

# The Development of the Theological Concept of Mission in Scripture

© Y. Fursov, 2011

Yevgen FURSOV, *Prague, Czech Republic*

---



**Yevgen Fursov** was born and raised in Mariupol. In 2001 he received a Bachelor of Missiology at Donetsk Christian University. Then he applied and was accepted at the Christian Study Center in Mittersill (Austria). After finishing this school he received Bachelor's degree in Theology. Currently writing a dissertation on the master's program at the International Baptist Theological Seminary (Prague). Sometimes he is preaching and teaching in the church. Yevgen lives in Czech Republic, married, has 3 years old daughter. E-mail: efursov@mail.ru

## Introduction

The term “mission” has often been associated with the idea, both linguistically and theologically, of sending. By looking at the historical development of mission David Bosch, in his comprehensive work *Transforming Mission*, argues that there has never been only one single theology of mission. Yet in his attempt to bring different theologies of mission together he begins with “the traditional understanding of mission as the sending of preachers to distant places.”<sup>[1]</sup> Similarly, Messer holds that “every Christian receives the call to be in mission as apostles... the term ‘as apostle’ means literally ‘one who is sent out.’”<sup>[2]</sup> To the objection of why the meaning of mission should be limited to sending, DuBose simply states: “because that is what mission means.”<sup>[3]</sup>

Understanding mission in terms of sending is not necessarily wrong and in some instances mission is to be presented in this way. For example, Scherer defines mission for the Church as reaching out beyond its inner life to bear witness to the Gospel.<sup>[4]</sup> His critique of the Church as being concentrated on its inner activities (e.g. worship, preaching, and education) and calling these things the “Church’s mission” may well be correct. However, such a narrow understanding of mission may lead to some theological difficulties. So Bosch, taking the concept of sending as the basis for mission, comes to the conclusion that there was no mission in the Old Testament: “There is, in the Old Testament, no indication of the believers of the old covenant being sent by God to

---

<sup>[1]</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), p. 17.

<sup>[2]</sup> Donald E., Messer, *A Conspiracy of Goodness* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992), p. 16.

<sup>[3]</sup> Francis M. DuBose, *God Who Sends* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1983), p. 25

cross geographical, religious, and social frontiers in order to win others to faith in Yahweh.”<sup>[5]</sup> He agrees with Rzepkowski who claims: “The decisive difference between the Old and the New Testament is mission.”<sup>[6]</sup>

This tension appears when the concept of sending is too much “Christianized” and mission becomes exclusively a Christian feature. In this paper I am going to investigate the development of the concept of mission in Scripture with an attempt to find out how both the Old and New Testaments represent the wholeness of mission. In the Old Testament we are going to explore the development of mission from a covenantal perspective. The focus will be on the missional nature of God’s covenant with Noah, Abraham and within the Sinaic covenant. The missional relation of God and the Christian Church towards this world will be considered in the second part of this paper.

Thus, the aim of this paper is twofold: to trace the development of mission in Scripture and to investigate whether the concept of redemption can be understood as a uniting feature between theology and missiology as well as missional unity between the Old and the New Testaments.

Mission’s point of departure – *Missio Dei*

There are different definitions of mission, but mostly their point of departure

comes from the Latin verb, *mittere*, “to send.” The root meaning “sending” or, “being sent” plays a significant role for the understanding of mission. But the term “mission” does not appear in the Bible and thus this theme has become the subject of debate.<sup>[7]</sup> The traditional view of mission has often been challenged and thus has made theologians review and redefine this concept.<sup>[8]</sup>

From the second half of the twentieth century the term *Missio Dei* has increasingly become popular in the theology of mission. The emphasis has been on God as a missionary God and that mission was not primarily the activity of the Church but of God. For instance, in his definition of mission Bosch states the following: “... mission is *missio Dei*, which seeks to subsume into itself the *missiones ecclesiae*, the missionary programmes of the church. It is not the church which ‘undertakes’ mission; it is the *missio Dei* which constitutes the church.”<sup>[9]</sup> Slightly modified. *Missio Dei* still remains the main point of departure for the developing theology of mission today. Verster defines mission from a solid theological point of view. For him “mission’s turning point of departure is God’s great turning towards the world in the form of his Son Jesus Christ.”<sup>[10]</sup> Such a Christological understanding of mission leaves no place for a missiological reading of the Old Testa-

<sup>[4]</sup> James A. Scherer, *Gospel, Church, and Kingdom* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987), p. 37.

