

A TRINITARIAN SPIRITUALITY OF MISSION

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Abstract. The via contemplativa and the via activa have been seen as two parallel tracks in spirituality. The separation is inevitable without a rich Trinitarian anchor. Uniting the Western, substantive view of God and the Eastern, relational view offers the hope of an integrative spirituality: the coming together of Mary and Martha, the active and the contemplative life. The high-priestly prayer of Jesus in the garden offers a similar vision of integration: Intimacy and fruitfulness are possible through a mutual indwelling empowered by the Holy Spirit. We feed on the living bread so that the life of Christ is manifest in the world. At the table hostility becomes hospitality. Missional spirituality is founded on a single movement of Godself into the world: mission as the self-unfolding of contemplation.

INTRODUCTION

As an apostolic church the church can never in any respect be an end in itself, but, following the existence of the apostles, it exists only as it exercises the ministry of a herald . . . Its mission is not additional to its being. It is, as it is sent and active in its mission. It builds up itself for the sake of its mission and in relation to it.¹

Most of us experience our personal journeys with a characteristic modality. Mine became apparent in my chosen course of study at Regent College in the early 1980s—integration. I found myself exploring a sense of fragmentation in head and heart. An internal issue seemed to be manifest externally in my life in the tension between doing and being. I had an intuition that theological insight could resolve the philosophical dichotomy, and assist both emotionally, and practically—it could help me live out of a still center that I had rarely experienced. I was convinced that the journey I had begun in Christ was the unifying way.

¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 724–725.

Many years later, well along that journey, I found myself writing pastoral theology with a growing interest in missional *spirituality*. It seemed to me that the dichotomy I had experienced was manifest systemically: observable in churches and ministries. Some were strong in activism, and some were strong in prayer and contemplation, but rarely were the two in balance. The symptoms of the separation were evident: an otherworldly pietism on one hand, and an over-zealous activism, often resulting in burnout, on the other.

With the enriched missional conversation of the past two decades (and reaching all the way to Karl Barth and Karl Rahner), I made a third connection. The modalistic² tendencies in much theological discourse reinforced the dualism I observed in spiritual practice. If Christology held the center, then Trinitarian theology receded, and it became difficult to renew an integrative practice: Doing and being travelled together, yet separately, as parallel modes in spiritual life.³

Two parallel tracks were marked out, and I wondered increasingly where in the distance the two might meet. In classical terms, these two tracks were the *via contemplativa*, and the *via activa*. Gazing along the parallel tracks on a sunny day, one senses they grow nearer in the distance. Is this merely an optical illusion, or do these parallel lines meet somewhere in the heart of God? Is there really a theological resolution to the question?

That resolution is found in a renewal and reappropriation of Trinitarian thought. The solution is theological.⁴

TRACKING THE THEOLOGICAL RESOLUTION

The roots of the missional shift can be traced directly to the 1952 Willingen conference, where Karl Hartenstein picked up the Barthian gauntlet and coined the term *missio Dei*. At Willingen the focus shifted from the mission of the church (ecclesiology) to the mission of God. Bosch summarized the conclusion in this classic statement:

Mission was understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It was thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of eccle-

² Douglas John Hall, "Confessing Christ in a Post-Christendom Context" (address to the 1999 Covenant Conference, Network of Presbyterians, November 6, 1999), 3. Hall warns of "Christomonism."

³ See Darrel Guder's discussion of the reductionist and dichotomizing tendencies that are at war with theology in his paper, "Missio Dei: Integrating Theological Formation for Apostolic Vocation," *Missiology: An International Review* XXXVII, no. 1 (January, 2009), 70.

⁴ A related argument, with application to the congregation in mission, is made by Swart, Hagley, Ogren, and Love in their article, "Toward a Missional Theology of Participation," *Missiology: An International Review* XXXVII, no. 1 (January, 2009), 3.

siology, or soteriology. The classical doctrine on the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another “movement:” [*sic*] Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church in the world.⁵

But there was one more note that needed to be played, and van Gelder and Zscheile relate the story in their recent survey of the missional conversation after *Missional Church* (1998). In *The Missional Church in Perspective* the authors note that even the rich Trinitarian ecclesiology of John Zizioulas and Miroslav Volf did not deal explicitly with mission. Ecclesiology and mission have been travelling on parallel, but separate tracks. A richer, integrative theological frame has been needed, and the growing conversation between Eastern and Western traditions holds promise for a recovery.

