TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF MISSION
IN THE NEW MEDIA AGE:
APPROPRIATING THE NOTION OF DIVINE MISSION BY
St. AUGUSTINE AND St. THOMAS AQUINAS
IN THE NEW MEDIA

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Dedicated

To

The Filipino People

Defiant in hope,

Infectious in joy
Statement of Sources

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person’s work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis.

The thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution

Joseph Echano

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is about providing a theological basis for doing mission in the new media age today. This thesis will argue that a theology of mission in the new media age needs to provide a strong theological justification for mission and at the same time a missiological examination of the new media. Missiology today is wanting in these two areas.

To respond to this lacuna, this thesis will argue that the notion of Missio Dei (Mission of God) is the most meaningful and profound justification for mission today by its insistence on a theocentric rather than ecclesiocentric and anthropocentric foundation in mission. The modernist and postmodernist theological ethos, however, failed to provide a robust environment for the growth and development of Missio Dei. Thus, Missio Dei experienced an impasse in the late twentieth century.

To help resolve this impasse, this thesis will retrieve the notion of divine mission elucidated by St. Augustine in De Trinitate and St. Thomas Aquinas in Summa Theologiae. The appropriation of the notion of Divine Mission articulated by Saint Augustine and Thomas Saint Thomas is envisaged to provide a firmer theological grounding of Missio Dei.

After showing that a more stable justification of Missio Dei is possible through St. Augustine and St. Thomas, the thesis will show that Missio Dei today is most appropriately manifested in the growing aspiration for deeper connection and communication in the church and in the world. St. Augustine and St. Thomas’ notion of Missio Dei intersects with many dynamics of the new media environment. A critical examination of the new media will show that it can strengthen a Trinitarian reformulation of mission, while at the same time, can pose some dangers to God’s vision of communication.

Strengthened by these foundational explorations, this thesis will identify some preliminary elements of a theology of mission in the new media age. A primilinary sketch of a theology of mission will be drawn from the confluence of the major investigations of this thesis: A retrieval of St. Augustine and St. Thomas’ notion of divine mission, a critical examination of communication theology and of the new media age.
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CONCLUSION
Introduction

“If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.”

Twentieth century was a favourable time for the theology of Christian mission. Developments in the world and the church in the twentieth-century radically changed the notion of mission that to say missions at the beginning of the twentieth-century was very much different to say missions at the end of the twentieth-century. The notion that best captures this radical transformation of mission is Missio Dei. Missio Dei, briefly stated, is the return to the authorship of God in mission; God is the source, the means and the end of mission.

The socio-political-cultural and theological context of the twentieth-century provided the fertile ground for the emergence of the notion of Missio Dei. These productive theological directions made the twentieth-century truly a renaissance period for theology. The most significant theological renaissance in the twentieth-century is the recovery of the Trinity and the development of many new insights about the Trinity. Missio Dei is one of the consequences of a Trinitarian revival which expresses an inner longing to return to God not just in mission but in the whole of theology itself.

In actual life and mission of the church, however, Missio Dei remains marginal. Indeed, old habits are hard to leave behind as large vestiges of the values and outlook of Christendom remain in the church today both among the hierarchy and the laity. It will take time before these transformations can truly permeate the consciousness of the whole church. After all

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Christendom has been with the church for sixteen hundred years; it will not be easy to undo it straightaway.

Furthermore, competing views on Missio Dei in the aftermath of its inception threatened to destroy its promising enterprise. The competing views were represented by two camps: On the one hand is the group stressing the Missio Dei in the church and on the other hand, is the group accentuating the Missio Dei in the world. The confusion about the meaning of Missio Dei exposed the weakness of Missio Dei in providing a substantial ontological justification for today’s understanding and praxis of mission.

Consequently, missiologists became divided as to the future of Missio Dei. Some say that the theme has run its course while others say that the discourse on Missio Dei is still at an infantile stage. Several missiologits have put forward suggestions on how to get the conversation on Missio Dei going. John Flett, for example, suggests that in order for Missio Dei to have a proper grounding, it is necessary to go back to Karl Barth’s theology. Other theologians have suggested that Missio Dei is not an invention of the twentieth century, but rather a retrieval, as well as a continuous development of the notion of mission in the context of the formation of Trinitarian doctrine. This is evident in the writing of early church fathers like Origen, Tertullian, and the Capadocian Fathers. Along the lines of Trinitarian framework, St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas also talked about the mission of God.

On the other hand, the face of mission is not only shaped by its rich past but by the significant developments in our world and the church today. In recent years, there has been a renewed interest on the significance of communication and media in the church. This is shown by the fact that the theme of social communication and media is one the most written theme in Catholic Church documents from the second half of the twentieth century up to the beginning of
the twenty-first century. These documents reflect the Catholic Church’s keen concern about integrating communication and media in the mission of the church. Several theologians have underscored the centrality of communication in theology like Karl Rahner, Bernard Lonergan and Avery Dulles.

The church’s emphasis in communication is influenced largely by the explosion of communication and media in our world today. In the twenty-first century, we are propelled to a Copernican revolution which is by and large a media revolution. This revolution is transforming not just global structures but everybody’s deepest values and beliefs. It is subverting old cherished meaning-giving dynamics as well as facilitating new ones with consequences both good and bad for families, communities, churches and traditions.

We have been living in the digital environment for nearly three decades now; it is just in its early stages but the transformations it has brought are already profound and overwhelming. The Internet and its transformation has become a very real part of everyday life today. The new media revolution has changed the world and the church. Contemporary discourse on missiology, however, has not considerably confronted the media revolution as one of the most crucial challenges and frontiers for mission today. The new media age is the elephant in the room for doing mission today, yet sadly theology has minimally engaged with the digital age.

Nonetheless, in recent years there has been some positive increase in studies about the new media and Christian mission. Many of these studies however, focus on the technical and practical side of the new media—new media as tools for mission and the practical considerations on how to engage with new media in doing mission today. More than just instruments, however, the new media create a new environment. New media are providing us a new way of life, a
means of sociality, and greater opportunities for participation. Consequently, the New Media culture has critical repercussions for the articulation, living out and doing mission today.

In this light, John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* challenged the church to study further the culture of the media—both the mass media and the emerging new media at the time of its writing. The culture of the media needs further research as it is bringing “new ways of communicating, with new languages, new techniques and a new psychology.”2 Focusing on the new media, the Pontifical Council for Social Communications in *The Church and Internet* similarly issued an appeal to study the Internet towards developing an anthropology and a theology of communication:

> [W]e urge continued research and study, including “the development of an anthropology and a theology of communication” —now, with specific reference to the Internet. Along with study and research, of course, positive pastoral planning for the use of the Internet can and should go forward.3

Before we can plunge into the practicality and technicality of new media in mission, therefore, it is essential to examine the culture and environment that the new media helped to materialize. Along with a critical examination of the new media environment is a strong theological and missiological foundation for a missionary engagement with the new media. The missiological problem is not just the minimal engagement with the new media culture. The bigger challenge is the elucidation of a deeper foundation of mission in the context of the profound transformations that the culture of the new media has brought forth.

The renewed focus in communication in the church, the transformation in the world propelled by the new media age along with the *Missio Dei* theology and history—these are the building blocks for the framing of a theology of mission in today’s hypermediated world.

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2 *Redemptoris Missio*, 37c.
Purpose

The primary goal of this thesis is to do a systematic theological reflection of mission vis-à-vis the new media. The secondary objectives are the following:

1. To pursue and contribute to the ongoing discourse on missio Dei in the context of the new media environment.
2. To contribute to the discourse on reimagining Christian mission in the context of the new media culture today.
3. To critically examine the new media, its culture and the subtle transformations it brought to global structures, faith and our personal lives today.
4. To obtain a profound missiological justification for engaging the new media from the depths and riches of the tradition of our faith
5. To appropriate the patristic and medieval tradition on mission as expounded by St. Augustine and St. Thomas.

To achieve these goals and objectives, this thesis will seek to answer the following questions:

1. Where is the mission conversation now? Where is Catholic missiology now?
2. How do we connect this conversation with the project of engaging missio logically the new media age?
3. What are the significant missiological foundation and considerations for doing mission in the new media age?
4. What is the contribution of the patristic and medieval tradition of mission as elucidated by Augustine and Aquinas?
5. What is the contribution of the documents of the Catholic Church on social communications to the framing of a theology of mission in the new media age?

6. How do we justify mission in the new media age?

7. What is the significance of the new media age to a theology of mission today?

8. What is the initial shape of a theology of mission in the new media age?

**Thesis**

In answering the above questions, these will be the main propositions of this thesis:

The justification for a theology of mission in the new media age is the articulation of *Missio Dei* rooted in the notion of Divine Mission as expounded by St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas.

The patristic and medieval tradition on mission as expounded by Augustine and Aquinas will help us provide a sound Trinitarian foundation for *Missio Dei*.

The new media is a fitting ground for the active presence and action of *Missio Dei*; it offers new insights for mission as well as risks.

A theology of mission in the new media age is drawn from the following investigations: A sound Trinitarian foundation for *Missio Dei* as expounded by St. Augustine and St. Thomas, Church teachings on social communications and the critical examination of the new media.

**Significance of the Study**

This study can contribute to the existing knowledge of missiology by retrieving Augustine and Aquinas’ notion of divine mission. This study is also significant because it will
endeavour to link Augustine and Aquinas theology with the complex reality of the new media. Another way that this study can contribute to existing knowledge is the examination of the new media age as an environment for the proclamation of *Missio Dei*. By looking at new media from a missiological perspective, not just as an instrument or a field to apply mission, this study can show that the new media are holy ground where God’s mission is actively present and at work.

This study will result in the following benefits: The continuation of the discourse of *Missio Dei*, consequently, it can help to drum up interest and conversation about *Missio Dei*. This thesis can provide a strong missiological foundation for the church’s mission in the new media, both for those who are already in the web and those who are about to launch a mission in the web through an active presence and engagement with the new media for their church and faith and in becoming digital evangelisers and missionaries in the web.

**Method**

The thesis will investigate the considerations and elements of a theology in the new media primarily through library research. It will also use some secondary methods such as content analysis of church documents on mission and social communications and surveys on new media. The thesis will also go back to the primary source of *De Trinitate* and *Summa Theologiae* by Augustine and Aquinas respectively, specifically Books II and IV of Augustine’s *De Trinitate* and Question 43 of Aquinas’ *Summa Theologia Prima Par*. In investigating the new media, this thesis will take an inter-disciplinary approach. The investigation of the new media can benefit from new media studies, philosophy, sociology, economics and communication theology.
Limitation of the Study:

Even as this thesis will continue to keep abreast with the latest developments in the new media, the researcher is cognisant of the fleeting nature of new media. Everyday new technologies are discovered and developed. Thus, this thesis cannot cover the latest developments in new media technologies.

This thesis is limited to the general study of new media which includes multimedia content in the internet: text, audio, video and images. This also includes the interactive dynamics in the internet like social networks, blogging, online communities and others. In contrast, the mass media, considered as the old media, are the broadcast media—TV, radio, newspapers and film.

This thesis will discuss missiology and the new media in a general and in abstract manner with no particular context and special area highlighted.

All the bible texts used in this thesis are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

Although the English translation is considered a faithful translation, the primary sources, De Trinitate and Summa Theologiae, were not read in original language which was Latin.

Outline of the Thesis:

Chapter I

This chapter will critically examine the developments of mission in the twentieth-century. It will examine where Christian Mission is at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Thus, it will go back to the journey of mission especially in the twentieth century.
This chapter will also show that the notion of *Missio Dei*—return to God in mission—is the most significant notion of mission in the twentieth-century. The modern and postmodern ethos and ideology, however, have posed some limitations and problems to the advancement of *Missio Dei*.

Chapter II

This chapter will go back to the sources of the discourse on Divine Mission as articulated by Augustine and Aquinas in order to strengthen the ontological foundation of *Missio Dei*. It will examine in particular Books II and IV of Saint Augustine’s *De Trinitate* and Question 43 of Aquinas’ *Summa Theologia Prima Pars*. It will also critically investigate some significant implications of Augustine and Aquinas’ notion of Divine Mission for theology of mission today.

Chapter III

This chapter will examine the media and its significance and challenges to theology of mission. It will approach media from different perspectives in order to give a robust understanding of how media enter and apply into God’s mission today.

Chapter IV

This chapter will critically examine and evaluate the new media’s fittingness for *Missio Dei*. Fittingness here means the openness and potential as well as the threats and dangers of the new media in deciphering the mission of God—*Missio Dei*. To discern the fittingness of the new media to theology of mission, this chapter will critically examine and analyze new media—its history, architecture, values, technology, and impact upon the life of individuals and society.
This chapter will argue that the new media has a significant contribution to a construction of mission theology today and thus, missiology should no longer relegate the new media.

Chapter V

Bringing all together these findings and insights, this final chapter will do a theological and systematic reflection on the theology of mission in the new media age. The proposal of this chapter is to formulate a theology of mission today by appropriating the notion of divine mission by Augustine and Aquinas vis-à-vis the new media. The main questions for this chapter are: How can we systematize theologically God’s active mission in the new media age today? What are the implications and emerging signs in mission today because of the impact of the new media and the revival of Trinitarian theology?
This is He who was from the beginning,
who appeared as if new,
and was found old,
and yet who is ever born afresh
in the hearts of the saints.

This is He who,
being from everlasting,
is today called the Son;
through whom the Church is enriched,
and grace, widely spread.¹

Introduction

We will begin the exploration of doing a theology of mission in the new media age by
doing two preliminary tasks. First is a critical examination of the contemporary situation of
Christian mission and second a critical examination of the digital age

In this chapter, we will critically examine the developments of mission in the twentieth-
century. Our main question is: What significant theological themes and movements helped to
shape the missiology in the twentieth century?

We will argue that the notion of Missio Dei—return to God in mission—is the most
significant notion of mission in the twentieth-century. The modern and postmodern ethos and
ideology, however, have posed some limitations and problems to the advancement of Missio Dei.

Theology in the Postmodern and Postcolonial Period: A New Way of Doing Theology?

The postmodern and postcolonial condition significantly altered the course of theology
and mission in the second half of the twentieth-century. Theologians in the postmodern period

strongly steered away from the course of modern theology. Canadian theologian Gregory Baum criticises modern theology as “the sheer inadequacy of a faith that had adapted itself too easily to the happy assumptions of modernity.”² Two principal routes were taken by theologians in the twentieth-century reacting to modern theology: The first direction is the self-correction by Western theologians of a theology heavily influenced by modernity. This self-correction led to a compelling desire to re-read the sources and original traditions of the Christian faith. The second direction is the vigorous assertion and exploration by non-Western churches of their identity and distinct method of doing theology. This bi-directional undertaking in theology became not just a departure from modernity but also a retrieval and reconstruction, in a process which Baum describes as, “Negation is here followed by retrieval, a negation of the negation.”³

These bi-directional reaction to modern theology brought forth their own movements. The most significant movements of the self-correction of theology and the return to the sources in the West were the revival of Trinitarian theology, the emergence of movements like neo-orthodoxy and ressourcement and the retrieval of apophatic theology or negative theology. The most significant undertaking of the assertion and exploration by non-Western churches of their own identity and method of doing theology were the rise of contextual theologies in North and Latin America, Africa, Asia and Oceania as well as the theology that developed out of the marginal experiences of women, blacks, laity, poor, and the environment. These developments in theology will have great impact on both the theological practice and articulation of mission in the twentieth century.

**Theology in the West: Self-Criticism of Theology and Return to God**

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Western theology’s self-correction took the form of both theological deconstruction and reconstruction. Western theologians especially in the aftermath of World War I and totalitarian regimes in Europe, questioned the modernist co-optation of theology, church and faith, identity and mission of Christianity as exemplified by the neo-scholastic and liberal theology. At the same time, theologians sought to reconstruct and redefine the identity and purpose of theology in the midst of the world’s crumbling optimism about modernity and Western civilisation, the rise of totalitarianism, poverty and social injustice and the unbridled growth of liberal capitalism.

The Western self-correction in theology was realised in separate movements within both the Protestant and Catholic tradition—neo-orthodoxy for the Protestants and réssourcement for the Catholics. Neo-orthodoxy and réssourcement theologians’ common aversion to modern theology’s preferred way of doing theology—natural and rational theology—led to an assertion of the sovereignty of God’s revelation and a return to the original sources of the faith, for example, scriptures, early church Fathers and writings of St. Thomas. Tracy stressed this point in arguing for the return of God’s sovereignty in contemporary theology: “Theos has returned to unsettle the dominance of the modern logos.”4 In contemporary theology, the power of God is once again the leading partner in the theological connection.5 An essential consequence of this reaffirmation of God’s sovereignty and return to the sources is the revival of Trinitarian theology for which Missio Dei owes much its inspiration.

The return to God in twentieth-century theology also led to the re-emergence of apophatic theology or negative theology which Tracy claims as perhaps one of postmodern theology’s greatest legacies. Tracy explains, “The affirmation of the radical incomprehensibility of God not only at the limits of our possibilities of comprehending God but as a new place to

4 David Tracy, On Naming the Present: God, Hermeneutics and Church (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 37.
5 Tracy, Naming the Present, 37.
start understanding God as God may well prove one of the great achievements of the postmodern forms of theology.”⁶ Similarly, Philip Kennedy observes that the greatest theologians of the twentieth century were the most negative. They were negative in two ways. First, God is best discussed in terms of what God is clearly not. Second, they were acutely aware of the bleak and harrowing negativity of human (and environmental) suffering.⁷

Neo-orthodoxy is an approach to theology developed by prominent Protestant theologians in the aftermath of the First World War. It has also been called theology of crisis and dialectical theology. The greatest theologian of this movement—Karl Barth—was horrified to learn that prominent liberal theologians supported Germany’s going into World War I.⁸ Liberal theology’s capitulation to the world led Barth to a profound re-examination of the whole theological project. In his massive project *Church Dogmatics*, he argues that the foundation of theology is God’s sovereignty, the prior action of God in revelation, and what God reveals is God’s self.⁹ God is not mediated in natural theology as God is wholly other. Wilhelm Pauck argues this emphasis on divine revelation as faith’s point of departure: “Instead of asking: What has modern [humankind] to say about the gospel? The theologians now concerned themselves with the question: What does the gospel say to modern [humankind].”¹⁰

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In the Catholic Church, a similar movement in the twentieth-century is ressourcement. Gabriel Flynn claims that ressourcement\(^{11}\) inspired a renaissance in twentieth-century Catholic theology and made a decisive contribution to the reforms of Vatican II.\(^{12}\) Italian-American Catholic theologian Marcellino D’Ambrosio claims that ressourcement theologians were dissatisfied with the overly-cerebral remoteness of a neo-Scholastic theology cut off from history, pastoral practice, and prayer. This is echoed by Hans Boersma’s commentary of the Jesuit patrologist Jean Daniélou’s controversial 1946 essay: “Les Orientations présentes de la pensée religious” (“Current directions in religious thought”). According to Daniélou, theology had become disconnected from life, the result of the neo-Thomist division between nature and supernature. Seeking to reconnect theology and everyday experience, Daniélou advocated “ressourcement … a return to the Bible, the Church Fathers, and the liturgy.”\(^{13}\) Similarly, John McDade described De Lubac’s critique of neo-scholasticism which had plenty of answers to which no one knows the questions.\(^{14}\) Consequently, the ressourcement scholars aimed to restore the dynamic links between dogmatics, historical theology, spirituality, and everyday life.\(^{15}\)

\(^{11}\) The foremost exponents of ressourcement were principally, though not exclusively, leading French Dominicans and Jesuits of the faculties of Le Saulchoir (Paris) and Lyon-Fourvière, respectively: Dominicans Marie-Dominique Chenu (1895-1990), Yves Congar (1904-95), Dominique Dubarle (1907-87), and Henri-Marie Féret (1904-92), and the Jesuits Jean Daniélou (1905-74), Henri de Lubac (1896-1991), Henri Bouillard (1908-81), and Hans von Balthasar (1905-88). Gabriel Flynn, “Introduction,” Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology, Gabriel Flynn and Paul Murray eds., (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1 – 2.

\(^{12}\) Flynn, “Introduction,” 1. The ressourcement theologians like Congar, de Lubac, Daniélou, Rahner, and Ratzinger, among others, played a prominent role during the Vatican II. It is widely known that Vatican II was motivated by two primary theological directions: aggiornamento and ressourcement. In the past aggiornamento (updating) has been more commonly understood as the overriding spirit of Vatican II, but it is now seen that ressourcement is equally, if not more than, the compelling spirit of Vatican II.

\(^{13}\) Hans Boersma, Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5.


The *ressourcement* theologians were also reacting to the manualist method of neo-Scholasticism wherein the teachings of St. Thomas and other scholastics were often transmitted through manuals or textbooks of philosophy, theology, and ethics, usually for use in seminary education. These theologians were not rejecting the scholastic tradition, as D’Ambrosio explains, “several of them were in fact themselves dedicated Thomists who had a sense that the Thomism of the manuals was not the Thomism of St. Thomas.” Thus, these theologians advocated for a re-reading of the original sources—writings and of St. Thomas. It was not, however, a kind of a return to a pristine past. Hall states that the return is “Not in the spirit of remembering that seeks refuge in the past but of that recall which, touched by divine grace, may really become productive of hope.” Similarly, D’Ambrosio argues that *ressourcement* is aimed not at a nostalgic restoration of earlier forms of thought and life but a ‘new achievements’ in different, as yet unforeseen contexts. This is best expressed by Balthasar where he affirms that returning to the sources was not all the same thing as returning to the past:

> We turn towards a more distant past, but without believing that exhuming the “Greek Fathers” and adapting them, for better or for worse, to the needs of the modern soul will be enough to bring a languishing thought back to life. We are not so naive as to prefer “neo-patristic” theology to a “neo-Scholastic” one! No historical situation is ever absolutely similar to any other preceding period; none can therefore furnish its own solutions as so many master keys capable of resolving our contemporary problems.