<sup>[5]</sup> *Ibid.*, Bosch, p. 17.

<sup>[6]</sup> H. Rzepkowski, *The Theology of Mission* (Verbum SVD vol. 15, 1974), p. 80.

<sup>[7]</sup> P. Penner also recognizes the existing tension by saying: “Though claiming Scripture as its foundation and starting point, missiology, nevertheless, often seems to be out of touch with basic biblical studies, and many of its terms – even the term mission – seem to have no biblical origins.” P. Penner, *Bible and Mission* (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2008),

p.74. Similarly, DuBose recognizes the existing tension due to the absence of the word “mission” in the Bible (Francis M. DuBose, *God Who Sends* [Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1983], p. 15).

<sup>[8]</sup> R. Routledge argues that “it is too narrow to limit ‘mission’ to its root meaning of ‘sending’ or ‘being sent.’” (R. Routledge, *Bible and Mission* [Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2008], p. 9).

<sup>[9]</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), p. 519.

<sup>[10]</sup> Pieter Verster, *A Theology of Christian Mission* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), p. 6.

ment. But if proclaiming God's will and word is an inseparable part of mission, then from the perspective of Heb 1:1 the incarnation event cannot be mission's point of departure but rather its climax.

For Wright God's people are seen as participants in God's mission. He states: "Fundamentally, our mission (if it is biblically informed and validated) means our committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command in God's own mission within the history of God's world for the redemption of God's creation."<sup>[11]</sup> This view presupposes that the point of departure for mission begins from the need of the created world for redemption.

Since the point of departure for mission is God, and his people are directly involved in God's mission, it is important to explore the development of this concept in Scripture. In order to understand whether "sending" is the only applicable root for mission, we will turn first to the Old Testament.

### Mission in the Old Testament

The contribution of the Old Testament to the theological concept of mission has not always been recognized. As has already been mentioned, Bosch holds that it is precisely mission that makes the decisive difference between the Testaments.<sup>[12]</sup> In order to investigate whether this is really the case we are going to explore missional aspects from the covenantal perspective.

In contrast to Bosch's view of mission, several scholars propose a missional understanding of the covenants in the Old Testament.<sup>[13]</sup> The covenant with Noah indicates God's direct involvement in the life of humanity and all creation though damaged by sin. The blessing of the Abrahamic covenant spreads out to all nations on the earth. Finally, God's covenant with the people of Israel at Mount Sinai was intended, among all other things, to witness to God and his mighty deeds to the surrounding nations. It is important to understand to what extent these covenants contribute to the development of a biblical theology of mission.

### The Covenant with Noah

Although the first time the word "covenant" is introduced in the Bible is in Gen 9, it is considered that God's covenant with Adam or, the creation covenant, was the first in the Bible. This view comes from a definition of covenant in terms of relationship. If we understand the creation covenant as the beginning of relationship and the covenant with Noah as a new beginning between God and humanity, then the creation covenant was first. Since the term "covenant" was first applied in Noah's context and since this covenant is very similar to what we are calling the creation covenant, it will be our point of departure.

The word "mission" has been understood as "going" or "sending" with a specific task. In a Christian context it is usually God who sends and man who is being

<sup>[11]</sup> Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006), p. 23.

<sup>[12]</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), p. 17.

<sup>[13]</sup> For instance, C. Wright in his book *The Mission of God* deals with the following question: "in what ways do the various covenant formulations reveal the

mission of God and the derivative mission of God's people in the world?" (pp. 324-356). Keiser also highlights the importance of covenants for the understanding of mission in his *Mission in the Old Testament* (pp. 15-28). R. Routledge in *Bible and Mission* explores the theme of mission in the Old Testament from a covenantal perspective (pp. 8-41).

sent. However, before we run into a discussion on the concept of sending, it is important to consider whether the original meaning of the word "mission" was the same.