The Western reading of the Trinity has emphasized the single divine substance of God and treated the personhood within the Trinity secondarily. Consequently, the West ended up with a functionally monistic way of imagining God’s engagement with the world: Father, Son, and Spirit acting individually. In contrast, “the Eastern tradition is seen as beginning with the relationality of the three divine persons, whose unity is found in the source or origin of the Father, as well as in their *perichoresis*, or mutual indwelling.”⁶ This attention to relationality is a crucial complement to the sending emphasis characteristic of the West. According to John Zizioulas, relational personhood is constitutive of being: a component of essence. There is no personal identity without relationality. “The Orthodox tradition has stressed the generative, outward-reaching love (*ekstasis*) and communion (*koinonia*) of the three persons. The Trinity is seen as a community whose orientation is outward, and whose shared love spills over beyond itself. Moreover, the concept of *perichoresis* . . . [a] dynamic, circulating movement, has offered rich analogies for human interdependence.”⁷

The work of Zizioulas⁸ reaches back to the Cappadocian fathers, who understood God’s being (substance or *ousia*) as an essentially relational achievement among the three persons (*hypostasis*) of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Therefore, the unified being of the One God is only to be found in the relational communion of the three persons. Lesslie Newbigin frames it like this:

Interpersonal relatedness belongs to the very being of God. Therefore there can be no salvation for human beings except in relatedness. No

⁵ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 390.

⁶ Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 103.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁸ John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Toronto: Novalis, 2002).

one can be made whole except by being restored to the wholeness of that being-in-relatedness for which God made us and the world and which is the image of that being-in-relatedness which is the being of God himself.⁹

My interest is a Trinitarian spirituality of mission: a *missional spirituality*. By definition this is an integrative spirituality rooted in Godself, with no separation of being and act. *Missio Dei* indicates that there is both communion and sending within God's triune life. Thus, as a community of Christ the church is always eccentric, always oriented toward the other. Relationality is defined by both inward and outward movement, both community and mission. Every inward movement begins an outward one, and every outward movement begins an inward one. The unifying theme is love.

The twelfth-century writer Bernard of Clairvaux reminds us that *lex immaculata caritas est*: the divine law is love. Love and *perichoresis*: this image of the dance offers a relational Trinitarian lens that is many centuries old. In one of his two hundred sermons on the Song of Songs, Bernard writes:

The man who is wise will see his life more as a reservoir than a canal. The canal simultaneously pours out what it receives; the reservoir retains the water until it is filled, then discharges the overflow without loss to itself. Today there are many in the church who act like canals, the reservoirs are far too rare . . .

You too must learn to await this fullness before pouring out your gifts, do not try to be more generous than God.¹⁰

Bernard saw clearly that God is the center, and his nature is love. Yet this did not lead him to activism; as a pastoral leader, he understood that theology determines practice. The best answer to the integration question is found in the being of the Trinity, and that answer has application to our faith communities as they seek to be whole and healthy expressions of God's life. Communities of *shalom* invite us into lives of emotional and spiritual wholeness. Jean Vanier, founder of the L'Arche communities, cues us to the dangers of shared life, which is outwardly oriented at the expense of inward life. Vanier writes:

The more we become people of action and responsibility in our community, the more we must become people of contemplation . . . It is only to the extent that we nurture our own hearts that we can keep interior freedom. People who are hyperactive, fleeing from their deep

⁹ Leslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 70.

¹⁰ Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs*, Sn 18, trans. Killian Walsh (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1979), 1:2.

selves and their wound, become tyrannical and their exercise of responsibility only creates conflict.¹¹

INTEGRATION IN THE GREAT COMMANDMENT

The starting place for our reflection is Deuteronomy 5, where we hear Moses summarize the Decalogue. Then in chapter 6 we hear the Shema, the liturgical formula that points to unity of God's being. Next we are urged to love the Lord with our whole self. The Shema runs like this: "Hear (shema) O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one,"¹² then follows the great commandment:

*Love the LORD your God with all your heart
and with all your soul and with all your strength.*

In other words, love God with all that you are, and all that you have. Bernard reminds us that God is not known if God is not loved. This pre-Enlightenment epistemology was less abstract than the paradigm we absorbed in Modernity. Writers like James K. A. Smith have been writing a postmodern critique of Enlightenment rationalism, pointing us to an older, more holistic way of seeing the world.¹³ Might that older way be offered to us here in this story?