**Revival of Trinitarian Theology**

The calls for God’s sovereignty by neo-orthodoxy and the return to the sources by *ressourcement* combined to inspire one of the greatest legacies of the twentieth-century

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16 D’Ambrosio, “Ressourcement.”
19 D’Ambrosio, “Ressourcement,”
theological discourse—the retrieval of the doctrine of the Trinity. Neo-orthodoxy’s emphasis on
the sovereignty of God and a return to revelation was a major inspiration for the Trinitarian
theological revival. As John Thompson explains, one “reason for this renewed interest in the
Trinity is the critique of scholasticism in favour of a new, dynamic understanding of the nature
of the living God and the consequent theological task.”\textsuperscript{20} A return to Trinity was an essential
consequence of the \textit{ressourcement} movement as it is the movement which advocated the return
to early church Fathers from which the Trinity was the quintessential dimension of their
theology.

\textbf{Modern Era: The Relegation of the Trinity}

The modern period saw the popularity of the Trinity at its lowest in church history. The
overly abstract appropriation of Saint Thomas by the neo-scholastics and modernist theology’s
excessive rationalism led to the diminished interest in Trinitarian God and conversely, the
alienation of Trinitarian God from the life of the church and the world. American Christian
Baptist theologian Stanley Grenz argues that the Reformation also contributed to the demotion of
the doctrine of Trinity: “In the wake of the Reformation, a small but influential chorus arose that
claimed that the doctrine of the Trinity is not the teaching of the Bible or is contrary to reason.”\textsuperscript{21}
Nicholas Lash believes that the paramount influence of modern theism has caused the doctrine of
the Trinity to cease to function as the Christian frame of reference for talking about God.\textsuperscript{22} The
modernist shelving of the doctrine of the Trinity is epitomised by German philosopher Immanuel
Kant’s contention that “absolutely nothing worthwhile for the practical life can be made out of


\textsuperscript{21} Stanley Grenz, \textit{Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology} (Minneapolis: Fortress
Press), 5.

\textsuperscript{22} Nicholas Lash, \textit{Easter in Ordinary: Reflections on Human Experience and the Knowledge of God} (Charlottesville:
the doctrine of the Trinity taken literally.” 23 Similarly, American Professor of Religion David S. Cunningham explains that “Trinitarian claims were not well suited to the narrow canons of logic; and this may have been one of the chief factors leading to the widespread marginalization of the doctrine in the modern era.” 24 This echoes German Catholic theologian Karl Rahner interesting observation in the first half of the twentieth-century that “should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged.” 25 Within Christianity’s doctrinal system, Rahner continues, the doctrine of the Trinity “occupies a rather isolated position,” and “its function in the whole dogmatic construction is not clearly perceived.” 26

Many theologians saw the dominance of speculative Trinity contributed much to the decreasing intelligibility of the Trinity. In the modern era, Trinity was equated with abstract, metaphysical and doctrinal. Jennifer Anne Herrick identifies the categories of thought which directed Western Trinitarian thinking as “Greek metaphysical, German idealist, subjective, and modern individualist.” 27 Herrick further argues that these ideas have become irrelevant in the twentieth century’s discourse on the Trinity: “When these categories are applied Trinitarianly in postmodern times, they have been found to be no longer adequate for Trinitarian intelligibility.” 28

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26 Rahner, The Trinity, 14.
28 Herrick, Trinitarian Intelligibility, 4.
Grenz contends that Aquinas contributed to the decline of the Trinity insofar as his monumental theological treatise, the *Summa Theologiae*, began with the doctrine of the one God (*De Deo Uno*) and only later developed an understanding of God as triune (*De Deo Trio*).²⁹ In the same line, Elizabeth Johnson comments, “[I]n the West, it [Trinity] has been neglected, literalized, treated like a curiosity, or analysed with conceptual acrobatics entirely inappropriate to its meaning. Consequently, the doctrine has become unintelligible and religiously irrelevant on a wide scale.”³⁰ Christopher Hall attributes the Trinitarian decline to the church’s language and grammar “that moves beyond the Bible’s specific boundaries as Christians sought to worship and understand the complex God the gospel revealed.”³¹ Cunningham sees the departure from Biblical language as due to favouring philosophical language, “Trinitarian doctrine came to find its ground not so much in experience but in philosophy, Greek philosophy. He contends that Trinitarian doctrinal neglect set in as a consequence of this shift away from the Biblical narrative.”³²

**Twentieth-Century: The Return of Trinity**

The state of Trinitarian theology would dramatically change in the second half of the twentieth-century. “Trinitarian thinking has proved to be one of the best-kept secrets in theology during the last half of the twentieth-century,” Lutheran pastor and theologian Ted Peters declares in 1993.³³ Cunningham adds to this optimistic observation, “Once threatened by its relative

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³⁰ Elizabeth Johnson, “Trinity: To Let the Symbol Sing Again,” *Theology Today* 34, no. 3 (1997), 299.
scarcity in modern theology, the doctrine of the Trinity now seems more likely to be obscured by an overabundance of theologians clustered around it.”34 “[V]irtually every serious theological movement of recent years has sought in its own terms to state and shape Trinitarian doctrine.”35 Because of this, Grenz contends that the renewal of Trinitarian thought is perhaps the greatest theological legacy of the twentieth-century:

Whenever the story of theology in the last hundred years is told, the rediscovery of the doctrine of the Trinity that sprouted and then came to full bloom during the eight decades following the First World War must be given center stage, and the rebirth of Trinitarian theology must be presented as one of the most far-reaching theological developments of the century.36

Herrick contends that the Trinitarian revival in the contemporary arena was propelled to a large extent by the desire to make the Trinity intelligible for the present generation especially in the context of a postmodern and pluralist world. The task of intelligibility entailed coming to terms with and reinterpreting, even overturning, previous forms of Trinitarian doctrinal expression.37 This further involved addressing and confronting past philosophical systems, returning to the scriptural witness, and engaging with postmodern thought, moving thus towards a better doctrinal integration and better linguistic intelligibility.38 Because of the increasing discontent with the legacy of Augustine and Aquinas, late twentieth-century theologians have been pursuing to re-fashion Trinitarian theology.39 Elizabeth Johnson epitomises this yearning by

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34 David S. Cunningham, *These Three Are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 19. Theologians who wrote about Trinitarian theology came from across various denominations: Torrance, Moltmann, and Barth from the Reformed tradition, Jüngel and Pannenberg are Lutherans, and Rahner, von Balthasar, Kasper, Congar, and Boff are Roman Catholics. R. P. C. and A. Hanson are Anglicans and Zizioulas and Lossky are Orthodox. Gunton and Newbigin are from the United Reformed Church in England and Geoffrey Wainwright is a Methodist.


38 Herrick, *Trinitarian Intelligibility*, 12.

39 Herrick, *Trinitarian Intelligibility*, 44.
saying, “For too long, this symbol has been imprisoned in misunderstandings. It is time to set it free to sing again.”

**Social Trinity**

One of the most popular construals of the twentieth century’s revival of the Trinity is the notion of social Trinity. Social Trinitarians contributed to the revival of Trinity by emphasizing the intelligibility and practical application of the Trinity to the present age. Social Trinitarians emphasized the threeness of the Trinity. They were particularly influenced by German Reformed theologian, Jürgen Moltmann and eastern orthodox theologians Miroslav Volf and John Zizioulas. They claim to recover the Eastern Christianity’s tradition propagated notably by the Capadocian Fathers [Basil the Great (330-379), Gregory of Nyssa (c.332-395), and Gregory of Nazianzus (329-389)]. The social Trinitarians claimed that the Cappadocian Fathers begun with the three persons and from there develop the sense of unity of the Trinity. They also argued that the Eastern tradition emphasized the threeness of the Trinity while the Western tradition emphasized the oneness of the Trinity.

A major tenet of the social Trinitarians is the new understanding of what person means in the Trinity. Herrick contends that recent academic theologians have sought to make traditional language used about the Christian Trinitarian God intelligible by replacing static definitions of the concept of the person with a dynamic relational model. Cunningham underscores the recent collective enthusiasm’ among Western Trinitarian theologians for the category of ‘relationality’ as an alternative to the traditional metaphysics of substance, clearly viewed now with some discontent. Elizabeth Johnson notes that “Since the Enlightenment … the arcane

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40 Johnson, “To Let the Symbol,” 305.
41 Herrick, *Trinitarian Intelligibility*, iii.
42 Cunningham, *These Three Are One*, 25.
philosophical meaning of person has receded in favour of an understanding of person as an individual centre of consciousness and freedom.” While Johnson highlights the assertion of personalist and postmodern philosophy that the autonomous person is utterly relational.

Emphasizing the notion of relationality in the Trinity, John Zizioulas declares that “it would be unthinkable to speak of the “one God” before speaking of the God who is “communion”, which is to say, of the Holy Trinity. Similarly, Colin Gunton reasons that “if God is a communion of persons inseparably related ... the human person is one who is created to find his or her being in relation, first with other like persons but second, as a function of the first, with the rest of the creation.” Our relational God designed us in His own image therefore, to be a person is to be related. We are not merely individuals, but persons in community. We were created in the imago Dei to be in relation. As Catherine LaCugna strongly affirms, we are “meant to exist as persons in communion ... not persons in isolation or withdrawal or self-centredness.”

Perichōrēsis

An important concept in the revival of the trinity is the notion of perichōrēsis. Perichōrēsis derives from the Greek noun chora, meaning ‘space’ or ‘room’ and from the verb

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44 Johnson, She Who Is, 203.
chorein, which can be translated as ‘to contain’, ‘to make room’ or ‘to go forward’, with the added idea of reciprocity introduced by the particle ‘peri’. Perichōrēsis, popularly translated as mutual indwelling or making room for the other, proclaims the mutual inter-penetration and indwelling within the threefold nature of the Trinity, God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Perichōrēsis is indeed the self-emptying or kenotic model of divine, love and fellowship. An equivalent English word was coined in order to express the idea of perichōrēsis—this is the term called circumincession (later circuminsession). Circumincession was articulated by the Council of Florence in 1442: "Because of this unity the Father is entirely in the Son and entirely in the Holy Spirit; the Son is entirely in the Father and entirely in the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is entirely in the Father and entirely in the Son."

The term perichōrēsis is not found in the Scripture. Instead, Gunton suggests that perichōrēsis is, “a human rational construct which has been developed under the constraints of revelation and inspiration, a process of thinking theologically under the impact of the economy of creation and redemption.” Yves Congar claims that although the term may not appear in the

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49 A popular but mistranslation of perichōrēsis is its characterisation as divine dance. Larry Perkins contends that some writers have confused perichoreuō (dance round) with perichōreō (interpenetrate). Although the verbs sound similar and are spelled somewhat similarly, they have two quite different meanings. The primary lexica for Classical and Patristic Greek give no indication that perichōreō was ever used to describe the motions of dancing. Larry Perkins, “The Dance is not Perichōrēsis,” December 8, 2006. https://www.nbseminary.ca/the-dance-is-not-perichrsis. Similarly Catherine LaCugna argues that “the philological warrant for this [divine dance] is scant.” LaCugna, God For us, 271.


53 Council of Florence (1442): DS 1331 in Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 255.

54 In the same manner, trinity is not found in the Bible.

writings of the earliest Fathers of the Church, the idea certainly does. The term, however, appeared more prominently in the works of Gregory of Nazianzus, Pseudo-Cyril (seventh century), John of Damascus (650-750) and Maximus the Confessor (579-662).

Theologians including Social Trinitarians regards *perichōrēsis* as one of their most significant tenets to the extent of saying that the Trinitarian *perichōrēsis* is the pattern of everything. The whole of creation mirror the *perichōretic* dynamics of the Trinity. Johnson, for example, argues that the Trinity “epitomises the connectedness of all that exists in the universe. Relation encompasses and constitutes the web of reality and, when rightly ordered, forms the matrix for the flourishing of all creatures, both human beings and the earth.” Boff declares it as the basis of liberation, “From the *perichōrēsis*-communion of the three divine Persons derive impulses to liberation: of each and every human person, of society, of the church … Society offends the Trinity by organising itself on a basis of inequality and honours it the more it favours sharing and communion for all.” While Leslie Newbigin proclaims that salvation can only be found in the Trinitarian communion,

> Interpersonal relatedness belongs to the very being of God. Therefore there can be no salvation for human beings except in relatedness. No one can be made whole except by being restored to the wholeness of that being-in-relatedness for which God made us and the world and which is the image of that being-in-relatedness which is the being of God Himself.

**Trinity in the Twentieth-Century: Revival or Revisionist?**

While the revival of the trinity and *ressourcement* of social Trinitarians especially of the Greek fathers is highly laudable, there are certain questionable tendencies in their theological

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project. For instance, much of twentieth century revival of the trinity veers away from the Trinitarian orthodoxy which the Fathers of the Church in the ancient and medieval period have proclaimed. This is the main contention of Scottish Baptist minister and theologian Stephen R. Holmes:

[T]he explosion of theological work claiming to recapture the doctrine of the Trinity that we have witnessed in recent decades in fact misunderstands and distorts the traditional doctrine so badly that it is unrecognizable. A statement of the doctrine was settled in the fourth century, and was then maintained, with only very minor disagreement or development, by all strands of the church West and East, Protestant and Catholic—until the modern period.\(^6\)

Holmes challenges the premises of the Trinitarian revivalist theologians,\(^6\) for example, the exaggerated difference between the Eastern and Western tradition. Holmes repeats their constant allegation against Augustine: “Augustine is held not to have understood the Cappadocian achievement, and to have stumbled through some metaphysical arguments which are best sub-Trinitarian when compared to the glories of the two Gregories.”\(^6\) Against this, Holmes contends that Augustine was the greatest interpreter of Cappadocian Theology.\(^6\)

Alternatively, Holmes argues that some of the revival Trinitarian theological concepts and categories deeply misunderstands and misappropriates the traditional doctrine of the Trinity.

I see the twentieth century renewal of Trinitarian theology as depending in large part on concepts and ideas that cannot be found in patristic, medieval, or Reformation accounts of the doctrine Of the Trinity. In some cases, indeed, they are points explicitly and energetically repudiated as erroneous—even occasionally as formally heretical—by the earlier tradition.\(^6\)

Holmes concludes that instead of a revival they are actually a departure from the Trinitarian orthodoxy. “I argue here that, methodologically and materially, they are generally

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\(^6\) Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, John Ziziouelas, Jurgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Robert Jenson, Miroslav Volf, Leonardo Boff, and Cornelius Plantinga were some of the theologians Holmes mentioned as having influenced the revival of Trinitarian theology in the twentieth century.

\(^6\) Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity*, 130.

\(^6\) Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity*, 122.

\(^6\) Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity*, 2.
thorough-going departures from the older tradition, rather than revivals of it. Moreover, Holmes demonstrates that the roots of the contemporary speculative anti-metaphysical and personalist reconstructions of the Trinity by social Trinitarians only go back to the thin soil of the Romantic age. He writes:

The practice of speaking of three ‘persons’ in this sense in the divine life, of asserting a ‘social doctrine of the Trinity’, a ‘divine community’ or an ‘ontology of persons in relationship’ can only ever be, as far as I can see, a simple departure from … the unified witness of the entire theological tradition.

Similarly Karen Kilby points to theological deficiencies amongst social Trinitarians which makes the very core of their beliefs severely problematic. Kilby describes the social Trinitarians’ assertion:

God though three is yet one becomes a source of metaphysical insight and a resource for combating the individualism, patriarchy and oppressive forms of political and ecclesiastical organisation. No wonder the enthusiasm: the very thing which in the past has been viewed as the embarrassment has become the chief point upon which to commend the Christian doctrine of God: not an intellectual difficulty but a source of insight, not a philosophical stumbling block but something with which to transform the world.

Kilby, however, points to a high level of projection in their [social Trinitarians] theories. She argues that this is not accidental, but is coming from the nature of the social theorists’ approach. At close examination of particular examples of social theories of the Trinity, “one can form the impression that much of the detail is derived from either the individual author’s or the larger society’s latest ideals of how human beings should live in community.” This shows how some of the Trinitarian retrieval of social Trinitarians is laden with anthropomorphic projections.

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66 Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity*, xvi.
Kilby suggests instead that the doctrine of the Trinity “be taken as grammatical, as a second-order proposition, a rule, or perhaps a set of rules, for how to read the Biblical stories, how to speak about some of the characters we come across in these stories, how to think and talk about the experience of prayer, how to deploy the ‘vocabulary’ of Christianity in an appropriate way.” Kilby does not see any need for the Trinity to be taken as a descriptive, first order teaching. It is not necessary to assume that its primary function must be to provide a picture of the divine, a deep understanding of the way God really is.

**From the West to the South**

The second principal direction that theology undertook in the second half of the twentieth-century was the rise of contextual theologies. Influenced by postmodernity, postcolonial theology marks the turn to the subject, experience, existence and context. This will inspire the generation of diversity in mission theologies—both in practice and articulation. The postcolonial direction of theology came mainly from non-Western countries that were former colonies of Western powers and mission fields of the Western church with their growing desire for self-assertion and self-expression of theology and mission. John Parrat described this undertaking of former colonial countries in theology as “the dynamic search for self-identity, an identity which takes seriously the traditions and cultures in which it is located.” It also came from the marginalised sectors of the church like women, laity, blacks and gays who have found their voice and has gradually moved into mainstream theology. These contextual theologies also reminded us that theology was mostly written not just from a Western perspective but from various vantage points in history: white, males, heterosexuals and anthropocentrism.

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71 Kilby, “Perichoresis and Projection,” 11-12.
72 Kilby, “Perichoresis and Projection,” 12.
Doing Theology After the West?: From One Theology to Many Theologies

An important factor that galvanised the rise of contextual and marginal theologies is the post-Western sentiment in theology. Peruvian Evangelical theologian Samuel Escobar speaking in the context of Latin American theological aspirations typified this post-Western sentiment, “The time of European and Western monologue is over.” Ghanian theologian Kwame Bediako speaking from the African context unmasked the universalist pretension of Western theology, “Western theology was for so long presented in all its particulars as the theology of the Church, when, in fact, it was geographically localized and culturally limited, European and Western, and not universal.” Joining in this post-Eurocentric sentiment is Willem A. Visser’t Hooft who described the postcolonial period as “a liberation of Christianity from the ‘Western captivity’.”

The realisation that Western theology is not the only way of doing theology led to the appreciation of diverse context in doing theology; there is no single context in doing theology. Werner Ustorf suggests in his work, Christianized Africa, De-Christianized Europe, the reverse character of Christianity in the postcolonial period which has become post-Christian West and post-Western Christianity. Samuel Escobar pointed to the reality that mission today has actually become a global mission. We no longer have one centre for mission; mission is conducted from a polycentric church. Mission is no longer monocentric but polycentric; there is no longer one centre of mission but many centres. Mission has become, in Escobar’s words,

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77 Ustorf, Christianized Africa, 13.
“from everyone to everywhere.”78 We are moving away from an imperial missiology to an incarnational and truly international missiology.79 Similarly, Tracy contends: “There is no longer a center with margins. There are many centers.”80 “Christian mission in the twenty-first century has become the responsibility of a global church.”81 No longer is mission unidirectional (vertical or top to bottom) but bi-directional (horizontal) even multidirectional.

Correspondingly, John Parrat notes the intrinsic contextual character of theology: “All theology is ultimately ‘contextual,’ that is it arises from a specific historical context and it addresses that context.”82 Stephen Bevans insists that theology today should not be done “by steeping oneself in only one tradition ... theology today needs to be done in a dialogue with one’s own contextual perspective and the broad and deep tradition of the Christian church, and in dialogue as well with the results of this interaction and the perspectives of Christians from every part of our world.”83 Bevans, therefore, infers, “There is no ‘theology’ as such—no ‘universal theology’—there are only contextual theologies.”84

**Contextual Theologies: Context as the New Centre**

With the confluence of the social movements of the sixties, the post-Western sentiment and the cultural turn in theology, there was an outburst of contextual theologies in different parts of the world in the second half of the twentieth-century.85 Despite the experience of destruction

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80 Tracy, *On Naming the Present*, 4.
84 Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective*, 4.
85 Wilbert R. Shenk argues that contextualization is the term used by Protestants while inculturation is the term preferred by Roman Catholics. Wilbert R. Shenk, “9: Contextual Theology,” in *The Changing Face of*
of culture and suppression under colonial rule, the former colonies made the context of suffering and victimhood as starting point and resource for the enunciation of their indigenous theologies. This proved what Mexican-American priest and liberation theologian Virgilio Elizondo favourably affirmed, that despite the weaknesses of the missionaries and the colonial anomalies of mission, “the seeds of evangelical new life started to take root in the various continents,” indeed, “the gospel has a life-giving power of its own.” Today, the churches of the South are beginning their new adventure as mature churches. They have learned how to tap the rich source of their indigenous culture in composing their own theology achieving what Gustavo Gutiérrez called “drinking from our own wells.”

The doing of theology from the diverse context led to a blossoming of diverse theologies like liberation theology from Latin American, Asian theology of dialogue, African theology of inculturation, black theology, feminist theology, and ecotheology. Each of these contextual theologies made distinctive contributions towards the abundant expression of theology. Latin America’s theology of liberation highlights the pursuit of liberation. The Asian context raised awareness on dialogue in proclamation. The African context pointed to the importance of inculturation.

