). Thus God continues, as Paul tells the Athenians, to bless all nations giving "to all life, and breath, and all things" (Acts 17:25). He also tells them that God "made of one blood all nations of men" to inhabit the whole surface of the earth. "He fixed the epochs of their history and the limits of their territory" (v. 26).⁶ And then Paul adds the purpose of God's blessed doing: That the nations "should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us" (17:26, 27). All this is in accord with the Noachian covenant, sealed with the sign of God's "bow in the cloud," a token between God and the whole earth for perpetual generations (Gen. 9:12).

It cannot take us by surprise that some interpreters have claimed that Noah's covenant is the real foundation of God's worldwide mission. Instead of calling it a "foundation" we should rather speak of it as a preparation of God's work of salvation. The Noachian covenant reveals to us God's forbearance and long-suffering toward all of His creation. As such it is a guarantee that the history of mankind will find its full development in accord with the *missio Dei*. This development is already condensed for us in the curse and blessing of Noah's three sons and their generations (Gen. 9:25–27).

Therefore the spiritual blessings with which the nations are to be blessed in Shem and then specifically in Abraham are never lost sight of in the Scriptures. Even when the temple was built in Jerusalem and all worship centered in the house of God, the doors of the sanctuary were never closed to the nations. When the ark of the covenant of the Lord came to Jerusalem, David in his psalm of thanksgiving told his people to be mindful of the covenant God made with Abraham as "the word he commanded to a thousand generations" (I Chron. 16:15f.). His salvation was not only to be shown forth in the temple, but His glory was to be declared among the heathen, His marvelous works among all nations (cf. v. 24), so that one word would be the watchword among the nations: "The Lord reigneth" (v. 31). No less did Solomon at the dedication of the temple express the desire that all the people of the earth may know the name of God to fear Him as do the people Israel (I Kings 8:43), that all the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God and that there is none else (cf. v. 60).

This is especially the perspective of the so-called "Royal Psalms" (Ps. 47; 93; 95–100), most of which repeat the refrain, "The Lord reigneth," and give us a wonderful view of the future conversion of the world of nations. Consequently the exhortation is constantly repeated in these Psalms to declare God's glory among the heathen, "His wonders among all people" (Ps. 96:8), to "say among the heathen that the Lord reigneth" (v. 10). The Psalmist even declares that "the Lord hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly showed in the sight of the heathen" (98:2), so that "all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God" (v. 8). As a result all the earth is exhorted to "rejoice" (97:1), to "make a joyful noise unto the Lord" (98:4), to "enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise" (100:4). All nations God has made shall come and worship before Him and shall glorify His name (cf. also Ps. 86:9; 102:15, 22; 22:27f; 67:2ff.).

Isaiah of all the prophets has the vision of the many people that shall flow unto the mountain of the Lord's house and that shall say: "He will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isa. 2:3). This is the Old Testament centripetal description of God's worldwide mission. In another vision Isaiah also hears nations, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the Sabeans, say to Israel: "Surely God is in thee; and there is none else, there is no God" (45:14). The prophet even sees a highway leading out of Egypt to Assyria and on it the Assyrian shall be coming into Egypt and the Egyptian into Assyria. Both nations as world nations will be serving the Lord joined by Israel as "the third," all three being blessed by the Lord (19:23ff.). Here we have a clear Old Testament statement that God is a God of both Jews and Gentiles.

⁶ *The New English Bible* (NEB) (Oxford and Cambridge, 1966).

None other than the captive nations are the ones who define this *missio Dei* as the work of the hidden God. First of all they confess concerning Israel: “Surely God is in thee” (45:14). And this God they confess to be the God that hides Himself, the hidden God, the *Deus absconditus*, as Luther calls Him. Still they know this God as the “God of Israel, the Savior,” who has saved Israel “with an everlasting salvation” (45:17). This their confession culminates in the mystery of the *missio Dei*. But how did they get to know of it, namely that Israel’s God is the one true God, their Savior?

Strange as it may seem, He first of all separated His people from the nations,⁷ who were “makers of idols” (45:16), so that they might not tempt Israel by their idolatry and seduce it to “worship any strange god” (Ps. 81:9). God Himself as their guide separated them. When Moses gained the assurance that God’s presence would go with him in bringing up His people, He confessed: “So shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth” (Exod. 33:16). But it is God Himself who lays all emphasis on this separation by saying to His people: “I am the Lord your God, which have separated you from other people” (Lev. 20:24). To this separation God gave a very positive motivation: “Ye shall be holy unto me: for I the Lord am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine” (20:26). This was the one purpose of the distinction from other nations, that Israel should be His inheritance (I Kings 8:53; Ps. 33:12), its service and mission based on this very inheritance and election. For as long as Israel remained loyal to its Lord, it played an outstanding missionary role on the strength of its loyalty. Our loyalty to Christ is no less a compelling missionary motive.