In Mark 12 Jesus answers the question of a lawyer, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" Jesus answers:

*"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this:
'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.
Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul
and with all your mind and with all your strength.'
The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'
There is no commandment greater than these."*

Jesus repeats the great liturgical formula, reminding us of the unity of God's being. Then he summarizes the great commandment, and adds a second: that we should "love [y]our neighbour as [y]ourself." But why is the Shema placed here? Why not merely restate the call to love God and then add the call to love our neighbour?

¹¹ Jean Vanier, *Community and Commitment* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989).

¹² All Scripture taken from TNIV unless otherwise noted.

¹³ See in particular James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009). I am reminded of Blaise Pascal's assertion that, "The heart has reasons which reason cannot know."

I believe Jesus had a very clear intention, and it is rooted in the nature of God. The emphasis is on integration: in uniting our whole heart in love we mirror God in his wholeness. The direction (telos) of living the commandment, and loving from all that we are, is *integration*. A Jewish reading of the Shema offers this force, called *yichud* or “unification” or “integrity.” *Yichud* is a response to *echud* (God is “one”). It is by living in God’s life that we find that integration.

Implied in the words of this passage, the great commandment, framed by the Shema, is a promise. When we love the Lord with all that we are, we are united in God’s wholeness. We experience integration of head, heart, and body—oneness of soul and intention—something most of us long for, but rarely know. We experience inner harmony, a restoration of God’s original intention and a form of healing.

William Cavanaugh writes of the first eleven chapters of Genesis that they point to shalom: a deep harmony. These chapters are a radically different explanation of origins than the accounts of the surrounding cultures. When the ancient Babylonians looked at the world, they saw violence as normal. Consequently their account of creation, the *Enuma Elish*, is a war among the gods. But for ancient Israel, the destiny of the world is peace and harmony. The world was created in peace, then fell into sin, and God’s purpose is to restore shalom. Cavanaugh writes that, “Harmony, in other words, is the way things really are. The story of Adam and Eve’s fall, therefore, is not a cause for pessimism, but for optimism: there is something originally good to fall away from . . . We have hope that we can be saved from our predicament, and recover the harmony that was meant to be.”¹⁴

Emotional and spiritual well-being walk together, and the down side is people operating without awareness of their own shadow. The dichotomy is too common. We so emphasized the juridical side of atonement, the legal standing we acquire when we give our lives to God, that we neglected our part in sanctification and many believers remained babes in Christ. We created a gap between emotional and spiritual wholeness, a gap that is mirrored in the tensions in our faith communities.¹⁵

Broadly speaking the question is one of spiritual formation. The most basic question is this: Why do we love what we love?

What if the work of formation is not just about habits and intellect, but about hearts and bodies? Smith argues that the promise of loving rightly requires new models of spiritual formation, and a new way of thinking about what it means to be human. Reaching back to Augustine, writers like Smith and Cavanaugh are telling us that Enlightenment models have pushed us toward a reductionist anthropology that legitimated appeals to the mind, while neglecting the grounds of motivation: the affections.

¹⁴ William Cavanaugh, “The Church as God’s Body Language,” *Zadok Perspectives* (Spring 2006), 7–13.

¹⁵ One of the books I have valued in this analysis is Larry Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999).

In *Desiring the Kingdom*, Smith describes the marketing of everything with sex, then writes:

A common churchy response to this cultural situation runs along basically Platonic lines: to quell the raging passion of sexuality that courses its way through culture, our bodies and passions need to be disciplined by our “higher” parts—we need to get the brain to trump other organs and thus bring the passions into submission to the intellect. And the way to do this is to get ideas to trump passions. In other words, the church responds to the overwhelming cultural activation and formation of desire by trying to fill our head with ideas and beliefs.¹⁶

Smith argues that this is not merely “wrong-headed,” but neglects the way humans really work. He suggests that “Victoria knows Augustine’s secret,”¹⁷ and that we should admit that the marketing industry is operating with a “better, more creational, more incarnational, more holistic anthropology than much of the (evangelical) church.”¹⁸ In other words, the marketing industry is able to “capture, form, and direct our desires precisely because it has rightly discerned that we are embodied, desiring creatures whose being-in-the-world is governed by the imagination.”¹⁹

For Smith, embodied desire is the heart of the matter, and the church has been missing the target: it is as if the church is pouring water on our head to put out a fire in our heart.