With the outburst of contextual these theologies, theology has become a worldwide enterprise; theology is now done all around the world. New voices in theology particularly Latin American, Africans, Asians are being heard. Prominent theologians from Latin America, Asia,

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Africa and marginalised sectors like women, blacks, laity, indigenous people and gay have emerged. Theology has become involved in a whole range of interests: political, cultural and economic. The encounter of Christianity with diverse cultures and religions has proven to be beneficial to the enrichment and understanding of Christianity. The experience of God from the margins and powerlessness brought new meanings to theology. These theologies brought to Christianity fresh and unique gifts.

**Drawback of Contextual Theologies**

While contextual theologies led to a richer and diverse experience of theology, there are some problems associated with it. In modern theology and mission, the readily identifiable centre was the West and its elevation of reason. Postmodern theology’s turn to the subject, experience and existence encouraged the shift from a monocentric to polycentric theology and mission. There is not one easy identifiable centre as the various local context and marginalised groups became the new centre. This lead to what Anselm Kyongsuk Min calls a fragmentary state of today’s theology of mission. Min further describes this as the “increasing fragmentation of contemporary theology into special interests and regional issues, its increasing preoccupation with the relativities of history, and its constant syndrome of hope and despair over the fluctuating fortunes of various liberation projects.”

The greatest temptation for contemporary mission is when the context becomes the new imperial, colonialist, totalizing metanarrative and force. Hoekendijk explains this temptation in “the ever-recurring attempt to re-ba’alize God; the conspiracy to make Him again the residential god of a well-defined locality; which may be a continent *(corpus christianum?)* a nation

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(Volkskirche?) or a more restricted residential area (parish).” By emphasizing God’s historicity there is the danger of using the relational model of Trinity as justification for any human ideology and program.

**Postcolonial Mission: The “End of Mission”**

One of the final blows to colonial mission was the expulsion of Western missionaries in China after World War II. According to British missiologist Max Warren this event generated “a loss of certainty about the whole missionary enterprise, a loss of any sense of direction, a loss of confidence in the whole method of Mission.” Greg McKinzie also pointed out to the growing realisation that Christian missions had been connected with the colonialisr project of Western civilisation and the spread of Enlightenment culture. Missions could no longer draw on Western culture as the normative culture for doing mission, thus the need for decoupling of Western imperialism and Christian mission, as Karl Hartenstein comments: “We have learned in these last years to think differently about the superiority of European culture. Every heathen throws our own words back into our faces.” This was also accompanied by a repentant admission that many things about mission in the past may have gone even contrary to the gospel. As David Bosch observed, “Mission appears to be the greatest enemy of the gospel.”

All these led to what the American Pentecostal theologian Amos Yong called the convulsion of colonial mission by the second half of the twentieth-century: “The older colonial, 

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Enlightenment-based, and Western-motivated approaches have been undergoing convulsions in the last two generations and slowly giving way to postcolonial, post-Enlightenment, and post-Western voices and perspectives."93 Thus, Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder declared that by the second half of the twentieth-century the era of [colonial] mission was over: “The missionary era begun in the fifteenth century, within the Age of Discovery, has come to an end.”94 Because of this, John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* commented that “[T]here is a certain hesitation to use the terms ‘mission’ and ‘missionaries,’ which are considered obsolete and as having negative historical connotations.”95

This “end of mission” phenomenon is not only experienced in former colonial mission fields but also in the West. This “end of mission” phenomenon was experienced, for example, in Australia. The Redemptorist missionaries experienced some kind of “dying” of mission in Australia. Australian Redemptorist theologian Kevin O’Shea laments about the experience of how the swift changes in work, family, recreation and other areas that occurred in the daily life of ordinary people in Australia beginning in the sixties have slowly rendered the Redemptorist traditional mission irrelevant.96 Gradually, Redemptorists felt that the traditional form of preached mission, which they performed as itinerant missionaries in the many parishes, no longer fitted into the changed landscape of the daily life of the people. Many Redemptorists struggled to maintain their traditional mission methodology and content due to these shifts. They found it

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hard to adjust to the new environment and to admit that their “glorious” missionary days are over.

The “end of mission” sentiment was described by Max Warren as an “orgy of self-criticism,” obsessed with the failings of Western missions. This self-criticism was complemented by a desire to distance more and more from the negative consequences of colonial mission. Leaving behind centuries-old ways of doing mission entailed discovering new themes, images and styles of mission. An important theme of mission in the postcolonial milieu is the reign of God as the goal of mission. If the goal of colonial mission was proselytization, postcolonial mission’s goal was the promotion of the Kingdom of God. Emphasizing the reign of God which transcends all culture and nationalities was a reaction to colonial mission’s highlighting of the Western culture as the norm of Christianity.

An important implication of this change in the goal of mission is the shift from church-centred (ecclesiocentric) mission to reign-of-God-centred (regnocentric) mission. The regnocentric mission calls for an expanded horizon of mission: from mission for the church to mission for the reign of God in the world. Mission is beyond the Church; its ultimate goal is the reign of God. As John Paul II said, “mission is only effective if it is done at the service of the reign.” The Vietnamese-American theologian Peter Phan illustrates this point by highlighting the differences by order of priority among church, proclamation, mission and reign of God between the old and new theology. Phan argues that the old theology prioritises these four realities in this descending order of importance: church, proclamation, mission, reign of God. On

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98 Redemptoris Missio, 20.
the other hand, the new way prioritises them in just the opposite order: reign of God, mission, proclamation, and church.99

Another new image of mission in the postcolonial milieu is dialogue. While colonial mission emphasized proclamation, postcolonial mission emphasizes dialogue. Mission is no longer one way, but two ways; mission is proclamation that is done in dialogue. This implies a shift in the conduct of mission from “mission to” to “mission with” and “giving mission” to “doing mission”. Whereas before, mission is done in triumphal confidence, postcolonial mission is done in vulnerability, in humility, with a sense of being open to be evangelised by those whom we are evangelising,100 a shift in mission which Paul Yonggap Jeong described as “from a position of power to a position of weakness.”101

Another important implication of postcolonial mission is the relinquishing of the Christendom model. An important albeit painful lesson learned from the decline of Christendom is that the church should never again align itself with any political power. Unless the church untangles herself from the dominance of Western culture or any other culture, ideology or earthly power, it cannot have the proper conviction to exercise the mission of God. As Hall argues, the church “outside the realms of worldly power and prestige … may have greater influence for worldly good than it ever possessed as Christendom.”102

These new themes and styles of mission expressed the desire for conversion and a change of attitude in mission; from over all confidence and triumphalism to what Bosch proposes as


100 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 489.


bold humility. This is reaffirmed by Bevans and Schroeder: “Mission today … must be lived out in a bold humility: bold in prophetic witness and speech, humble in attentive dialogue.”

Bevans and Schroeder tried to summarise these new missiological challenges today:

No longer can we conceive of mission in terms of church expansion or the salvation of souls; no longer can we conceive of mission as supporting the outreach of colonial powers; no longer can we understand missionary activity as providing the blessings of Western civilization to “underdeveloped” or “developing” peoples and cultures; no longer can we conceive of mission as originating from a Christianized North and moving toward a non-Christian or a religious underdeveloped South.

**Missio Dei: The New Justification for Mission**

The search for a new model of mission in the second half of the twentieth century stemmed profoundly from a search for a more meaningful ontological justification for Mission. If it is no longer the church, West, Christendom, human being, which gives justification for Mission, then, what and who now? After the tragic consequences of modernity and Christendom sponsored mission, how can the church now justify mission? This question became a central question in mission in the second half of the twentieth century.

The downfall of modern mission, the search for a new paradigm of mission more suited to a multi-cultural and postcolonial world and the aspirations and aims of the two main directions of theology—self-correction of Western theology and the rise of contextual theologies in the South and East, the revival of Trinitarian theology and return to the sources in the West, all converged to inspire a return to God in Mission. While the first part of the development of postcolonial mission was a reaction to modern/colonial mission, the second part was a deeper connection of mission with Trinitarian theology. As John F. Hoffmeyer explains, recent emphasis in missiology provides a terminological invitation to think of missiology and trinitarian

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103 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 484-5.
104 Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 348.
theology together.106 These twin aspirations found able expression in the notion of *Missio Dei* (mission of God).

Dutch missiologist Johannes Verkuyl called *Missio Dei* a Copernican revolution in mission reflection.107 Greg McKenzie similarly declared *Missio Dei* as one of the most significant theological developments of our time.108 *Missio Dei* embodies the aspirations of the two major theological directions of the century: Western theology’s self-correction and the rise of contextual theologies in the South and East as well as marginal theologies.

The particular historical context for the surfacing of *Missio Dei* in the twentieth-century, however, was the ecumenical movement within the Protestant tradition in the twentieth-century.109 Many acknowledged the German theologian Karl Barth as a primary inspiration behind *Missio Dei*. This theme was highlighted at the conference of the International Missionary Council (IMC) in Willingen, Germany in 1952.110 This was propagated further after Willingen particularly by the Lutheran theologian, Georg Vicedom.111

*Missio Dei* as a recollection of the classical notion of mission as a nature of God in the context of Augustine and Aquinas’ discussion of the attributes of the divine Trinity was a

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109 *Missio Dei* is more endemic to the Protestant churches than the Catholic Church. This is based on official church documents and publications using the term *Missio Dei*. Although the Catholic Church never used the term *Missio Dei*, the spirit of the term can be found in various expressions in Catholic Church’s documents.
significant, although not substantial, part of the theological project of Karl Barth.  The revival of Trinity by Barth was born out of a concrete missiological dilemma—liberal theology’s capitulation to Germany’s entry into the war—not a philosophical or speculative agenda.

The Willingen Conference was held under the atmosphere of a fundamental loss of confidence in missions by Protestant churches in the West. Goodall believes that Willingen was caught up by the overcast “end of mission” mood atmosphere: “We have come to the end of an age, perhaps to the end of the age.” In this context, John Flett contends that in hindsight Missio Dei constitutes an apologia for the church’s missionary activity during this period of crisis.

The turning point at Willingen was not so much the introduction of the term Missio Dei but the Trinitarian direction in mission that it inspired in the years ahead. Indeed, the principal legacy of Willingen was the shift in assigning the source of mission from the church to the Trinitarian God. As Mark Laing states, “The source of mission is located, as it has traditionally been, within ecclesiology or soteriology. Mission is thus not seen as originating out of the church or from any other human agency, but as an attribute of the Triune God himself.” Gunther pointed out that the achievement of Willingen was mainly due to the

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112 John Flett claims that Barth never once used the term Missio Dei, never wrote the phrase “God is a missionary God,” and never articulated a Trinitarian position of the kind expressed at Willengen (John Flett, The Witness of God, 12). Having said this, however, Barth’s influence looms large in the story of the actual emergence of Missio Dei in the twentieth century. We will discuss further Barth’s influence on the development of Missio Dei in the next chapter.

113 Goodall, Minutes of the Enlarged Meeting and the Committee of the IMC: Willengen, Germany, July 5th to twenty-first, 1952 (London; New York: IMC, 1952), 10.

114 Flett, The Witness of God, 123.

115 Flett refutes the conventional history that Hartenstein brought Barth’s 1932 position to Willengen (The Witness of God, 130). Flett also maintains that while Hartenstein did introduce the actual term “Missio Dei,” he did not locate that mission in the doctrine of the Trinity (The Witness of God, 217-29).

preparatory work done by the USA committee in the conference which focused on the simultaneity of God’s action in the world and church, and the search for a Trinitarian basis of mission.\textsuperscript{117}

The Trinitarian direction of \textit{Missio Dei} brings all three persons of the Trinity together into focus in missionary theology. Newbigin, one of the missiologists who propagated the Trinitarian thrust of \textit{Missio Dei} after the Willingen Conference, affirms this: “The mission of the Church is to be understood, can only be rightly understood, in terms of the Trinitarian model.”\textsuperscript{118} Although this has not always been the case as Goheen suggests that before Willingen up to 1959, Newbigin’s understanding of the mission of God was Christocentric even to the point of omitting the work of the Father and the Spirit.\textsuperscript{119}

\textit{Missio Dei: From missions to Mission}

\textit{Missio Dei} as the most profound justification for missions in the twentieth century brought (or retrieved, as we shall see later) new realisations to theology of mission. It brought a fundamental decentring and change in direction in missiology—from missions to Mission.

Since the modern inception of mission, the church has understood Mission primarily as missions, that is, all the activities, programs and strategies of the church—evangelisation, community building, sacramental-liturgical celebrations, and social outreach. These are all important and necessary to the understanding of mission. The problem, however, is the understanding that these activities are external activities of the church. They find their source and end in the church. They are often driven by the vision, mission and goals of the church at


\textsuperscript{118} Leslie Newbigin, \textit{The Gospel in a Pluralist Society} (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 118.

\textsuperscript{119} Michael Goheen, “‘As the Father has sent me, I am sending you’: J.E. Lesslie Newbigin’s missionary ecclesiology” 2001, 115. Accessed 04/05/2014 at http://igitur-archive.library.uu.nl/dissertations/1947080/full.pdf
any given time and space. They are measured by church and human standards. The danger, as history has shown, is these activities are limited by and tainted with human ideologies and agenda. The focus becomes the activity, strategies, context, culture, church and human-made programs. Mission becomes the task of accomplishing the programs of the church and no longer about contemplating God. Consequently, mission is understood as more about the the missionary, the church, the social issues, revolutionary ideologies and scientific frameworks.

*Missio Dei* departs from this idea. *Missio Dei* shifts the missional conversation from missions to Mission. Mission is *Missio Dei*. Mission first and foremost is the work of God. Thus, the first and most important realisation is returning the centre of missions to God: God is the source, means and end of missions. As George Vicedom argued, “*Missio Dei* means first of all … is God’s work. He is the Lord, the commissioner, the owner, the one who accomplishes the task. He is the acting subject of mission. If we attribute mission to God in this way, it is withdrawn from every human whim.”120

*Missio Dei* also implies that God is a missionary God, as Birkeli says: “Mission is a predicate of God. God is a missionary God… *Missio Dei* is active in the whole of history, and it consists of God’s addressing himself to the whole world, both in and outside of the church. Through the events of history, God leads the world.”121 This means Flett adds, “mission is the determining factor of God’s nature and acts.”122 Ultimately, *Missio Dei* affirms that God is Mission, as Stephen Bevans says, “Another way of saying all this is that God is Mission. Not that God *has* a Mission, but that God *is* Mission.”123

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Rethinking Church

As the church is not the source of mission but the Trinity, the role of the church in Missio Dei is primarily a participation in the mission of the triune God. Thus, Missio Dei is God-centred mission rather than church-centred or human-centred mission. This indicates a significant movement in the understanding of mission from missio ecclesia (mission of the church), dominant in the Western church from the third to early twentieth-century, to Missio Dei.

Thus, Missio Dei calls for a recovery of the understanding of being church. God’s mission precedes the church, as David Bosch says, “There is church because there is mission;”124 “it is the Missio Dei which constitutes the church;”125 and ultimately, therefore, “Christianity is missionary by its very nature, or it denies its very raison d’être.”126 German Lutheran theologian Wilhelm Andersen said that “The final and real goal of the Missio Dei … is not the Church, but the establishment of God’s Kingdom, to which the Church as ecclesia viatorum is on its way.”127 As Flett argues, “God acts in and apart from the church and calls her to participate in this wider activity.”128 The beginning and the end of the church, therefore, are God’s mission.

This implies that, as Wilhelm Anderson argues, mission goes beyond the church; mission is the whole act of proclaiming the reign of God by God in history: “The missionary enterprise is the historical happening which embraces the Church and takes it up into its service.”129 In this context, Flett reminds the church that she must not regard of herself as having any kind of “ontic


124 Bosch, Transforming Mission, 390.
125 Bosch, Transforming Mission, 519.
126 Bosch, Transforming Mission, 9.
“otherness” since this encourages the attitude of presumptive superiority which underlies imperialism. Flett further argues that while the traditional missionary goals, such as individual conversion and planting churches are appropriate, they are reductionist when seen in the context of the fullness of God’s Kingdom.

In this light, Libertus Hoedemaker suggests that in Missio Dei “eschatology precedes ecclesiology.” Flett concurs with this view by arguing that the understanding of mission within an eschatological framework detaches the local church “from the partial and provisional expressions of the gospel; it frees her to recognize the necessarily cultural location of her faith.”

Rethinking the Missionary

Missio Dei in the light of Divine Mission also calls for a rethinking of the identity of the missionary. Missionaries are called by God to participate and contemplate God’s Mission. Missionaries are not social workers, development workers nor community organizers but workers in God’s mission. Missionaries are also called to invite others to participate in the abundant harvest of God’s vineyard. Missionaries make fellow missionaries. To say that the whole Church is missionary, however, does not preclude the existence of a specific missio ad gentes, just as saying that all Catholics must be missionaries not only does not exclude, but actually requires that there be persons who have a specific vocation to be “life-long missionaries ad gentes.”

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130 Flett, The Witness of God, 58.
133 Flett, The Witness of God, 52.
134 Redemptoris Missio, 32c.
God is already at work, in mission in every place that missionaries are sent to. The role of missionaries is to celebrate, intensify, point, clarify and inspire the people in experiencing and seeing God’s active work and mission in their lives, situation and natural environment.

Missionaries should refrain, therefore, from thinking that it is only during the mission that God is active; that God is only working in the lives of the people through the mission activities.

This also highlights the vocational character of the missionary. It is God who draws the missionaries into the world, not the missionaries who bring God into the world. “You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name” (John 15: 16). God is already there in the place, people and culture that missionaries are sent. God calls, God send, God welcomes and receives. As Jesus said, “Come and see!” (John 1: 39; John 1: 46; John 4: 29). Mission is an invitation by Jesus’ to discover, seek and participate in God’s amazing work. As Redemptoris Missio affirms “[I]t is not we who are the principal agents of the Church’s mission, but Jesus Christ and his Spirit. We are only co-workers, and when we have done all that we can, we must say: ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty’ (Lk 17:10).”

Therefore, the task of missionaries is to respond, participate in God’s already ever-active, prevenient, life-giving grace, presence and movement in any space and time. The missionary ensures the proper disposition of the people in receiving and living out the grace of Trinitarian life. They also identify and warn the people about the consequences of their rejection of the grace of Trinitarian life. “If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them” (Mark 6: 11).

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135 Redemptoris Missio, 36c.
Rethinking Missiology: A Missio-Dei Missiology

Living and practicing Missio Dei in the context of a Trinitarian orthodoxy implies a reframing of theology of mission and other fields of theology as well like ecclesiology, systematic theology, apologetics and biblical theology. As Darrell Guder declared, “No area of theological work or churchly practice is untouched by the theological agenda of the Missio Dei,”136 The reframing of theology understands missiology as the science of discerning, proclaiming and living the Missio Dei—the missionary dynamics of God, the immanent trinity in the economic actions of God in the here and now.

This brings to the fore the debate about the place of missiology in the theological spectrum. The predominant view of modern missiology is that it is part of practical theology. Since “mission” was a church-centred branch of its diverse ministries, missiology was regarded as one of the many sub-divisions of practical theology.137 This implies that theology happens before the mission and mission happens after theology; mission, therefore, is the practical application of theology. The territorial paradigm of missio ad gentes typifies this model. Mission as adjunct of theology implies that mission is excluded from dogmatic theology. This has been the problematic of missiology—that of separating mission from dogma and church. Much of the work done in the field of missiology was related to cultural, ethnological, linguistic and socio-economic programs (community organising, income-generating, and other pastoral activities.). There was very little interaction between missiology and the other disciplines of systematic theology.

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137 Darrell L. Guder, Missional Theology for a Missionary Church, 4.
Flett asserts that the emphasis in the understanding of mission should shift from the geographical expansion of the Christian faith from the West to the non-Christian world, but to its dogmatic origins, to the activity of the Father in sending his Son and Spirit. The territorial paradigm of mission (missio ad gentes) has become irrelevant and deficient both in its response to the Trinitarian theology and responding to the presence of Trinitarian God in the world today.

The Trinitarian centred theology of Missio Dei implies that missiology can no longer be seen as practical theology. Mission is an essential dimension of the systematic integration of the faith. Theology is mission and mission is theology. This implies a systematic approach to missiology rather than merely practical theology. Missiology is not a kind of “post-systematic” theology but rather an integral part of systematic theology. Missiology, first and foremost, is dogmatic theology before practical theology. This further implies the centrality of dogma in mission as well as the centrality of mission in dogma.

**Missio Dei and Catholic Tradition**

The exact phrase Missio Dei is never mentioned in any Catholic church documents. Missio Dei is not endemic in the Catholic church, although, recent Catholic missiologists have jumped on the Missio Dei bandwagon. Nevertheless, Robert Schreiter claims that a similar vibrant development in missiology in the Catholic Church was present during the time right after the inception of Missio Dei in protestant ecumenical movement: “The second half of the twentieth century produced considerable ferment in the understanding of mission in Catholic circles, parallel for the most part to what was happening in Protestant circles.” In the same vein, William Frazier, although he did not mention Missio Dei, in a survey of Roman Catholic

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missiology since the Second Vatican Council, maintains that from 1965 to 2000 Catholic missiology experienced a breakthrough. By “breakthrough” in missiology, he meant “either the unfolding of a new insight or a better understanding and formulation of an old one.” He identifies nine breakthroughs for Catholic missions during this period as:

1. From unrefined to unmistakable articulation of the universal availability of salvation.
2. From mission as a function of the church to the church as missionary by its very nature.
3. From exclusion to inclusion of the local church in full missionary responsibility.
4. From mission-sending churches and mission-receiving churches to mutuality in mission.
5. From minimal to full participation of the laity in the missionary vocation of the church.
6. From functional to organic bonding between priesthood and mission.
7. From one to five components of evangelization.
8. From culture-dismissive to culture-intensive evangelization.
9. From long-term neglect toward emerging regard for foundational missiology.

