

# The 'Silent Orthodoxies' of God's Mission: Rethinking Wesley's 'Means of Grace' as the 'Marked-Practices' of the *Missio Dei*

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From the Alpha to the Omega, God is love. And from everlasting to everlasting, God is abundant, constant overflowing and indwelling love, unchangeably faithful in 'sending' and 'breathing out' God's love. God is thus a missionary God<sup>1</sup> whose character is unveiled by the eternal mission of God. Simply stated, God's character is God's mission and vice versa because God is love. Consider the warp and woof of God's *Story* in Word and Event. From the very beginning of creation (human and non-human) to its fulfillment in the New Creation, is one astonishing tale of God 'sending' and 'breathing out' God's Word. God's character has been steadfast (*hesed*) in 'speaking' and 'embodying' God's Word of condescending love. God spoke the Word and the world came into being. And the very Word of God that spoke creation into existence is the same Word that became flesh by the Spirit of God. The eternal Word that became incarnate 'for us and our salvation' (*Nicea*) is the Triune God of Holy Scripture, a 'sending' God, a missionary God of condescending love.

Once one starts with the ontological predicate: God is love to connect the character of God to the mission of God, then the *being* and *mission* of the Church can be *reconnected* if they are firmly grounded in the *missio Dei*.<sup>2</sup> Following these theological connections and ecclesial convictions, the age old questions of ecclesiology must be revisited. What is the Church, <sup>(Being)</sup> and what on 'earth' is the Church for? <sup>(Mission)</sup> Where is the Church on 'earth'? Can we properly understand the Mission (*Purpose*) of the Church apart from what the Church is (*Being*)? Does the Church have a mission? What is the Church's mission? What does the biblical witness pronounce about the relation of the Church to the Gospel, and the ongoing irruption of God's Kingdom on earth that 'awaits' consummation in the New Creation?<sup>3</sup> Why and in what ways do the Church and her mission

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<sup>1</sup> Particularly helpful in thinking about the Mission of God: Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2006). Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, volume 2, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), *The Triune Identity*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

<sup>2</sup> The bi-directional nature of the *being* and *mission* of the Church will not only establish a theological context and framework for exploring, ***The Church is Mission***. It will also offer a more biblical and theological rationale for the *missio Dei*. As the Church lives after the *missio Dei*, the Church lives after the likeness of the Holy Trinity and vice versa. Since the mission of God moves in step with the character of God, a Trinitarian theology of mission is doxological from the Alpha to the Omega. Once mission is grounded in the character of God, we can no longer think of the Church as having a mission, instead we will come to see the very *being* of the ***Church is mission***, a mission that is doxological from beginning to end. The *missio Dei* for the people of God always begins and ends with never-ending praise, thanksgiving, and profound gratitude for *gathered life* in the character and mission of God.

<sup>3</sup> I share the eschatological orientation of ecclesiology in the works of Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991); "The Trinity and the Kingdom," (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1993); Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, (Grand Rapids, Michigan:

unwittingly eclipse the future of God's kingdom with an overly realized eschatology? Why have we not always followed the Scriptures teaching that the Church is not the Gospel, nor is the Church the Kingdom of God? After all, the Gospel instructs that the faithful posture of the Church is to lean into the future of God's Kingdom while it lives out the 'mission of the Gospel.' The mission of the Gospel determines the *being* and *mission* of the Church as the *missio Dei*.

The *Great Commission*<sup>4</sup> (Matthew 28:16-20) is fundamental to defining the Gospel mission of the Church. But what happens when the *Great Commission* is understood as a 'program,' an 'agenda,' an *ad hoc* 'function' of the Church, or when the *essence* of the Church's mission is 'located' in the permanently fixed structures of the institutional Church?<sup>5</sup> What do we dare to say, when we audaciously presume that the aim of the Church's mission is to 'finish' the *Great Commission*? Are these aims the consequences of viewing the *being* of the Church *apart* from the *mission* of the Church and vice versa? Do they fail to see that the Church is the result of the Gospel, and thus, the Church bears witness to the mission of the Gospel and God's kingdom? The Church serves the Gospel; it does not 'finish' the *Great Commission* of the Gospel.

Despite the Church's best intentions, we must ask ourselves, why do we persist in bifurcating the *being* of the Church from the *mission(s)* of the Church? On the surface of that question one could easily answer that a woefully deficient ecclesiology is to blame. While that may be true on one level, a deeper and more profound diagnosis would reveal that an incomplete Trinitarian concept of God whose nature is missional touches the very nerve of our ecclesial failures.<sup>6</sup> Failure to ground the *being* and *mission* of the Church in the mission and character of the Triune God has often rendered confused and conflated attempts in narrating the epiphanies of God in the Story of Incarnation and Pentecost, sometimes severing the Head from the Body in our ecclesiologies.<sup>7</sup>

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Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998); Robert Jenson, *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969); Carl Braaten, *The Future of God*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1969); Nikos A. Nissiotis, "Pneumatological Christology as a Presupposition of Ecclesiology," in *Oecumenica: An Annual Symposium of Ecumenical Research*, (Augsburg: Minneapolis, 1967); Dumitru Staniloae, *Theology and the Church*, (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980); John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985); Alfred Loisy, *The Gospel and the Church*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966).

<sup>4</sup> Often the *Great Commission* is located *only* in verse 19 and is thereby, cut off from the rest (verses 16-20) of the context. Doxology is at the heart of Mission. After all, the *Great Commission* is the Mission of God. One must spend time in the 'worship' of God before one is 'sent' to make disciples of the Triune God. Viewing mission as a mandate of the Church separate from the context of the worship of God has led to an unfortunate separation of the mission of God from the character of God. The *Great Commission* is the *missio Dei*.

<sup>5</sup> Darrell L. Guder (editor), *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998); Lesslie Newbigin, *One Body, One Gospel, One World: The Christian Mission Today*, (New York International Missionary Council, 1958); Lesslie Newbigin, *Sign of the Kingdom*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1980); Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989); Lesslie Newbigin, *The Other Side of 1984: Questions for the Churches*, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1984); Lesslie Newbigin, "The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission," (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> This critique and insight has been shaped by: Robert W. Jenson's argument in *Unbaptized God The Basic Flaw in Ecumenical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992). The late Colin E. Gunton made a similar argument one year earlier in *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), cf. chapter 4, "The Community: The Trinity and the Being of the Church," 58-85.

<sup>7</sup> I first began working on the being and mission of the Church in my Wesleyan Theological Society Presidential Address in 2001. Cf. K. Steve McCormick, "The Heresies of Love: Toward A Spirit-Christ Ecclesiology of Triune

When the Church fails to understand the ongoing work of Christ *and* the Spirit as the *missio Dei*, the Church's service of the Gospel will not live after the likeness of Triune love, because the Church has dislodged the mission of God from the character of God.

The **purpose** of this paper is to *reconnect* the being and mission of the Church to the character and mission of God. As the Gospel hope of salvation is tied indissolubly to the mission of God, I intend to argue in the **thesis** of this paper that to partake of God's nature <sup>(2 Peter 1:4)</sup> is to participate in God's redemptive mission to '*rectify*' the whole creation back into the eternal mission of God. Specifically, this paper will explore the salvific interplay of the promise and mission of the Gospel in the *one, holy, catholic and apostolic* Church.<sup>8</sup> Further, by the intertwining of soteriology and ecclesiology, I will contend that the *marks* of the Church are the marks of the *missio Dei* and that these marks of God's mission contain the veiled promises of the Gospel. In essence, these hidden promises of the Gospel, depicted in the marks of God's mission, are essentially the "*Silent Orthodoxies of the Church*" that awaits discovery and embodiment and language in the same way that the future of God's kingdom remains open to consummation in the New Creation. These "*Silent Orthodoxies*" will continue to emerge from the *koinonia* of God's eternal mission in newly spoken and embodied ways with 'all' the gathered people of God participating in God's mission by the '*marked-practices*' of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity.

The **context** to *reconnect* the mission and being of the Church to the mission and character of God is twofold: 1) the Trinitarian Faith of Nicea and the Christological Faith of Chalcedon; 2) the soteriologic of John Wesley's missional-ecclesiology translated in the '*marked-practices*' (*means of grace*) of the Church. The **rationale** for these two foci maintains first, that the wisdom of both the Trinitarian and Christological Faith of Nicea and Chalcedon addresses most specifically '*why*' the character and mission of God are congruous and must not be separated. In other words, since God is 'for us and our salvation,' according to the Faith of Nicea and Chalcedon, salvation as Divine-human communion (*koinonia*) would be a contradiction of triune love if the *eternal* mission and nature of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were incongruous with the *incarnate* mission and nature of God in Christ by the Spirit.<sup>9</sup> The triune communion (*koinonia*) of outgoing and indwelling love that is the Triune God would not be possible for the 'people of God' if the *way* God is 'for us and our salvation' in God's mission is different than the *way* God is in God's character.

Innumerable insights and lessons taken from the orthodoxies of Nicea and Chalcedon can teach the Church '*why*' unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity are '*markers*', Trinitarian '*referents*' depicting that God's mission is God's character and vice versa. Moreover, without these orthodoxies of the Christian Faith '*continuously*' mapping the ongoing trajectories of these veiled

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Love," in *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, Volume 37, No. 1 Spring 2002, 35-47. A continued reflection on the necessity of a Spirit-Christology was developed in a later WTS article. K. Steve McCormick, "The Church An Icon of the Holy Trinity: A Spirit-Christology as Necessary Prolegomena of Ecclesiology," in *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, Volume 41, No. 2 Fall, 2006, 227-241.

<sup>8</sup> I owe a great deal to the ecumenical vision of Albert C. Outler in helping me to think about the *notae ecclesiae*. Cf. Albert C. Outler, "Methodism in the World Christian Community," in *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage*, edited by Thomas C. Oden, Leicester R. Longden (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 241-250. Cf. also the following chapters on Outler's vision for Methodism: "Visions and Dreams, the Unfinished Business of an Unfinished Church," 253-262; "Do Methodists Have a Doctrine of the Church?" 211-226; "The Mingling of Ministries," 227-239.

<sup>9</sup> I am following '*Rahner's Rule*' here: "The immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity and vice-versa."

promises of the Gospel, the Church cannot discern the "*Silent Orthodoxies of the Church*." The living faith of Nicea and Chalcedon continue to enliven the faith of the 'one, holy, catholic, and apostolic' Church that participates in God's mission. The Trinitarian and Christological Faith of Nicea and Chalcedon remains a gold mine of wisdom to be excavated and developed into a Trinitarian ecclesiology where the Church after the likeness of the Triune God is a Church after the *missio Dei*.