In order to find some significant missional elements in God's covenant with Noah it is important to compare it with the creation covenant. Genesis 9 begins with blessings. God blessed Noah and his family and gave them a command: "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth" (Gen 9:1). Similarly, the first human beings were blessed and received the same commandment: "Be fruitful and increase in number" (Gen 1:28). Though the event described in Gen 9:1-17 is usually considered to be God's covenant with Noah it is not precisely so. The first time the word "covenant" occurs in the Bible in Gen 9:9-11 with a clear indication of who God is going to establish a covenant with: "I establish my covenant with you... and with every living creature that was with you." Genesis 9:13 is important: "I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth." This covenant is global in scope and to some extent becomes a restoration of the creation covenant. In the same way that Adam was given a command to work and take care of the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:15), now every creature on the earth is given into Noah's hands (Gen 9:2).

How does this statement of God relate to mission? To sustain the environment, everything God created and has given into man's hands has an important missional aspect. The sustenance of the order in the created world is a great commission for hu-

mans. Having a similar view, Yoder applies sustenance in a broader context: "To go with integrity as a messenger of the God in whose image each person is made is to go as one whose mission is to sustain and enrich the life of others. This sustenance may be physical, it may be emotional or political, or it may be the sustenance of faith in Jesus Christ."<sup>[14]</sup> So, Yoder concludes: "Because God has covenanted with the whole world, not only with the human world, our message should also concern the whole world and not only the human world... Caring for the fate of the earth as well as for the fate of its people is an issue for Christian mission."<sup>[15]</sup>

Yet another contribution to the development of mission is value for human life. In Gen 9:6 God says: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man." At first sight these words can be understood as a call to revenge. Similarly, in Lev 24:20, "eye for eye, tooth for tooth," is often associated with vengeance. Debates on this subject can be discussed elsewhere. However it would be relevant to point out that from the divine perspective revenge was never meant to be an end in itself. The ultimate purpose at that particular time in history was to prevent the spread of even greater evil. This is part of our peacemaking mission. But here the emphasis should be put on the second part of verse 6: "for in the image of God has God made man." It is precisely for this reason that human life has a value above all. Thus peacemaking, an important mission-related subject, finds its development in the value of human life which, in turn, is closely related to ethics. This is well noted by Yoder: "The figure of Noah, by virtue of the covenant with him, has played a significant role in the development of mission

<sup>[14]</sup> Perry B. Yoder, "The Noachide Covenant and Christian Mission," in Mary H. Schertz and Ivan Friesen, eds., *Beautiful Upon the Mountains* (Elkhart, IN: Herald Press, 2003), p. 14.

<sup>[15]</sup> *Ibid.*, Yoder, P., p.15.

ethics in the New Testament.”<sup>[16]</sup> Several other scholars view the Noachic covenant as a significant contribution to the development of mission theology.<sup>[17]</sup> Thus, from that perspective, our role as God’s people in mission is “being and doing” rather than “going and sending.” In order to find out whether “being” in the Old Testament is the key for understanding mission, we will explore the next biblical covenant.

### The Covenant with Abraham

The call of Abraham in Gen 12:1-3 has often been viewed as closely related to mission. Since the divine promises to Abraham in Gen 12 are reinforced by God’s covenants with Abraham in Gen 15 and 17, our concern at this point is to explore the missional nature of the Abrahamic covenant in Gen 12.<sup>[18]</sup> So, for instance Kaiser states: “Genesis 12:1-3 is foundational to the missionary vision of the whole Bible and the people of God through all the ages.”<sup>[19]</sup> At this point Kaiser emphasizes the concept of being sent. Furthermore, he sees Abraham’s calling and sending as a link between the Testaments. However, the argument on the basis of the lexical usage of the verb “send” is too weak. It would be more accurate to say that for both the Old and New Testaments the redemptive aspect of

mission is held in common. On one hand, God in his mission acts as the ultimate source of redemption. On the other hand, human mission relates to committed participation in God’s mission by means of “going” and “being.” This is the ultimate purpose of sending. Thus, Kogan sees the call of Abraham as God’s response to the “desperate need of redemption” for humanity.<sup>[20]</sup> Wright has a similar view.<sup>[21]</sup>