Thus, the spirit and essence of Missio Dei, particularly its theocentric emphasis in mission, is expressed a number of times in many church documents. For example, Ad Gentes proclaims: “The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the

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This is the quintessential expression of Missio Dei in the whole of Catholic Church’s document. Many other documents, however, expressed similar view.

Redemptoris Missio identifies mission as God’s work, “The mission of the Church, like that of Jesus, is God’s work or, as Luke often puts it, the work of the Spirit.” Moreover, Redemptoris Missio declares that the goal of mission is sharing in the communion of the Father and the Son.

The ultimate purpose of mission is to enable people to share in the communion which exists between the Father and the Son. The disciples are to live in unity with one another, remaining in the Father and the Son, so that the world may know and believe (cf. Jn 17:21-23). This is a very important missionary text. It makes us understand that we are missionaries above all because of what we are as a Church whose innermost life is unity in love, even before we become missionaries in word or deed.

Redemptoris Missio furthers explains,

The so-called return or “repatriation” of the missions into the Church's mission, the insertion of missiology into ecclesiology, and the integration of both areas into the Trinitarian plan of salvation, have given a fresh impetus to missionary activity itself, which is not considered a marginal task for the Church but is situated at the center of her life, as a fundamental commitment of the whole People of God.

Redemptoris Missio also warns about the anthropocentric tendencies in mission. This anthropocentrism may be seen in some theologies which projects human agenda and ideologies in the project of building the Kingdom of God.

[T]here are ideas about salvation and mission which can be called “anthropocentric” in the reductive sense of the word, inasmuch as they are focused on man’s earthly needs. In this view, the kingdom tends to become something completely human and secularized; what counts are programs and struggles for a liberation which is socio-economic, political and even cultural, but within a horizon that is closed to the transcendent.

Similarly, Evangelii Nuntiandi mentions the anthropocentric tendencies in mission especially with regards to liberational projects.

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143 Redemptoris Missio, 24.
144 Redemptoris Missio, 23c.
145 Redemptoris Missio, 32c.
146 Redemptoris Missio, 17.
We must not ignore the fact that many, even generous Christians who are sensitive to the dramatic questions involved in the problem of liberation, in their wish to commit the Church to the liberation effort are frequently tempted to reduce her mission to the dimensions of a simply temporal project. They would reduce her aims to a man-centered goal; the salvation of which she is the messenger would be reduced to material well-being.\textsuperscript{147}

\textit{Redemptoris Missio} concludes that mission is based not on human abilities but on the power of the risen Lord.\textsuperscript{148}

\textit{Redemptoris Missio} also highlights the primacy of the Holy Spirit in Mission by calling the Holy Spirit as the primary agent of mission, “The horizons and possibilities for mission are growing ever wider, and we Christians are called to an apostolic courage based upon trust in the Spirit. \textit{He is the principal agent of mission}.\textsuperscript{149} \textit{Redemptoris Missio} also affirms that the most important work of the Holy Spirit is in the area of evangelisation.

Now if the Spirit of God has a preeminent place in the whole life of the Church, it is in her evangelizing mission that He is most active. It is not by chance that the great inauguration of evangelization took place on the morning of Pentecost, under the inspiration of the Spirit.\textsuperscript{150}

Likewise, \textit{Evangelii Nuntiandi} asserts that the Holy Spirit is the instigator and fulfilment of evangelisation.

It must be said that the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of evangelization: it is He who impels each individual to proclaim the Gospel, and it is He who in the depths of consciences causes the word of salvation to be accepted and understood.\textsuperscript{[118]} But it can equally be said that He is the goal of evangelization: He alone stirs up the new creation, the new humanity of which evangelization is to be the result, with that unity in variety which evangelization wishes to achieve within the Christian community.\textsuperscript{151}

There are, however, significant observations about the theocentric focus of missions in the church documents. Based on this documents, the theocentric focus of Catholic missiology leans heavily on the mission of the Son particularly on the salvific and redemptive mission of Christ. The Catholic Church has always emphasized Jesus as the unique saviour. The opening

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\textsuperscript{147} Paul VI, \textit{Evangelii Nuntiandi: Apostolic Exhortation}, (Vatican, 1975), 32.

\textsuperscript{148} \textit{Redemptoris Missio}, 23d.

\textsuperscript{149} \textit{Redemptoris Missio}, 30.

\textsuperscript{150} \textit{Evangelii Nuntiandi}, 75e.

\textsuperscript{151} \textit{Evangelii Nuntiandi}, 75g.
\end{flushright}
statement of John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio*, for example, highlights mission as the mission of Christ:

> The mission of Christ the Redeemer, which is entrusted to the Church, is still very far from completion. As the second millennium after Christ's coming draws to an end, an overall view of the human race shows that this mission is still only beginning and that we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service.  

> Indeed, Jesus is the unique saviour. Jesus, however, is beyond the church as he is the Word through whom all creation was created. Thus, the big challenge for the church is how to connect the presence and invisible mission of Christ in the church and in the whole world. Recognising that the mission of Jesus and the Holy Spirit is beyond the church, a crucial question is how does the church discern and proclaim the uniqueness of Jesus in the context of a pluralistic and secular world—the presence of various religions and diverse cultures, continuous advances in science and technology and the information explosion?

> There are some openings that the church has articulated in some of the Vatican II’s documents which recognized God’s work outside of the church. For examples: Salvation is possible for all people of goodwill whether they have explicit faith in God or not. Other than Christianity, there is a ray of truth that enlightens all men and women. The Holy Spirit is in a way known only to God offers every person the possibility of being associated with the paschal mystery. The church believes, however, that the presence and activity of God in these

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152 *Redemptoris Missio*, 1.


situations are only preparations or inchoate; the presence and activity of God in these situations naturally leads them to or will only find fulfilment in communion with the Catholic Church.

Moreover, most Catholic church documents talks about missions as ministries, programs and activities of the church. The modern understanding of mission as adjunct of the church and practical application of theological systematic reflection is still very strongly present in these documents. *Ad Gentes*, for example, defines Missions as

[T]he term usually given to those particular undertakings by which the heralds of the Gospel, sent out by the Church and going forth into the whole world, carry out the task of preaching the Gospel and planting the Church among peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ. These undertakings are brought to completion by missionary activity and are mostly exercised in certain territories recognized by the Holy See. The proper purpose of this missionary activity is evangelization, and the planting of the Church among those peoples and groups where it has not yet taken root.  

The church also remains a priority and serves a prominent role in the missiological documents of the Catholic Church. Many times the church documents has emphasized the church as the sacrament of the mission of God relegating the world’s significance to the mission of God. This is pronounced in *Lumen Gentium*,

[Christ] sent His life-giving Spirit upon His disciples and through Him has established His Body which is the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation. Sitting at the right hand of the Father, He is continually active in the world that He might lead men to the Church and through it join them to Himself and that He might make them partakers of His glorious life by nourishing them with His own Body and Blood. Therefore the promised restoration which we are awaiting has already begun in Christ, is carried forward in the mission of the Holy Spirit and through Him continues in the Church in which we learn the meaning of our terrestrial life through our faith, while we perform with hope in the future the work committed to us in this world by the Father, and thus work out our salvation.  

The Catholic position has been more about the church having a mission rather than the mission having a church. The church strongly upholds that mission cannot be separated from the church. **After Willingen: Missio Dei Reached an Impasse**

After Willingen, the conflicting interpretations and understanding of the basis of mission during the conference did not end. Lalsangkima Pachuau identified two major and competing

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156 *Ad Gentes*, 6.
157 *Lumen Gentium*, 48b.
approaches to post-Willengen’s *Missio Dei*: The first which was a dominant view at the Willingen meeting saw mission as God’s evangelising action through the church. The second, in opposition to the dominant Willingen view and developed strongly later, conceived *Missio Dei* as God’s activity in the secular world over and above the church, as Pachuau explains, “The world provides the agenda.”\(^{158}\) Goheen calls these two points of view as Christocentric-Trinitarian and Cosmocentric-Trinitarian.\(^{159}\) The Christocentric sees God’s mission as centred on the work of Christ through the Church, whereas the Cosmocentric view sees God’s mission as being active in all of the cosmos.\(^{160}\) Philip uses the terms church-centric and world-centric\(^{161}\) while Matthey uses the terms “classical” and “ecumenical.”\(^{162}\) The classical approach affirms “God is in mission through creation, and the sending of the Son and the Spirit to enable the church to witness in the world.”\(^{163}\) Paul Lehmann and J. C. Hoekendijk were the most prominent proponents of the world-centric view while the group which advocated a church-centric view was aided by Oscar Cullmann’s eschatology.\(^{164}\)

Hoekendijk, one of the prominent advocates of the cosmocentric view, sees the church as an appendix to God’s work\(^{165}\) even saying to the extent that “The structures in the world have been made Christian ... these matters are part of history. They have been transformed into public

\(^{158}\) Pachuau, ‘Missiology in a Pluralistic World, 539.

\(^{159}\) Goheen, “*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you,*” 117.


\(^{163}\) Matthey, “Missiology in the World Council of Churches,” 429.


events on the road to the final cosmic liberation.” Similarly, Harvey Cox affirms that “God is first of all present in political events, in revolutions, upheavals, invasions, defeats,” since “it is the world, the political world and not the church, which is the arena of God’s renewing and liberating activity.”

Eddie Arthur points to a number of theological inconsistencies in the cosmocentric understanding of Missio Dei. He shows, for example, the insufficient Christological grounding in the understanding of the Kingdom of God as covering the whole of human history. This view does not seem to reflect Jesus’ proclamation that the Kingdom ‘drew near’ through his ministry (Mark 1:15). Libertus Hoedemaker argues that because of these inconsistencies, the Missio Dei concept becomes too open in all directions. Similarly, Wolfgang Günther comments that Missio Dei has become a “container term, which is filled differently depending upon each individual author.” Missio Dei is now used to refer to too many things, or even to everything the church is about. These criticisms echoes Stephen Neill’s complaint: “If everything is mission, nothing is mission.” As a result, Richebächer argues that the notion became useless: “As we have seen, the term that once gave identity and acted as a corrective for Christian mission theology became so imprecise in the 1960s and 1970s, because it said everything and


168 Arthur, Missio Dei and the Mission of the Church.


nothing, that its use did not capture the true nature either of mission or of the church.”

Similarly, Flett comments that although Missio Dei provided a necessary critical distance between the missionary act and the colonialist project, it failed to supply that act any alternative form. Without any link to a particular action, “mission” soon expanded to encompass the entire horizon of divine and human history.

Aagaard argued that without any determining criteria, everything the human does can become “identified with the historical missio of God, unqualifiedly and indiscriminately. In this way, all secular activities can get a kind of divine sanction—and support—again indiscriminately and unqualifiedly.” This is similar to Wilhelm Richebächer observation that Missio Dei is used by some to “justify the Christocentric definition of all the mission of the church as distinct from religious propaganda, and by others to do just the opposite, i.e., to propound a deity that bears witness to itself in other religions and thereby counters the absolute claims of Christianity.” Pachuau sees the danger of projection in these tendencies: “If mission is the Christian community enlisting in God’s revolutionary acting in the world, it becomes necessary to identify where God is acting. This may be prone to the danger of projection, as God’s mission becomes more a projection of the values of those identifying God’s acting in history.” Mike Breen, on the other hand, asserts that Missio Dei encouraged individualistic mission methodology. He proposed instead that the missional conversation must change from Missio Dei to missio Trinitatis, he explains,

173 Wilhelm Richebächer, “Missio Dei
*Missio Dei* seems to be producing individual missionaries, because our theology of a singular God (*Missio Dei*) combined with the heady cocktail of Western individualism gives rise to an individualistic methodology of mission. It’s almost as if the missional conversation has inadvertently become merely theist as opposed to truly Christian… we need to start talking about *Missio Trinitatis* (“the mission of the Trinity”), and as we do, we’ll find our methodology shifts from individual missionaries doing the best they can to families on mission that demonstrate and proclaim a fuller picture of who God is.179

In reply to criticism of *Missio Dei*, Bosch warned against confining *Missio Dei* to clear-cut categories, “[W]e are tempted to incarcerate the *Missio Dei* in the narrow confines of our own predilections, thereby of necessity reverting to one-sidedness and reductionism. We should beware of any attempt at delineating mission too sharply.”180 The desire to comprehend totally *Missio Dei* also denies the sense of mystery in *Missio Dei*. This shows the lack of openness to the numerous creative opportunities resulting from the continuous discovery and participation while remaining steadfastly faithful to *Missio Dei*. Thus, Bosch reiterates, “[M]ission remains undefinable … The most we can hope for is to formulate some approximations of what mission is all about …”181 Flett adds that “While [*Missio Dei*] has a definitive task … [it] cannot delineate a set of programmatic forms… It is wrongly understood if it is treated as abstracting mission, that is, rendering it non-historical and impractical. The missionary act is a living history, not a program.”182 Perhaps critics of *Missio Dei* try to equate *Missio Dei* with missions not Mission. Consequently, *Missio Dei* is mistakenly identified as another program or a strategy or approach to mission not an ontological foundation that unites and roots all programs of mission.

Flett sees that the root cause of the impasse of *Missio Dei* is the grounding in a deficient Trinitarian theology. He asserts that, “while the doctrine of the Trinity is counted as the Copernican heart of *Missio Dei* theology, in actuality it holds no constructive place in that

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Flett’s main argument against Missio Dei is doctrinal; it does not add to Trinitarian theology: “Dogmatically, Missio Dei is not clear ... Missio Dei has been at its best when understood as a heuristic device that locates the initiative for mission, inside and outside churches, in the activity of God... At its worst, Missio Dei becomes a theological abstraction that can justify in practice just about anything that Christians do in the name of God’s mission.”

Because of all these theological vagueness and confusion about Missio Dei, Günther argues that Missio Dei “needs either to be more precisely defined or dropped altogether.” Jaques Matthey has called for “a ‘moratorium’, or at least for the greater restraint, in the use of classical Missio Dei terminology.” Richebächer questions whether Missio Dei is the “basis of mission theology or a wrong path?” Philip Wickeri predicted that the concept of Missio Dei, which has dominated all ecumenical discussions of mission for at least the past seventy-five years, is now at an end. Wickeri proposed to return to the understanding of mission as practical activity, “Mission means an emphasis on the particular, the concrete, and the real, and so on the contextual...The point of departure ... is face-to-face encounters, historical involvement and Christian faith, not theological assumptions about Missio Dei.” He further explains, “My point ... is not to replace one mission theology with another, but to suggest that the idea of

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189 Wickeri, “The End of Missio Dei,” 43.
Missio Dei, whether as critique, inspiration or organising principle for a theology of mission has now run its course.”¹⁹⁰

Wickeri’s proposal may, however, signal a return to anthropomorphic mission. Thus, Wickeri’s prediction about the end of Missio Dei did not happen. Missio Dei has continued to persist because it was perceived as a positive step forward towards a more profound foundation of mission in God than in human beings. As Bosch states, “The recognition that mission is God’s mission represents a crucial breakthrough in respect to the preceding centuries. It is inconceivable that we could again revert to a narrow, ecclesiocentric view of mission.”¹⁹¹ This is concurred by Matthey when he points out, “if we were to lose the reference to Missio Dei, we would again put sole responsibility for mission on the human shoulders and thereby risk, missiologically speaking, believing that salvation is gained by our own achievements.”¹⁹² Flett sums it up this way: “The Copernican turn of Missio Dei is not something from which the Christian community can depart. Any other conception of the ground, motive and goal of mission apart from Missio Dei’s Trinitarian location risks investing authority in historical accident and human capacity.”¹⁹³

Missio Dei: Quo Vadis?

We saw that the root of the problem of Missio Dei is a faulty trinitarianism. The faulty trinitarianism continued under the modernist and postmodernist ethos. The shortfall in Trinitarian under the modernist and postmodernist ethos contributed to the impasse of Missio

¹⁹¹ Bosch, Transforming Mission, 393.
¹⁹² Matthey, God’s Mission Today, 582.
¹⁹³ Flett, Witness of God, 9.
Dei. Trinitarianism under the modernist and postmodernist framework did not sufficiently sustain Missio Dei.

Missio Dei was constricted by the modernist framework despite its attempt to escape from it. Modern mission had a very clear centre—the Church under the auspices of Western civilisation and a very clear agenda—the conversion of pagans to Western Christianity. Thus, mission was understood more as geographical expansion from Christian West to non-Christian non-West. Moreover, under the modernist framework, mission was understood as practical theology; missions is application and not part of the systematic rationalization of theology. The modernist and enlightenment’s ideology of anthropocentricity and rationality also contributed to the anthropocentrism and ecclesiocentrism of mission.

On the other hand, postmodern tendencies helped in the decentring of mission—from the West and Christendom to new centres. The new centres were the diverse contextual missiologies that have bourgeoned during the twentieth century. In postmodernity, the new centre became the various context and diverse cultures. Consequently, the trend of mission in the postmodern period shifted towards specialisation and concreteness. In this context, the principal partner of missiology became the social sciences—anthropology, sociology, social analysis, even psychology. Postmodernity, which touted the centrality of the relative—subject, culture and situation and existence before essence contributed to the dilemma of fragmentation and relativisation of mission. The role of a metaphysical foundation slowly disappeared in doing mission theology. Richard Tarnas commented that in abandoning God as the Absolute Being, the “postmodern human exists in a universe whose significance is at once utterly open and without warrantable foundation.”

This weakened the universality and ontological justification.

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of missions. Postmodernist in their aversion to any metanarrative also objected to Missio Dei as another metanarrative. Bosch, for example, argued throughout his book, Transforming Mission, that there is no one meta-paradigm for missions, it is a continually transforming paradigm. The abstract, the foundational, the ground of all being, the unitive factor—these have been lost in contemporary missiology, which valued more the personal, experience, culture, and the socio-economic situation.

Quo Vadis? (Where do we go from here?) John Flett argues that the project of grounding the Missio Dei in Trinitarian theology continues. Flett also asserted that for Missio Dei to have a proper Trinitarian grounding, it is necessary to go back to Barth. If a solid Trinitarianism is the key to Missio Dei, this thesis’ proposal is to do a ressourcement of the patristic and medieval framework of mission. Before Barth could think about the Missio Dei, the early church Fathers were already talking about mission as the Mission of the Trinity. The twentieth century notion of Missio Dei needs to dialogue with the patristic and medieval sources of mission discourse. We need to integrate the classical and scholastic notion of divine mission with the postmodern and postcolonial concept of mission.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we critically examined the developments of mission in the twentieth-century, the significant theological themes and movements which helped shape missiology in the twentieth century. We established that twentieth century was a propitious time for the theology of mission. Developments in the world and the church in the twentieth-century radically changed the notion of Mission that to say missions at the beginning of the twentieth-century is very much

195 Flett, Witness of God,
196 Other routes possible were explored by this thesis like radical orthodoxy. While radical orthodoxy is a ressourcement of patristics and mediaval sources, it lacks Trinitarian focus on mission.
different to say missions at the end of the twentieth-century. The notion that best captures this radical transformation of mission is Missio Dei.

The main question of mission in the second half twentieth century is how to justify mission. The justification for mission was driven in part by the desire to remove the guilt and penalty of past mission while at the same time by to uphold the integrity of mission through God’s initiative in mission. The justification of mission through Missio Dei implies mission finding its source and end in God.

*Missio Dei* as a theological concept of mission developed not in isolation but at the very heart of the whole movement of theology in the twentieth-century. Not only the theological context but the intellectual and socio-political-cultural context of the twentieth-century provided the fertile ground for the emergence of the notion of *Missio Dei*. These productive theological directions made the twentieth-century truly a renaissance period for theology. The most significant theological renaissance is the recovery of the Trinity and the development of many new insights about the Trinity. Inspired by the revival of Trinitarian theology and the flourishing of contextual theologies, the notion of *Missio Dei* came to being. *Missio Dei* is just one of the expressions of an inner longing of return to God not just in mission but in the whole of theology itself.

There have been significant missiological shifts in the twentieth century, for example, from ecclesiocentric to regnocratic and from anthropocentric to theocentric. This is encapsulated in *Missio Dei* as the quintessential justification and ontological foundation of mission in the twentieth-century. Competing views on *Missio Dei*, however, has exposed the superficiality of *Missio Dei* in providing a substantial ontological justification for today’s
understanding and praxis of mission. Moreover, in actual life and mission of the church, *Missio Dei* remains marginal. Indeed, old habits are hard to leave behind as large vestiges of the values and outlook of ecclesiocentric mission remain in the church today both among the hierarchy and the laity. It will take time before these transformations can truly sink into the consciousness of the church. The values and attitudes of Christendom is deeply entrenched in the church; it will not be easy to transform them.

The contemporary notion of *Missio Dei* is still wanting as an ontological justification for missions. The modernist and postmodernist ethos failed to provide a more stable ontological foundation and robust environment for the growth and development of *Missio Dei*. Hence, the search for a stronger ontological grounding of mission continues.

The discourse on *Missio Dei* continues. To advance the discourse on *Missio Dei*, we need to continue to deepen the understanding and experience of the centrality of God in mission. We need to re-examine more deeply the rootedness of *Missio Dei* in the triune God—the Trinitarian foundation of *Missio Dei*. This will be the focus of the next chapter.
Chapter II: Towards a Ressourcement of the Notion of Divine Mission in Augustine and Aquinas

[T]here is one special mode belonging to the rational nature wherein God is said to be present as the object known is in the knower, and the beloved in the lover. And since the rational creature by its operation of knowledge and love attains to God Himself, according to this special mode God is said not only to exist in the rational creature but also to dwell therein as in His own temple.¹

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we identified Missio Dei as the most significant missiological theme of the twentieth century. Missio Dei’s main tenet was its insistence on a theocentric rather than ecclesiocentric and anthropocentric foundation in mission—the return to God as the basis of mission. The biggest setback of the notion of Missio Dei, however, is its weak and muddled Trinitarian foundation.