How do we form desire? How do we learn to love rightly? What liturgical forms can help us? These are Smith’s pursuit, moving beyond “worldview” questions and cognitive pedagogies. Smith’s goal, like mine, is integrative.

LUKE 10—MARY & MARTHA

Luke 10 has become paradigmatic in the missional conversation: The disciples are sent out before Jesus, sent empty-handed and vulnerable, sent into villages and towns two by two.²⁰ In the flow of the chapter, the great commandment follows: We are to love God with all that we are, and our neighbours as ourselves. Then follows the story of the Good Samaritan. The lesson is that God cares for the needy, the “other,” and not just the righteous few, and even the caregiver may not meet our idea of righteousness! So much for a colonial style mission: We go as learners, and God’s

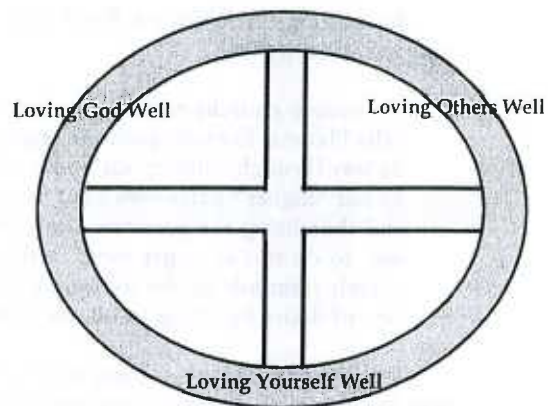
¹⁶ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 76.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 77.

²⁰ See especially the treatment of this passage in Alan Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighbourhood* (Eagle, ID: Allelon, 2011).



heart is much larger than ours. The emptiness advocated earlier in the chapter is broader than only a physical leaving (v. 4 “purse and bag”) but requires also a poverty of spirit.²¹

Then follows the Mary-Martha story; the placement of this one has puzzled me. The focus has been on mission: Now it shifts to contemplation, with Mary who sits quietly finding the Lord’s approval. What? What about the needy world? What about our neighbours? What about our being sent out on mission?

This story is a radical reframe of service. Our first service is to Christ. Actually—our ONLY service is to him and any other service is in him and through him. All other voices, all other calls are relativized in view of our call to worship. All that does not flow from our intimacy with the Father will fall short of God’s intention.

Taken another way, contemplation and mission are two sides of a coin, two tracks that find their unity in the being of God. Only the contemplative will be a healthy missionary, a rich channel for the Spirit, securely rooted in the love of God; only the missionary, rooted in place, feet on the dusty road, mired in the brokenness of humankind, understands the need for contemplation. Root and fruit are intimately related. Then, to reinforce and expand this point, chapter 11 leads off with the disciples prayer—the prayer of the kingdom. We are reminded that God’s purpose is to unite heaven and earth: no other-worldly spirituality here, but rather a physical, embodied, slam-bang ending.

Notice also that this interaction occurs in the context of a home. Jesus on mission enters our homes, or as Eugene Peterson put it, “The Word became flesh and blood and entered the neighbourhood” (*The Message*). It turns out that mission looks a lot like life—like extending family bound-

²¹ See in particular Henri Nouwen’s reflections on poverty in *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (New York: Doubleday & So., 1975), 72ff.



Christ in the House of Mary & Martha. Johannes Vermeer, c. 1654

aries—like hospitality. Hospitality nearly always involves food, but food has an over-plus of meaning: the bread we share nurtures body *and* spirit. Hospitality at its best is sacramental.

The story of Mary and Martha moves us beyond polarities: mission and devotion belong together. The deeper question is identity: To whom do we belong? We need to hear the approval of the Father before we serve him: *You are my beloved*. Then we can go out with freedom and offer the same love to others, a free and hospitable space.²² Coming to know and trust God's love is a lifelong process. David Benner writes, "Every time I dare to meet God in the vulnerability of my sin and shame, this knowing is strengthened. Every time I fall back into a self-improvement mode and try to bring God my best self, it is weakened. I only know Divine unconditional, radical and reckless love for me when I dare to approach God just as I am."²³

NURTURING INNER LIFE: THE BREAD OF LIFE

I was reading in John 15–17, and I was particularly interested in the context of the "in but not of" framing in John 17. My interest is a Trinitarian and missional *spirituality*: an engaged and contemplative spirituality

²² See in particular the marvelous work of Henri Nouwen on hospitality in *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*.