God as a guide of His people gave them His holy Law, which witnessed to God’s holiness. At the same time it made out of God’s elect people a great nation, that had God so near to it, that had statutes and judgments so righteous as all the Law, which God had set before it (Deut. 4:7f.). Keeping these ordinances was their wisdom and understanding “in the sight of the nations,” who, when they heard all these statutes, said: “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people” (v. 6). Thus God’s people became witnesses to the Lord their God and God Himself could say of them, “Ye are my witnesses” (Isa. 43:10; 44:8).

Israel as a nation was a theocracy in the midst of all the ungodly nations and had God ruling over them through kings, priests, and prophets as so many “shepherds” (Jer. 3:15, RSV). The kings were to do justice and righteousness, deliver from the hand of the oppressor, and do no wrong to the alien, the fatherless, and the widow (Jer. 22:3). The priests were to be the messengers of the Lord of hosts, were to keep knowledge and seek the Law at the mouth of God (Mal. 2:7). The prophets were to teach the people the correct meaning of the Law and apply it to their daily lives. They were to preach repentance, saying: “Turn now every one from his evil way and go not after other gods to serve them, and to worship them” (Jer. 25:5f.). God even ordained Jeremiah to be “a prophet unto the nations” (1:15), “unto whom,” as he himself says, “the Lord had sent” him (25:17), whom he must make to drink of the cup of the Lord’s anger (v. 15). “For judgment is the expression of the love of God no less than of his justice.”⁸

Of course, Jeremiah in person was sent only to his own nation, at his time an apostate people, whose seed God overthrew among the nations and “scattered them in the lands” (Ps. 106:27), because they forgot God their Savior (v. 21).⁹ To scatter them God used the nations as plowers to plow upon the back of His apostate

⁷ The Bible distinguishes between both by designating the nations as גוֹיִם and Israel as עַם - The former has religious meaning identical with “Gentiles” or “heathen,” the latter in connection with קָדוֹשׁ means “consecrated (and thus also separated) for a special service.” Johannes Blaw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1962), p. 25. The New Testament ἔθνη is used as a translation of גוֹיִם and can have the same religious meaning (cf. I Thess. 4:5 and Jer. 10:25). Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1965), vol. II, p. 371.

⁸ H. H. Rowley, *The Missionary Message of the Old Testament* (London: The Carey Kingsgate Limited Press, 1955), p. 68.

⁹ This scattering resulted in the Diaspora and only thus the Jews, with Daniel at their head, became missionaries to the East. Their dispersions also extended to southern Europe and to northern Africa. The many religious proselytes at the time of Christ testify to their zeal. Jerusalem, the religious capital, maintained contact with the Diaspora through “apostles,” usually rabbis sent out in pairs. When Jesus in Matthew 23:15 calls down a woe on Scribes and Pharisees, who “compass sea and land to make one proselyte,” He is, according to Lenski, referring to their practice of imposing “circumcision and the entire Levitical tradition and system” on them and

people against whom His anger was kindled. He gave the nations victory over Israel and permitted them to make “long their furrows” (Ps. 129:3), while His people cried out: “Doth the plowman plow all day to sow?” (Isa. 28:24). Ezekiel does not tire of telling us why God even forces the nations, Gog and Magog and many others, to march against His people (38:4–6). God’s purpose is that the heathen may know Him when He shall be sanctified through Gog and the other nations, i.e., when He shall have vindicated His holiness before their eyes (v. 16). Again when God will turn against Gog and “the many people that are with him” (v. 22) in His jealousy and the fire of His wrath (v. 19), He will magnify Himself and sanctify Himself and “will be known in the eyes of many nations,” who shall then know that He is “the Lord” (v. 23), “the Holy One of Israel” (39:7).

No less did God use the nations to save His people. We but have to think of Cyrus, king of the Persians, whom God called His “shepherd” (Isa. 44:28), His “anointed” (45:1), who was to perform all His pleasure, His purpose, “even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built, and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid” (44:28). It is Ezekiel who again tells us that when God shall have thus vindicated His holiness in the sight of many nations by again bringing the captivity of Jacob and having mercy upon the whole house of Israel, that then in turn the house of Israel will know that He is “the Lord their God from that day and forward” (39:22). Thus the Lord revealed His lordship over all the nations of the world and His divine power over Israel by chastising and saving His people, even if but a remnant (Isa. 10:22f.). But this remnant, the more it recognized Jehovah as “the Lord their God,” the more it turned to Him who is to come as the Messiah, the Servant of the Lord, who is to bring salvation to many.