The missiological implications in the Abrahamic covenant are the imperatival “go” and “be a blessing.” In the Hebrew language Gen 12:1-3 can be read in two ways. The imperative “be a blessing” can express the result of the first imperative “go.” So it can be read as, “go... and *as result* you will be a blessing.” Another way to read this text is to see the imperative “be a blessing” as explaining the imperative “go.” This can be read as an expression of purpose: “you go... *so that* you may be a blessing.”<sup>[22]</sup> Repeated several times in the Abraham narrative, the idea of blessing to all the nations becomes an ultimate goal of the calling. This is where the concept of mission begins. This is the way Paul understood God’s promise to Abraham to bless all the nations and called it “the gospel in advance” (Gal 3:8). It should be noted that “making disciples of all nations” in Matt 28:19 echoes Gen 12:1-3. Thus, an

<sup>[16]</sup> *Ibid*, Yoder, P., p. 15.

<sup>[17]</sup> For example, C. Wright states: “To care for creation is in fact the first purposive statement that is made about the human species; it is our primary mission on the planet. The covenant with Noah effectively renews this mission, within the context of God’s own commitment to creation” (*The Mission of God*, p. 327). Messer also notes “the emphasis on global or universal perspectives in mission and ministry’ in the Old Testament (*A Conspiracy of Goodness*, p. 34).

<sup>[18]</sup> T. Longman III, *How to Read Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), p. 132. Longman also holds that there is a strong link between Gen 12:1-3 and the covenant narrative in Gen 15.

<sup>[19]</sup> Walter C., Kaiser, Jr., *Mission in the Old Testa-*

*ment: Israel as a Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), p. 39.

<sup>[20]</sup> M. Kogan “Abrahamic Faith,” in George, F., McLean, ed., *Abrahamic Faiths, Ethnicity, and Ethnic Conflicts*, (The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1997), pp. 99- 114.

<sup>[21]</sup> For Wright the bottom line of God’s covenant with Abraham is “the redemptive intention of the Creator to bless the nations” (Christopher J. H., Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* [Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2006], p. 328).

<sup>[22]</sup> Wright has a more detailed discussion on this subject in his book *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative*, p. 201.

important link between the Testaments is the missional nature of the Abrahamic covenant, that is, the mission of redemptive blessing.

### The Sinaitic Covenant

God's covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai is considered an extension of the Abrahamic covenant. The election of Israel as a peculiar people in the Old Testament has often been emphasized. However, this peculiarity is presented in relation to other nations. Therefore, it is important to consider the role of Israel in respect to surrounding nations.

In Exod 19:4-6 the purpose of Israel's election is clearly stated: Israel is to be God's "treasured possession," "a kingdom of priests," and "a holy nation." It is interesting to note that what Israel is to be appears in respect to "all nations" and "the whole earth." It is important to read the Hebrew expression (כְּנִלְהָ לִי) – "my treasured possession" together with (לִי כָל הָאָרֶץ) – "my whole the earth." The people of Israel receive this particular status not in contrast with, but in relation to the nations.<sup>[23]</sup> From the context it is clear that "the earth" is meant to be all the nations on the earth, which are also subjects of God's concern. Thus, Israel living in the midst of the nations had a twofold role: to be and act as priests, and to be a holy nation.

Among other responsibilities, priests were to bless the people (Num 6:22). Now the task of the priestly nation remains the same – to be a blessing. This is not only

continuity, but also an extension of the Abrahamic covenant. The missional function of Israel is to act as a mediator of divine blessing.<sup>[24]</sup>

To be a holy nation was one of the greatest tasks for Israel. By being holy the people were to reflect the holiness of God. The means by which this could be achieved are stated in Exod 19:5: "If you obey me fully and keep my covenant then... you will be a holy nation."

However, not only Israel's obedience witnessed to God's holiness, but also its disobedience. For example, in Deut 29:24-25 it is written: "All the nations will ask: 'Why has the Lord done this to this land? Why this fierce, burning anger?' And the answer will be: 'It is because this people abandoned the covenant of the Lord, the God of their fathers, the covenant he made with them when he brought them out of Egypt.'" Again we can see the missional function of Israel which is to live an explicit life and be a witness of God. In this respect Vicedom correctly notes: "Thus Israel became at one and the same time a point of attraction as well as a warning to the heathen."<sup>[25]</sup>

Although the concept of sending is clearly implied in the Old Testament, the term "mission" is associated with election and thus "election in order to be." In the case of Noah humanity is to be the sustainer of all of God's creation. The election of Abraham was to be a blessing to all the nations and Israel continued this task. In addition to this, Israel was elected to be a witness to Yahweh. So, it is important to con-

<sup>[23]</sup> Wells has a similar view when he says: "What the reader is given is not a description of Israel in isolation but in relation to the whole of God's earth." (Jo Bailey Wells, "God's Holy People: A Theme in Biblical Theology," *JSOT Supplements* 305, Sheffield, UK [2000], p. 49).