²³ David Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 51.

rooted in Godself. No surprise, the framing of John 15 is *intimacy and fruitfulness*: the frame is mission, and the context is prayer. John 17 is similarly framed. In both narratives Jesus is concerned to maintain an intimate connection with his disciples. But this is an intimacy that has little in the way of human parallels. Jesus prays that they will “remain in his love,” in the same sense that the branch is connected to the vine. In the grapevine life flows to the branches because they share one heart and one source.

In chapter 17 this relationship takes on an even richer tone. Here Jesus speaks of a mutual participation that is *perichoretic*—a mutual indwelling that is made possible by the Holy Spirit. He prays that, “[J]ust as [the father] is in me and I in [him], they also be in us,” (v. 21) and then again, “I in them and you in me” (v. 23). How are we to describe this relationship? We are speaking of spiritual realities and can only “see through a glass darkly.” In a text written around 1670, Henri Scougal writes,

By this time I hope it doth appear, that religion is with a great deal of reason termed a *life*, or vital principle . . . and so it may be called, not only in regard of its fountain and original, having God for its author, and being wrought in the souls of men by the power of his Holy Spirit; but also in regard of its nature, religion being a resemblance of the divine perfections, the image of the Almighty shining in the soul of man: nay, it is a real participation of his nature, it is a beam of the eternal light, a drop of that infinite ocean of goodness; and they who are endowed with it may be said to have “God dwelling in their souls, and Christ formed within them.”²⁴

As Scougal makes clear, we are considering an organic relationship between root and fruit. Mission must grow out of intimacy with God: anchored in the place where we *experientially* know that Christ is our all in all. We would be mistaken, however, to reduce this to a cognitive exchange. To participate in the life of Christ is to feed on him. When we feed on this bread, we first *receive* what we will later share. How does this occur?

In John chapter 6 Jesus feeds the multitude, and then reflects on the meaning of what he has done. He tells them not to “work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you” (v. 27). A little later, after some are grumbling because Jesus will not continue to give them physical food, he says, “I am the living bread that comes down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (v. 51). In verses 55–56 his words are expanded somewhat when he claims that, “my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.”

This writer is not going to argue for trans-substantiation, an actual physical transformation of the bread or the wine, but rather for real grace

²⁴ Henri Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* (Christian Heritage, 1996), 39.

coming through our participation in the Eucharist. Paul states in 1 Corinthians 11 that at the table there is a real participation in the life of Christ (vv. 16–17). At the table we receive real sustenance—inward and spiritual grace, and sometimes more. How is this possible? The answer lies in the nature of the human spirit.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:23 Paul prays, “May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit (*pneuma*) and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Elsewhere, in 2 Corinthians 4 Paul tells us that we carry a treasure in earthen vessels, and while the outer man is decaying, the *inner man* is being renewed day by day. This is accomplished by the power of the Spirit. Paul also reminds us in 1 Corinthians 2 that the Spirit communicates with our human spirit so that, “[W]e may know the things freely given to us by God” (vv. 10–13).

There is a spiritual component to our earthly existence that parallels our bodily existence. Generally we have called this our “soul,” and some writers have termed it our “spiritual man” that exists alongside our physical or natural body.²⁵ I note this here because it explains some kinds of spiritual experience that cannot be explained any other way. Anyone who has ever heard (with inner ears) or seen (with inner sight) knows what I am talking about. When God wants to, and when we are open, he communicates with us directly and we “hear” and “see” with a spiritual part of our being.

If, however, we have a spirit body, then that body also requires nourishment—but physical food will not suffice. Rather, we feed on Christ through prayer, study, in meeting with other believers, and through the ordinances he has given, and particularly at the table of the Lord.

The book of alternative services of the Anglican Church of Canada offers this liturgy.

We pray you, gracious God,
to send your Holy Spirit upon these gifts,
that they may be the sacrament
of the body of Christ
and his blood of the new covenant.
Unite us to your Son in his sacrifice,
that we, made acceptable in him,
may be sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

In the fullness of time,
reconcile all things in Christ,
and make them new . . .²⁶

²⁵ Watchman Nee, *The Spiritual Man* (New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers, Inc., 1968), 1.

²⁶ Anglican Church of Canada, *Book of Alternative Services* (Toronto: ABC Publishing, 1985), 199–200.