This Servant of the Lord will carry out the work of the Triune God. He “shall deal prudently” (52:13). He shall “prosper,” as our Authorized Version translates the same word, הַשְׁכִּיל where Jeremiah uses it for the future Messiah (23:5). He “shall succeed,” as it is also rendered, i.e., He shall carry out His task successfully. This task consists in bringing “judgment to the Gentiles” (Isa. 42:1), the *mishpat*, the “right” of the new covenant made with Abraham, embracing the revelation of His Gospel grace and mercy, the forgiveness of sins (cf. Jer. 31:34) and the knowledge of the true God. Jehovah has anointed Him “to preach good tidings to the meek,” He has “sent” Him to bind up the broken-hearted ... to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord” (Isa. 61:1f; Luke 4:16ff.). He is not only sent to “the tribes of Jacob” and “the preserved of Israel,” but God has also given Him “for a light to the Gentiles,” in order to be His “salvation unto the end of the earth” (49:6). With these words the *missio Dei*, the Sending of the Servant of the Lord, the Messiah, is being described centrifugally. Isaiah (53:11) even prophesies His sufferings for our transgressions and iniquities and His justifying of many.¹⁰ His sufferings and death, whereby God made His soul an offering for sin, have a twofold purpose. “He shall see his seed” (v. 10), He shall have an enduring posterity and shall accomplish His task. And then “he shall prolong *his* days” (ibid.), i.e., as Prof. Pieper in his *Jesias II* interprets: “He shall live many years. From His voluntary sacrificial death, which He died once and for all, eternal life also issues for the Servant, Romans 6:9; Revelation 1:18.” This is the twofold purpose of the Lord, to give His Servant spiritual seed and eternal life. Consequently He shall amaze many nations, for kings shall see “that which had not been told them” and consider that “which they had not heard” (52:15). This Servant will even be given the status of a King, when God will “divide him a portion with the great,” when “he shall divide the spoil with the strong” (53:12). God will then make him “the highest of the kings of the earth” in fulfillment of the promise made to David (Ps.

starting a process which made that man “twofold more the child of hell” than the Pharisees themselves. The Judaizers, who opposed the Apostle Paul in his missionary work, were such fanatics. Yet we must not overlook that Ruth, the progenitor of David, was a proselyte (Ruth 1:16); Naaman, the Syrian, likewise (II Kings 5:1); and that Zechariah speaks of many proselytes, of people and inhabitants of many cities that shall come and say to one another: “Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts” (8:20ff.). It is also worthy of note that the Diaspora was a very important link between Palestine and the rest of the Roman Empire and that the dispersion, *nolens volens*, contributed much to the spread of the Gospel message (cf. Acts 13:15).

¹⁰ The רַבִּים “many” in verses 11 and 12 has the same meaning as πολλοί in Romans 5:15, namely the meaning of “all men” (v. 18).

Consequently the promise given to Israel in the following chapter of Isaiah, “thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles” (54:3) includes all nations, an inheritance already promised to Abraham (Gen. 17:4–6), “a father of many nations” (v. 4). Paul argues that the promise of this inheritance is grace and therefore “sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all” (Rom. 4:16).

89:27). “He shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high” (Isa. 52:13). Indeed, He shall carry out His task successfully.

He shall carry it out successfully, because the Lord put His Spirit upon Him (42:1). This Spirit, with which the Lord has anointed Him (61:1), works in Him “the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord” (11:2). From this “Spirit of the Lord,” who “shall rest upon him,” He shall receive all the attributes of a “King,” who “shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth” (Jer. 23:8). He shall “stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek” (Isa. 11:10), i.e., they shall pay homage to Him as their King. This rule of the Messiah as king reaches its Old Testament climax in Daniel’s vision of “the Son of man” coming “with the clouds of heaven ... to the Ancient of days,” and to whom “was given ... a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed” (Dan. 7:13f.).

When these Gentiles worship their King, in whom the Spirit of the Lord is pre-eminently concentrated, they will experience the working of the Spirit. Israel, as the elect people of God, was the first to experience this working of the Spirit in their midst. It happened when God took of the spirit that was upon Moses and gave it to the seventy elders, so that they began to prophesy. Then Moses already gave utterance to the prophetic desire: “Would God that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that God would put his spirit upon them” (Num. 11:29f; cf. Isa. 63:11). To this future outpouring of the Spirit both Isaiah (43:15; 44:3) and Ezekiel then testify. Ezekiel does it with these words: “Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord God” (39:29). How that Spirit will work in putting a new spirit within God’s people, so that they shall live, we learn by reading what Ezekiel has to tell us in chapters 11:19; 36:27; 37:14. Here Ezekiel is already prophesying “the central wonder of the new aeon,” in which the Holy Spirit will exercise “an enduring influence on men.”¹¹ But the Gentiles are not mentioned with so many words in these prophecies of Ezekiel. Joel, however, does mention the Gentiles, when he prophesies the outpouring of God’s Spirit “upon all flesh” (2:28). This prophecy found its fulfillment at Pentecost, when “they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). It was then that the Apostle Peter interpreted this outpouring of the Holy Spirit as the fulfillment of that which had been spoken through the prophet Joel (Acts 2:17). Here in Joel the *missio Dei* as prophesied culminates in the trinitarian work of God.