In this chapter, we will argue that in order to provide a strong trinitarian foundation for Missio Dei, we need to make a ressourcement of the discourse on Divine Mission as articulated by Augustine and Aquinas. We will examine in particular Books II and IV of Augustine’s De Trinitate and Question 43 of Aquinas’ Summa Theologia Prima Pars. We will also examine how Divine Mission as expounded by Augustine and Aquinas can clarify, deepen, renew, rectify and strengthen the contemporary notion of Missio Dei. We will also elaborate on some qualitative characteristics of Divine Mission that will enable practical discernment of how one knows what God’s mission is in any situation.

¹ Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 3.
I. “Resourcing” Aquinas and Augustine

Mission in Trinitarian Doctrine

Several theologians have already suggested that Missio Dei is not an invention of the twentieth century, but rather a retrieval, as well as a continuous development of the notion of Mission in the context of the formation of Trinitarian doctrine. John F. Hoffmeyer, for example, claims that “mission’s” first theological usage was to denote Trinitarian relationships. This was evident in the writing of early church fathers like Origen, Tertullian, and the Capadoccian Fathers. Augustine speaks of sendings or the missio within the Triune God. Hence, Vicedom suggests that Missio Dei originated in Augustine. Edward Poitras points out the significance of retrieving Augustine’s theology to articulating Missio Dei, “The potential relevance of Augustine’s theology for mission today becomes evident when we notice how a descendant of his concept of the Missio Dei has become commonplace in recent mission thought.” In the same manner, Aquinas also talked about the mission of God. Aquinas spoke of the mission of God in his magnum opus—Summa Theologica—as an essential link or transition between his treatise on the one God and God’s creation. Bonaventure and Peter Lombard also talked about Mission in the Trinitarian context. For lack of a better term, we shall call this discourse on Mission in the Trinitarian context in the Patristics and Medieval tradition as Divine Mission. We shall focus our examination of Divine Mission in the writings of Augustine and Aquinas.

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Negative Reception of Augustine and Aquinas

Despite suggestions to trace the rootedness of Missio Dei in the theocentric theologies of Augustine and Aquinas, this did not receive positive attention in missiology. Most of the investigations of Divine Mission were in the area of Patristics and Dogmatic Theology.\(^5\) Perhaps, the primary reason for missiologists’ shying away from Augustine and Aquinas is the negative reception of both Doctors in both modern and postmodern times. This negativity discouraged many missiologists to apply the theologies and philosophies in practical theology, such as mission and ministry.

Saint Augustine received an exceedingly negative reaction in recent times, as Neil Ormerod states,

Saint Augustine has become the whipping boy of much modern Trinitarian theology. It is not uncommon to find all that is wrong with Western Trinitarian tradition slated home to his writings on the Trinity, specifically *De Trinitate*. To him, we owe our baneful legacy of modern individualism, arising from a modalist understanding of the Trinity, a neglect of the economic Trinity due to an obsessive focus on the immanent Trinity, and so on.\(^6\)

We have also seen in the previous chapter, how social Trinitarian like Gunton, Plantinga, and LaCugna, alleged that Augustine’s theology “begins” with a unity of divine substance which undermines the distinctiveness of the divine Persons. Mary Clark lists other criticisms on Augustine’s Trinitarian reflection such as the substantial influence of neo-Platonic philosophy, tendency towards modalism of his psychological “analogy”, and the severance of


the life of the Triune God from the economy of salvation by focusing on the immanent Trinity.  

Likewise, Aquinas received numerous criticisms. Korean-American theologian Anselm Kyongsuk Min presents a litany of the frequent critique of Aquinas theology:

Abstractness of the metaphysical language (as opposed to the concrete narratives of Scripture), the sexism of the Trinitarian formula, the inadequacy of the psychological model of one subject and one substance, the isolation of the doctrine of God from the doctrine of salvation, the practical irrelevance of the traditional doctrine, the separation of the treatise on the one God from the treatise on the Triune God, and the undue emphasis on the unity of the divine essence at the expense of the Trinity of persons.

All these contributed to a decline even abhorrence of the sapiential theology of Augustine and Aquinas in the modern and postmodern times. The problem, however, was many of these critiques were based on secondary sources—commentaries and interpretation of the works of Augustine and Aquinas—which are to a large extent misperceptions of Augustine’s and Aquinas’s work. Ormerod, for example, argues that systematic theologians Rahner, Congar, Everhard Jungel, Walter Kasper, and Moltmann have read Aquinas’s tractate on the Trinity in the *Summa Theologiae* through the lens of the nineteenth-century French theologian Theodore de Régnon who argued that “Western Trinitarian theology begins with (in the sense of ‘presumes’ and ‘is ultimately concerned with’) divine unity (i.e. the essence), while Eastern Trinitarian theology begins with divine diversity (i.e. the persons).”

In defense of Augustine, Lewis Ayres, and Michel Barnes have convincingly demonstrated that criticisms of Augustine were based on fundamental misreadings of

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8 Min, *Paths to the Triune God, Paths to the Triune God*, 240.

9 Augustine has found able defenders in Lewis Ayres, Michel René Barnes, Michael Hanby, Rowan Williams, and Stephen Holmes while Aquinas has recently been defended by the likes of Gilles Emery, Matthew Levering, Jean-Pierre Torrell, and Karen Kilby. Some of these authors we will cite in this thesis.

10 Ormerod, *Trinity : Retrieving the Western Tradition*, 34.
Augustine’s Trinitarian theology.\textsuperscript{11} Mary Clark argues that there is no evidence in \textit{De Trinitate} that Augustine asserted divine unity prior to Trinity, nor Trinity to unity.\textsuperscript{12} Keith Johnson, moreover, dispute these critics’ allegations that, contrary to widespread portrayals, his Trinitarian doctrine shares much in common with the Greek-speaking theologians of the East (e.g., the Cappadocians: Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus).\textsuperscript{13} That the divine Persons act inseparably \textit{ad extra} according to their relative properties \textit{ad intra} is an assumption Augustine shares not only with the entire Latin pro-

Nicene tradition but also the Greek-speaking theologians of the East (e.g., the Cappadocians).\textsuperscript{14}

Some of the criticism which led to the shelving of Augustine and Aquinas in theology and mission are, however, noteworthy and reasonable. Min, for example, criticises Aquinas’ bias for the intellect that posits the superiority of theory to praxis and leads to an intellectualist determination of and emphasis on our ultimate end.\textsuperscript{15} As a consequence, the theology of Aquinas

\textit{“suffers from the incapacity to provide compelling reflections appropriate to the changing human situation as well as from the tendency to uncritically accept the prejudices and ideologies of the times. This lack of historical sensibility, adaptability, and effectiveness, I am afraid, has been the story of Thomism in the modern world.”}\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{A Post-Critical Ressourcement of Augustine and Aquinas}

It may seem that the path of Augustine and Aquinas is the path less traveled today. Ignorance and contempt of the classical tradition are, however, unfortunate as the retrieval of

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{11} See Lewis Ayres, \textit{Augustine and the Trinity} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

\textsuperscript{12} Clark, “De Trinitate,” 91.


\textsuperscript{14} K. Johnson, “Trinitarian Agency,” 17.

\textsuperscript{15} Min, \textit{Paths to the Triune God}, 159.

\textsuperscript{16} Min, \textit{Paths to the Triune God}, 166.
\end{footnotesize}
Augustine and Aquinas can help significantly in the search for a stronger ontological justification of Missio Dei.

Our project will entail a “post-critical retrieval” of key insights of Augustine and Aquinas on Divine Mission. By post-critical we mean a critical retrieval after the dominant critique and rejection of Augustine and Aquinas by the modern and postmodern theologians. This will involve the evaluation of both the constructive and destructive elements of Augustine’s and Aquinas’ notion of Divine Mission in today’s articulation of Missio Dei and a dialogue of their theologies with contemporary missiologies. Through a post-critical retrieval, we will show that their works can serve as a valuable framework for exploring the process of doing theology in the new media age.

**Augustine and Aquinas: Common Approaches and Framework**

Augustine and Aquinas employed common approaches and framework in their discourse on Divine Mission. These approaches and framework form an important background and rationale for their formulation of the notion of Divine Mission.

First is the theocentricity in both Augustine and Aquinas’ writings. The theocentricity of Augustine the doctor of grace and Aquinas the angelic doctor is evident in their presentation of theology as contemplative wisdom. Because of their staunch theocentricity, they are considered by the church as theologians *par excellence*.

Augustine and Aquinas located their notion of Divine Mission within the classical doctrine of Trinity. They identified mission as an essential expression of the Triune God. The understanding of the Trinitarian nature of God, therefore, precedes the understanding of Divine Mission. Both understood first of all the notion of mission as sending from God, within God and to God. The Latin word for mission, *missio* comes from *mittere*, to send. It
was in this sense that Augustine first used the term ‘mission’ and inquired what it could mean for a divine person to be ‘sent’.17

Recently much attention has been given to Eastern tradition to counter Augustine and Aquinas. Holmes lamented contemporary Trinitarians’ contention that Augustine and Aquinas is the culprit for the demise of the Trinitarian doctrine without a careful reading of their works and the classical tradition.18 Contrary to the claims of critics, Augustine and Aquinas represents true Trinitarian orthodoxy, i.e., pro-Nicene discourse on the Trinity. Both worked in continuity with the faith tradition of the church—both East and west. Augustine with the Patristic tradition, Aquinas with the classic and medieval sources: Patristics, Augustine, Denys, Boethius, and others.19

Both Augustine and Aquinas utilised the scriptures extensively. Both had a vast and profound knowledge of the Bible. They may not have the tools of historical criticism that are available to us today, but they produced profound exegesis of the Bible given the available hermeneutical tools of their day. This can be properly said of their notion of Divine Mission; Augustine and Aquinas supported and built their ideas of Divine Mission with abundant scriptural texts. They showed that the Scripture is full of references to the Divine Mission; indeed, the scripture is the story of Divine Mission.

Augustine and Aquinas responded to the burning theological issues of the day using the philosophy available during their times, and at the same time, providing a critique of these philosophies. Augustine using Platonic or Neo-platonic presented the Trinity as a counterculture to the dominant worldview of their times—opposed to power and hierarchy.

18 Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity*, 199.
Aquinas revolutionised the ideas of Aristotle, and as a result was able to Christianise Aristotle. An important philosophical notion that both doctors employed was onto-ontology\(^{20}\) or God-centred metaphysics. Both were ontological or metaphysical in their philosophical approach which may be foreign for the contemporary generation who are used to an empirical, historicist, existentialist, phenomenologist or post-structuralist philosophical method and language. Thus, their philosophical language may be foreign to many of us today, terms like “being itself” (\textit{ipsum esse}), “substance,” “accidents,” “relation,” “person,” “supposit,” “essence,” “nature,” “procession,” “notion,” “appropriation,” which make up the vocabulary of classical Trinitarianism. The heavy philosophical approach of the two doctors does not mean that they were armchair theologians or philosophers writing from the ivory towers of their ideas. Even as their theologies were profoundly intellectual, both lived what they wrote through the holiness of their lives and selfless services rendered to the Church and the people.

Augustine and Aquinas lived and wrote within the pre-modern worldview where there is no divide between the sacred and secular and where the Trinitarian God is the central issue of faith. This worldview helped the two Doctors to develop their theology as sapiential theology that is cosmological, theocentric, universalist, and not intentionally confined to the needs of a particular time.\(^{21}\) Wanda Zemler-Cizewski alerts us to become aware of the distinctive, “premodern” theological method especially of Aquinas and to avoid reading them from our modern and postmodern bias:

“We cannot avoid reading Thomas’s work with our own modern questions in mind, but find that Thomas considers issues in a different way from ours, in a different context, and with different associations than ours. We may be tempted, therefore, to pick and choose and rearrange the order of

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\(^{20}\) Ontotheology is a philosophy of being which regards God as the source of all beings. This is evident in the classical and medieval philosophy. We shall discuss onto-theology at greater length later in this chapter.

\(^{21}\) Min, \\textit{Paths to the Triune God, Paths to the Triune God}, 241.
Aquinas’s presentation to suit our sense of the problem, but in so doing we can end up distorting or misunderstanding what Aquinas has to say.”

Thus, the premodern theological approach of the two doctors is relevant especially in the context of the increasing recognition of the problems of homocentrism or anthropocentrism today and conversely with the necessity of rethinking the place of humanity in the larger scheme of the universe.  

**Trinitarian Framework**

A key to the proper understanding of the Divine Mission in both Augustine and Aquinas is the Trinitarian framework of the post-Nicene orthodoxy. This framework expresses the absolute unity of God’s life in the immanent and economic trinity. The notion of Divine Mission is the notion of how *missio* or sending can be applied to the unity of the immanent and economic life of the Divine Trinity. The source of the Divine Mission in the economic trinity is the divine processions and relations in the immanent trinity. The reason why there is Mission in God is because of the divine processions and relations. The three persons-as-relations in one God necessitate the Divine Mission. Mission in the Divine Trinity is an expression of the utterly relational nature of God.

It is, therefore, absolutely important to have a clear grasp of the Trinitarian framework of the post-Nicene orthodoxy before delving into the notion of Divine Mission. It is this framework that Augustine and Aquinas strongly defended and expounded in their notion of Divine Mission. Thus, a basic understanding of this framework is essential.

St. Thomas explained the notion of *processio* in question 27 of the *Summa*: “Question 27, The Procession of the Divine Persons.” Aquinas explains *processio* in this way:

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23 Min, *Paths to the Triune God, Paths to the Triune God*, 241.
As God is above all things, we should understand what is said of God, not according to the mode of the lowest creatures, namely bodies, but from the similitude of the highest creatures, the intellectual substances; while even the similitudes derived from these fall short in the representation of divine objects. Procession, therefore, is not to be understood from what it is in bodies, either according to local movement or by way of a cause proceeding forth to its exterior effect, as, for instance, like heat from the agent to the thing made hot. Rather it is to be understood by way of an intelligible emanation, for example, of the intelligible word which proceeds from the speaker, yet remains in him. In that sense the Catholic Faith understands procession as existing in God.24

There are two immanent processions in the divine trinity. This is the procession of the Son from the Father (generation) and the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son (spiration).25 These two processions generate four relations. St. Thomas identifies the four real relations in God as: paternity (relation of Father to the Son; active generation); filiation (relation of the Son to the Father; the passive generation), spiration (relation of the Father and of the Son to the Holy Spirit; active spiration); and finally, procession (relation of the Holy Spirit to the father and to the Son; the passive spiration).26 Moreover, the particular mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit is based on their distinctive relational identity.

The procession of the Word is called generation in the proper sense of the term, whereby it is applied to living things. Now the relation of the principle of generation in perfect living beings is called paternity; and the relation of the one proceeding from the principle is called filiation. But the procession of Love has no proper name of its own (Q[27], A[4]); and so neither have the ensuing relations a proper name of their own. The relation of the principle of this procession is called spiration; and the relation of the person proceeding is called procession: although these two names belong to the processions or origins themselves, and not to the relations.27

These relations are real rather than accidental. They are not just logical real relations. St. Augustine explains how the relations are “real” in De Trinitate:

But if the Father, in that He is called the Father, were so called in relation to Himself, not to the Son; and the Son, in that He is called the Son, were so called in relation to Himself, not to the Father; then both the one would be called Father, and the other Son, according to substance. But because the Father is not called the Father except in that He has a Son, and the Son is not called Son except in that He has a Father, these things are not said according to substance; because each of them is not so called in relation to Himself, but the terms are used reciprocally and in relation each to the other; nor yet according to accident, because both the being called the Father, and the being called the Son, is eternal.

24 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 27, Article 1.
25 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 27.
26 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 28, Article 4.
27 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 28, Article 4.
and unchangeable to them. Wherefore, although to be the Father and to be the Son is different, yet their substance is not different; because they are so called, not according to substance, but according to relation, which relation, however, is not accident, because it is not changeable.  

Chung-Hyun Baik argues that a distinction between *missio* (mission) and *processio* (procession) is more prominent in Augustine and in Aquinas. While Augustine began with *missio* and then went to *processio*, Aquinas started from *processio* and then proceeded to *missio*. For Aquinas, *processio* and *missio* are in an intimate relationship with each other.

*Missio* is further distinguished into visible and invisible mission. Anthony Kelly describes that the “invisible” missions of the Word and Spirit occur in the minds and hearts of all good people in the realm of grace; to that degree they span all space and time. While the “visible” missions occur with a specific history in the incarnation of the Word in Jesus of Nazareth, and in the ecclesial outpouring of the Spirit—with consequences for our understanding of Scripture as the inspired word, and the sacraments as symbolized mediations of grace, and so on.

**Examining Divine Mission in Augustine and Aquinas**

*Missio Dei* is not a term that Augustine and Aquinas used. They used *Processio* and *Missio* to refer to the Mission of the Trinity instead. We shall call the *Processio-Missio* as Divine Mission.

Saint Augustine’s writings on Divine Mission in *De Trinitate* are specifically found in Book II and IV. In addition to the *De Trinitate*, the other main sources from Augustine where we can found his direct references to the Divine Missions (using various forms of

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Aquinas’ investigations of Divine Mission in the *Summa Theologiae Prima Pars* are specifically found in the Question 43. As the question of mission in Aquinas is within the ambit of the doctrine of the Trinity, we shall cite other questions in the *Summa*, which could illuminate for us further the question of Divine Mission.

We will present each one’s position which is neither a comprehensive analysis of Augustine and Aquinas’ work nor a comparative analysis between the two works. Many literatures have already been written about exegetical commentary on Book II and IV of *De Trinitate* and the Question 43 of the *Summa*. We will benefit from these commentaries, thus, our task is not to add nor subtract nor expand these commentaries. The English translation of these works was used for this thesis.32

**Augustine’s Work on Divine Mission in *De Trinitate***

**a. Background**

Johnson declares that Augustine’s *De Trinitate* is by far the most influential book on the Trinity in the history of the West.33 D. Juvenal Merriell claims that not even Thomas’ own *Summa Theologiae* can challenge the position of the *De Trinitate* as a dramatic but meditative, poetic but rigorous, introduction to the mystery of the Triune God.34 Mary Clark identified three main objectives that Augustine sought in writing *De Trinitate*.

31 Poitras, “St. Augustine and the Missio Dei,” 44.
32 I would rely on my basic knowledge of Latin to refer to the Latin translation of the said writings here and then.
First, he wished to demonstrate to critics of the Nicene Creed that the divinity and co-equality of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are rooted in scripture. Second, he intended to show pagan philosophers the need for faith in a divine mediator so that divine self-revelation and redemption can occur. Finally, he wanted to convince his readers that salvation and spiritual growth are connected with knowing themselves as images of the Triune God, from whom they came and toward whom they go, with a dynamic tendency to union realized by likeness to God who is Love.  

The notion of Divine Mission is, first of all, a response by Augustine to the post Nicene Trinitarian heresies, reactions and controversies during the period of 350s to the 380s. This placed Augustine in a polemical context, defending the tenets of Nicene Creed and contesting a wide variety of heterodoxical interpretations about the creed by the Arians, Semi-Arians, Homoians, Donatist, Pelagians, pagans and philosophers. The historical context of *De Trinitate*, therefore, makes it an exegetical, theological, philosophical, and polemical work. Its systematic and pastoral character is also discernible.

In 389 CE, Nebridius, Augustine’s student friend, wrote to ask him: How is it that, if the Trinity does all things together in unity, the Son alone is said to be incarnated and not the Father and Holy Spirit as well? Wilkins reframes the question this way: Why are there two who are sent, the Word, and the Spirit? Why is one sent visibly to live a human and historical life, and the other sent secretly to dwell in the inmost reaches of our hearts? Moreover, it was through controversies about communion and grace particularly hurled against him by Donatists and Pelagians that Augustine deepened his insight into the relevance of the two missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit to the human situation. This marked the beginning of Augustine’s theology being structured around the indivisible activities of the Trinity, with

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35 Clark, “*De Trinitate*,” 91.
36 Clark, “*De Trinitate*,” 91.
37 Clark, “*De Trinitate*,” 92.
38 Clark, “*De Trinitate*,” 92.
40 Wilkins, “Why Two Divine Missions?”, 43.
the Son as revealer of God the Trinity. His Trinitarian theology and Christology are not
separated.\textsuperscript{41}

\textbf{b. Divine Mission in \textit{De Trinitate}}

Augustine discussed the idea of ‘missions’ in two books of \textit{De Trinitate}, Book II, and
IV, specifically in Book II, Chapter 5, nos. 7-10 and in Book IV, nos. 18, 25 – 32. In Book
II, Augustine’s discussion of Divine Mission begins with the clarification of the meaning of
mission as “sent” language for the divine Persons. In Latin, ‘mission’ (\textit{missio}) is derived
from \textit{mittere}, to send so that a mission is a ‘sending.’ It was in this sense that Augustine used
‘mission’ and asked what it could mean for a divine person to be ‘sent.’\textsuperscript{42} Ayres argues that
Augustine offers by far the most extensive and analytical discussion of the term ‘sending’ and
he applies that account logically and across the board.\textsuperscript{43} At the same time, Ayres points out
that Augustine’s notion of Divine Mission, particularly the account of the relations between
missions and processions, is an idiosyncratic appropriation of themes already in play among
his Latin forebears especially Ambrose and Hilary of Poitiers.\textsuperscript{44}

We also see in Book II Augustine responding extensively to issues about the Trinity
arising after the Council of Nicaea. For example the question of Old Testament theophanies,
which the Arians used very effectively. Which, if any, of the divine Persons, in particular,
were manifested in each of the Old Testament theophanies? Congar shows that in reply to
this question, Augustine turned to the visible missions of the Word and the Spirit and then to
the invisible missions, describing them theologically, on the one hand as a value of
manifestation and knowledge and, on the other, by means of their connection with the eternal

\textsuperscript{41} Clark, “\textit{De Trinitate},” 92.
\textsuperscript{42} Wilkins, “Why Two Divine Missions?”, 41.
\textsuperscript{43} Ayres, \textit{Augustine and the Trinity}, 188.
\textsuperscript{44} Ayres, \textit{Augustine and the Trinity}, 187.
Augustine was guided on the one hand by the affirmation of the unity and consubstantiality of God and, on the other, by his related desire to deepen and intensify the image of the Deus-Trinitas in the souls of believers.