In similar ways, when the heresies of Nicea and Chalcedon are deemed as '*heresies of love*,' they provide immensely helpful and cautious warnings, stern reminders about the contradictory consequences of disembodied, splintered and broken *koinonia* for the Church presuming to live after the *missio Dei*, because they effectively disconnect the eternal character and mission of God from the incarnate nature and mission of God. Basically, the '*heresies of love*' are violations of *koinonia*, and yet, like the Trinitarian and Christological orthodoxies of Nicea and Chalcedon, these '*heresies of love*' are vitally *necessary* to discerning the '*Silent Orthodoxies of the Church*'.

The second reason for the two foci contends that the soteriologic of Wesley's missional-ecclesiology recaptures concretely and imaginatively the missing link of '*embodied fellowship*' that reconnects the being and mission of the Church. For Wesley, it is the Spirit that gathers the people of God into the Body of Christ, and inscribes upon faithful hearts in the fellowship of triune love the '*marked-practices*' of God's mission. Embodiment and fellowship mark Wesley's missional-ecclesiology.

In synopsis, the pull of my thesis is that between the secured wisdom of Nicea and Chalcedon, and the '*marked practices*' of *koinonia* in Wesley's missional-ecclesiology, the '*Silent Orthodoxies*' of the *missio Dei* may be discovered because the being and mission of the Church are reconnected to the character and mission of God. When the Church lives out of the fellowship of God's mission, the Church will live out of fellowship with *all* the people of God, so that from this *koinonia* (communion), the Church's imagination full of wonder, praise and thanksgiving, can humbly begin to think and discern with the creativity of the Spirit, in a newly embodied language(s) and practice(s) of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity.

### **Pentecost & the *Missio Dei***

A closer look into the narrative of Scripture reveals that God's Story is God's Mission. Not only does the mission of God move in step with God's character, but tightly woven into this tale of salvation is a mission to *include* all of creation into the narrative and mission of God. The nature of God's Story is meant to *embrace* all of Creation <sup>(Romans 8:19-23)</sup> in this narrative because the immutably generous and hospitable character of God is love. God continues to unveil a much larger Story in God's mission by 'gathering up' the Church, the people of God, to live in God's character through the *missio Dei*. This is the Gospel mission of the Church.

Listen to the constant refrain of God's mission sung through the faith of Israel: "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one." Now, this "One," "almighty God," "maker of heaven and earth," is God the Father of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; the eternal Son of God who became incarnate "for us and our salvation," has given us his Spirit, whereby we cry, "Abba Father." In this, we have been drawn into the life of God and share in the very character of God. <sup>(2 Peter 1:4)</sup> As we move deeper into

this narrative we find a much larger vision than ever imagined. Here is a story of the *missio Dei* where the past is not "fixed" because the "finish" of the story is still being unveiled through our participation in the character and mission of God. Harken further to the promise and mission of the Gospel in the Letter to the Hebrews: "All of these died in faith without having received the promises. . . . Since God had provided something better so that they would not apart from us, be made perfect." (Heb. 11:13, 39-40) This is an inconceivably broad vision where 'all the people of God' have been *embraced* and "*gathered up*" into God's Story, so that in the new creation, when God has spoken the last Word in the Story, and is "all in all," 'all the people of God' will have 'become by grace what God is by nature.'<sup>10</sup> The *purpose* of God's Story unfolds in the *missio Dei*; a mission where all the people of God will partake of the character of God by participation in the mission of God.

"As the Father has sent me, so I send you." (John 20:21) The way the Father sends the Son is the way the Son sends the Church by the Spirit. Thus, to be *sent* is to be *marked by the fellowship of triune love*, with the same *mission to love* that exists in the *fellowship of the Holy Trinity*. As the mission of God the Father moves through the Son and the Spirit to rectify the whole creation, the Church is gathered up in the fellowship of God's mission. The Church is *marked* and *sent* by the love of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to partake of the *constant* overflowing and perichoretic fellowship of triune love by participating in the mission of God to rectify the whole creation back into the eternal mission of God. When the mission of the Church lives out of the fellowship of triune love, the Church is truly after the likeness of the Holy Trinity. And, as the Church reflects the will and character of God in all of her mission, the Church is unified in love, holy in love, catholic and apostolic in love. The Church is after the *missio Dei*.

Why then have these "marked practices" (unity, holiness, catholicity, apostolicity) of God's mission been stumbling blocks of division rather than the building blocks of 'unity and diversity'? Often, ecclesial '*difference(s)*,' rather than diversity, have eclipsed 'unity' only to more or less, script the mission of the Church by division and fragmentation. Perhaps a commonly shared flaw in these marks of ecclesial impasse is by not grounding the marks of the Church in the mission of God, a mission that is 'constantly' rooted in both history and the future of God's kingdom. In times past, whenever the Church's point of reference was *only* to look backwards to the '*static*' permanence of history, while forgetting to also lean into the future of God's kingdom, the Church tended to define the marks of *unity, holiness, catholicity* and *apostolicity* by the vested power and authority of the institution of the Church. In essence, the marks were mostly identified in the '*structures*' of the Church and less in the *missio Dei* that rests securely in God's final future, i.e., God's *Eschatos*.<sup>11</sup> If Pentecost means anything, it means that what the Spirit did for Christ in the mission of the Gospel,

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<sup>10</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976), 65. Vladimir Lossky depicts a vision of salvation as consisting in grace and glory, a share in communion with the Holy Trinity: "The goal of orthodox spirituality, the blessedness of the Kingdom of Heaven, is not the vision of the essence, but above all, a participation in the divine life of the Holy Trinity; the deified state of the co-heirs of the divine nature, gods created after the uncreated God, possessing by grace all that the Holy Trinity possesses by nature."

<sup>11</sup> I am arguing that a '*static*' notion of history is inconsistent with the '*ek-static*' character of God unveiled in the mission of God throughout history. Pannenberg's view of '*proleptic history*,' along with the work of Moltmann and Jenson, has shaped my understanding of eternity and time, especially in the broader context of the biblical narrative. Cf. Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), especially, chapter 4, "The Community: The Trinity and the Being of the Church," 58-85.

the Spirit will do for the Church on earth in the mission of the Gospel. In other words, just as the Spirit rescued the Son from the boundaries of history in his resurrection, the Spirit will rescue the Church from those boundaries in bringing in the new creation.<sup>12</sup>

It will take both the work of Christ and the Spirit to exegete for the gathered people of God, this 'new way' of living in history after the *missio Dei*. Without both 'presences' of Christ and the Spirit, the Incarnation and Pentecost quickly become confused and conflated where the Head is severed from the Body. Consequently, when the Incarnation overshadows Pentecost, the Church falsely moves backwards with the objective certainties of history and locates the *missio Dei*, not in the future of God, but in the kinds of power and authority vested in socially constructed models of institution. Conversely, when Pentecost eclipses the Incarnation, the Church mistakenly moves forward, often looking beyond the past with a confidence in newfound freedom, novelty and unique difference. When the Church misplaces the *missio Dei* beyond history, the Head is no longer present and apostolic memory is lost. Essentially, both positions of the *missio Dei* are misplaced in that they are out of sync with the 'new way' the character and mission of God are being unveiled in history. What both Christ and the Spirit teach is that the Church is only one, holy, catholic and apostolic in the Spirit, and the Church is only one in the Body of Christ, only holy in conformity to Christ, only catholic in its redemption for all the world in Christ, and only apostolic in continued faithful witness to the life, death and resurrection of Christ.<sup>13</sup> Pentecost means that what the Spirit did for Christ in the eschatological mission of God in the Incarnation, the Spirit will do for the church in the continuing mission of God post Pentecost.

Pentecost, that radically new Day in history key to 'making all things new,' is the result of the Father having sent the Son and the Spirit<sup>14</sup> to carry out the *missio Dei* in the Cross and Resurrection on earth, in time and history. The descent of the Spirit on that radically new Day 'constitutes' Christ and His Church, and opens space (*makom*) in the *oikodomē* for all the gathered, to participate in the life and mission of the Triune God on earth, in time, in history in a radically 'new way.' And yet, not only is this new Day of Pentecost, a 'new way' for the people of God in history, it is also a 'new way' for the Triune God in history. Simply put, for the first time in history, through the work of Christ and the Spirit, a new iconic window into the *oikodomē* was opened to the

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<sup>12</sup> John David Zizioulas, *Being As Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 130. Zizioulas writes: "Now if *becoming* history is the particularity of the Son in the economy, what is the contribution of the Spirit? Well, precisely the opposite: it is to liberate the Son and the economy from the bondage of history. If the Son dies on the cross, thus succumbing to the bondage of historical existence, it is the Spirit that raises him from the dead. The Spirit is the *beyond* history, and, when acting in history, the Spirit does so in order to bring into history the last days, the *eschaton*. Hence, the first fundamental particularity of pneumatology is its eschatological character. The Spirit makes of Christ an eschatological being, the "last Adam."

<sup>13</sup> For further reflection on this problem of the "constituting" and "instituting" mission of Christ and the Spirit, cf. my Wesleyan Theological Society presidential address: "The Heresies of Love: Toward a Spirit-Christ Ecclesiology of Triune Love," in *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, Volume 37, Number 1, Spring, 2002, 35-47, especially 39-41, 45-46.

<sup>14</sup> A 'Spirit-Christology' is an underlying assumption at work in this paper. In addition to Nissiotis' work on Spirit-Christology, I have found Ralph Del Colle and Eugene F. Rogers to be extremely helpful and insightful. Cf. Ralph Del Colle, *Christ and the Spirit: Spirit-Christology in Trinitarian Perspective*, 28-29. "Spirit-Christology is after all a model that exegetes the divine economy. The risen Christ cannot be understood to be the 'sender' of the Spirit if the incarnate Christ is not already the "bearer" of the Spirit" (29); Eugene F. Rogers, *After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources outside the Modern West*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005).

whole creation, so that in this 'new reorienting way,'<sup>15</sup> not only do the gathered people of God have unimpeded access to the Triune God, but God has unimpeded access to all of creation.