The Perfection of the *Missio Dei*

Before we begin with the meaning of Pentecost for the *missio Dei*, we must give thought to the work of the Triune God, as presented to us by the Gospels, preparatory to Pentecost. We can continue where we left off recalling what the Old Testament had to say concerning the work of the Spirit including also what the post-exilic writings tell us of His working (Hag. 2:5; Zech. 4:6). Need it be said that this Spirit worked less clearly under the old covenant, so that the prophets had to try “to find out what was the time and what the circumstances, to which the spirit of Christ in them pointed”? (I Pet. 1:11, NEB).¹² But He did work, even if only “startwise”¹³ before Pentecost, being at all times one and the same Spirit (cf. I Cor. 1:1–4; Acts 7:51, 52; Gal. 4:28, 29; I Pet. 1:10, 11). We are here dealing not with a work of men, but with a work of God, which is not limited to time and space, although always in conformity with the divine pedagogy of God Himself.

Consequently in as far as the Gospels begin with the working of the Spirit, they but continue with His working as recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures. They speak of John the Baptist (Luke 1:15; John 3:34), of

¹¹ Walter Eichrodt, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 4. Aufl. (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961), Teil 2, p. 33. English translation: *Theology of the Old Testament* (London, 1960), p. 26.

¹² Instead of “what was the time” the Revised Standard Version (RSV) has “what person,” which the NEB has as an alternative translation, “who was the person,” a grammatically justified rendering.

¹³ This rendering has been adopted for Walther Eichrodt’s *stossweise* (op. cit., p. 33) in the sentence: *Die Geistwirkung tritt nicht mehr nur stossweise in einzelnen besonderen Ereignissen auf.*

Mary (Matt. 1:18; Luke 1:35), of Elisabeth (v. 41), of Zechariah (v. 67), of Simeon (2:27), who were filled with the Holy Ghost and prophesied. When John baptized Jesus, he “saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him” (1:32), and it was revealed to him that “the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost” (v. 33). Jesus appropriates to Himself the prophecy of Isaiah that the Spirit of the Lord “sent” Him (Luke 4:18) and Matthew sees Isaiah’s prophecy concerning the Servant of the Lord, upon whom God had put His Spirit, fulfilled in Jesus (12:18ff.). All these manifestations of the Spirit, as they are centered in and around Jesus, give promise to the fulfillment of all the Old Testament Messianic prophecies, including those pertaining to the Gentiles. Added to this the above passages do not only portray the working of the Spirit as intertwined with the action of the Son, but the working of the three Persons of the Trinity, so that we at once have the trinitarian nature of God’s work before us.

How did this work of the Triune God progress? “Immediately” after His Baptism, according to the Gospel of Mark, the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness, where “he was forty days tempted of Satan” (1:12f.), but did not give in. The Israelites were in the wilderness forty years, but were overthrown because they “lusted” and “murmured” (Num. 14:29f; I Cor. 10:5f.). And as the Old Testament wilderness became the place of God’s mighty deeds and judgments, “written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (v. 11), thus the wilderness where Jesus was tempted became the place of His first great deed in overcoming Satan, who sought to overthrow God’s kingdom. “When the devil had ended all the temptation” and “departed from him for a season ... Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee” (Luke 4:13f.), “preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:14f.). Preaching the Gospel of the kingdom from place to place was the great purpose of Christ’s coming; “for therefore came I forth,” He tells His disciples (1:38). Added to His preaching He “healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils” (v. 34). Because He cast out devils “by the Spirit of God,” Jesus could say: “The kingdom of God is come unto you” (Matt. 12:28).

This kingdom of God is the kingdom of Christ and as such is the Messianic Kingdom. It is noteworthy that in several passages (Eph. 5:5; Rev. 11:15) we find both the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Christ used synonymously. This implies that the Father has “appointed” the kingdom to His Son (Luke 22:29). Jesus as the Messiah-King (Ps. 118:26; Luke 19:38) is the king of this kingdom, to whom after His Resurrection has been given “all power ... in heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18), who is “the prince of the kings of the earth” (Rev. 1:5), the “KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (19:16). But we do well to remember that the nature of this kingdom is “not of this world” (John 18:36), is “not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom. 14:17).