Baik claims that Augustine in his discourse on the divine mission begins with the discussion of missio and thereafter examines processio. Moreover, Baik maintains that Augustine showed how missio reveals processio. The missio of Son means that the Son proceeds from the Father, the missio of the Spirit means that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son as well.

Thus, the key to understanding a Divine Mission for Augustine is to understand the divine procession on which it is based. Augustine understood the Trinity to be an order of giving and receiving. The distinctive ‘property’ or personal identity of each divine person is in some sense a function of his place in that order. The temporal missions—missions in time—reveal the processions in eternity. If a mission shows a person in his procession, it is because the procession—the eternal relation of origin—is the foundation of the mission.

This highlights Augustine’s twin notion of mission—processio—coming from the Father and missio—coming into the world. To be sent is to come forth from the Father and to come into the world. This language of missio reflects the soteriological focus of their—Son and Holy Spirit—work in the world. Augustine explains this particularly with the sending of the Son:

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47 Baik, The Holy Trinity-God for God and God for Us, 52.

48 Wilkins, “Why Two Divine Missions?”, 42.


50 De Trinitate, Book II, Chapter 5, 7
And when this fullness of time had come, “God sent His Son, made of a woman,” that is, made in time, that the Incarnate Word might appear to men; while it was in that Word Himself, apart from time, at what time this was to be done; for the order of times is in the eternal wisdom of God without time. Since, then, that the Son should appear in the flesh was wrought by both the Father and the Son, it is fitly said that He who appeared in that flesh was sent, and that He who did not appear in it, sent Him; because those things which are transacted outwardly before the bodily eyes have their existence from the inward structure (apparatu) of the spiritual nature, and on that account are filly said to be sent.\(^5\)

Saint Augustine also speaks of the sending of the Spirit at Pentecost as a manifestation for the purpose of moving people beyond that visible manifestation:

This operation, visibly exhibited, and presented to mortal eyes, is called the sending of the Holy Spirit; not that His very substance appeared, in which He himself also is invisible and unchangeable, like the Father and the Son, but that the hearts of men, touched by things seen outwardly, might be turned from the manifestation in time of Him as coming to His hidden eternity as ever present.\(^5\)

There can be missions, or sendings, of the Son and the Holy Spirit but never of the Father.\(^5\) Missio or sending can only properly be said of the Son and the Holy Spirit not the Father. As Augustine says, “The Father alone is never described as being sent.”\(^5\) Sending, however, does not necessarily imply inequality between sender and sent, but only that the one sent is from the sender, as the Son is God from God.

Another question to which Augustine responded is the question of how can God be sent if God is present everywhere. Augustine maintains that the Son and Spirit are always ‘sent’ to a place where they already are.

For He who says, “I fill heaven and earth,” was everywhere. But if it is said of the Father, where could He be without His own word and without His own wisdom, which “reacheth from one end to another mightily, and sweetly ordereth all things?” But He cannot be anywhere without His own Spirit. Therefore, if God is everywhere, His Spirit also is everywhere. Therefore, the Holy Spirit, too, was sent thither, where He already was.\(^5\)

Augustine emphasized that to be sent is different in God than in human terms.

Sending in God is not equivalent to the command in human sending as sending in God does

\(^{51}\) *De Trinitate*, Book II, Chapter 5, 9.
\(^{52}\) *De Trinitate*, Book II, Chapter 5, 9.
\(^{53}\) Poitras, “St. Augustine and the *Missio Dei,*” 32.
\(^{54}\) *De Trinitate*, Book II, Chapter 5, 3.
\(^{55}\) *De Trinitate*, Book II, Chapter 5, 7.
not entail separation and division. The Father’s sending of the Son is intrinsic to the Father’s eternal ‘speaking’ of the Word and Wisdom; there can be no importation of the language of ‘command’ because the Son eternally comes into existence as one who eternally shares in the decisions of the Father as the Father’s wisdom. Augustine also argues that the standard spatial language does not apply to God—the eternal God does not go from one place to another or leaving behind one location for another. The manner of sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit implies no change and motion because it is within God Himself. Instead, the “sendings” or “missions” are visible manifestations in time of the God who in himself contains all times. Thus this occurs without a diminution of God’s divine eternity. As Augustine explains,

For perhaps our meaning will be more plainly unfolded, if we ask in what manner God sent His Son. He commanded that He should come, and He, complying with the commandment, came. Did He then request, or did He only suggest? But whichever of these it was, certainly it was done by a word, and the Word of God is the Son of God Himself. Wherefore, since the Father sent Him by a word, His being sent was the work of both the Father and His Word; therefore the same Son was sent by the Father and the Son, because the Son Himself is the Word of the Father.58

The change in mission, therefore, is only in the human persons not in God. The revelation of a divine person changes the human person in some new way. This entails a new divine–human interpersonal presence. This new way, for Augustine, is revelatory. A divine person is said to be ‘sent’ when he is made known to those to whom he is sent. This is the principle of “to be sent is to be known”—mitti est cognosci—which is a central principle in Augustine.

It is also essential to understand that missio is governed by the principle of the indivisible work of the Trinity. Augustine develops and accounts for the doctrine of inseparable operations whereby the actions of the three are grounded in the Father’s eternal

56 Ayres, Augustine and the Trinity, 182.
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58 De Trinitate, Book II, Chapter 5, 9.
59 Wilkins, “Why Two Divine Missions?”, 42.
generation of the Son and spiration of the Spirit. Augustine insists that the Father and Son—who “have but one will and are indivisible in their working”—were both involved in sending the Son. Just as the Father sends the Son; indeed, the Son must in some sense send himself—just as the Son sanctifies himself (John 17: 19). Augustine writes,

Because the will of the Father and the Son is one, and their working indivisible. In like manner, then, let him understand the incarnation and nativity of the Virgin, wherein the Son is understood as sent, to have been wrought by one and the same operation of the Father and of the Son indivisibly; the Holy Spirit certainly not being thence excluded, of whom it is expressly said, “She was found with child by the Holy Ghost.”

Augustine upholds the equality of the persons in Divine Mission. Augustine disputed strongly the suggestion that the Son was less than the Father just because He is sent. Ambrose anticipated Augustine’s question and discussions when he asks: Is the one who sends greater than the one who is sent? Scriptural texts referring to the sending of the Son and Spirit into the world were interpreted by some anti-Nicene theologians and formerly by the “economic” theologians to argue that the one sent is less than the sender, and therefore only the Father is God. They even held that the Old Testament recorded certain “missions” of the divine Persons. In refutation of the Homoian objection that the one who sends must be greater than the one who is sent, Augustine offers what amounts to a short treatise on what it means to speak of the Son or Spirit being sent.

The Son and Holy Spirit being sent do not imperil their equality with the Father. Augustine asks, “In what manner the Son was sent and proclaimed beforehand? How in the

60 Ayres, Augustine and the Trinity, 182.
61 De Trinitate, Book II, Chapter 5, 8-9.
62 De Trinitate, Book II, Chapter 5, 9.
63 Ayres, Augustine and the Trinity, 188.
64 The Homoians taught that the Son is similar to the Father, either “in all things” or “according to the scriptures,” without speaking of substance. Michael Barnes claims that Augustine is engaged in polemic against Latin Homoian theologians in the earliest sections of De Trinitate, for example, Augustine refers to the Homoians in Book I: “They who have said that our Lord Jesus Christ is not God, or not very God, or not with the Father the One and only God, or not truly immortal because changeable” (De Trinitate, I, 6, 9). See Michel René Barnes, “Exegesis and Polemic in Augustine’s De Trinitate I,” Augustinian Studies 30, no. 1 (1999): 43-59.
65 Ayres, Augustine and the Trinity, 181.
sending of his birth in the flesh he was made less without detriment to his equality with the Father?"66 The Son being ‘sent’ from the Father indicates nothing other than that one is Father and begetter, while the other is begotten and Son:

But if the Son is said to be sent by the Father on this account, that the one is the Father, and the other the Son, this does not in any manner hinder us from believing the Son to be equal, and consubstantial, and co-eternal with the Father, and yet to have been sent as Son by the Father. Not because the one is greater, the other less; but because the one is Father, the other Son; the one begetter, the other begotten; the one, He from whom He is who is sent; the other, He who is from Him who sends. For the Son is from the Father, not the Father from the Son.67

Being sent, Augustine argued, means not being less than God but rather being from the Father as principle of origin, God from God, light from light.68

Thus, Augustine rejects all forms of subordination by the Son and the Holy Spirit to the Father; the biblical language of the Son and the Spirit being “sent” into the world does not entail subordination in the Trinity. “The Glorification of the Son by the Father does not prove inequality.”69 “The Son and Holy Spirit are not therefore less because sent.”70 The Son was ‘sent’ without implying that one has the authority to send, while the one sent is merely subordinate, because that the Son will be sent is intrinsic to the Son’s generation from the Father. The visible life and ministry of the Incarnate Word is thus founded in the ‘interior ordering’ of the Trinity.71

In Book IV, Augustine comes back to the topic of the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit where he affirms once more that their being sent does not imply that they are not equal to the Father, and defines their being sent into the world in time as the making known to the world that they proceed from the Father in eternity. Augustine also focuses on the missio of

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66 De Trinitate, Book IV
67 De Trinitate, Book IV, Chapter 20, 27.
68 Clark, “De Trinitate,” 92.
69 De Trinitate, Book II, Chapter, 52.
70 De Trinitate, Book II, Chapter 5, 52.
71 Ayres, Augustine and the Trinity, 183.
the Son as the work of the Mediator. The purpose of the Son’s *missio* is to be the mediator between God and the world, and the accomplishment of this purpose requires the Son of God to be incarnated into the world.\(^72\) The purpose of the Son’s mediatorship is to purify people by faith and thereby to enable them to contemplate the truth of eternal things, which is the eternal *processio* within the Trinity.\(^73\) He turns to the issue of the *missio* of the Son in the incarnation—how this sending differs from those in the Old Testament, and what we can learn from this sending.\(^74\) Wisdom is sent in one way to illumine prophets and the ‘friends of God’ and in another when the Word and Wisdom himself is born of the virgin.\(^75\) The theophanies of the Old Testament are regarded as preparatory to the *missio* of Son that of Holy Spirit.\(^76\) Thus, all other ‘sending’ is prophecy of or testimony to the one true ‘sending into the world’—the sending of the Son.\(^77\) He explains,

> Behold the purpose for which the Son of God has been sent, or rather behold what it means for the Son of God to be sent. Whatever things have been done in time for the sake of producing the faith, whereby we are cleansed for the contemplation of the truth, in things that had a beginning, have been brought forth from eternity and are referred back to eternity, and have been either testimonies of this mission or are the mission itself of the Son of God.\(^78\)

Augustine recapitulates his ideas on divine mission in the final summary of book IV:

> But now, as I think, it has been sufficiently shown, that the Son is not therefore less because He is sent by the Father, nor the Holy Spirit less because both the Father sent Him and the Son. For these things are perceived to be laid down in the Scriptures, either on account of the visible creature; or rather on account of commending to our thoughts the emanation [within the Godhead]; but not on account of inequality, or impurity, or unlikeness of substance; since, even if God the Father had willed to appear visibly through the subject creature, yet it would be most absurd to say that He was sent either by the Son, whom He begot, or by the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from Him.\(^79\)

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\(^72\) Baik, *The Holy Trinity-God for God and God for Us*, 51.  
\(^73\) Baik, *The Holy Trinity-God for God and God for Us*, 52.  
\(^74\) *De Trinitate*, Book IV, Introduction  
\(^75\) *De Trinitate*, Book IV, Chapter 20, 27  
\(^76\) Baik, *The Holy Trinity-God for God and God for Us*, 51.  
\(^77\) *De Trinitate*, Book IV, Chapter 20, 28.  
\(^78\) *De Trinitate*, Book IV, Chapter 19, 25.  
\(^79\) *De Trinitate*, Book IV, Chapter 21, 32.
Wilkins encapsulates Augustine’s key contributions to the theology of the missions as “clarifying, on the divine side, the relations of origin that ground both personal identity and Divine Mission, and, on the human side, the need for coordinated internal and external graces and so of coordinated invisible and visible missions.”\textsuperscript{80} Furthermore, Augustine laid the foundation for a robust theological account of how the concrete economy of grace is rooted in the mystery of the divine life.\textsuperscript{81} Augustine not only inextricably links the ‘immanent’ Trinity to the economy of grace and salvation; it also coordinates the ‘invisible’ mission of the Spirit with the ‘visible’ mission of the Word incarnate.\textsuperscript{82} “What is more, we cannot deny that the Spirit also proceeds from the Son... I cannot see what he could otherwise have meant when, breathing on the faces of the disciples, the Lord declared: ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’.”\textsuperscript{83}

\textbf{Aquinas’ Divine Mission}

\textit{a. Background}

St. Thomas was in a better position in examining the theology of Divine Mission because of the ingenious work of Augustine and the developments in theology after Augustine both from the Latin and Greek tradition. Thus, Aquinas has more to say both quantitatively and qualitatively about Divine Mission. \textit{De Trinitate}, however, was the greatest influence on Aquinas’ teaching on the Trinity. Merriell showed that the \textit{Summa Theologiae} reflects a serious engagement with Augustine’s \textit{De Trinitate}.\textsuperscript{84} In Question 43 of the \textit{Summa} Aquinas quotes Augustine’s \textit{De Trinitate} sixteen times. Indeed, he built on the Augustinian foundation in multiple ways.

\textsuperscript{80} Wilkins, \textit{Why Two Divine Missions}, 41.
\textsuperscript{81} Wilkins, \textit{Why Two Divine Missions}, 48.
\textsuperscript{82} Wilkins, “Why Two Divine Missions?”, 39.
\textsuperscript{83} \textit{De Trinitate} Book IV, Chapter 20, 29.
\textsuperscript{84} Merriell, \textit{To the Image of the Trinity} in Wilkins, “Why Two Divine Missions?”, 48.
Rudi te Velde showed that the discussion of Divine Mission by Aquinas follows the general scheme of exitus-reeditus of the Summa Theologiae. Poitras concurred with te Velde’s observation, “To understand Aquinas Divine Mission in full perspective, it is necessary to understand them in this scheme, that is, that the Divine Mission is both sendings and returnings to the Father.”

St. Thomas discussed the Trinitarian mission in Question 43, The Mission of the Divine Persons with eight articles, at the very end of the treatise on the Trinity de deo trino (questions 27–43) of Summa Theologiae. This is the last question of the de deo trino which provides a transition to the de deo creante (Treatise on Creation—questions 44–46). The question of the missions closes the investigation of ‘the distinction of persons in God’ or ‘the Trinity of persons in God’ which creates the bridge between the field which studies God’s mystery as it is in itself, and the Weld of God’s design in creation. In other words, in order to understand Question 43, it is fundamental to connect it with Aquinas’ previous discussion of the Trinity and locate it within the doctrine of God in prima pars of the Summa. Thus, contrary to critics’ claims, this structure strongly shows that the consideration of the persons in their immanent divine life is not separated from the Trinitarian economy. In question 43, we look down on God’s economy ‘from above’, from the perspective of the mutual relations of the divine Persons. The question about the missions exhibits the ground-plan of the economy of grace within the Trinity itself.

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87 W. J. Hankey, God in Himself: Aquinas’ Doctrine of God as Expounded in the Summa Theologiae (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 126,
89 Emery, The Trinitarian Theology of Aquinas Aquinas, 363.
Emery claims that question 43 of *Summa* is one of the most difficult in the whole Trinitarian treatise.⁹⁰ The mission of the divine Persons has provoked more problems, and outstanding disagreements within Trinitarian theology than any other topic that “rivers of ink have flowed into it.”⁹¹ Emery suggests that Question 43 has a peculiarly complex internal structure where he describes it as:

(1) the preliminary features of the notion of ‘mission’ (aa. 1–2: the fact of Divine Missions, the notion of mission, and how it is related to the person’s eternal procession);

(2) the ‘invisible’ missions of the divine Persons, that is, how the giving of grace to the saints is a sending of the Son and Spirit (aa. 3–6: the gifts which are the evidence for a person’s mission, which person is sent, to whom is he sent);

(3) the ‘visible’ missions of Son and Holy Spirit (a. 7);

(4) the author of the sending: which person brings the sending about? (a. 8).⁹²

**b. Articles**

**1. Article I**

The first article of Question 43 is whether the notion of mission as sending can be applied to the divine Persons. Here, Aquinas takes up the Augustinian examination on the concept of sending or *missio*. Aquinas wants to investigate the suitability of *missio* for God: “Whether it is suitable for a divine person to be sent? Whether a divine person can be properly sent?”⁹³ Suitability or fittingness, a principle that he probably inherited from Aristotle, is essential for Aquinas in the question of Divine Mission. Simply defined, fittingness is the notion that the operation of being is proper to the nature of that being. Anthony Kelly reaffirms the necessity of the fittingness of God’s *missio* to God’s creation:

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⁹³ *Summa Theologiae*, I, Question 43, Article 1.
“God’s communications are not reserved for pure spirits, but meet human existence in its temporal, historical embodiment.”94

St. Thomas posits some problems to this proposition which imply that when we apply missio to God this will suggest some imperfections—contradictions to the perfection of God. The first apparent contradiction of God’s missio is subordination or inferiority of the one sent. “It would seem that a divine person cannot be properly sent. For one who is sent is less than the sender. But one divine person is not less than another.”95 Another contradiction Aquinas points out is missio cannot be applied to God because missio implies “that in some way he begins to be present there: either because in no way was he present before in the place whereto he is sent, or because he begins to be there in some way in which he was not there hitherto.”96 But God is everywhere; how can God be sent if there is no place that God is absent. Being sent also implies a change in God’s nature in the terminus where God is sent.

To these contradictions, St. Thomas replied that they only apply to humans but not to the divine Persons. Insubordination only applies to humans since mission in human “implies inferiority in the one sent, when it means procession from the sender as principle, by command or counsel; forasmuch as the one commanding is the greater, and the counsellor is the wiser.”97 No change happens in God in missio; the change, however, happens in the creatures to whom God is sent. Moreover, missio in God does not mean that the divine Person is sent independently of the others but each divine Person works according to each person’s distinctiveness. The distinctiveness of the missio of the divine persons implies that

95 *Summa Theologiae*, I, Question 43, Article 1, Objection 1.
96 *Summa Theologiae*, I, Question 43, Article 1.
97 *Summa Theologiae*, I, Question 43, Article 1, Reply to Objection 1.
the divine persons do not carry one’s own agenda and will independent of others. *Missio* for God means *processio* of origin in equality. Moreover, the mutual indwelling described in the notion of *perichōrēsis* or *circumincession* within the Trinity implies that each person in God is involved in the distinctive work of the other.

Another proposition that argues *missio* cannot apply to God is the principle of simplicity of God. The simplicity of God means that God is not composed of parts, thus, mission cannot apply to God since mission implies separation between the sent and sender. The divine Persons are not sent because this would imply a divisible and separable God composed of parts. This goes against the simplicity of God as Aquinas writes:

Further, what is sent is separated from the sender; hence Jerome says, commenting on Ezech. 16:53: “What is joined and tied in one body cannot be sent.” But in the divine Persons there is nothing that is separable, as Hilary says (De Trin. vii). Therefore one person is not sent by another. 98

St. Thomas replies to this objection by pointing out that God “neither begins to exist where he did not previously exist, nor ceases to exist where He was.”99 Once again Aquinas clarifies that sending in God only means *processio*—distinction of origin:

What is so sent as to begin to exist where previously it did not exist, is locally moved by being sent; hence it is necessarily separated locally from the sender. This, however, has no place in the mission of a divine person; for the divine person sent neither begins to exist where he did not previously exist, nor ceases to exist where He was. Hence such a mission takes place without a separation, having only distinction of origin.100

The third seeming contradiction of *missio* to God’s perfection is that the divine Persons are not sent because this would imply that God is not present in creation. “Further, whoever is sent, departs from one place and comes anew into another. But this does not apply

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98 *Summa Theologiae*, I, Question 43, Article 1, Objection 2.
100 *Summa Theologiae*, I, Question 43, Article 1, Reply to Objection 2.
to a divine person, Who is everywhere. Therefore it is not suitable for a divine person to be
sent."\textsuperscript{101}

Once again, Aquinas reply is that this is not applicable to Divine Mission since this
runs counter to God’s immutability and only apply to human mission. The principle of
locomotion which implies change in motion, cannot apply to God’s Mission but only
applicable to human mission. “This objection rests on the idea of mission according to local
motion, which is not in God”\textsuperscript{102} because God is present in creation as the cause is present in
its effects.