Alfred Loisy made the notorious ecclesial maxim: "Jesus announced the kingdom, but it was the Church that came."<sup>16</sup> This was touted by Robert Jenson as "an eschatological *detour* of Christ's coming."<sup>17</sup> What came on the Day of Pentecost, in this 'eschatological detour' was 'a new and decisive epiphany of the Trinitarian God in time.'<sup>18</sup> Nikos Nissiotis views this 'eschatological detour' as necessary and essential to the 'second epiphany of God' in history. Nissiotis writes:

... The descent of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost in a new and special way means the completion of the Christ event by a further Trinitarian revelation. The Church is not only people who are called to salvation but also the embodiment of grace, where salvation is received by Word and Sacrament. The Church is not an anthropocentric institution but a theocentric organism inspired by the Spirit. Therefore its value is neither in its hierarchical and juridical structure nor in its right administration of Word and Sacrament. This attitude shifts the centre of the Ecclesia to the anthropological side and diminishes the creative energy of the Spirit which is the main constitutive element of the Church. The Church is the receptacle of the Trinitarian presence in history through the action of the Spirit. . . . If this action on the part of the Spirit is denied the Church becomes anthropomorphic and is reduced to a sociological institution.<sup>19</sup>

Since both the *nature* and *purpose* of the *missio Dei* has *always* embraced 'the people of God' to 'become by grace what God is by nature,' God's eschatological mission in history would not move toward consummation until God became what we are (human) in flesh. This *purpose* of God's enfleshment in the incarnation was eternally grounded in the *missio Dei*, so that we might become in the *oikodomē* what God (divine) is in character and mission.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the descent of the cruciformed Spirit of Christ at Pentecost could not move the *missio Dei* toward the future of the New Creation without the earlier work of Christ and the Spirit in the *missio Dei* in Cross and Resurrection.

This new and decisive epiphany of God in history with the people of God would suggest that the *missio Dei* is certainly not a detour of interruptions. Instead, these eschatological detours continue to unveil that the faithful character of God lives and moves kenotically in mission, in history, 'for us and our salvation.' In some ways, the enduring eschatological unveilings of the *missio Dei* in the biblical narrative, are analogous to 'why' all the 'cloud of witnesses' still await perfection—'they should not be made perfect apart from us.' Similarly, in the 'economy' of God's grace, as the *missio*

<sup>15</sup> In the earliest days of Christianity, the first Christians were those who were living in 'The Way.'

<sup>16</sup> Alfred Loisy, *L'Évangile et l'Église*, (Paris: 1902) is quoted by Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 170. This quote can also be found in the English translation of Alfred Loisy, *The Gospel and the Church*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 166.

<sup>17</sup> Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, page 170.

<sup>18</sup> Nikos A. Nissiotis, "Pneumatological Christology as a Presupposition of Ecclesiology," 249-250. Nissiotis explains: . . . the continuously renewed event of the Spirit and also as an established historical reality. If the act of the Spirit is recognized as the second personal revelation of God in history, if Pentecost signifies a new and decisive epiphany of the Trinitarian God in time, which is as important as the first one in Christ and which is inseparable from it, then the Church is God's permanent gift to men, given in Christ."

<sup>19</sup> Nikos A. Nissiotis, "Pneumatological Christology as a Presupposition of Ecclesiology," 244.

<sup>20</sup> The Orthodox doctrine of theosis holds together the mystery of the incarnation with the mystery of salvation. Irenaeus and Athanasius viewed the purpose of the incarnation in the following paraphrase: "God became what we (human) are so that we might become what he is (divine); and in becoming what we are God never ceased to be who God is; so that as we become what God is we will never cease to be who we are."

*Dei* in the Incarnation awaited Pentecost, the ongoing *missio Dei* awaits the Church to become in the 'marked-practices' of the *missio Dei*, one in love, holy in love, catholic in love, and apostolic in love. And finally, from the Alpha to the Omega of God's Story, the *missio Dei* awaits the consummation of God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, in the New Creation.

Once Pentecost, is envisioned as the new epiphany of God in history, then the *being* and *mission* of the Church is essentially the '*sacrament par excellence*'<sup>21</sup> because the *oikodomē* is the '*new way*' in history that the Triune God is presently working out the eschatological *missio Dei* to '*rectify*' the whole creation through the Church. This can be seen in the sacramental nature of the *Notae Ecclesiae*. The *marks* contain *descriptors*, not only of who the people of God *already* are as partakers of triune love, but the *marks* contain the '*hidden promises*' of who the people of God shall become in the eschatological consummation of the *missio Dei*. In similar ways to the Gospel, the Church is '*already*' by the descent of the Spirit, the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, but the Church is '*not-yet*' in the eschatological unveiling of God's mission, the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. The Church is '*already*' the true Israel, the body of Christ, the people of God, the holy city, the temple of the Spirit, the light of the world, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, to name just a few of the biblical metaphors, but the Church is only what the Church hopes from God in the eschatological mission of God. The Church is the *oikodomē* of an inexhaustible God, and therefore, metaphor and *mark* alike, are merely descriptors of the *missio Dei*, and certainly not definitions. The Church's sole identity rests securely in the future of God. And yet, with '*gathered hearts*' *already* full of the love of God, the Church *anticipates* in the '*marked-practices*' of the *missio Dei* that all the people of God will '*become by grace what God is by nature.*'

Pentecost makes this possible because there '*the whole Trinity*' descends, and the Spirit gathers up the people of God into the body of Christ, and inscribes upon their hearts the vestiges of the Holy Trinity. In that '*moment*' of condescending love, on the Day of Pentecost, the Church is "*marked*" in the *oikodomē* of God with all the marks of triune love; namely, *one, holy, catholic* and *apostolic*. Keep in mind, that God whose '*name and nature is Love,*' is the Holy Trinity: the *One God, holy* in nature, *catholic* in presence, *apostolic* in constant witness and mission. And once, the Church's very *being* is *marked* in the character of God; the Church is by that '*marking,*' a Church that lives by the very *missio Dei*. By the cruciformed Spirit of Christ, the Church is gathered into the life of God, and *marked* by God's *sending* love to live after the *mission* of God. Further, to be gathered up into the body of Christ by the descent of the Spirit, is to be *sent* to *be* in the '*marked-practices*' of God's mission, *one* by her love, *holy* by her love, *catholic* by her love, and *apostolic* by her love. To be *sent* is to be *marked* by love and our mission is to love in the same way we have been *sent* and *marked*.

### The Wisdom of Nicea & Chalcedon

On the surface of the Christian Faith, the inherent logic and wisdom of Nicea and Chalcedon is not always discernable, but when one digs deeper into those Trinitarian and Christological connections one discerns '*why*' the ontological predicate—God is Love—makes *koinonia* (communion) the ontological category and goal (*teleos*) of God's mission. Probe a little deeper and one discovers '*why*' the '*fellowship of triune love*' in the eternal and incarnate mission of God *necessarily* fuses

<sup>21</sup> Nikos A. Nissiotis, "Pneumatological Christology as a Presupposition of Ecclesiology," 250.

soteriology and ecclesiology making them both ontological categories in the koinonia of God's mission. Simply stated, this means that to partake of God's nature is to participate in God's mission.  
(2Peter 1:4)

The Church that lives out of the fellowship of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the Church that is 'sent' out in the mission of God to 'rectify' the whole creation back into the fellowship of triune love in the same way that the Father has 'sent' the Son by the Spirit to fill the whole creation with God's glory. This is the work of salvation and the mission of the Gospel in the fellowship of triune love. Outgoing and perichoretic love that exists in the eternal and incarnate mission of God is 'sending' and 'marking' the Church to 'be' in and for the world in the same way that God 'is' 'for us and our salvation.' Gathered and marked in the fellowship of triune love, the work of salvation is the work of the Church after the *missio Dei*, and to disconnect soteriology from ecclesiology is to breach the very koinonia of triune love that connects the being and mission of the Church.

The wisdom of Nicea insists that as the eternal mission of the Father sends through the Son and the Spirit, if the Son is not *homoousious* (*one in being*) with the Father then the incarnate mission of God would be derivative of the eternal mission of God.<sup>22</sup> And if the incarnate mission is foreign to the eternal mission of God then the incarnation is merely derivative of God and is not essentially God from everlasting to everlasting. God is therefore, not in nature 'for us and our salvation,' and the Church, therefore, cannot partake of God's nature by participating in God's mission.

The central question of the incarnation: 'Why God became human?' occupied much of Chalcedon's insistence on 'two natures in one person.' Tied to that question, of course, is the more basic question raised by Jesus which continues to be the vocation of Christian discipleship: Who do you say that I am? Often one can better understand the earlier tensions and issues of Nicea pertaining to the Son being *homoousious* with the Father by returning to the later questions of Chalcedon that were germane to the incarnation. A helpful paraphrase of Irenaeus and Athanasius gets right to the heart of the matter: God became what we are (human) so that we might become what God is (divine); and in becoming what we are God never ceased to be who God is (divine), so that as we become what God is (divine) we never cease to be who we are (human). In other words, not only does the mystery of the incarnation express the mystery of salvation in the humanization of God, but likewise, the mystery of the incarnation expresses the mystery of salvation in the divinization of humankind.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Paul S. Fiddes in his work, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000) has been extremely helpful in advancing my argument that God's character is God's mission. Also helpful is Stephen R. Holmes, "Trinitarian Missiology: Towards a Theology of God as Missionary," *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, Volume 8 Number 1, 2006:72-90; Mark Heim, *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> Roberts, Alexander and Donaldson, James, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* Vol. 1. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979). P. 256. Irenaeus speaks quite vividly of the incarnation accomplishing the will of the Father in making humankind into the image and likeness of God: ". . . And in all these things, and by them all, the same God the Father is manifested, who fashioned man, and gave promise of the inheritance of the earth to the fathers, who brought it (the creature) forth [from bondage] at the resurrection of the just, and fulfills the promises for the kingdom of His Son; subsequently bestowing in a paternal manner those things which neither the eye has seen, nor the ear has heard, nor has [thought concerning them] arisen within the heart of man. For there is

Look more closely at the *way* in the fellowship of triune love that God became human by the faithful responses of Mary: "Let it be with me according to your Word," and Christ: 'my meet is to do the will of my Father,' "not my will but thine be done." Notice the *necessary* synergy of divine-human communion in both the humanization of God and the divinization of humankind. In condescending love the humanization of God waits on the faithfulness of Mary and Christ. Otherwise, the koinonia of triune love that is the Triune God who exists 'for us and our salvation' would be compromised. Also notice the unbroken synergy in the humanization of God in the fellowship of triune love that is necessary to the deification of humankind becoming 'by grace what God is by nature.' This dynamic synergy of koinonia, as depicted in the incarnation, is the missing link to reconnect the being and mission of the Church.