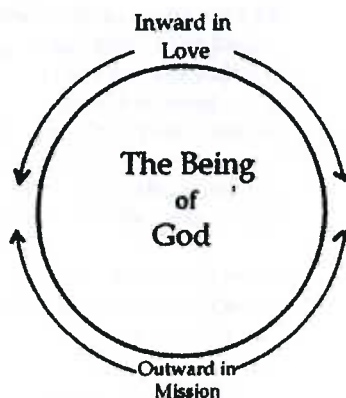
This liturgy is clearly Trinitarian. These words demonstrate that the supper is both a remembrance of Jesus' sacrifice and a looking forward to the coming of the kingdom. This liturgy acknowledges our relationship to Christ, his identity as Creator and Redeemer, even as it invites God to unite us more fully to the Head. At the Lord's Table we confess our hope that God will unite all things in Christ. We symbolize Jesus' death and his resurrection for our sakes and as the first-fruit of the life we have already entered. We invite and expect the Spirit to empower us to live in God's life.

At the table we *become* the new community. We celebrate the breaking down of divisions between rich and poor, Greek and Jew, male and female: at the table we are all needy. And we celebrate a meal that we will one day celebrate with God in the new world: the veil between heaven and earth, the past and the future, is lifted. At the table we feed both our physical and our spiritual being with food adequate for all the world.

A similar invitation is used in some Episcopal churches, but this one incorporates an element of confession. Diane Butler Bass shares the liturgy in her chapter on contemplation.

This is the table, not of the Church, but of the Lord.
 It is made ready for those who love him
 And for those who want to love him more.
 So, come, you who have much faith and you who have little,
 You who have been here often and you who have not been here long,
 You who have tried to follow and you who have failed.
 Come, because it is the Lord who invites you.
 It is his will that those who want him should meet him here.²⁷

I am particularly fond of this invitation, because it bridges the human and divine uniquely in recognizing our brokenness. It is precisely because



²⁷ Diane Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us* (San Francisco: Harper-Collins, 2006), 117.

we are spiritually hungry and needy that we gather together, and that we invite God to restore us and make us whole. As Simone Weil is rumored to have written: "The world is real: it offers resistance to love." There is a quality of realism here, as there is in Jesus' prayer for his disciples in John 15–17, that makes it easier for us to present our whole selves to God: both light and darkness, in joy and in sorrow, in hope and faith for a new creation.

THE ONTOLOGY OF MISSIONAL COMMUNITY

Mission that flows from life in the Spirit, rooted in the vine, will be fruitful. God's mission is God's life in us, given for the world.

John 17:20–21 pulls all the pieces together for us, and points us back to the nature of God.

*"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also
for those who will believe in me through their message,
that all of them may be one,
Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.
May they also be in us so that the world may believe
that you have sent me."*

It is all here: prayer and intimacy; the message alive and embodied in us; our unity with Christ, and through Christ with his body. Here also is our participation in the perichoretic life of God so that our lives make God's life known. As we are rooted in the loving nature of God we grow in the wholeness that offers shalom—wholeness and true life for others.²⁸

At one time I was content to view the essential dynamic of missional community as a rhythm found in the life of God: inward in love, outward in mission. In an article in 2004, Seng-Kong Tan had something different to say. He writes:

God creates and missionizes from his overflowing fullness, freedom and love . . . As holistic self-relation and relation with others proceed from our relation with God, so genuine human missions must arise from true contemplation. Prayer and missions are not in competition. "On the contrary," according to Jean Daniélou, "mission appears as the self-unfolding of contemplation."²⁹

²⁸ That love and that life will make demands on us, as Carlo Caretto somewhere remarks. To speak about our sentness is to speak about our submission to God's life and his purposes. But where power is exercised, intimacy can become dangerous and manipulative. How do we avoid abuses? By remaining rooted in self-giving love, the very life of God.

²⁹ Seng-Kong Tan, "A Trinitarian Ontology of Missions," *International Review of Missions* (April, 2004).

Tan's insight, echoing Bernard's, is simple enough: God has a single nature and it is love. His inward life is perfect communion among three Persons. The reservoir overflows from its abundance. All is love: both community and mission, a single unifying movement in Godself.³⁰ *Missio Dei* indicates both communion and sending within God's triune life. Every inward movement begins an outward one, and every outward movement begins an inward one.