St. Thomas in his \textit{Summary} of article 1 explains that there are two principles of \textit{missio}
of the divine Persons: “[T]he notion of mission includes two things: the habitude of the one
sent to the sender; and that of the one sent to the end whereto he is sent.”\textsuperscript{103} He proceeds to
distinguish these two principles of sending in human reality. The first is the origin or cause
as from the sender and the recipient as the one sent:

Anyone being sent implies a certain kind of procession of the one sent from the sender: either
according to command, as the master sends the servant; or according to counsel, as an adviser may be
said to send the king to battle; or according to origin, as a tree sends forth its flowers.\textsuperscript{104}

The second principle is the change in the person sent at the destination where the
person was sent:

The habitude to the term to which he is sent is also shown, so that in some way he begins to be present
there: either because in no way was he present before in the place whereto he is sent, or because he
begins to be there in some way in which he was not there hitherto.\textsuperscript{105}

Emery explains these two components in Thomas’ theory of the Divine Missions as a
relation of origin and a mode of arrival. Only the divine processions ground relations of

\textsuperscript{101} \textit{Summa Theologiae}, I, Question 43, Article 1, Objection 3.

\textsuperscript{102} \textit{Summa Theologiae}, I, Question 43, Article 1, Reply to Objection 3.

\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Summa Theologiae}, I, Question 43, Article 1.

\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Summa Theologiae}, I, Question 43, Article 1.

\textsuperscript{105} \textit{Summa Theologiae}, I, Question 43, Article 1.
origin in God, so the foundation of a missio is processio by which one divine Person may indeed be said to be from another or others. The missio is contingent while the processio is eternal. 106 This is the inseparable dynamics of processio-missio of Divine Mission which was also discussed by St. Augustine.

These principles, while fitting for God, are similar but also different in Divine Mission. Therefore,

\[\text{The mission of a divine person is a fitting thing, as meaning in one way the procession of origin from the sender, and as meaning a new way of existing in another; thus the Son is said to be sent by the Father into the world, inasmuch as He began to exist visibly in the world by taking our nature; whereas “He was” previously “in the world” (Jn. 1:1).}^{107}\]

From the very first article, Aquinas clearly presents the radical distinction in mission between God and human beings. Thus, Divine Mission is, both participation and non-participation, association and non-association of human and church’s mission with God’s Mission. The categories of Mission between God and people are different. In other words, mission in Divine Mission only imply a relational and originating principle within the one essence of God, thus, mission does not entail separation or division within God.

2. Article II

The second article shows Aquinas trying to clarify the relationship of the notion of time with the mission of God: Whether the mission of God is outside of time, i.e., eternal or in time, that is, temporal or both: “Whether mission is eternal, or only temporal?”^{108}

The main objection to this article is that if mission is an attribute of God, then it can only be eternal. : “It would seem that mission can be eternal. For Gregory says (Hom. xxvi, in Ev.), ‘The Son is sent as He is begotten.’ However, the Son’s generation is eternal.

107 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 1.
108 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 2.
Therefore, mission is eternal.”109 Garrigou-Lagrange reframes Gregory in this way, “[T]he Word is not changed by the visible mission of the Incarnation, that is, by the fact that the humanity of Christ terminates in the Word.”110

Another objection for Divine Mission to be both eternal and temporal that Thomas points out is the immutability of God. “Further, a thing is changed if it becomes something temporally. But a divine person is not changed. Therefore the mission of a divine person is not temporal, but eternal.”111 Thomas’ replies to this by saying

That a divine person may newly exist in anyone, or be possessed by anyone in time, does not come from change of the divine person, but from change in the creature; as God Himself is called Lord temporally by change of the creature.112

The change, therefore, is only in the creature not in God as Emery comments on Thomas’ reply. There is no internal alteration within the divine person. Rather, the divine person is the source or cause of the creature’s changing, his being united to God in a fresh way.113

Another objection Thomas states is that Divine Mission is only eternal since it is only procession. “Further, mission implies procession. But the procession of the divine persons is eternal. Therefore, mission is also eternal.”114 Divine Mission is both eternal and temporal not either or. Aquinas, therefore, suggests the possibility of “twin procession” in Divine Mission

Mission signifies not only procession from the principle, but also determines the temporal term of the procession. Hence mission is only temporal. Or we may say that it includes the eternal procession, with the addition of a temporal effect. For the relation of a divine person to His principle must be eternal.

109 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 2, Objection 1.
111 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 2, Objection 2.
112 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 2, Reply to Objection 2.
113 Emery, The Trinitarian Theology of Aquinas Aquinas, 368.
114 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 2, Objection 3.
Hence the procession may be called a twin procession, eternal and temporal, not that there is a double relation to the principle, but a double term, temporal and eternal.\textsuperscript{115}

In his \textit{Summary} on this second article, Aquinas clarifies the principle of \textit{processio-missio} in Divine Mission: To be sent is either \textit{processio} or \textit{missio}—\textit{processio} as eternal and \textit{missio} as temporal. Aquinas uses the term generation for the eternal procession of the son and spiration for the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit. The equivalent of these two terms in temporal terms respectively is mission and giving.

Of these some express the eternal term, as “generation” and “spiration”; for generation is the procession of the divine person into the divine nature, and passive spiration is the procession of the subsisting love. Others express the temporal term with the relation to the principle, as “mission” and “giving.”\textsuperscript{116}

St. Thomas goes on to clarify whether the terms mission, giving, generation and spiration are eternal or temporal or both. Aquinas argues that the principle of \textit{processio-missio} in Divine Mission implies that there is no dichotomy between the immanent and economic Trinity.

Hence “mission” and “giving” have only a temporal significance in God; but “generation” and “spiration” are exclusively eternal; whereas “procession” and “giving,” in God, have both an eternal and a temporal signification: for the Son may proceed eternally as God; but temporally, by becoming man, according to His visible mission, or likewise by dwelling in man according to His invisible mission.\textsuperscript{117}

\textit{Missio} in Divine Mission is not only from the point of view of origin but also from the point of view of arrival. Divine Mission is not only of divine origin but also of divine means and divine end.

\textbf{3. Article III}

The third article is about the invisible mission which is God’s \textit{missio} among human beings through sanctifying grace: “In what sense a divine person is invisibly sent? (Whether the invisible mission of the divine person is only according to the gift of sanctifying

\textsuperscript{115} \textit{Summa Theologiae}, I, Question 43, Article 2, Reply to Objection 3.

\textsuperscript{116} \textit{Summa Theologiae}, I, Question 43, Article 2.

\textsuperscript{117} \textit{Summa Theologiae}, I, Question 43, Article 2.
This brings the notion of Divine Mission not just as sending but as giving—datio. Through the invisible mission of the divine Persons the gift of sanctifying grace is given. Garrigou-Lagrange explains the nature of God’s giving—datio,

[I]t is not only created grace but also a divine person that is given; secondly, we shall see that the grace is according to the Holy Ghost, because grace is given us through Him; and lastly, we ask why the Son and the Holy Ghost are not said to be sent according to the graces gratis datae.119

The objections to this proposition is the belief that if the divine person is “sent only according to the gift of sanctifying grace, the divine person Himself will not be given.”120

It would seem that the invisible mission of the divine person is not only according to the gift of sanctifying grace. For the sending of a divine person means that He is given. Hence if the divine person is sent only according to the gift of sanctifying grace, the divine person Himself will not be given, but only His gifts; and this is the error of those who say that the Holy Ghost is not given, but that His gifts are given.121

St. Thomas replies to this objection by saying that “the invisible mission takes place according to the gift of sanctifying grace; and yet the divine person Himself is given.”122 Commenting on this article, Garrigou-Lagrange says that Aquinas joins missio and datio here, not because they are entirely the same but because they are in a certain way in agreement.123 In Divine Mission not just created gifts but the divine Persons themselves are given. “By the gift of sanctifying grace the rational creature is perfected so that it can freely use not only the created gift itself, but enjoy also the divine person Himself.”124

St. Thomas affirms that the invisible mission is not just through sanctifying grace but also the gift of the persons. “The divine person is fittingly sent in the sense that He exists newly in any one; and He is given as possessed by anyone; and neither of these is otherwise

118 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 3.
120 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 3.
121 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 3, Objection 1.
122 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 3, Reply to Objection 1.
124 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 3, Reply to Objection 1.
than by sanctifying grace.”

Aquinas also implies in this article the fittingness of creation to receive God’s gift of themselves in the Divine Mission. As Kelly affirms, “God reaches out to human beings in a manner that accords with their nature (connaturaliter).”

Aquinas affirms the truth that God is in all creation. Moreover, he underscores God’s extraordinary presence in humans which corresponds to humans primordial identity as imago Dei—created in the image and likeness of God.

For God is in all things by His essence, power and presence, according to His one common mode, as the cause existing in the effects which participate in His goodness. Above and beyond this common mode, however, there is one special mode belonging to the rational nature wherein God is said to be present as the object known is in the knower, and the beloved in the lover. And since the rational creature by its operation of knowledge and love attains to God Himself, according to this special mode God is said not only to exist in the rational creature but also to dwell therein as in His own temple.

God’s special presence among humans can only happen through sanctifying grace.

As Kelly explains, God’s sanctifying grace implies that “our intentional existence is drawn into the transcendent depth of divine communion underlying all creation. God, knowing and loving, indwells the soul, as known and loved in return.” Thus, Divine Mission can only be accomplished in time through sanctifying grace.

So no other effect can be put down as the reason why the divine person is in the rational creature in a new mode, except sanctifying grace. Hence, the divine person is sent, and proceeds temporally only according to sanctifying grace.

4. Article IV

The fourth article concerns with who among the persons in the Trinity are properly sent: Who is sent and what is the fittingness of their being sent. A particular question of interest is whether the Father is also sent. “Whether it is fitting that each person be sent?

125 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 3.
127 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 3.
129 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 3.
(Whether the Father can be fittingly sent?)”130 St. Thomas inquired about whether missio can
be applied to the Father by virtue that the Father is given through sanctifying grace.

It would seem that it is fitting also that the Father should be sent. For being sent means that the divine
person is given. But the Father gives Himself since He can only be possessed by His giving Himself.
Therefore it can be said that the Father sends Himself.131

But Aquinas replies that missio only applies to the Son and the Holy Spirit as they are
the only persons who proceeds from another:

In the sense of “giving” as a free bestowal of something, the Father gives Himself, as freely bestowing
Himself to be enjoyed by the creature. But as implying the authority of the giver as regards what is
given, “to be given” only applies in God to the Person Who is from another; and the same as regards
“being sent.”132

Accordingly, St. Thomas explains that the Father cannot be possibly sent since he does
not proceed from another.

Although the effect of grace is also from the Father, Who dwells in us by grace, just as the Son and the
Holy Ghost, still He is not described as being sent, for He is not from another. Thus Augustine says (De
Trin. iv, 20) that “The Father, when known by anyone in time, is not said to be sent; for there is no one
whence He is, or from whom He proceeds.”133

Therefore, missio and processio cannot apply to the Father as he is not visibly sent
and does not proceed from anyone he is properly not sent. In Summary, Aquinas explains,

The very idea of mission means procession from another, and in God it means procession according to
origin, as above expounded. Hence, as the Father is not from another, in no way is it fitting for Him to
be sent; but this can only belong to the Son and to the Holy Ghost, to Whom it belongs to be from
another.134

5. Article V

Article 5 concerns about the question whether the invisible mission can be applied to
the Son and Holy Spirit. “Whether both the Son and the Holy Ghost are invisibly sent?

130 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 4.
131 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 4, Objection 1.
132 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 4, Reply to Objection 1.
133 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 4, Reply to Objection 2.
134 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 4.
Whether it is fitting for the Son to be sent invisibly? As in previous articles of Divine Mission where the notion of locomotion does not apply, mission as sent does not imply that God traveled from heaven to earth. This can help to understand the concept of invisible mission. Garrigou-Lagrange comments on this,

The Son was sent visibly by the Incarnation, but He is also sent invisibly, for He said: “And We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him”; and besides this the Son has His origin from the Father. Thus He is sent invisibly according to the gift of grace gratum faciens.

Several objections were put forward by Aquinas to the possibility that the Son is invisibly sent.

The whole Trinity dwells in the mind by sanctifying grace, according to Jn. 14:23: “We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him.” But that a divine person be sent to anyone by invisible grace signifies both that this person dwells in a new way within him and that He has His origin from another. Hence, since both to the Son and to the Holy Ghost it belongs to dwell in the soul by grace, and to be from another, it therefore belongs to both of them to be invisibly sent.

Kelly calls the invisible missio of the Son and the Holy Spirit as divine-human communication. Kelly describes this,

[T]here results a transformed intentionality as the human subject, in its knowing and loving, relates to the divine subject in its own self-knowing and loving. The Trinity becomes newly present in the interpersonal knowledge and love existing between the Trinitarian selfhood of God and the human self (novus modus essendi in alio).

6. Article VI

The sixth article concerns the inquiry whether the invisible mission was also sent before the Incarnation and Pentecost, for example to the fathers of the Old Testament.

135 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 5.
137 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 5.
Aquinas asks: “To whom the invisible mission is directed? Whether the invisible mission is to all who participate in grace?” Aquinas poses several objections to this article:

It would seem that the invisible mission is not to all who participate grace. For the fathers of the Old Testament had their share of grace. Yet to them was made no invisible mission; for it is said (Jn. 7:39): “The Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” Therefore the invisible mission is not to all partakers in grace.

St. Thomas answer is that the Holy Spirit was sent to all who are open to God’s grace.

As above stated (AA[3],4,5), mission in its very meaning implies that he who is sent either begins to exist where he was not before, as occurs to creatures; or begins to exist where he was before, but in a new way, in which sense mission is ascribed to the divine Persons. Thus, mission as regards the one to whom it is sent implies two things, the indwelling of grace, and a certain renewal by grace. Thus the invisible mission is sent to all in whom are to be found these two conditions.

Aquinas, therefore, maintains that the invisible mission was also given to the fathers of the Old Testament as they were open to God’s grace. “According to Augustine (De Trin. iii, 4; xv, 27), the invisible mission is for the creature’s sanctification. Now every creature that has grace is sanctified. Therefore the invisible mission is to every such creature.” As Garrigou-Lagrange explains, “The Holy Trinity dwelt in the fathers of the Old Testament by the fact that they were in the state of grace, and the Son and the Holy Ghost were invisibly sent to them. But the Holy Ghost was not sent visibly except at our Lord’s baptism and on Pentecost.”

7. Article VII

Article 7 concerns with the question whether the Holy Spirit was sent visibly. “Of the visible mission. Whether it is fitting for the Holy Ghost to be sent visibly?” Aquinas explains that the Holy Spirit was not sent visibly in the same way that the Son was sent

140 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 6.
141 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 6, Objection 1.
142 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 6.
143 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 6.
145 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 7.
visibly but only in a way that is fitting to human beings—that is to provide visible manifestations of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit was sent visibly to human beings in a manner that is fitting to human capacity to receive the Holy Spirit.

It is not necessary that the invisible mission should always be made manifest by some visible external sign; but, as is said (1 Cor. 12:7)--"the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man unto profit"---that is, of the Church. This utility consists in the confirmation and propagation of the faith by such visible signs. This has been done chiefly by Christ and by the Apostles, according to Heb. 2:3, "which having begun to be declared by the Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that heard."146

St. Thomas also explains that the Holy Spirit was visibly sent for the Son:

The visible mission was directed to Christ at the time of His baptism by the figure of a dove, a fruitful animal, to show forth in Christ the authority of the giver of grace by spiritual regeneration; hence the Father’s voice spoke, "This is My beloved Son" (Mat. 3:17), that others might be regenerated to the likeness of the only Begotten. The Transfiguration showed it forth in the appearance of a bright cloud, to show the exuberance of doctrine; and hence it was said, "Hear ye Him" (Mat. 17:5).147

The Holy Spirit was also visibly sent to the Apostles especially on the day of Pentecost.

To the Apostles the mission was directed in the form of breathing to show forth the power of their ministry in the dispensation of the sacraments; and hence it was said, "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven" (Jn. 20:23); and again under the sign of fiery tongues to show forth the office of teaching; whence it is said that, "they began to speak with divers tongues" (Acts 2:4).148

However, the Holy Spirit was not visibly sent to the fathers of the Old Testament

The visible mission of the Holy Ghost was fittingly not sent to the fathers of the Old Testament, because the visible mission of the Son was to be accomplished before that of the Holy Ghost; since the Holy Ghost manifests the Son, as the Son manifests the Father. Visible apparitions of the divine Persons were, however, given to the fathers of the Old Testament which, indeed, cannot be called visible missions; because, according to Augustine (De Trin. ii, 17), they were not sent to designate the indwelling of the divine person by grace, but for the manifestation of something else.149

Garrigou-Lagrange explains that the visible mission of the Holy Spirit is fitting because it is connatural to man to be led by visible things to the invisible. These visible missions are to the Trinity of persons as creatures are to the one God, that is, God manifests

146 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 7, Reply to Objection 6.
147 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 7.
148 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 7.
149 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 7.
Himself as triune in these visible events, namely, in the incarnation of the Son and in the heavenly fire of Pentecost. As Aquinas explains,

I answer that, God provides for all things according to the nature of each thing. Now the nature of man requires that he be led to the invisible by visible things, as explained above (Q[12], A[12]). Wherefore the invisible things of God must be made manifest to man by the things that are visible. As God, therefore, in a certain way has demonstrated Himself and His eternal processions to men by visible creatures, according to certain signs; so was it fitting that the invisible missions also of the divine Persons should be made manifest by some visible creatures.

St. Thomas explains the difference between the visible manifestations of the Son and Holy Spirit based on their distinctiveness in the Trinity:

“This mode of manifestation applies in different ways to the Son and to the Holy Ghost. For it belongs to the Holy Ghost, Who proceeds as Love, to be the gift of sanctification; to the Son as the principle of the Holy Ghost, it belongs to the author of this sanctification. Thus the Son has been sent visibly as the author of sanctification; the Holy Ghost as the sign of sanctification.”

8. Article VIII

The last article concerns with the question by whom are the divine sent? This could be expanded into the question of who sent whom. “Whether any person sends Himself visibly or invisibly? Whether a divine person is sent only by the person whence, He proceeds eternally?” The obvious reply which the general idea of mission seems to imply is that the Son is sent by the Father, who engenders him, and the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father and Son from whom he proceeds. Aquinas affirms this in his reply to the objections:

There is some truth in both of these opinions; because when a person is described as being sent, the person Himself existing from another is designated, with the visible or invisible effect, applicable to the mission of the divine person. Thus if the sender be designated as the principle of the person sent, in this sense not each person sends, but that person only Who is the principle of that person who is sent; and thus the Son is sent only by the Father; and the Holy Ghost by the Father and the Son. If, however, the person sending is understood as the principle of the effect implied in the mission, in that sense the whole Trinity sends the person sent. This reason does not prove that a man can send the Holy Ghost,

151 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 7.
152 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 7.
153 Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 8.
154 Emery, The Trinitarian Theology of Aquinas Aquinas, 370.
forasmuch as man cannot cause the effect of grace. The answers to the objections appear from the above.\textsuperscript{155}

In summary, Aquinas defines mission theologically as the sending of a divine Person to creatures by the other Person (or Persons) from which the one sent proceeds eternally. Hence the Father is sent by no one, the Son is sent by the Father, and the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son. Only the Son and the Holy Spirit are sent, because they are the only two Persons who proceed eternally in God. The Father himself is not sent, but the missions of Son and Holy Spirit culminate in him. Thus, the missions of Son and Holy Spirit present and disclose the Father.\textsuperscript{156}

II. Appropriating Augustine and Aquinas’ Divine Mission

In this section we will critically investigate some significant implications of Augustine and Aquinas’ notion of Divine Mission for theology of mission today. This is not a comprehensive but a preliminary sketch of a theology of mission springing from Augustine and Aquinas’ notion of Divine Mission.

We are not trying to bring back the notion of Divine Mission in its pristine form, but rather to construct new interpretations by recollecting the old. What we are trying to do is analogous to the liturgical act of remembrance called \textit{anamnesis}. As Paul Ashton explains,

\textit{Anamnesis} means remembrance or reminiscence, the collection and recollection of what has been lost, forgotten, or effaced. It is, therefore, a matter of the very old, of what has made us who we are. But \textit{anamnesis} is also a work that transforms its subject, always producing something new. To recollect the old, to produce the new, that is the task of \textit{Anamnesis}.\textsuperscript{157}

A. God Sends God: Reconsidering Sending

Augustine and Aquinas teaching on Divine Mission locate and root the theological meaning ‘sending’ or \textit{missio} in God. In this way, Augustine and Aquinas notion of Divine

\textsuperscript{155} \textit{Summa Theologiae}, I, Question 43, Article 8.
\textsuperscript{156} Emery, \textit{The Trinitarian Theology of Aquinas}, 377.
\textsuperscript{157} Paul Ashton, T. Nicolacopoulos, and G. Vassilacopoulos, eds., \textit{The Spirit of the Age: Hegel and the Fate of Thinking} (Melbourne: Re.Press, 2008), iv.
Mission helped to lucidly distinguish between divine and human mission. Their construed challenges the Church to re-interpret the human understanding of sending and align them with God’s epitome of sending.

Bernard Lonergan declares, “All anthropomorphism must be excluded from a Divine Mission.”\textsuperscript{158} We need to leave behind anthropocentric ideas and intentions of sending, for example, power, status and authority in order to understand the true meaning of Mission. Power, domination, control and authoritarianism—all too common in human sendings—do not play a part in God’s missio. It is rather, giving and witnessing that is the hallmark of Divine Mission. Thus, Divine Mission serves as a critique and challenge to anthropocentric exercise of mission.