<sup>[24]</sup> In his discussion on this subject Vicedom also sees the mediatory role of Israel: "Israel was for them the bearer of the promise and the mediator of the blessing. (Georg F. Vicedom, *The Mission of God* [Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing, 1965], p. 48).

<sup>[25]</sup> *Ibid*, Vicedom, p. 49.

sider how all this has contributed to the development of the New Testament theology of mission.

### Mission in the New Testament

Although caring for the poor and enriching the lives of the oppressed is an important part of the missional call for each Christian, in the New Testament mission is often associated with “going out” and proclaiming the good news. Indeed, proclaiming the word of God is significant for the understanding of mission and relevant for both the Old and the New Testaments.

In order to better understand the integration of mission between the Testaments it is important to explore the passage in Luke 24:44-48.<sup>[26]</sup> On the road to Emmaus Jesus explains the messianic character of the Scriptures to his disciples, particularly, the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms. Jesus begins with the statement: “This is what is written.” That Messiah will suffer, be killed, and rise from the dead can be found in the Old Testament. But Jesus also states that what is also written is that “repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations.” In other words, the missional activity of the disciples flows from Jesus’ messianic work. In this respect Wright correctly states: “The proper way for disciples... to read their Scriptures, is *messianically* and *missionally*.”<sup>[27]</sup> It is also important to note that all nations (often mentioned in a missional context) have always been within God’s soteriological view.

In v. 48 Jesus points out to his disciples: “You are witnesses of these things.” As mentioned above, the idea of being a witness comes from the Old Testament where Israel represented Yahweh in the midst of surrounding nations. The call to be a witness now reappears for the followers of Christ and apparently carries a missional character.

Thus, the theological development of mission in the New Testament comes from the Old Testament. In this respect Montgomery correctly states: “The missionary meaning of the New Testament grows out of the Old as a tree is rooted in the ground.”<sup>[28]</sup> In the following section we are going to explore mission in respect to God, God’s people, and the world.

### God and Mission

For New Covenant believers the nature of mission has been interpreted from a Christological and later a Trinitarian perspective. Christ himself was sent by his Father as the Holy Spirit was sent to the Church. Thus, within the context of a biblical theology of mission the Trinitarian model has been utilized for a better understanding of mission.

In his discussion on this theme Wolanin states: “The core of the missional foundation of the church... there is God who has revealed and given himself to humanity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”<sup>[29]</sup> Not all are so enthusiastic about applying the Trinitarian model to mission. In his critical approach to this issue Dorr sees the danger of the pyramid image of mission which needs to be replaced.<sup>[30]</sup> According

<sup>[26]</sup> A detailed discussion on Luke 24:45-47 can be found in C. Wright, *The Mission of God*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>[27]</sup> Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God* (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2006), p. 30.

<sup>[28]</sup> H. B. Montgomery, *The Bible and Missions* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), p. 51.

<sup>[29]</sup> Adam Wolanin S.J., “The Trinitarian Foundation of Mission,” in S. Karotempel, chief ed., *Following Christ in Mission* (Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media, 1996), pp. 47-57.