The church as the Body of Christ participates in the divine life of God: It exists as community in mission with no separation between being and action. David Bosch writes that, "Mission is epiphany, God's arrival on the scene: In the church's mission the Lord of the entire world reveals himself."³¹ But equally, in the very life of the community God is revealed. As Yoder and Cartwright put it,

The political novelty that God brings into the world is a community of those who serve instead of ruling, who suffer instead of inflicting suffering, whose fellowship crosses social lines instead of reinforcing them. This new Christian community in which the walls are broken down not by human idealism or democratic legalism but by the work of Christ is not only a vehicle for the gospel or only a fruit of the gospel; it is the good news. It is not merely the agent of mission or the constituency of a mission agency. This is the mission.³²

Bernard's metaphor is both reservoir and river. In the spring a river may overflow its banks. Is the river more full when the banks overflow? No, the river itself remains the same. Is the water that overflows any less the life of the river? No, the river retains its center and the waters outside the banks remain part of the river.

Missio Dei tells us that ecclesial identity is rooted in the life of God. Mission is not a secondary, optional, and derivative thing that churches do once they have the main thing down. *When we pull apart God and mission Christian life and mission are similarly separated*; the fabric of the gospel itself is damaged. Sharing the gospel ends up like propaganda: an ideology; a system of belief. When the church is one thing, and its mission another (i.e., church planting), we end up with something akin to a franchise, de-con-

³⁰ While this discussion is occurring in a section labeled "ontology," it would be only a short step to make a connection to epistemology. The Eucharist is an identity experience. As Bernard put it, *amor est magis cognitivus quam cognitio*, "We know things better through love than through knowledge."

³¹ David J. Bosch, "Theological Education in Missionary Perspective," *Missiology* X, no.1 (January, 1982), 23.

³² J. H. Yoder, R. Mouw, and M. Cartwright, *The Royal Priesthood* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1998), 91.

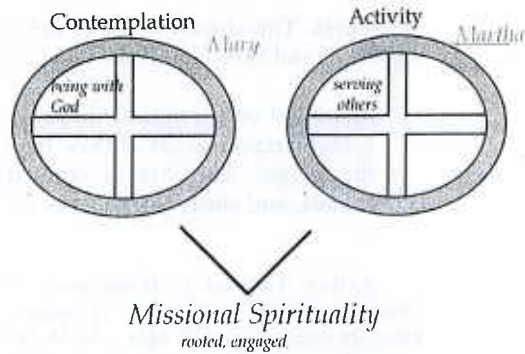


Diagram inspired by Peter Scazzero, "Emotionally Healthy Spirituality"

tualized McDonaldization.³³ Means and the message are intrinsically tied, and when those ties are severed bad things happen. As Lesslie Newbigin put it: "An un-churchly mission is as much a monstrosity as an un-missionary church."³⁴

CONCLUSION

The Great Commandment hints at the integration of life that the Lord intends, founded on the very nature of Godself. The Mary and Martha story reinforce the meaning: the active life and the contemplative life are both manifestations of the life lived in God's Trinitarian life, the life integrated and whole. Missional communities reflect the Triune life, the single life of community in mission.

It turns out that mission looks a lot like life: like hospitality. Hospitality involves food, but food has an over-plus of meaning. The lesson of John 6 is that the bread we share nurtures body *and* spirit, roots us more deeply in Godself. Relationality in God's life is defined by both inward and outward movement. Every inward movement begins an outward one, and every outward movement begins an inward one. The unifying theme is love. When we as communities of faith embody God's love together, mission is a product of the overflow of our experience of shalom: harmony and

³³ Roger Helland and Len Hjalmarson call this dynamic "ex-carnation." *Missional Spirituality* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011). For McDonaldization see John Drane, *The McDonaldization of the Church* (Wandsworth, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2000).

³⁴ Quoted in John Flett, *The Witness of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 71.

wholeness. The church becomes the hermeneutic of the gospel, a sign, instrument, and foretaste of the kingdom of God. Inagrace Dietterich writes,

Missional communities, shaped by faith in Jesus Christ . . . bring the actual circumstances of their lives into conversation with the peace of the gospel. Hostility is converted into hospitality, strangers into friends, and enemies into guests.³⁵

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³⁵ Inagrace Dietterich, "Cultivating Communities of the Holy Spirit," in *Missional Church*, ed. Darrel L. Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 151.



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