All the *necessary* issues, connections and tensions, that exist in the 'unity and equality' and 'distinctions of the persons' in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Nicea), as well as the 'two natures in one person' 'without confusion, change, division or separation' (Chalcedon) define and determine the *necessary* connections and tensions in the fusion of Soteriology to Ecclesiology in the *missio Dei*. When these Trinitarian and Christological connections are focused on the *koinonia* of triune love they provide fascinating and imaginative ways to *reconnect* the being and mission of the Church. Once reconnected in the fellowship of triune love, the Church partakes of God's nature by participating in God's mission because the Church's being is mission and vice-versa as God's character is God's mission and vice-versa.

The living Faith of Nicea and Chalcedon continues to enlarge and enliven the Church in moving from the Logos Christology that framed much of their understanding of the Trinitarian and Christological connections and tensions to a Spirit Christology whereby the 'two hands of God' not only exegete the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation for us, but the work of Christ and the Spirit exegetes koinonia in the *missio Dei* for the Church.

Take Apollinarius as a case in point. Unfortunately, his brilliant contribution to the church's faith is almost never mentioned because of his glaring errors of divine application to the humanity of Christ. For example, Apollinarius follows Athanasius and the Nicene Creed with such logic and skilled precision that he gave us an incredible picture of an indissoluble unity of the Word in Jesus that safeguards against any hint of a dualism that gives us two persons in Jesus. When pushed to the conclusion of his logic, however, the humanity of Jesus could not have a "mind" and "will" like the rest of humanity and, therefore, Jesus could not face God as we do. Unfortunately, "only" the end of Apollinarius' logic is remembered and the brilliant contribution of the Son's unity with the Father is long forgotten. Understandably, the application of Apollinarius' teaching must be rejected for how it negates the church's doctrine of salvation. Apollinarius "rightly" argues that, without all of Christ's oneness with the Father, there will be no salvation, but what

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the one Son who accomplished His Father's will; and one human race also in which the mysteries of God are wrought, "which the angels desire to look into;" and they are not able to search out the wisdom of God, by means of His handiwork, confirmed and incorporated with His Son, is brought to perfection; that His offspring, the First-begotten Word, should descend to the creature, that is, to what had been moulded, and that it should be contained by Him; and, on the other hand, the creature should contain the Word, and ascend to Him, passing beyond the angels, and be made after the image and likeness of God." Vol. 1, P. 567.

was missing was the celebrated argument of Gregory Nazianzen: If the Son of God does not assume *all* of human nature, then the Son of God cannot "heal" *all* of human nature.<sup>24</sup>

The ironic wisdom of Apollinarius' heresy, however, is discovered in how it unwittingly taught the Church why she must face God and depend on God by the same Spirit that Christ relied on in doing the will of his Father. And yet, the Church has not always "faced God" by the Spirit with the same faith as was evident in Christ. Once again, in her drive for ecclesial oneness, she has prematurely universalized the institution of the Church without a reliance on the Spirit to bring the openness of the future in the new creation. This is evidenced in the way the "structures" are rigid and do not allow for "new" ways, even "novel" ways to re-structure the institutional power and authority of the Church.

The "unwitting" insight of Apollinarius' heresy was that the Word "must" not dwell immediately or directly in the humanity of Jesus. Otherwise, Jesus would not be able to "face God" in the same way that all humankind must.<sup>25</sup> In other words, Jesus was able to do the will of his Father not because he "possessed the Word," but because of his complete dependence on the Spirit. "Jesus learned obedience by the things he suffered . . . and became perfect" (Heb. 5:8-9). All too often, the Church has moved in the same christomonistic direction as is found in Apollinarius and, thus, she assumes the Church possesses the Word in the same way that Apollinarius had erroneously envisioned.

My aim in this brief section of the paper is chiefly to highlight the soteriological and ecclesiological '*why*' of these connections. As has already been declared, salvation is a partaking of God's nature in the fellowship of triune love by participating in the fellowship of God's mission. I continue to work from the premise that God's character is God's mission and God's mission is God's character. All the specific ways, however, by which these particular orthodoxies and 'heresies of love' determine '*how*' to *reconnect* the being and mission of the Church is part of a larger project on ecclesiology that is underway. Unfortunately, there is not enough space in this paper to 'flesh' out the *necessary* connections and concrete implications for the Church after the *missio Dei*.

### **The Soteriologic of Wesley's Missional-Ecclesiology: Koinonia and the 'Marked-Practices' of God's Mission**

At the heart of the Christian life, for both John and Charles Wesley, was this resolute conviction that to be created in the image of God meant that we were made "capable of God;" we were made to "know" and "obey" and "love" God.<sup>26</sup> "Knowledge," "obedience" and "love" of the "Three-One God"

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<sup>24</sup> In Gregory Nazianzen's letter "To Cledonius the Priest against Apollinarius," Gregory writes: "If anyone has put his trust in Him as a Man without a human mind, he is really bereft of mind, and quite unworthy of salvation. For that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved." *Nicene & Post Nicene Fathers* (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), second series, vol. 7, 440.

<sup>25</sup> I have long been intrigued by the corrective notion that a Spirit-Christology brings to the Incarnate Word. Accordingly, the Word is not some sort of power or being that is animating, or acting directly on the humanity of Jesus. This thesis is perceptively demonstrated in the work of Alan Spence, "Christ's Humanity and Ours: John Owen," in *Persons Divine And Human*, edited by Christoph Schwobel and Colin E. Gunton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 74-97.

<sup>26</sup> John Wesley. *The Works of John Wesley*, Volume 7, *A Collection of Hymns For the Use of the People Called Methodists*, Franz Hilderbrandt and Oliver A. Beckerlegge, editors (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), Hereafter cited as **BE** 7:398. Hymn 256: O all-creating God,/At whose supreme decree/Our body rose, a breathing clod, Our

was so thoroughly “interwoven with all true Christian faith, with all vital religion,”<sup>27</sup> that when the Spirit of the “Three-One God” is poured into our hearts, both brothers were convinced that we will come to know and love the God whose “name and nature is love.”<sup>28</sup>

Now, to know the God one loves and to love the God one knows is to partake of God's nature. And yet, this means that one cannot partake of God's nature without participating in God's mission because God's nature is God's mission and vice versa. So how does one partake of God's nature by participating in God's mission?

One of the best places to start in understanding this soteriologic of Wesley's missional-ecclesiology is in the Book of Common Prayer. Perhaps, the commentary of Wesley's missional-ecclesiology was being formed early in prayer, notably in “The General Thanksgiving” where the Church taught Wesley how to pray for ‘*the means of grace*’ and ‘*the hope of glory*.’ A prayer full of gratitude, praise and thanksgiving for all the necessary ‘*means*’ of sharing in our ‘*end*,’ would shape profoundly Wesley's vision of God as way of connecting soteriology with ecclesiology.

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your unworthy servants give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made. We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the **means of grace**, and for the **hope of glory**. And, we pray, give us such an awareness of all your mercies that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your

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souls sprang forth from thee./For this thou hast designed,/And formed us man for this, To know, and love thyself, and find/In thee our endless bliss. Cf. also BE 2:439, “The General Deliverance.”

<sup>27</sup> John Wesley. *The Works of John Wesley*, Volume 2, Sermons II, 34-70, Albert C. Outler, editor. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), Sermon 55: “On the Trinity,” p. 385. Hereafter cited as BE 2:373-386. I would like to express my deepest gratitude and indebtedness to Geoffrey Wainwright who first helped me see a “deliberate trinitarianism” at work in John Wesley. Cf. Geoffrey Wainwright, “Why Wesley Was A Trinitarian,” in *The Drew Gateway*, volume 59, Number 2, (Spring 1990): 26-43.

<sup>28</sup> BE 7:250-252. Charles Wesley entitled this hymn, *Wrestling Jacob*. (*emphasis in bold and italics is mine*)  
 Come, O thou Traveller unknown,/Whom still I hold, but cannot see!/My company before is gone,/And I am left alone with thee;/With thee all night I mean to stay,/And wrestle till the break of day./I need not tell thee who I am,/My misery or sin declare;/Thyself hast called me by my name,/Look on thy hands, and read it there./But who, I ask thee, who art thou?/Tell me thy name, and tell me now./In vain thou strugglest to get free,/I never will unloose my hold;/Art thou the Man that died for me?/The secret of thy love unfold:/Wrestling, I will not let thee go/Till I thy name, thy nature know./Wilt thou not yet to me reveal/Thy new, unutterable name?/Tell me, I still beseech thee, tell;/To know it now resolved I am;/Wrestling, I will not let thee go/Till I thy name, thy nature know./What though my shrinking flesh complain/And murmur to contend so long?/I rise superior to my pain:/When I am weak, then I am strong;/And when my all of strength shall fail/I shall with the God-man prevail./Yield to me now—for I am weak,/But confident in self-despair!/Speak to my heart, in blessings speak,/Be conquered by my instant prayer./Speak, or thou never hence shalt move,/And tell me if thy name is LOVE./’Tis Love! ’Tis Love! Thou diedst for me;/I hear thy whisper in my heart./The morning breaks, the shadows flee,/Pure Universal Love thou art:/To me, to all, thy bowels move—/Thy nature, and thy name, is LOVE./My prayer hath power with God; the grace/Unspeakable I now receive;/Through faith I see the face to face;/I see the face to face, and live!/In vain I have not wept and strove—/Thy nature, and thy name is, LOVE./I know thee, Saviour, who thou art—/Jesus, the feeble sinner’s friend;/Nor wilt thou with the night depart,/But stay, and love me to the end:/Thy mercies never shall remove./Thy nature, and thy name, is LOVE./The Sun of Righteousness on me/Hath rose with healing in his wings;/Withered my nature’s strength; from thee/My soul its life and succour brings;/Thy nature, and thy name, is LOVE./Contented now upon my thigh/I halt, till life’s short journey end;/All helplessness, all weakness, I/On thee alone for strength depend;/Nor have I power from thee to move:/Thy nature, and thy name, is LOVE./Lame as I am, I take the prey,/Hell, earth, and sin with ease o’ercome;/I leap for joy, pursue my way,/And as a bounding hart fly home./Through all eternity to prove./Thy nature, and thy name, is LOVE.

praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up our selves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory throughout all ages. Amen.