<sup>[30]</sup> D. Dorr, *Mission in Today’s World* (New York: Orbis Books, 2000), p. 189.

to Dorr such a view of mission creates a hierarchy which begins from God the Father sending his Son Jesus Christ and goes down from the apostles to bishops and then to ordinary lay people. Dorr argues that such an image of mission makes the Church purely hierarchical and institutional which in turn does not easily fit with the view of the Church as the people of God and as a communion.<sup>[31]</sup>

Although the Trinitarian model can in many ways help us to grasp the concept of mission, we should be careful with its missional application. It is important to remember that any theological interpretation of the Trinity is quite complex and, to some extent, remains a mystery. Likewise from a missiological perspective the Trinitarian model for mission contains elements of mystery. At this point it would be relevant to mention some great debates in the history of the Church on *Filioque* which became a point of contention between the Eastern and Western Churches. So Vicedom may be correct in saying that the Trinitarian model is “the highest mystery of the mission.”<sup>[32]</sup> It is important to see the difference between the two ideas of “how” we are sent and “what for,” or the purpose of our being sent. Apparently the act of sending includes a special commission. If we perceive the act of Christ’s incarnation as God sending his Son, then “how” would refer to mystery. However, sending “what for,” that is, the commission is made clear in the Bible. Incarnation denotes the saving act of God in Jesus Christ toward mankind. Similarly, the act of sending the Holy Spirit to the earth cannot be fully ex-

plained. But the purpose of his sending is plainly revealed.

Thus the implication of the Trinitarian model of mission for the church should first of all be teleological. This means that the ultimate goal of “going out” should be to transmit the redemptive message for the salvation of people. This was the mission of Christ during his earthly life and continues to be the mission of the Church.

## Church and Mission

Participation in God’s mission belongs to the Church. Attempts have been made to identify more accurately the role of the Church in this mission. In other words, if the mission is God’s, to what extent should Christians be engaged in it?

For Messer mission means the Christian Church and its ministries, lay and clergy. According to him the “salinization of mission” (i.e., “travelling over salt water”) is not required. Basically, for him, in a Christian context everything is mission: “Church is mission, ministry is missional, and every Christian is a missionary.”<sup>[33]</sup> Others, like Moltmann, hold that it is precisely mission that shapes the theological understanding of the Church.<sup>[34]</sup> Similarly, Newbigin holds that a proper understanding of the Church comes from its missionary calling.<sup>[35]</sup>

Although it may be the case that the Church in many respects is understood in terms of its missional activities, the above views have failed to trace the line between these two concepts. In his reflection on this issue Penner, alongside Neil, brings up a paradoxical statement: “if everything is

<sup>[31]</sup> *Ibid*, Dorr, p. 189.

<sup>[32]</sup> Georg F. Vicedom, *The Mission of God* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), p. 8.

<sup>[33]</sup> Donald E. Messer, *A Conspiracy of Goodness* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992), p. 18.

<sup>[34]</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of*

*the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1977), p. 7.

<sup>[35]</sup> Michael W. Goheen, “As the Father Has Sent Me, I am Sending You: Lesslie Newbigin’s Missionary Ecclesiology,” *International Review of Mission*, 91 no 362 *Jl.*, (2002), pp. 354-369.



mission then mission is nothing.”<sup>[36]</sup> Let us turn to the biblical foundation for mission.

A passage in Matt 28, which is usually read from vv. 19-20a, remains the mission statement in evidence for a missional calling of the Church. This passage is also known as the Great Commission with prime emphasis on the word “go” (v. 19). That the greatness of the commission is defined by the word “go” can be challenged in at least two ways. First, in the text we read not one but rather four tasks such as going, making disciples, baptizing, and teaching. Therefore, the mission of the Church should be viewed at least in the holistic context of this passage. Second, although these four tasks are important for the mission of the Church, from a grammatical point of view the focus is on the main verb “making disciples.” There is only one imperatival verb in the text – “make disciples.” If this is, indeed, the main verb in the passage, then mission is primarily about making disciples and not about going out. The Great Commission then, is to make disciples and not to go. The word often mistranslated as “go” should rather be translated as “while going” or “as you go.” The participle “while going” or “as you go” is a necessary condition for accomplishing the main task. The other two participles, “baptizing” and “teaching” designate the way to make disciples.

In his discussion on this issue Wright emphasizes the priority of biblical indicative over imperative. So, for instance, in Matt 28:18 there is an indicative statement: “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me,” which stands before the imperative “make disciples.” This is an im-

portant point and we should include the immediate context of vv. 16-20. However, even here too much emphasis on the indicative may lead to a lack of accuracy in interpretation. Thus Webber states: “The church’s mission in the world, then, is to represent the reign of God, to bring people under the present reign of God, and to witness to the ultimate reign of God.”<sup>[37]</sup> Although Webber’s statement is correct that this is, indeed, part of the Church’s task within the context of vv. 16-20, the missional commandment to make disciples remains of primary importance.