Still it remains necessary to ascertain the essential meaning of the term “kingdom” as it is used both in the Old (מְלֻכּוּת) and the New Testament (βασιλεία). It does not have the meaning of realm, but of dominion or sovereignty, not of *Reich* but of *Herrschaft*. This specific meaning has to be emphasized, since our dogmatists simply spoke of *regnum potentiae, gratiae et gloriae*, the kingdom of power, grace and glory, *Machtreich, Gnadenreich und Ehrenreich*. The way this division is worded has the disadvantage that it does not point to the meaning of God’s activity as ruler, whether His omnipotent, His gracious, or His eschatological activity was taken into consideration. Christ’s kingdom is the rule of the Redeemer-King and as such it constitutes a soteriological activity. When Pilate asked Jesus about His kingdom, He informed him “that His kingdom was a gracious royal rule of the Truth in the hearts of the sinners. It is that that He came to suffer and to die for and establish.”¹⁴ As Redeemer-King “the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them” (Luke 9:56). The Gospel of Christ’s kingdom is the message of this His saving activity that “he died for our sins according to the scriptures ... that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (I Cor. 15:3f.). Luther in his *Large Catechism* in his explanation of the Second Petition answers the question: “But what is the kingdom of God? Answer: Nothing else than what we learned in the Creed, that God sent His Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, into the world to redeem and deliver us from the power of the devil, and to bring us to Himself, and to govern us as a King of righteousness, life, and salvation against sin, death and an evil

¹⁴ Harold H. Eckerr, “The Specific Functions of the Church in the World” (mimeographed essay), p. 17.

conscience, for which end He has also bestowed His Holy Ghost, who is to bring these things home to us by His holy Word, and to illumine and strengthen us in the faith by His power” (*Triglotta*, p. 711). Here we have the kingdom of God or of Christ expressed as the activity or work of the Triune God.

The Gospel of this kingdom was the entire preaching of Jesus and of His disciples. When Jesus chose the twelve disciples, He “sent them to preach the kingdom of God” (Matt. 10:7). And when He “appointed other seventy also,” He told them to say to the people of the city which received them: “The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you” (Luke 10:9). And whatsoever city did not receive them, they were to go out into the streets of that city and say: “Be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you” (v. 11). But the preaching of the twelve and the seventy was still confined to the cities of Israel. For Jesus commanded the twelve: “Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not” (Matt. 12:5). And the seventy He sent “into every city and place, whither he himself would come” (Luke 10:1). Jesus also confined His activity to Israel. Therefore He told the woman of Canaan: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 15:24, RSV). And to His “little flock” of disciples He said: “It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). Although Jesus healed the daughter of the Canaanite woman and the servant of the centurion (Matt. 8:5–13), and even crossed the border at times, nevertheless He kept Himself within the bounds of God’s plan of revelation and salvation. A parallel case is that of the Holy Spirit, who “was not yet given” (John 7:39) before Christ’s Resurrection, “because that Jesus was not yet glorified.” It was only when Jesus ascended into heaven, that Pentecost and the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles took place. All this did not prevent Jesus from glorying in the conversion of the Gentiles and saying to them that followed Him, “That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 8:11). Also the many parables of Jesus point to a universal kingdom (see esp. Matt. 13:38).

But before Christ could perfect the *missio Dei* He had to be glorified both by His sacrificial death and by His Resurrection. In the parable of the wicked husbandmen (Matt. 21:37ff.) Jesus foretold His being “sent” (*ἀπέστειλεν*) and “killed” (*ἀπέκτειναν*). Because of the suffering of death, which He underwent, He was “crowned with glory and honor” (Heb. 2:8). “Jesus’ death was a sweet-smelling savor to God, who *therefore* (italic ours) crowned him.”¹⁵ Christ’s suffering and His entering into glory are not to be separated from one another. From His sacrificial death, which He died for all, glory issued for Him, so that He could simply say to the Emmaus disciples: “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:26) Even in view of the hour of death during the Last Supper Jesus revealed the meaning of His mission by saying: “Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him” (John 13:31). And His high-priestly prayer, which He prayed the same night, He began with the words: “Father the hour has come: glorify thy Son that thy Son may glorify thee” (17:1).¹⁶

This glorification consists in God having made the crucified One “both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). He made Him Lord by raising Jesus from the dead and by making Him “to sit at his right hand in heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power” (Eph. 1:21). He made Him Christ by giving Him His Spirit according to His promise (Acts 2:33) and by declaring Him “to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4). It was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who thus “glorified his Son” (Acts 3:13) and “gave him glory” (I Pet. 1:21) when He raised Him from the dead (Acts 3:15). Therefore Jesus could confer the Holy Spirit on the disciples immediately after His Resurrection, when He “breathed on them” and when He said unto them, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22, RSV). On a mount in Galilee He also could give them the Great Commission in the Spirit, commanding them to “make

¹⁵ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1936), p. 76.