As the *koinonia* of triune Love is poured into our hearts, we are 'marked—graced—with with the "means of grace"—"the gifts of God for the people of God"<sup>29</sup>—where we can "know" "obey" and "love" the Triune God whose 'name and nature is love.' The constant abiding presence of triune love 'marks' the Church in the fellowship of the Trinity with the 'marked-practices' of God's mission. This way of salvation is the way of the Church after the *missio Dei*. The soteriologic of the abiding fellowship of God in these embodied "means of grace" means that we will know who we love and we will love who we know as we participate in the mission of God. The soteriologic of God's mission was the constant refrain of Wesleyan hymns, sermons, and prayers alike that shaped at the deepest level of faith their understanding of the "means of grace" as a way of salvation, a way of participating in our "hope of glory."<sup>30</sup>

What lies behind the means of grace in Wesley, according to Knight, "is the intent of God's love to transform the whole world into the image of God, so that all its relationships are characterized by love."<sup>31</sup> Hence, it does not seem to be too much of a stretch to suggest that what Wesley was beginning to envision by praying for the 'means of grace and hope of glory' in 'The General Thanksgiving' was that God's love is God's mission.

The salvific vision of Wesley's missional-ecclesiology could be described as follows: Out of the fellowship of triune love in the *missio Dei*, adoption into the house of God rests on God sending the Spirit of God's Son into our hearts, enabling us to cry "Abba!" "Father!" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6) Now envisage this 'sending love' in a slight change of metaphor; God's love poured into our hearts (Rom. 5:5) is like a *parabola*<sup>32</sup> in that it is always 'thrown out.' God's love originates "from the Father, proceeds through the Son, and is effected in the Spirit." And in the continued sweep of God's sending love, the Spirit gathers up the body of Christ and, with renewed and grateful hearts, the people of God respond in love, by the energy of the Spirit, through conformity to the Son, and back to the Father. So, by the energy of the Spirit, in this ecclesial movement of gathering, "the whole Trinity

<sup>29</sup> BE 1:381. Wesley defined the "means of grace" as "outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby He might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace."

<sup>30</sup> Wesley's broader vision of the whole creation groaning for redemption by the Triune Creator can be found in the following sermons, "The New Creation," BE 2:500-510; "The General Deliverance," BE 2:436-451; "The General Spread of the Gospel," BE 2:485-500; "The Great Assize," BE 1:354-376 "God's Love to Fallen Man," BE 2:422-436; "God's Approbation of His Works," BE 2:387-400; "On Divine Providence," BE 2:534-551; "The Wisdom of God's Counsels," BE 2:551-567.

<sup>31</sup> Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life*, 4. Henry Knight, in his published dissertation, "*The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace*," argues that the function of the means of grace, in Wesley, is to nurture and enable faith to grow through openness to the constant presence of God, and to provide descriptive access to the character and identity of God. Cf. 168-178. The "Presence of God" and the "Identity of God" are two mutually interrelated motifs that run all through his work to demonstrate how Wesley's means of grace "form an interrelated context within which the Christian life is lived and through which relationships with God and one's neighbor are maintained." Cf. 2.

<sup>32</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna, "The Trinitarian Mystery of God," in *Systematic Theology, Roman Catholic Perspectives*, Vol. 1, edited by: Francis Schussler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), pp149-193, esp. p. 176-178. Cf. also Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*. (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991).

descends into our faithful hearts" and we are "filled with the energy of love" 'sent out' and 'marked' with the same 'thrown out' love of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

God's *sending* love remains open-ended "for us and our salvation." And God's *sending* love is always open because it always gives and receives.<sup>33</sup> Finally, God's *sending* love is forever open because it must always be returned. This koinonia of triune love 'marks' the *being* and *mission* of the Church. Hence, as the Church is "gathered" up into the life of the Triune God, her mission, in that continued sweep of triune love, is to "gather" up by the Spirit, by the energy of triune love, the whole creation into the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic mission of God. When the Church returns back doxologically all that the Church has received, the Church participates in the *missio Dei* in 'making all things new.' The Church will become in the fellowship of triune love what God is in character and mission; the Church will become what she 'already' is in the koinonia of triune love: one in love, holy in love, catholic and apostolic in love.

The central vision of these "means of grace and hope of glory" in Wesley's soteriologic for connecting the means of salvation to the end of salvation rested on two pivotally driving questions: *Who is God? What is God's Will?* Nowhere is this clearer than in the opening of Wesley's thirteen discourses on the Sermon on the Mount. "Let us observe who it is that is here speaking, that we may 'take heed how we hear.'"<sup>34</sup> The One speaking in the Sermon on the Mount is "the eternal Wisdom of the Father," "the Creator," "the Lord our Governor," "the great Lawgiver," "the Lord of heaven and earth," "the great Prophet of the Lord," "the God of love, who, having emptied himself of his eternal glory, is come forth from his Father to declare his will to the children of men."<sup>35</sup> Finally, what is most significant in Wesley's opening declaration is that he identifies the One speaking as the great "*I AM*," "The Lord Our Righteousness." The preacher in the Sermon on the Mount is "the Creator of all—a God, a God appears! Yea, ο ων, (*I AM*) the being of beings, Jehovah, the self-existent, the supreme, the God who is over all, blessed for ever!"<sup>36</sup>

For Wesley, when Christ who is the '*I AM*' is present in the believer, all of God is present in the believer. The whole beatitude is Christ and in that 'happy exchange' when Christ is present in the believer, all the attributes or properties of the *One* who is God is communicated to the believer. Christ, alone, the great '*I AM*,' is "The Lord Our Righteousness."

In the 1771 edition of Wesley's *Works*, Wesley sandwiches his pivotal sermon, "The Lord Our Righteousness," between "The Great Privilege of Those that are born of God," and the thirteen discourses on the "Sermon on the Mount." Albert Outler argued that after the intervening years between the 1748 edition with "The Great Privilege" placed just before the "Sermon on the Mount,"

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<sup>33</sup> John Wesley. *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*. Vol. II. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1981). Wesley's note on 1John 4:8: "God is love—This little sentence brought St. John more sweetness, even in the time he was writing it, than the whole world can bring. God is often styled holy, righteous, wise; but not holiness, righteousness, or wisdom in the abstract, as he is said to be love; intimating that this is his darling, his reigning attribute, the attribute that sheds an amiable glory on all his other perfections."

<sup>34</sup> BE 1:470.

<sup>35</sup> BE 1:470.

<sup>36</sup> BE 1:474. I am grateful to D. Stephen Long's work that points this out most emphatically. Cf. *John Wesley's Moral Theology: The Quest for God and Goodness*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Kingswood Books, 2005), especially pages 137-142.

Wesley had decided to address more than a decade of protracted debates with the Calvinists over the 'formal cause of justification,' by placing "The Lord Our Righteousness" in the middle of those two aforementioned.<sup>37</sup> On many occasions, Wesley was painstakingly vigilant to keep together justification with sanctification. If he followed the Calvinist position that made the atoning death of Christ *only* the formal cause of our justification, he could no longer keep the doctrines of justification and sanctification together because *only* the *imputed* righteousness of Christ is given. The means would be cut off from the end. In response, Wesley maintained that Christ's death is not *only* the formal cause, but also the meritorious cause of justification whereby Christ righteousness is *imparted* to the believer in the same moment that Christ's righteousness is imputed.

Once again, the soteriologic at work in Wesley is this: when Christ, the great I AM is present in the believer, all of God's righteousness and nature is present in the believer. Thus, Christ alone is our righteousness, and this is indeed the doctrine "by which the Church stands or falls." And yet, in the same moment Christ's righteousness is imputed to the believer, all of Christ's righteousness is imparted to the believer. While imparted righteousness is not the ground of our acceptance with God, it is the fruit of our acceptance. Inherent righteousness does not take the place of imputed righteousness but is the consequence of it.<sup>38</sup> "In that strategic sermon, "The Lord our Righteousness," Wesley held that Christ alone is our righteousness.

"[the Lord our righteousness] is certainly the pillar and ground of that faith of which alone cometh salvation—of that catholic or universal faith which is found in all the children of God, and which 'unless a man keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly."<sup>39</sup>

What was at stake for Wesley in the Calvinist debates between the formal and meritorious cause of justification? The formal cause of justification from the Calvinist perspective stressed the imputation of Christ's righteousness while the meritorious cause of justification stressed the impartation of Christ's righteousness. Wesley wanted to claim that because Christ is the great *I AM* whereby all of God's nature and righteousness are present in the believer, Christ is therefore, both our formal and meritorious cause of justification, which would hold together both justification and sanctification.<sup>40</sup> This is why he placed "The Great Privilege" *before* "The Lord Our Righteousness." Wesley was depicting a robust vision of salvation as partaking of God's nature which would require that Christ's atoning death be both the formal and meritorious cause of justification.

the life of God in the soul of a believer is, . . . the continual inspiration of God's Holy Spirit: God breathing into the soul, and the soul breathing back what it first receives from God; a continual action of God upon the soul, the re-action of the soul upon God; an unceasing presence of God, the loving, pardoning God, manifested to the heart, and perceived by faith; an unceasing return of love, praise, and prayer,

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<sup>37</sup> BE 1:441-446.

<sup>38</sup> BE 1:458.

<sup>39</sup> BE 1:451.

<sup>40</sup> BE 1:462-463. In "The Lord Our Righteousness," Wesley writes: ". . . lest any should use the phrase, "the righteousness of Christ," or, "the righteousness of Christ is 'imputed to me,'" as a cover for his unrighteousness. . . . though a man be as far from the practice as from the tempers of a Christian, though he neither has the mind which was in Christ nor in any respect walks as he walked, yet he has armour of proof against all conviction in what he calls the "righteousness of Christ." . . . *O warn them that if they remain unrighteous, the righteousness of Christ will profit them nothing.*" (*Italic emphasis is mine.*)

offering up all the thoughts of our hearts, all the words of our tongues, all the works of our hands, all our body, soul, and spirit, to be an holy sacrifice, acceptable unto God in Christ Jesus.<sup>41</sup>

Drawing explicitly from these two basic questions, *who is God? What is God's Will?* Wesley contends that God has named Godself and that the self-giving name of God is: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And in that very moment of God's self-giving name, the very nature of God is given. "God's name and nature is love" and this triune love poured into our hearts by the energy of the Holy Spirit, '*marks*' us in the *way* of salvation, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The '*mark*' of triune love is:

". . . the immediate cause of all holiness in us; enlightening our understandings, rectifying our wills and affections, renewing our natures, uniting our persons to Christ, assuring us of the adoption of sons, leading us in our actions; purifying and sanctifying our souls and bodies, to a full and eternal enjoyment of God.<sup>42</sup>

This love poured into our hearts is the *koinonia* of triune love, the energy of the Spirit which gathers us together into the body of Christ, and inscribes upon our hearts the vestiges of the Holy Trinity, so that "we become by grace what God is by nature," namely, "Transcripts of the Holy Trinity."<sup>43</sup> The *way* God is "for us and our salvation" is the '*marked way*' "we become by grace what God is by nature." Wesley would maintain unwaveringly that this *way* of salvation is the *way* of God's mission that can be found modeled and structured in the whole creation, because the full economy (*oikonomia*) of grace, the entire household of God is unceasingly present in all the stages of salvation,<sup>44</sup> (*via salutis*) iconically patterning for us in the varied "means of grace" a doxological "way" to respond and partake of the fellowship of triune love.<sup>45</sup> After all, the whole creation is full of the glory of God.