Because of the limitation of space in this paper it would be relevant just to mention that the idea of teaching and making God known to the people is not new in the Christian context. It is, rather, an extension of the priestly function in the Old Testament. One of the main tasks of the priests was to teach people the law of God and to make God known to others (Lev 10:11, Deut 33:10, Mal 2:7). According to 1 Pet 2:9 Christians are a “kingdom of priests... in order to declare” or make God known. In the sense that Christ is the ultimate revelation of God, the New Testament message is different in its quality. However, in their functions (teaching and declaring to make God known) both the Old and the New Testaments contain the same idea. It is important at this point to explore to whom the missional message should be addressed.

## World and Mission

Since the Church is called to actively participate in *Missio Dei*, which carries primarily a redemptive character, it is important to designate what Wright calls the arena of mission. There is no doubt that the world is the main focus of the missional ac-

<sup>[36]</sup> P. Penner, *Bible and Mission* (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2008), p. 74.

<sup>[37]</sup> Robert E. Webber, *Journey to Jesus* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), p. 46.

tivity of the Church. However, “the world” has various meanings in the Bible. Usually it is spoken of with reference to mankind and the rest of creation affected by sin and evil. In a missionary context there is a commonly accepted view that one of the fundamental relations of the Church to the world is the proclamation of the Gospel. The Greek word κήρυγμα (preaching, proclaiming the Good News) is often described using other terms such as “to evangelize,” “to give witness.” Thus Karotempel considers proclamation to be the permanent priority of mission.<sup>[38]</sup> Following him, Klaiber defines proclamation of the Gospel as: “Evangelism, as word event, is the heart of mission in so far as it names what saves and liberates humankind and that from which the Christian community and its members live.”<sup>[39]</sup> These statements are very important. Jesus came to the world to proclaim the Good News (Luke 4:18-19). He sent his followers into the world to preach the Gospel. In John 20:21 Jesus says: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” This is what defines the missional nature of the Church. But the concept of sending plays a crucial role in terms of the Church’s relation to the world. Any attempt to present Christianity as a closed community separated from the world by means of physical forms of asceticism and monasticism is challenged by mission theology.

However, it is important to consider whether the Church’s relation to the world can only be missional in terms of *kerygma*, or evangelism. That the world is God’s and henceforth the Church’s objective of redemption is clear. The question is whether

redemption is missional in terms of sending and making disciples. Although sending and proclaiming the Gospel is important, not everything that the Church does is mission. Equally important is not only what the Church *does* for the world’s redemption but also what the Church *is* to bring divine redemption. The Old Testament idea of God’s people as being sustainers of creation and a blessing to the world can be relevant here. A similar idea can be found in the New Testament in Matt 5:13-16. Jesus points out their missional nature to his followers in that they are “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.” Here the condition of the world is also presented: it is in the process of decaying and it is in darkness. By being salt the Church performs a preservative function, preventing the world from decay. By being light the Church illuminates the true value of things that really matter. The world is the arena of mission which the Church accomplishes by *being* what God intended it to be.

### Implication

We have explored the development of the concept of mission in Scripture. It is important for us to keep in mind that among all its other definitions, mission carries a redemptive character which takes its beginning in the Old Testament. At this point we explored God’s covenants with Noah, Abraham, and Israel, which have one redemptive purpose. Within the framework of this article we have seen how each of these covenants contributes to the development of the concept of mission.

First of all it is important for us to see Jesus Christ as the one in whom mission in both the Old and the New Testaments are united according to divine purposes. Was Jesus an Old Testament person? Of course

<sup>[38]</sup> S. Karotempel, *Following Christ in Mission* (Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media, 1996), p. 122.

<sup>[39]</sup> Walter Klaiber, *Call and Response* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, TN, 1990), p. 26.

he was! Was Jesus a New Testament person? Of course he was! The matter of crucial importance here is whether we read the story of Jesus in the New Testament as a continuation of the Old Testament story, or whether it is a completely different story. The mission of Jesus was seen as closely related to God's covenant with Abraham. Both Mary and Zechariah saw the beginning of Jesus' redemptive mission as deeply rooted in the covenant (Luke 1:55, 72). Therefore, Jesus' missional activity on this earth should be a pattern for Christians. It is important to check whether our missional activity among the people around us contains this redemptive message.