¹⁶ The author of an article, “The Purpose and Motive of Mission” in the *International Review of Missions* (vol. LIV, No. 215, July 1965) quotes the following line from one of the hymns sung at Matins on Sundays in the Orthodox service: “Thy Cross, O Lord, is life and resurrection for Thy people.” Here the praise of the cross is interwoven with the praise of the resurrection. In *The Theology of the Christian Mission*, edited by Gerald H. Anderson (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), we read from an article “Further Toward a Theology of Mission” by Wilhelm Andersen: “If we want to recognize mission as the work of God and if we want to let it be true and valid, then we must learn ever anew to see it from the standpoint of the Cross” (p. 302).

disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (RSV), preceded by the declaration: “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” and followed by the promise: “Lo, I am with you always,” i.e., in the Spirit, “even unto the end of the world” (Matt. 28:18ff.). With this Commission He proclaims the fulfillment of Daniel 7:13f, and the perfection of those things which “the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:23), and “that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47). Jerusalem became the scene of the outpouring of the Spirit and of the execution of the Great Commission, when the disciples at Pentecost “were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). Here the Holy Spirit reveals His work as worldwide, uniting Jews and Gentiles in the fellowship of the Spirit, and restoring the unity of mankind, lost by an act of divine judgment at Babel, by means of one language, “the language of Canaan” (Isa. 19:18), the Gospel language of the Kingdom of God.

The Promulgation of the *Missio Dei*

As Jesus prior to His death had “sent” His twelve and seventy disciples into the cities and villages of Palestine to “preach the kingdom of God,” He sent them after His Resurrection “unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). He did not do this before He had given them the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18ff.) and again had spoken to them “of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). He also told them that they would receive the power of the Holy Ghost and that they would be His witnesses (v. 8). Prior to Christ’s death “the Holy Ghost was not yet given” (John 7:39); after His Resurrection at Pentecost we have the outpouring of the Spirit. The Spirit who came upon the disciples at Pentecost was the Spirit “who raised Jesus from the dead” (Rom. 8:18), the Spirit of whom Jesus had said: “He shall glorify me” (John 16:14). The Spirit did this not only by raising Jesus from the dead, but also by “testifying” of Him when He was “sent” by the exalted Jesus from the Father to the Apostles (15:26). This, indeed, is the promulgation of the *missio Dei* of the Triune God.

The Holy Spirit is the missionary of the Gospel. When the Apostles spoke of “our” or “my” Gospel, they only indicated who the preachers were in one or the other instance. The fact, however, that they emphasized the “power” of the Gospel (Rom. 1:16) made clear that it is the Holy Spirit who exerts this power (I Thess. 1:5) and that their preaching the Gospel is done “with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven” (I Pet. 1:12). Even when they referred to those things of God which God had revealed to them by His Spirit, they did not fail to mention that they spoke them “not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth” (I Cor. 2:13). He is throughout the witness of all Gospel preaching, testifying to Jesus as the exalted Savior (cf. Acts 5:32). All preachers of the Gospel must keep this in mind and not trace the power of their sermons back to themselves but to the Holy Ghost. No less should the preacher whose sermons are not eloquent fail to trace the power of his Gospel sermons back to the power of the Holy Spirit, who remains the agent and witness of the Gospel.

As such an agent and witness the Holy Spirit “sent forth” (*ἐκπεμφθέντες*, Acts 13:4) the Apostles to the Gentile nations, there to bear witness of Jesus. The disciples did not immediately go forth among the Gentiles after they had received the Great Commission from their Lord. He had commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem but to wait for the promise of the Father (Acts 1:4). Even then they did not at once go and preach to the Gentiles. It was only when the Spirit moved Philip to go near to the Ethiopian eunuch on the latter’s return trip to Ethiopia and to join himself to his chariot (8:29) that the first non-Jewish convert, a black man, was won for Christ. Again it was only when the Spirit told Peter to arise and to go with the three men to the house of the centurion Cornelius, an uncircumcised foreigner, that he learned “that God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34), that “God also granted repentance unto life to the Gentiles” (11:18). Finally it was the Holy Ghost who said, “Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them” (13:2) and then sent them forth (v. 4). Here the *missio Dei* as God’s worldwide work had its further promulgation.

But the Holy Spirit did not only send forth but also opened and closed doors for their missionary work and told them where to go. Thus the Holy Ghost forbade Paul on his second missionary journey to preach the Word in the province of Asia (16:6) and told him not to go north into Bithynia (v. 7) but directly to Troas. In a vision the Lord called Paul and his coworkers to preach the Gospel unto the Macedonians (v. 10). Again in a vision the Lord told Paul to continue his preaching in Corinth, where He had “much people” (Acts 18:10). Consequently Paul taught the Word of God among the Corinthians for a year and six months (v. 11). When Paul at the conclusion of his third missionary journey was taken prisoner in Jerusalem, the Lord told him: “As thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome” (23:11) and “must be brought before Caesar” (27:24). In this manner God assigned the Gentile world-fields to the Apostle, even as He by His “action” (Gal. 2:8, NEB) assigned the Diaspora to the Apostle Peter. This resulted in the promulgation of the *missio Dei* into a worldwide mission of the Triune God.