While there are many places to identify and explicate the soteriologic of Wesley's missional-ecclesiology translated in the '*marked-practices*' of the Church, a few strategic places will suffice to establish this claim in the limited space of this paper.

The soteriologic of Wesley's missional-ecclesiology is clearly discernable in his use of the class meetings and the bands that would become Methodism's most distinctive contribution to the Church of Christ after the *missio Dei*. Since God is communal to the core of God's being, the way in which one receives God's love is in community. This is why the means of grace must always arise out of Christian community, a *koinonia* of believers. Such a vision of triune Love meant that love, that

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<sup>41</sup> BE 1:442.

<sup>42</sup> John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1978). "A Letter to a Roman Catholic," p. 82. 10:80-86.

<sup>43</sup> BE 7:88.

<sup>44</sup> BE 2:153-169. cf. 156-157; 160-162. Wesley makes it clear in his sermon, "The Scripture Way of Salvation" that the *via salutis* is the way of Triune Love.

<sup>45</sup> Stanley S. Harakas. *Wholeness of Faith and Life: Orthodox Christian Ethics*, Part Two—Church Life Ethics. (Holy Cross Orthodox Pres: Brookline, MA, 1999. cf. especially "The Doctrine of the Trinity in Eastern Orthodox Ethics, pp. 1-23. I am greatly indebted to Stanley for helping me to see the ethical "ought" rooted in Triune Love. "From the Eastern view, the significance of this controversy for ethics is that there are inherent and patterned relationships appropriate to the persons of the Trinity. This means that human beings are created in the image and likeness of a God who is a Trinity of persons in concrete and specifically defined relationships. Consequently, an ethic based on becoming "God-like" must be firmly grounded in patterned relationships that indicate the appropriate behavior of human beings relative to God, neighbor, self and the rest of creation." (p. 8)

"queen of all graces," is always communal of which fellowship is a genuine "mark" of the gathered people of God filled with the energy of holy, healing and enabling love. It is out of this triune vision of God as love that Wesley envisions for the people called Methodists a distinctive way of combining both "works of piety" and "works of mercy" in the class meetings and the bands.<sup>46</sup>

There is a profound simplicity and genius in the design of the class meetings and the bands that is reflective of the koinonia of triune love that is poured into our hearts. Wesley was convinced that God is Love—a koinonia of triune love—which meant that one must receive love in the fellowship of community before one would know how to properly give love. As the Methodists would "watch over one another in love" they were not only strengthened in love by the healing of "holy tempers" but they were learning how to properly love "with the mind of Christ" in their deeds of mercy and piety. As the close-knit groups of fellowship and mutual accountability<sup>47</sup> received that love of God through one another in prayer, singing of hymns, Scripture reading, exhortation, encouragement, and confession, they were able to zealously "give out" in "works of mercy" and "works of piety," in the same way that God's love has been "thrown out" "from the Father through the Son in the Spirit." As they "reached out" in the means of grace through "works of piety" and "works of mercy" not only were others receiving this triune love, but also they were being healed. They were becoming "transcripts of the Trinity." Their zeal to love was because they had already received the energy of love ("the whole Trinity descends into their faithful hearts") that was moving "outward" transforming the holy tempers, inciting and enabling works of mercy to their neighbor and works of piety to God and finally triune love for the whole Church of Christ. This is the most explicit rationale for the design of the Societies, Class Meetings and Bands in Methodism.

They offered a close-knit fellowship of mutual encouragement and accountability where they learned how to "love" as God is love through the marked-practices of God's mission, and thereby pattern for others in their specific acts of mercy and piety, the fellowship of triune love. Their acts of piety and mercy not only patterned for the whole world a way of love, but the very structure of the class meetings and the bands would be the "iconic gifts" of Methodism to the Church and the world.

This was Wesley's vision of the Church as a koinonia of believers, patterning for the whole world in the means of grace, the way of triune love. As the Church participates in the life of triune communion, by using all the means of grace, especially the class meetings and the bands, the congregation of the faithful becomes one (united), holy, catholic and apostolic. Again, this is first, because God whose name and nature is Love, is the Holy Trinity; the One who is One God, Holy in nature, Catholic in presence, and Constantly (as in apostolic continuity) the Three-One God, who was, who is, and who will be, forever and ever, is Triune Love. So, we love because God first loved us. Thus the Church can only be "one" by her love. Only love can unite the Church. The Church can only be "holy" in ecstatic love. Triune love is always ecstatically "thrown out," and therefore, the Church can only be holy in the same "thrown out" ecstatic love. The Church can only be catholic by love. After all, the freedom of love, the freedom of the Spirit, is that which "places" the Church "anywhere" and "everywhere". The Church can only be apostolic by love. Love is that which gives us

<sup>46</sup> "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists," Works, 8:248-268; esp. 251-261. cf. also "The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies, 8:269-271; "Rules of the Band-Societies, 8:272-274.

<sup>47</sup> David Lowes Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1987).

identity and continuity, and relationality with “all the people of God.” Love gives the Church identity with a memory of the past as well as a memory of the future, so we can love now with the same love “everywhere, always, and by all.”

“Use not trust”<sup>48</sup> is an aphorism that would best sum up Wesley's theology of the means of grace. After all, “The soul and body make a [person], and the spirit and discipline make a Christian.”<sup>49</sup> What is often forgotten in the means of grace is that they are indeed “gifts of grace.” Perhaps, another way of understanding the “patterning” nature of the means of grace is not by viewing them as external duties or forms of patterned behavior to be copied,<sup>50</sup> but rather as “iconic gifts,” transitive in nature, that opens us up to the constant presence and identity of the Triune God. Remember, for the Wesley brothers, we can only know God in the fellowship of triune love and we can only love the God we know in the fellowship of triune love. So, these iconic gifts, these ‘marked-practices’ of shared koinonia must never be deemed as external copies or patterns but as iconic gifts that are the signs of the constantly abiding fellowship of triune love that are to be shared and participated in. So, like all gifts, use them, participate in them, share them, and be healed in them, but never just “trust” them. So, we “must” use them because they are the gifts of triune love that enable us to partake of God's nature by participating in the mission of God. And, as we return God's love, we “use not trust” the means of grace, so that we will be renewed as “transcripts of the Holy Trinity.”

The return of triune love is the hermeneutical key to understanding the renewal of the image of God as the goal of salvation. This is most clear, in his sermon, *The Image of God*, where Wesley ponders the essence of what it means to have been made in God's image.

... His affections were rational, even, and regular—if we may be allowed to say ‘affections’, for properly speaking he had but one: *man was what God is, Love*. Love filled the whole expansion of his soul; it possessed him without a rival. Every movement of his heart was love: it knew no other fervour. Love was his vital heat; it was the genial warmth that animated his whole frame. And the flame of it was continually streaming forth, directly to him from whom it came, and by reflection to all sensitive natures, inasmuch as they too were his offspring; but especially to those superior beings who bore not only the superscription, but likewise the image of their Creator.<sup>51</sup>

In *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, Wesley envisions the whole economy of grace at work in all the successive stages of salvation “throwing out” triune love. Salvation, for Wesley, is “the entire work of God, from the first dawning of grace in the soul till it is consummated in glory. . . . all the

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<sup>48</sup> Because the Holy Spirit, “the immediate cause of all holiness in us,” was constantly present patterning for us in those means of grace, the way of triune love, they were to be “used” and not passively “trusted.” Not to use the means of grace would mean that one was no longer “trusting” in the direction of the Holy Spirit to conform one to the “mind of Christ.” Cf. BE 1:376-397, esp. 390-397.

<sup>49</sup> BE 20:357, Journal (17 August 1751).

<sup>50</sup> Wesley's citation from Augustine is most instructive here: “It is the best worship or service of God, to imitate him you worship.” Cf. Sermon on the Mount, IX, Sermon 29, 1:635, esp. 636 where he writes: “Now God is love; therefore they who resemble him in the spirit of their minds are transformed into the same image. They are merciful even as he is merciful. Their soul is all love. They are kind, benevolent, compassionate, tender-hearted; and that not only to the good and gentle, but also to the forward. Yea, they are, like him, loving unto every man, and their mercy extends to all his works.”

<sup>51</sup> BE 4:294-295. (**Bold** and *italics* are mine for emphasis)

'drawings' of '**the Father**', the desires after God, which, if we yield to them, increase more and more; all that 'light' wherewith the **Son of God** 'enlighteneth everyone that cometh into the world', showing every man 'to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with his God'; all the convictions which his **Spirit** from time to time works in every child of man."<sup>52</sup>

The most important distinction made in Wesley's *use* of the means of grace for understanding how he connected the means to the end, i.e. for restoring humankind back into the image of triune love is made in the "works of piety" and the "works of mercy." "Works of piety" are those patterned responses of triune love directed to God and are identical to the instituted means of grace. "Works of mercy" are those graced-patterns of triune love that are directed to our neighbor and are related to the prudential means of grace.<sup>53</sup>

Wesley's, *Scripture Way of Salvation*, sketches out the *via salutis* in God's mission through the 'marked-practices' of "piety" and "mercy" that are "necessary to full sanctification." These 'means of grace' in the works of "piety" and "mercy" are *necessary* to live in the "hope of glory."

'But what good works are those, the practice of which you affirm to be necessary to sanctification? First, all **works of piety**, such as public prayer, family prayer, and praying in our closet; receiving the Supper of the Lord; searching the Scriptures by hearing, reading, meditating; and using such a measure of fasting or abstinence as our bodily health allows. . . . all **works of mercy**, whether they relate to the bodies or souls of men; such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, entertaining the stranger, visiting those that are in prison, or sick, or variously afflicted; such as the endeavouring to instruct the ignorant, to awaken the stupid sinner, to quicken the lukewarm, to confirm the wavering, the comfort the feeble-minded, to succour the tempted, or contribute in any manner to the saving of souls from death. This is the repentance, and these the fruits meet for repentance, which are necessary to full sanctification. This is the way wherein God hath appointed his children to wait for complete salvation<sup>54</sup>

Wesley's sermon, *On Zeal*, makes this rationale clear as he envisions the Church universal living after the *missio Dei*. Working from a framework of four concentric circles where each "circle" of these graced-patterns moves us 'ecstatically' and kenotically' to the "queen of all graces" -- Love. The center circle is Love, the love of God and humankind. Next to this center circle is the circle representing holy tempers—affections or disposition. This love of God and neighbor that is poured into the hearts and lives of faithful believers moves outward to another concentric circle known as works of mercy, and that same love of God continues in the sweep of outward and emptying love to works of piety.