It is crucial for us to have the right start in our discussion on the subject of mission. According to the classical approach to this subject, discussion usually begins from the Great Commission in Matt 28:19-20 with the imperative "go," from which the concept of sending is developed. However, as we have already considered, the Great Commission actually begins with the divine indicative, with the statement of who God is. This was the case in the Old Testament. Jonah was sent by God to Nineveh and, although he did want to go, yet he makes it very clear that his mission is closely connected with the nature of God: "I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love" (Jonah. 4:2). Mission in the New Testament also begins with who God is (Matt 28:18). If God's mission flows from his nature, shouldn't the Church's missional activities come from its nature as well? The New Testament is particularly concerned with the issue of what the Church is (or should be). So we as Christians are in the world with a missional

message which is to be proclaimed not only by *going* into it, but also by *being* and living out the divine reality in it. In fact, the Scripture says that we can affect the world by being a blessing, being the light, and being salt. Thus, it is important for us to have missional integrity between *being* and *going*. We *are* and we *act* in the world on the basis of who God is and what he does through us. This integrity will lead us to a more effective way of achieving God's redemptive purposes for the whole of creation.

Integrity is necessary in a missional approach to people. Our concern for God's creation and particularly for humans plays an important role in mission. It is crucial for us to comprehend the value of human life and the integrity of the whole person. As we bring the Gospel to a human being, we need to approach him as a whole person trying to meet his spiritual, physical, and emotional needs. During his earthly life, Jesus preached the Good News and called people to repentance. But he was concerned not only about the spiritual needs of people. Sometimes his Gospel took the form of "bread and fish" when he fed thousands of people. Often the Gospel was manifested in the form of medical care when Jesus healed sick people. From that perspective we immediately can see various missional activities through which we can relate to the world. But whatever missional activity we undertake, we need to realize that this is God's mission and it also becomes ours to the degree in which we participate in his mission. Mission is something that has always been in God's heart from the beginning of the human need for redemption. It continues to be in the center of his body – the Church on earth.

## Bibliography

- Bosch, David, *Transforming Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991).
- Dorr, D., *Mission in Today's World* (New York: Orbis Books, 2000).
- DuBose, Francis M., *God Who Sends* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1983).
- Goheen, Michael W., 'As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You: Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology', *International Review of Mission*, 91 no 362 JI., (2002).
- Kaiser, Jr. Walter C., *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations* (Baker Books, 2000).
- Karotemprel, S., *Following Christ in Mission* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1996).
- Klaiber, Walter, *Call and Response* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990).
- Kogan, M. 'Abrahamic Faith' in McLean, George, F., (chief ed.), *Abrahamic Faiths, Ethnicity, and Ethnic Conflicts* (The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1997).
- Longman III, T., *How to Read Genesis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005).
- Messer, Donald E., *A Conspiracy of Goodness* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992).
- Moltmann, Jurgen, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1977).
- Montgomery, H.B., *The Bible and Missions* (Texas: Baylor University Press, 2009).
- Penner, P., *Bible and Mission* (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2008).
- Routledge R., *Bible and Mission* (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2008).
- Rzepkowski, H., *The Theology of Mission* (Verbum SVD vol. 15, 1974).
- Scherer, James A., *Gospel, Church, & Kingdom* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987).
- Verster, Pieter, *A Theology of Christian Mission* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008).
- Vicedom, Georg, F., *The Mission of God* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1965).
- Webber, Robert E., *Journey to Jesus* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001).
- Wells, Jo Bailey, 'God's Holy People: A Theme in Biblical Theology', *JSOT Supplements 305*, Sheffield, (2000).
- Wolanin, Adam, S.J., 'Trinitarian Foundation of Mission' in Karotemprel S., (chief ed.), *Following Christ in Mission* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1996).
- Wright, Christopher J.H., *The Mission of God* (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2006).
- Yoder, Perry B., 'The Noachide covenant and Christian Mission', in Schertz, Mary H., and Friesen, Ivan, (eds.), *Beautiful Upon the Mountains* (Elkhart: Herald Press, 2003).