At Pentecost the Apostles became the specially chosen instruments of the witnessing Spirit in accord with the promise of their Lord (Acts 1:8). And still, besides the Apostles, Stephen, Philip, and Barnabas are given special mention as men being “full of the Holy Spirit” (6:5; 7:55; 11:24), who “preached Christ” (8:5). Ultimately all the members of the church assembled in Jerusalem received the Spirit. “They were all filled with the Holy Ghost” (2:4). Not only the Apostles, the recipients of the whole Gospel truth, but every one of the many men and women who “were all with one accord in one place” (v. 1). For the Spirit gathers all believers, men and women, old and young, into His mighty and blessed work. We but have to read Romans 16 to become acquainted with the names of the many men and women who helped the Apostle Paul on his missionary journeys in his extensive work in Asia Minor, Europe, and finally also in Rome. The Spirit gave the missionary impulse to the whole primitive church even as He gives it to the church today and converts it as His mouthpiece into a witnessing community.

We welcome every passage in Acts that tells us specifically of the missionary activity of the church. Apart from the day of Pentecost mention is made in Acts 4:23–31 of the congregation in Jerusalem receiving the report of Peter and John as to what the chief priests and elders had said unto them. Having “prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness” (v. 31). Here we have a precise statement concerning the speaking of the Word on the part of the church. Acts 11:20 is still more specific in telling us that Hellenistic proselytes, lay-Christians from Cyprus and Cyrene, “spake unto the Grecians” in Antioch, “preaching the Lord Jesus.” This is the first time according to Acts that pagan Greeks heard the Gospel preached to them and that a great number of them believed (v. 21). Again, while the church in Antioch was engaged in a divine service to the Lord and fasting, “the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them” (13:2). At once the service was turned into a commissioning service with fasting, praying, and the laying on of hands, and then the whole congregation “sent them away,” i.e., released them (*ἀπέλυσαν*; Luther: *liessen sie gehen*). The Antioch church did not send them. The Holy Spirit did this, as Luke tells us with so many words (v. 4).¹⁷ But the congregation “recommended” them “to the grace of God” for their work (14:26) and received their report, how they had become the instruments through which God’s grace worked and how God “had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles” (v. 27). By doing this, the congregation made the work of the two apostles, “which they fulfilled” (v. 24), apparent as the *missio Dei*.

The Apostles were the missionaries in the full sense of the word, “ordained” witnesses of the resurrection of their Lord (Acts 1:22; 10:41), by whom they had received the apostleship (*ἀποστολή*), the sending, Rom. 1:5; Gal. 2:8) with an immediate call into the *missio Dei* (John 20:21; Acts 10:42). The other functionaries of the church as so many gifts of the Spirit, prophets, teachers, “miracle workers, those who have

¹⁷ This, of course, was an extraordinary sending. “The other way of sending,” as Luther tells us, “is indeed also one by God, but it is done through the instrumentality of man. It has been employed ever since God established the ministry with its preaching and its exercise of the Office of the Keys.” This “new way of sending was instituted, which works through man but is not of man... This type of sending is also of God and commanded by God. Even though God resorts to our aid and to human agency, it is He Himself who sends laborers into His vineyard.” *Luther’s Works*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1957), vol. 22, p. 482.

gifts of healing” (NEB), helps, governments, diversities of tongues (I Cor. 12:28) no less testified in the Spirit to Jesus as their Lord (v. 3). In short, all members of the church were “workers in the Lord” (Rom. 16:12, RSV), fellow workers with the Apostles (v. 9, RSV), who were to “covet earnestly the best gifts” (I Cor. 12:31). Today also we must distinguish between missionaries called by the church to work in mission fields and “workers in the Lord.” We cannot simply tell all the individual members of our congregations that they are and are to be missionaries. This is open to misunderstanding. They are and are to be workers, who work “hard in the Lord” (Rom. 16:12, RSV), proclaiming as good news (εὐαγγελιζόμενοι) the Word (Acts 8:4), even as the members of the church of Jerusalem, who were scattered abroad, had done. This is why “evangelism” should be emphasized strongly in our day, which is nothing less than a recruitment of the members of our congregations as “workers in the Lord.”¹⁸ Still the Apostle distinguishes between himself and Apollos on the one hand as fellow-workers (συνεργοί) of God and the Corinthian congregation as God’s tilled field (γεώργιον; Luther: *Ackerfeld*) on the other hand (I Cor. 3:9).

Pentecost is also the miraculous promulgation of the *missio Dei* according to the promise of the Lord, “I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18), “Christ, the Son of the living God” (v. 16) being the “rock” (v. 18), the “foundation” (I Cor. 12:12), the “chief corner stone” (Eph. 2:20), the church being “the body of Christ” (I Cor. 12:27; Eph. 1:23; Col. 1:18; 3:15). Therefore the inspired Apostle in I Corinthians 12:12 goes so far as to call the church “Christ.” His act of building (οἰκοδομεῖν) consists in that all believers “are built together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph. 2:22). They are God’s “workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (v. 10). These works God has “prepared in advance for us to walk in them.”¹⁹ They are the fruit of the Spirit with “love,” *agape* in first place (Gal. 5:22), whereby members of the primitive church were closely united with one another and whereby they made such a strong impression on their whole environment and rapidly grew in numbers. Throughout the Scriptures and church history we can discern how the Lord builds His church. Pentecost virtually lets us see how miraculously this building progressed and was promulgated, the Lord added “to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47).