In a Christian believer *love* sits upon the throne, which is erected in the inmost soul; namely, love of God and man, which fills the whole heart, and reigns without a rival. In a circle near the throne are all **holy tempers**: long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, goodness, fidelity, temperance -and if any other is comprised in 'the mind which was in Christ Jesus'. In an exterior circle are all the **works of mercy**, whether to the souls or bodies of men. By these we exercise all holy tempers; by these we continually improve them, so that all these are real means of grace, although this is not commonly adverted to. Next to these are those that are usually termed **works of piety**: reading and hearing the Word, public, family, private prayer, receiving the Lord's Supper, fasting or abstinence. Lastly, that his followers may the

<sup>52</sup> BE 2:156-157. (Bold emphasis is mine) Kenneth J. Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation, The Heart of John Wesley's Theology*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), gives one of the most thorough treatments of the specific synthesis that is at work in the various "conjunctions and parallelisms" found in Wesley's *via salutis*.

<sup>53</sup> Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>54</sup> BE 2:166.

more effectually provoke one another to love, holy tempers, and good works, our blessed Lord has united them together in one *-the church*, dispersed all over the earth; a little emblem of which, of the church universal, we have in every particular Christian congregation.<sup>55</sup>

What is most fascinating about how the imagery of Wesley's metaphor of four concentric circles works is best captured in the ecstatic and kenotic breath of Triune Love. As God's love is 'breathed' out all that love is emptied and pushes outward by that same breathed out love, in works of mercy and works of piety, thereby, changing and transforming the affections or disposition of the recipient of God's breathed out love. Everyone in the house of God is changed. This is how we become like God, by the very breath of God. This imagery came to be expressed in Wesley's most composite view of the Christian life: *faith filled with the energy of love*.

Just as we cannot love unless God first loves us, likewise, we cannot breathe, we cannot live unless the Spirit breathes the energy of love into our hearts and lives. And, a sign that the Methodists were in good health breathing deeply in the fellowship of triune love was measured by using the marked-practice of "reaching out" to the poor. A quick look into some of Wesley's letters to Miss J. C. March is most revealing especially in the way Wesley continues to distinguish between works of piety and works of mercy. When Miss March insisted that she needed more time for nurturing her spiritual life (piety) Wesley demonstrates precisely "why" mercy is closer to the center of the "queen of all graces."

Yet I [writes Wesley] find time to visit the sick and the poor; and I must do it, if I believe the Bible, if I believe these are the marks whereby the Shepherd of Israel will know and judge His sheep at the great day. . . .  
 . . . . I am concerned for you; I am sorry you should be content with lower degrees of usefulness and holiness than you are called to.<sup>56</sup>

Out of the fellowship of triune love, Wesley envisions for the "people called Methodists" a distinctive way of combining both "works of piety" and "works of mercy," especially in the way of the poor.<sup>57</sup> What is most striking in Wesley's doxological vision is the deliberate correlation of theosis and poverty. Wesley's frequent doxological refrain would declare that the way of the poor is the way of triune love. Touch the poor and you touch Christ. Touch the poor and you live to the glory of God. Forget the poor and you forget Christ. Neglect the poor and you cannot become who you are, "transcripts of the trinity." After all, the way of God's mission is the way of God's Love. And, the way of glory is the way of poverty. Hence, to live to the praise and glory of God, to love as God is love, to be holy as God is holy, and to be perfect as God is perfect, means that we must become poor by means of the poor.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> *On Zeal*, Sermon 92, §II.5; 3:313-314.

<sup>56</sup> Letters to Miss March (10 December 1777), Letters (Telford), 6:292-293. I am grateful to Randy Maddox for reminding me of these letters. Cf. Randy Maddox's chapter: "'Visit the Poor': John Wesley, the Poor, and the Sanctification of Believers," in Heitzenrater, *The Poor and the People Called Methodists*, Pages 59-81, esp. 76-79.

<sup>57</sup> "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists," Works, 8:248-268; esp. 251-261. cf. also "The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies," 8:269-271; "Rules of the Band-Societies," 8:272-274.

<sup>58</sup> S T Kimbrough highlights a helpful distinction of "gospel poverty" and "perfect poverty" as it is used in Charles Wesley's *Songs for the Poor*. This is one of my favorite in Charles Wesley. "Thus, thus may I the prize pursue, and all the appointed paths pass through to perfect poverty: thus let me, Lord, thyself attain, and give thee up thine own again, forever lost in thee." Cf. *Songs for the Poor*, no. 7; from *Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures*, 2 vols. (Bristol: Farley, 1762), 2:140. This hymn is quoted from S T Kimbrough's chapter "Perfection

These doxological practices of triune love written upon our hearts enable us to live to the praise and glory of God. Doxological living means to love as God is love, to be holy as God is holy, and to be perfect as God is perfect. Moreover, the transitive character and doxological pattern of these means of grace in the triune act of condescending love, will always be proleptic, ensuring that we will not "miss our providential way"<sup>59</sup> but "in love renewed" through these 'marked-practices' of triune love, we will be "stamped with the triune character."<sup>60</sup> The doxological way of God's mission is "patterned" in the 'marked-practice' of reaching out to the poor so that by *using* this doxological practice in the fellowship of triune love we will "become by grace what God is by nature," "transcripts of the Holy Trinity."

### The Silent Orthodoxies of God's Mission

As the Church leans into the future of God's kingdom and experiences the foretastes of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity, what treasures of 'hidden promises' are contained in the 'marked-practices' of the *missio Dei*? What fresh new ways of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity can be discerned as we give praise and thanksgiving for communion 'already' enjoyed in the *koinonia* of the Holy Trinity? If the 'marked-practices' of God's character and mission are 'movements' in shared fellowship with the Holy Trinity, then we must pay closer attention to the 'new ways' in which the *koinonia* of the Holy Trinity moves in unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity for the redemption of the whole creation. *Koinonia* is the contagion of triune love that fuels the *missio Dei*.

Although these questions are immense and evoke an imagination of endless and creative possibilities, a few 'outline' reflections are in order to push our argument that when the Church lives out of the fellowship of triune love, the Church lives after the *missio Dei*.

First, the unity of the Church is grounded in the unified fellowship of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The 'marked' Church is one *only* in the fellowship of triune love. How does the fellowship of the Holy Trinity model, pattern and structure unitive love in the *missio Dei*?

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*Revisited: Charles Wesley's Theology of "Gospel Poverty" and "Perfect Poverty" in The Poor and the People Called Methodists*, edited by Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2002). Pages 101-119.

<sup>59</sup> BE 7: 472. This is a profound hymn of trust in the providence of the Triune God. **Hymn 17**: Captain of Israel's host, and guide/Of all who seek the land above, Beneath thy shadow we abide,/The cloud of thy protecting love:/Our strength thy grace, our rule thy Word,/Our end, the glory of the Lord./By thy unerring Spirit led,/We shall not in the desert stray;/We shall not full direction need,/Or miss our providential way;/As far from danger as from fear,/While love, almighty love, is near.

<sup>60</sup> BE 7: 394-395. Hymn 253: Come, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,/Whom one all—perfect God we own,/Restorer of thine image lost,/Thy various offices make known;/Display, our fallen souls to raise,/Thy whole economy of grace./Jehovah in Three Persons, come,/And draw, and sprinkle us, and seal/Poor guilty, dying worms, in whom/Thy dost eternal life reveal;/The knowledge of thyself bestow,/And all thy glorious goodness show./Soon as our pardoned hearts believe/That thou art pure, essential love,/The proof we in ourselves receive/Of the Three Witnesses above;/Sure as the saints around thy throne/That Father, Word, and Spirit are one./O that we now, in love renewed,/Might blameless in thy sight appear;/Wake we in thy similitude,/Stamped with the Triune character;/Flesh, spirit, soul, to thee resign,/And live and die entirely thine!

The ecstatic love of God the Father moves to *send* the Son and the Spirit to live kenotically 'for us and our salvation.' The unitive love that exists in the fellowship of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit moves ecstatically in self-emptying love. This is God's mission. God who delights over us is a God who exists ecstatically to deliver us, making room, opening space, a "broad place" for us to *delight* in the fellowship of triune love and move in the same unitive love in the *missio Dei*. (Psalm 18:19)

This fellowship of unitive love is not constituted by a single static substance or Subject, but rather by ecstatic love for and in the other. The one is in the other and the *difference* of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is constituted by virtue of the free relations of love. As the Father is totally in the Son and totally in the Spirit communicating the Father's will to the Son, the Father opens up space for the Son totally in the Father and totally in the Spirit to become obedient to the will of the Father, while the Spirit is totally in the Father and totally in the Son making room, enabling and empowering the Son to do the will of the Father.<sup>61</sup> These mutually indwelling relations are relations of kenotic (self-surrendering, self-giving, self-sacrificing) and ecstatic love.

The way God exists in these perichoretic relations models and structures for the Church, life after the mission of God. Out of the contagious fellowship of triune love, the Church learns to *practice* unity in the mission of God from the same way in which the fellowship of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are diversely unified in mission. As the Church lives in the '*marked-practice*' of unitive love, the Church learns that the *missio Dei* requires fellowship with all the people of God. The fellowship of other believers is not only necessary to live in a diversely unified mission, but the koinonia of triune love is the very gift that motivates the fellowship of all believers to live in the commonly shared mission of unitive love. It takes the fellowship of other believers to be one in mission.

The fellowship of triune love, patterns in perichoretic relations a unity of diversity. But diversity without fellowship is merely chaotic. There can be no commonly shared mission of God without fellowship. And the Spirit is most creative in the diversity of the Body through the fellowship of believers. The infectious koinonia of God's people opens space and makes room for the creativity of the Spirit to teach in endlessly diverse ways for the Church to live after the *missio Dei* in unitive love. Hence, any local Church setting out to write a mission statement ought to listen to the creative mission of the Spirit and discern ways to 'unite' with other local Churches to share in the *missio Dei*. There can be no unity without the diversity of fellowship with all believers.

Second, the holiness of the Church is grounded in the holy fellowship of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The '*marked*' Church is holy *only* in the Holy contagious fellowship of triune love. How does the fellowship of the Holy Trinity, model, pattern, and structure holy love in the *missio Dei*?