The Consummation of the *Missio Dei*

With Pentecost the church entered into a new eon, which extends from the first to the second coming of Christ. Consequently the nature of the *missio Dei* is an eschatological one. Its beginning is the πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου, the fullness of the time, when “God sent forth his Son” (Gal. 4:4). Jesus called attention to it when He began to preach “the gospel of the kingdom of God,” and said, “The time is fulfilled” (Mark 1:14f.). It is God’s own time, “the end of the world” (AV), “the climax of history” (NEB), “the consummation of the eons” (Lenski), when all the past ages of the world, of the old eon, came to their joint goal, and when Christ “appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb. 9:26). In this time between the times the *missio Dei* is being brought to its consummation according to Christ’s own words: “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (Matt. 24:14). The church does not only proclaim the Christ that has come but the Christ that will come, and the latter not only in the Advent Season of the Church Year. She is the pilgrim church bearing witness from place to place to the “already” (ἤδη, Luke 12:49) and the “not yet” (οὐπω, Phil. 3:13; Heb. 2:8). Therefore she proclaims with the words of the Apostle: “Behold, now is the accepted time, behold, now is the day of salvation” (II Cor. 6:2). This καιρός, this “time-period,” this ἡμέρα, this “day,” this νῦν, this “now,” is not only εὐπρόσδεκτος, the “highly acceptable” day of salvation, but also the time in which we by the gifts of the Spirit are to approve, to recommend ourselves as the θεοῦ διάκονοι, as the ministers, the servants of God (v. 4), that the διακονία, the ministry, our service be not blamed and brought into discredit (v. 3), that we may be prepared to meet our Lord.

¹⁸ Cf. Hans-Lutz Poetsch, *Theologie der Evangelisation* (Bremen: Verlag Stelten, 1967).

¹⁹ Cf. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians* (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937), pp. 422ff.

One must always keep well in mind that in contrast to the $\nu\tilde{\nu}$, the “now,” Paul just as often makes mention of the $\pi\acute{o}\tau\epsilon$, the “once” (AV: sometimes; Luther: *weiland*). This “once” with all its darkness is still a reality. It is, however, being overcome by those who in the power of the Spirit put off the old man with all his evil deeds and put on the new man, which is being constantly renewed in the image of its Creator (Col. 3:9f.). The Risen Lord did not consent to tell His disciples when that end is to come. It was not for them to know the times and season, which the Father had put in His own power (Acts 1:7). Power, however, He did promise them, the power of the Holy Spirit, who would make them His witnesses “unto the uttermost part of the earth” (v. 8) and “unto the consummations of the age” (Matt. 28:20). This consummation is being preceded by the conjunction of the old eon and the new eon, which are in constant conflict with one another, during the whole inter-parousia period. It has found a dramatic description in Revelation. John sees heaven opened and beholds a white horse. The name of Him that sits upon it is called “The Word of God” (19:11ff.). A crown is given unto Him and He rides forth “conquering, and to conquer” (6:2). But there also come out alongside Him the red, black, and pale horses of War, Famine, and Death. Together they picture both the judgment of God and the salvation of God, pointing to the consummation of the new eon. Then the souls of those who are slain for the sake of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ (1:9) are clothed with white flowing robes (cf. 6:11), their reward of grace, while the ungodly, who do not believe in God’s Word, will receive their just reward (v. 17).

These martyrs are told to “rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled” (v. 11). For the *missio Dei* will not find its consummation until “a new heaven and a new earth” will take the place of “the first heaven and the first earth” that will pass away (Rev. 21:1). It is the new Creation of God for which the whole creation, the created universe, waits with “earnest expectation” (Rom. 8:19). We, to whom the Spirit is given as “first fruits of the harvest” (v. 23, NEB), by “waiting for it” and showing “our endurance” (v. 25: NEB) bear witness to it. For this new Creation has its beginnings in us now who are in Christ (II Cor. 5:17). The “old things” of the flesh, in which we “once” delighted, “are passed away;” now “things have become new” (II Cor. 5:17), ²⁰new in mind and soul. But this newness in us is to reach its consummation, when “all things” are made new by our exalted Lord (Rev. 21:5), all things, all of God’s saving work from its inception to its consummation. This consummation of the *missio Dei* is the world-wide work of the Triune God, the “Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come” (Rev. 4:8), whom the four and twenty elders worshipped, saying: “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (v. 11).

²⁰ We are here following Lenski in his translation of our passage, who calls “all things” in the AV an “importation” from Revelation 21:5.