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<sup>61</sup> I have adopted Robert Jenson's Trinitarian rule for the *missio Dei*: "Given the Incarnation, so that the human person Jesus is in fact the Son who lives with the Father in the Spirit, the distinction between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity holds only in the same way as does the distinction between two natures in Christ. Therefore the Father's role as unoriginated Originator of deity is concretely not other than his role as the One who sends the Son and the Spirit on their ecclesial missions; the Son's role as the one in whom the Father finds himself is concretely not other than his role as the head of the church that in him finds the Father; the Spirit's role as the one who frees the Father and the Son is concretely his role as the one who frees the Christian community." Cf. Robert W. Jenson, 'Systematic Theology,' vol. 2, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 173.

Wesley believed that once the Spirit, 'the immediate cause of all holiness' pours the ecstatic love of God into our hearts we are made 'happy' because we have received the 'holy-happy' fellowship of the 'Three-One God.'<sup>62</sup> To be holy is to be happy and to be happy is to be holy. We are most happy when we love and we are most holy when we love. This is because the nature of holiness is ecstatic love which is God's mission. God *delivers* us because God *delights* over us. Again, in the fellowship of triune love, God does not exist *statically* in Godself, but exists out of Godself—*ek-statically*—for the other. God is ecstatically happy because God is love, and God is ecstatically holy because God is love.

The Church is holy because the Church has been *marked* to live in the holy mission of God through the *ecstatic* fellowship of the Holy Trinity. The Church cannot be holy when the Church does not live in mission. Holiness apart from mission is a contradiction. When holiness is no longer grounded in the *missio Dei*, it is reduced to a moral category and the holy life becomes mostly concerned with morality or an individual experience of God, and less about the mission of God. When the people of God live as they are sent after the *missio Dei*, they will be holy they will be happy. Nothing is as infectious as the holy fellowship of all believers living happily after the *missio Dei*.

Third, the catholicity of the Church is grounded in the universal fellowship of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The 'marked' Church is catholic *only* in the fellowship of triune love that is wholly present. How does the fellowship of the Holy Trinity, model, pattern, and structure catholic love in the *missio Dei*?

Since the '*totus Christus*' is present by the descent of the Spirit, "Wherever the Holy Spirit is, there is the Church of Christ." And we might add to this ecumenical consent that wherever the 'two hands of God' are present there is the whole fellowship of triune love. This was evident in the earliest fellowship of believers who were already living in the '*way*' of the *missio Dei*. It is important to remember that before there was a canon of Scripture or Creed, there was only the fellowship of believers that continued to drive these Christian missionaries to live after the mission of God. Marked by the contagious fellowship of triune love the earliest Christian missionaries knew who they were in the fellowship of triune love and why they were *sent* into the world. These gathered hearts of faithful believers were so sure and confident of this abiding fellowship of triune love that they were ready to stake their very lives on God's enduring love that was *marking* them in the *missio Dei*.

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<sup>62</sup> This Trinitarian pattern of ecstatic love as happiness is most pronounced in his sermon on "*Spiritual Worship*." John Wesley comments on I John 5:11,12: This eternal life then commences when it pleases the Father to reveal his Son in our hearts; when we first know Christ, being enabled to 'call him Lord by the Holy Ghost'; when we can testify, our conscience bearing us witness in the Holy Ghost, 'the life which I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.' And then it is that happiness begins—happiness real, solid, substantial. Then it is that heaven is opened in the soul, that the proper heavenly state commences, while the love of God, as loving us, is shed abroad in the heart, instantly producing love to all mankind; general, pure benevolence, together with its genuine fruits, lowliness, meekness, patience, contentedness in every state; an entire, clear, full acquiescence in the whole will of God, enabling us to 'rejoice evermore, and in everything to give thanks.' Cf. also John Wesley's sermon, "*On Zeal*," 92, §II.5; 3:313-314.

The catholic presence of the Church is constantly attested in the ongoing fellowship of believers. Every local fellowship of believers is the church catholic because it continues to live after the *missio Dei* in and through the fellowship of triune love. Whenever one travels throughout the world in the Body of Christ, already, one is at home in the family of God because the catholic koinonia of triune love is constantly there marking 'all' the people of God in this 'holy-happy' fellowship to live after the mission of God. Wherever the catholic fellowship of believers is, there is the catholic fellowship of triune love.

Fourth, the apostolicity of the Church is grounded in the immutable fellowship of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The 'marked' Church is apostolic in identity and witness *only* in the fellowship of triune love that is the same yesterday, today and forever. How does the fellowship of the Holy Trinity, model, pattern, and structure apostolic love in the *missio Dei*?

The apostolic identity and witness of the Church is best understood by the disciples' relation to Christ. To know Christ is to be known by Christ and to be known by Christ is to be loved by Christ. The apostles of Christ knew they were loved and they loved who they knew. This is the soteriologic of apostolicity. And now, at Pentecost, the descent of the cruciformed Spirit of Christ makes possible the continued work of Christ in the eschatological mission of cross and resurrection. This love of Christ is continuously poured into the gathered hearts of faithful believers.

In the fellowship of believers, the Church continues to live in the same apostolic love after the *missio Dei*. When the church loses her apostolic memory, she loses her apostolic identity. And when the church is no longer apostolic in fellowship, she cannot be catholic in fellowship. And when the Church is no longer one in fellowship, she cannot be holy. And when the Church is no longer holy in fellowship, she cannot be one in fellowship. It is in this abiding fellowship of triune love that all the people of God are *marked* in the *missio Dei* to be one in their love, holy by their love, catholic in their love, and apostolic in their love.

In closing, let us consider one final metaphor as we come to see that to live after the *missio Dei* is what John Wesley deemed as, "*The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God.*"

"From what has been said we may learn, secondly, what the life of God in the soul of a believer is, wherein it properly consists, and what is immediately and necessarily implied therein. It immediately and necessarily implies the continual inspiration of God's Holy Spirit: God breathing into the soul, and the soul breathing back what it first receives from God; a continual action of God upon the soul, the re-action of the soul upon God; an unceasing presence of God, the loving, pardoning God, manifested to the heart, and perceived by faith; an unceasing return of love, praise, and prayer, offering up all the thoughts of our hearts, all the words of our tongues, all the works of our hands, all our body, soul, and spirit, to be an holy sacrifice, acceptable unto God in Christ Jesus."

"And hence we may, thirdly, infer the absolute necessity of this re-action of the soul (whatsoever it be called) in order to the continuance of the divine life therein. For it plainly appears God does not continue to act upon the soul unless the soul re-acts upon God. He prevents us indeed with the blessings of his goodness. He first loves us, and manifests himself unto us. While we are yet afar off he calls us to himself, and shines upon our hearts. But if we do not then love him who first loved us; if we will not hearken to his voice; if we turn our eye away from him, and will not attend to the light which he pours upon us: his Spirit will not always strive; he will gradually withdraw, and leave us to the darkness of our own hearts. He will not

continue to breathe into our soul unless our soul breathes toward him again; unless our love, and prayer, and thanksgiving return to him, a sacrifice wherewith he is well pleased."<sup>63</sup>

At Pentecost, once the Church receives the breath of God, the Church is '*sent*' to live after the mission of God. When the breath of God's Spirit is breathed into the Body, it 'pushes out.' Once the gathered people of God receive the breath of God—the energy of triune love—they are 'breathed out,' 'thrown out,' '*sent*' by the breath of the Spirit to the very edges of creation, to the marginalized and disenfranchised. There is no place in all of creation (human and non-human) where the breath of God does not reach.

*Emerging* from the Church's longstanding polarization seems to be a rediscovery of Pentecost. Little by little, as the Church is discovering a commonly shared mission in newly embodied contexts she is learning a new way of speaking and consequently, the Church is gradually letting go of tightly clutched theological identities. Theological '*differences*' are pushed into the background, while that commonly shared mission is discovering a renewed vision of the unity of the Church. This is truly a strange phenomenon, where ecclesial traditions are discovering their 'common need' of each other to carry on the *missio Dei*. When we are driven by our *marked* need to preach the good news and embody it in feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, touching the poor, including the marginalized and downtrodden, healing the environment, extending forgiveness and liberation, offering eternal hope, etc., it does not take long to realize that this mission of God will take 'all the people of God.'

I can recall from my former conversations with the Orthodox in Romania, sharing their great appreciation for the Church of the Nazarenes' 'Compassionate Ministry' among the sick and orphaned children of Romania. While staying in an Orthodox monastery in Sighisoara, the abbot confessed to me that the Orthodox Church needed the Nazarene's help in caring for all the sick of Romania. Last year, as a participant in an Orthodox-Methodist Consultation at St. Vladimir's Seminary in New York, I watched Father Jillian, an Orthodox priest from Canada, step onto the floor of the assembly, and speak these astounding words to his presiding Bishop: "When are we as Orthodox going to confess our need of the Methodists in order to carry out God's mission?" Surely, this is a sign of the Spirit moving in the midst of the *one, holy, catholic and apostolic* Church, and giving to the Church what the Church needs to live after the mission of God. Surely, these are signs of God's kingdom breaking forth, a new creation in the making? Remember, when we participate in the character of God we participate in the mission of God. As I listen discernibly to these signs, I seem to hear the Spirit saying to the Church: The *common ground* for all the 'people of God' is to live out of the '*marked practices*' of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity in the *missio Dei*.

In the mission of God, the 'ecstatic' love of God moves outward, 'kenotically' through the Son by the breath and energy of the Spirit to the very margins of those in need. And so, the Church in turn exhales and breathes out by living ecstatically out of herself for the marginalized, the sick, the imprisoned, the disenfranchised, and the poor. The doxological nature of the *missio Dei* means that the people of God *must* return back to God what was started by God and will be finished by God.

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<sup>63</sup>John Wesley, 'The Works of John Wesley,' edited by: Albert Outler, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984). Bicentennial Edition, BE 1:442, Sermon 19: 'The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God.'

Remember, to 'become by grace what God is by nature' is to love ecstatically after the *missio Dei*; i.e. love as God is love. As koinonia is the contagion that fuels the *missio Dei*, breathing back (exhaling) the breath of God is how God's breath is returned to fill the lungs of the Body to live after the mission of God, as the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. When the Church stops breathing after the *missio Dei* the people of God lose their breath and die. There is no life after the *missio Dei* without the energy of triune love breathing into the people of God and the people of God exhaling back that breath, God's love. Continue to breathe in your Church 'O breath of God.' And may your Church breathe back with all their breath your praise and thanksgiving. . . Amen.

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit:  
As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.*