Commenting on Question 43 of the Summa, Stacy Trasancos argues that although “sending on a mission” may be taken to mean the command from one who is superior to another, in God this is not so because the divine Persons are coequal and coeternal.\textsuperscript{159} This also does not mean that the divine Person is sent on Mission independently of the others. It shows, however, how each divine Person works according to one’s unique personality so that we can have a clearer and more personal understanding of the divine Persons in their perfections.\textsuperscript{160}

Sending in Divine Mission is also not constricted and bound by time and space. Sending as spatial, and time-bound does not apply to Divine Mission since God is eternal and is everywhere. Lonergan argues that in God, both the mind of the sender and the revelation of that mind are nothing other than what we said concerning the constitution of a Divine


\textsuperscript{160} Trasancos, “The External Divine Missions of the Holy Trinity.”
Mission. Thus, traditional images of God travelling from up in heaven down to earth as images of sending only serves human’s romantic or devotional expression. This challenges conventional images and metaphors of the sending of the Son and Holy Spirit, as Lonergan further explains,

> Therefore, since the divine persons are not only incorporeal but also omnipresent, movement from one place to another contributes little or nothing to our understanding of a Divine Mission. For although it is quite devotional and most useful for us to imagine the Son or the Holy Spirit coming down from the heights of heaven, our present quest is for an understanding, not an image, of a Divine Mission.

The new meaning of sending in accordance with Divine Mission can help to rectify some problematic understanding about sending today. A common misperception is that sending is an external activity of God separate from the inner life of the Trinity. This misconception developed into the use of “sending” to connect God with the world that was reduced to a range of mediating entities external to who God is in and for himself, as Flett argues. Because of this, “sending” became vulnerable to manipulation by a range of agenda, which were not shaped by the doctrine of the Trinity but became confirmed by its authority. Worst, the Trinitarian formula merely served as a preamble for a wide variety of seemingly inconsistent positions in the name of *Missio Dei*. This is what happened particularly in the modern missionary expansion: “Though theologically grounded in God, the human act of ‘sending’ succumbed to the colonialist agenda by being framed in terms of geographical expansion.”

Another prevalent problematic conception of mission is the interpretation of the act of sending by God in a linear, top-down and hierarchical way: God→Church→world. Modern sending theology states that God sent the Son, the Son sent the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit

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sent the Church, and the Church is sent to the world. This linear direction of sending contributed to a triumphalistic and ethnocentric mission as we saw in the modern missionary movement. It also promoted a hierarchical and vertical relationship evident in the ecclesial relationship within the ethos of Christendom. This linear direction is problematic from the very start, as it overlooks the rich dynamics of the mutual indwelling and interconnectedness of each person within the Trinity. Wolfhart Pannenberg expounds on this rich Trinitarian dynamics which challenges the conventional linear understanding of sending:

The Father does not merely beget the Son. He also hands over his Kingdom to him and receives it back from him. The Son is not merely begotten of the Father. He is obedient to him and, therefore, glorifies him in his obedience to the Father, thereby glorifying the Father himself. In so doing he leads into all truth (John 16:3) and searches out the deep things of Godhead (1 Cor. 2:10-11).  

Thus, sending in God is neither linear nor vertical. There is ‘sentness’ within Trinity—the eternal processions (immanent Trinity) and ‘sentness’ in the Trinity’s interruption into God’s own creation—temporal mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit (economic Trinity). These are not, however, two or multiple sendings but one since God is one. Thus, Mark Love alternatively suggested a participatory understanding of God’s sending similar to the *perichōrētic* dynamics of the Trinitarian God: “God is no longer a series of one-way sendings in a straight line but a participatory God making room for the other with movements in all directions.” Matthey insists that God is not just sending to the world, but he is in the world, through the world, and cares for the world. God is the drama of Mission on earth and heaven where we are all invited to participate.

The full appreciation of the ownership of Mission as God’s can help to dispel the illusion that the Church is the one primarily sent. In Divine Mission, it is the Son and the Holy Spirit who is primarily sent. The ‘sentness’ of the Church is an analogical participation with

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169 Matthey, *Trinity As Paradigm for Missio Dei,*
the ‘sentness’ of the Son and the Holy Spirit. “As the Father sent me, so I am sending you” (John 20: 21). It is analogical since the church’s participation in Divine Mission is, both and at the same time, a participation and non-participation.

In this context, the church is sent (missionary) only by virtue of their participation in the sending of the Divine Mission. Mission is on the one hand, God’s initiative and God’s completion, and on the other hand, human participation. This cooperative dynamics between divine cause and human agency is essential in Mission. The divinisation of mission, however, does not eradicate the humanness in mission. Divine Mission does not obliterate the radical distinction between God’s Missio and human mission.

Jacob Kavunkal also deplores the reduction of Missio Dei to the notion of sending. Kavunkal’s main critique is that the concept of sending limits considerably the whole gamut of God’s Mission; God’s Mission is much more than just sending. Kavunkal instead proposes extensio Dei as an alternative paradigm of mission—since in God, sending means God extending God’s triune life to all of creation. Sending in God’s Mission is precisely God’s gratuitous offer of his divine life to all of creation and the indwelling of God in human beings. It is not an external activity of God outside of God’s inner being. It is this kind of sending that God invites the church and the world to partake.

This new understanding of sending, therefore, necessitates new and alternative metaphors of mission. One such metaphor is “blooming” which was proposed by Anthony Kelly. Kelly describes this new metaphor of Mission,

\[\text{[O]nce the spatial limits \ldots are recognised, the reality is more like a blooming or an emergence of the mystery out of the depths of existence. What could have been, or appeared to be, a universe of simple fact, however uncanny, is now irradiated as a field of divine consciousness. God dwells in us, and we dwell in God in the circulation of divine life and love.}\]

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170 Eastern church’s understanding of divinisation or theosis
172 Kelly, An Expanding Theology.
This new metaphor shows that God is not only the Sender but simultaneously the One, who is sent and the effect of the sending. Vicedom beautifully describes this integral unity of sending in God,

God makes Himself not only the One sent, but at the same time the Content of the sending, without dissolving through this Trinity of revelation the equality of essence of the divine Persons. For in every Person of the deity God works in His entirety. That process of the intra-divine sending is of eminent significance for the mission and work of the church. The church’s commission is prefigured in the divine; her work is there assigned.173

B. Theocentricity of Mission

Augustine and Aquinas were “intoxicated” with God in all their writings. The theocentricity of Augustine and Aquinas implies a dynamic, not static, God.

The theocentricity of Augustine and Aquinas’ writings is also ubiquitous in their notion of Divine Mission. While Divine Mission connotes sending and procession, Augustine and Aquinas argued that Divine Mission does not contradict divine attributes. Divine Mission is not incompatible with the attributes of God especially divine simplicity and perfection. To say that God has a mission, for example, contradicts God’s simplicity, as God cannot have parts.174 God does not have a mission; rather God is Mission. In line with God’s simplicity and perfection, God’s Mission is a continuous, changeless dynamic operative in the world, while the created effects of Divine Mission in the diverse forms of missions of the church and the world in different contexts and cultures, vary over time and space (and are, thus, historical and existentially experienced as changing and wide-ranging). Mission will remain properly an attribute of God even if human beings participate or cooperate in it or not, even if human beings attain full communion with the Triune God. People cannot claim ownership of Mission, for Mission is God’s. In other words Mission is not “of the nature” or constitutive of any created being but only of God.


Using the framework of ‘cause-effect’ of *ipsum esse subsistens*, the relationship between Divine Mission and our mission also bears a cause-effect relation. The existence of our mission is derived from the Mission of God. As Aquinas said, “Being related to God is a reality in creatures, but being related to creatures is not a reality in God.” Divine Mission is not ultimately dependent upon our mission whereas our mission is initially and ultimately dependent upon God’s Mission. More than just the sustaining cause of all missions, Divine Mission which contains all perfections as in *ipsum esse subsistens* is also the exemplary cause and final cause of all missions.

Participation in Divine Mission means that our mission can imitate the relationship within God’s Mission. The relations between divine persons are the primary relations in Divine Mission—the *processio* (eternal processions) and *missio* (temporal missions). There is no denial of the imperfectness and inadequacy of our missions, which prevent its full identification with the Divine Mission. There is a clear distinction between God’s Mission and our praxis of missions. God is intimately and immediately present to everything that we do in missions for every mission is a participation in God’s Mission. However, every mission is an imperfect reflection of God’s perfect and infinite Mission; thus, our missions are in constant renewal on the road towards the fullness of Divine Mission. This implies the transitory and pilgrim nature of our mission amidst the permanent and ultimate nature of Divine Mission.

God’s Mission is infinite and necessary which is not ultimately dependent on our missions. God’s Mission is its very own being-ness and is not in reference to any missions. In contrast, human mission are contingent and finite since our mission originated from the infinite Divine Mission. All goodness and splendour that can ever be found in missions is already in the goodness and glory of Divine Mission. It is in this light that we need to be wary

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175 *Summa Theologiae* I, Question 50, Article 2.
of human and church’s mission’s projection of anthropocentric ideologies and agenda upon Divine Mission. God’s Mission is the measure of church mission, not vice versa.

Thus, Divine Mission is the unlimited possibility of mission. God’s Mission is unlimitedly good; Divine Mission is supremely good without limits. Any unity, truth, or goodness, which we find in mission, is a pale reflection of the unity, truth, and goodness, in Divine Mission. The wide variety of missions in the world suggests the depth and breadth of the goodness and perfection of God’s Mission. God intends to diffuse the goodness and perfection of God’s Mission by a broad and vibrant participation of missions.

C. God Gives God: Mission as Gift

The idea of mission as primarily a gift is often overlooked in mission. Because of the anthropocentric and ecclesiocentric tendencies in mission, oftentimes, mission was understood more as going out and doing something—activities, strategies and pastoral programs. Concomitantly, there has been little talk about the relationship between sanctifying grace and mission in recent missiological discourse. The notion of divine grace, however, has an important place in mission. As Louis Bouyer argued, the scholastic notion of created grace is often belittled today but expresses the incontrovertible fact that “it is we ourselves, and our creaturely being, which the active presence in us of the Spirit makes divine, without for that reason absorbing us and annihilating us in God.”

Divine Mission is not just sending—missio, but is also giving—datio. God has also implanted within creation and humanity the gift to receive God. It is God who sends, and it is also God who receives in humanity. God sends; humanity receives, through God. Thus, “mission” here acquires a new meaning. It does not only refer to God sending God but it also means humanity receiving God through God. Mission as God’s giving and receiving in God indicates the presence of a divine Person in creature—the indwelling of the divine persons in

the souls of the just. This highlights the utter giftedness of Mission—Mission is a sheer act of giving and gift. We neither merit nor earned the gift; it comes from the sheer gratuitousness of God.

Augustine and Aquinas believes that in the temporal missions the Son and Spirit are, always ‘sent to a place where they already are; that God has “neither begins to exist where he did not previously exist, nor ceases to exist where He was.”’\(^\text{177}\) This implies that there is no place that the missionary had been to or will go to that God had not been there before they arrived. The primary missionary is God who called the church and the missionary to participate in God’s Mission. However, before the missionary arrives, God has already sowed God’s gift of divine life to the people. As the famous advice of Max Warren for missionaries says, “When you go into a mission area, take off your shoes, for the ground that you are standing is holy—God was here before your arrival.”\(^\text{178}\)

This is what Augustine and Aquinas taught in the divine processions. Emery explains, “As far as the recipient is concerned, the created gifts have to arrive before the divine person does because they dispose us to receive him.”\(^\text{179}\) Similarly, Flett argues that human participation in the divine is a result of the prior reality of divine participation in human being.\(^\text{180}\) God’s Mission is already in the world, within us even before we participate in God’s Mission. Only as humans participate in Jesus Christ’s own humanity do they participate in the life of God.\(^\text{181}\)

All these indicate that Divine Mission is utterly gratuitous, and its completion is not dependent on anything that we can do in our mission. Thus, every mission’s proper

\(^{177}\) Summa Theologiae, I, Question 43, Article 1.


\(^{179}\) Emery, The Trinitarian Theology of Aquinas Aquinas, 376.


disposition towards Divine Mission is gratitude and dependence on the pre-eminence of God in missions. The bountiful work of God’s Mission in the world is not a work that is necessitated by God’s creation, but as the work that causes the good and makes the creation lovable. God sends the divine persons in creation not out of necessity, but through God’s own will. As Aquinas writes,

> God is outside the whole order of creation, and all creatures are ordered to Him, and not conversely, it is manifest that creatures are really related to God Himself; whereas in God there is no real relation to creatures, but a relation only in idea, inasmuch as creatures are referred to Him.  

The importance of divine grace in mission is expressed most appropriately in the notion of prevenient grace. “Prevenient (or preceeding) grace” implies that God’s grace which is present everywhere prepares us to receive the Gospel. As Jesus said, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (John 6:44). Timothy Tennent explains that there is a “drawing” or “preparing” which precedes our actual conversion.

Both Augustine and Aquinas talked about prevenient grace. Aquinas quotes Augustine as he talked about prevenient grace,

> And as one effect is posterior to this effect, and prior to that, so may grace be called prevenient and subsequent on account of the same effect viewed relatively to divers others. And this is what Augustine says (De Natura et Gratia xxxi): “It is prevenient, inasmuch as it heals, and subsequent, inasmuch as, being healed, we are strengthened; it is prevenient, inasmuch as we are called, and subsequent, inasmuch as we are glorified.”

Prevenient grace is all of the work of God that enables good human activity with the hope that persons would be led to saving grace in all its forms. The longing for wholeness and the hope for eternity are all yearnings placed there by God. As Saint Augustine proclaims, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in

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182 Summa Theologiae I Question 13, Article 7c.
184 Summa Theologiae II, Question 111, Article 3.
Human beings are proffered grace by God with the hopes that they would seek him and find him (Acts 17:27).

That God’s grace is immanent in all places raises some questions for the Catholic Church’s insistence on the primacy of *missio ad gentes*. The Catholic Church maintains that *ad gentes* remain a top priority of the mission of the church. There are new areas of *missio ad gentes* today that needs church response. In emphasizing *ad gentes*, the Catholic Church must be careful, however, not to repeat the mistakes of the modernist understanding and practice of *ad gentes*—being triumphalistic and imposing one’s (Western) culture to these new areas of *ad gentes*. That Divine Mission is not just sending but a gift that missionaries encounter and experience in the people they were sent to, entails that the church needs to be mindful that God has already been there even before the missionaries has arrived.

The Catholic Church, however, is correct in affirming the permanent validity of the missionary vocation of everyone. The church admits that one does not need to become “professional missionaries” and go to foreign lands for mission. The ubiquity of God’s prevenient grace implies that one can experience and do mission even from one’s own backyard.

God’s prevenient grace does not just work in persons but also in cultures. Prevenient grace is the Incarnation of Divine Mission in the various cultures and context. As African scholar John Mbiti, once said, “The missionaries who introduced the Gospel to Africa in the past two hundred years did not bring God to our continent. Instead, God brought them.”

By acknowledging God’s prevenient work in the world, the Church can do missions in a way

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187 Saint Augustine, Confessions, I, 1.
188 *Redemptoris Missio*, #40.
189 *Redemptoris Missio*, #40.
that meets people where they are, listens for what God has already done, and is present in the world through holistic ministry.  

The awareness of God’s grace among the people even before the missionaries arrive upholds the conviction that local people are active not passive agents in mission. They are continuously and dynamically seeking and appropriating the Divine Mission in their local culture and context.

When missionaries are so full of and absorbed in so many mighty activities and projects in mission, they often overlook that first of all the only one thing necessary (Luke 10: 42) is to ‘enjoy’ God’s grace already working in the people whom the missionaries have perceived to craving for their mighty missionary endeavours. As missionaries become so focused on their goals, they forget the real goal of Divine Mission—that of the indwelling of the Trinity in the souls of the just; the possession or enjoyment of the divine persons. The moment of sanctification is a moment of Divine Mission, as Emery explains while commenting on Aquinas,

> When the Holy Spirit is sent, within a sanctifying gift, he is really given to the person who ‘possesses’ him. The person who receives the Holy Spirit’s mission ‘enjoys’ the divine person himself. A mission takes place where his recipient can ‘enjoy’ not just created gifts, but the divine person himself.  

The many tasks and programs that missionaries work so hard often betray the hidden desire to make the people need them. Their obsession with activities also leads them to overlook the priority of the interpersonal dynamic; that in any missionary endeavor, they are not just givers but also recipients.

As God’s gift is unowed to creature which shows the utter gratuitousness of God’s Mission, the first response to God’s Mission is gratitude, then awe and wonder. That is why Augustine and Aquinas call this gift gratia gratum faciens—grace making someone gracious! In this light, many contemporary missiologists have proposed new, as alternative to old, metaphors of mission which conveys the spirit of mission as a gift. Stephen Bevans and

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Roger Schroeder advocated the paradigm of mission as dialogue as alternative to mission as conquest. Bevans and Schroeder presented several images of mission as dialogue. First, the missionary might be imaged as *treasure hunter*. The image of a *treasure hunter* was first used by Robert T. Rush. Bevans and Schroeder also describes the missionary as *treasure hunter*,

Rather than the image of the missionary coming into a particular place already bearing a treasure, this image highlights the fact that—while she or he does bring something of inestimable value—the missionary’s task is also to search for the treasure that is already present there.

As treasure hunters in a foreign land, missionaries are also deeply aware that they are *guests*. Moreover, as guests, missionaries always remain *strangers*. Bevans and Schroeder explain why the missionary is a *stranger*; “Strangers, too, are blessings, but they also are sources of challenge and uneasiness within a group or society. And so strangers have to be very careful not to impose their strange ideas on the people among whom they have come.” In his writings, Roger Schroeder has proposed a fourth image: *entering into someone else’s garden*. Roger Schroeder’s explains the task of the missionary as *entering into someone else’s garden*;

One enters another’s garden not to compare its beauty and variety with one’s own, but to appreciate another way of gardening, another way of arranging the flower beds or vegetable patches, another way of pruning and weeding… On a deeper level, the plants valued as bearing life-giving fruit in that particular garden represent how God is already present and nurturing them, the seeds of the word of God, or using the term from above, the treasure buried in this ground.

Donal Dorr broached the notion of mission as exchange of gifts: “[T]here is a two-way exchange of gifts, between missionaries and the people among whom they work.”

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195 Bevans and Schroeder, “We Were Gentle Among You.”

196 Bevans and Schroeder, “We Were Gentle Among You.”

That mission is not just a matter of doing things for people. It is first of all a matter of being with people, of listening and sharing with them.”\textsuperscript{198} In the spirit of the awareness of the presence of God’s gift between missionary and the people, there is the realisation that mission should be done in vulnerability and humility, with a sense of being open to be evangelised by those whom we are evangelising. This involves what Bosch called “mission in reverse,”\textsuperscript{199} or what Paul Yonggap Jeong called a shift in “mission from a position of power to a mission from a position of weakness.”\textsuperscript{200}

Missions as gratuitousness of God’s gift are done not out of utility or productivity. Missions are not just implementation of strategies, programs and activities nor following some vision, mission and goals. Missions as gift are carried out in creative delight; missions follow the pattern of God’s creation. When God created everything, God did not create them because God is incomplete without them but as an inherent overflow of God’s sheer goodness and joy: “And God said, and there was … and it was good!” (Genesis 1). Similarly, missions are participation in the utter generosity of God. Missions expresses what Pope Francis said in his first encyclical—the joy in evangelisation.\textsuperscript{201}

D. No Dichotomy in Divine Mission, God’s Being and Act Are One

Augustine’s and Aquinas’ construal of Divine Mission as one and at the same time eternal processions and temporal missions affirms that there is no dichotomy between the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity. Aquinas’ processio-missio continuum offers a framework that not only unites the immanent and economic aspects of the Trinity, but also locates mission in the life and work of the Trinity—creation, redemption, and the new

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[198]{Max Warren, “Preface.”}
\footnotetext[199]{Bosch, \textit{Transforming Mission}, 489.}
\footnotetext[201]{Pope Paul VI, \textit{Evangeli Nuntiandi}, 1.}
\end{footnotes}
creation. Thus, the widespread perception that Augustine and Aquinas privileged the immanent over the economic and that their Trinitarian began in De Deo Uno and moved to De Deo Trino needs to be rethought, if not entirely discarded.

Mary Clark argues that there is no evidence in De Trinitate that Augustine asserted divine unity to be prior to Trinity, nor Trinity to unity. This was confirmed by our readings of De Trinitate. That the divine persons act inseparably ad extra according to their relative properties ad intra is an assumption Augustine shares not only with the entire Latin pro-Nicene tradition but also the Greek-speaking theologians of the East (e.g., the Cappadocians). As against the reductionist thesis that the economy is just the extension of the De Deo Uno, Aquinas taught that the Father creating the world through the Son and in the Spirit runs so deep that the Trinitarian processions are the cause, rationale, and exemplar of the world and its creatures, and of their return to God. He has a genuinely Trinitarian doctrine of action.

The notion of Divine Mission in Augustine and Aquinas upholds the unity of the immanent and economic Trinity. The Mission of God is one and the same in the immanent and economic life of the Trinity. There is nothing to bridge the gap between God’s being and act since God’s being and act are one. Divine Mission is not an adjunct act of God in creation. Divine Mission is both being and act of God in relation to God’s creation. The economic acts of God ad extra reveal and correspond to the immanent life of God ad intra in Divine Mission.


204 Emery, The Trinitarian Theology of Aquinas Aquinas, 413.

Divine Mission does not only refer to God’s work in salvation history (economic Trinity) but also the work within the inner life of God. In modern times, what was emphasized more was the history of salvation (economic Trinity), neglecting the affirmation about the presence itself of God (immanent Trinity). In Sik Hong argues that understanding Divine Mission based only on the economic Trinity pointing to what made God in the world would translate into an image of conquest, domain, colonization and missionary production.206 There should not be mere dichotomy between God’s being (immanent) and act (economy) but also that neither one is downgraded for the benefit of the other or advantaged at the expense of the other.

The perception that Augustine and Aquinas are heavy on the immanent Trinity to the disadvantage of economic Trinity generated reactions trying to rectify this imbalance by emphasizing the economic trinity. A well-known example of this is so-called Karl Rahner’s rule: “The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity.”207 Peter Bellini, however, argues that in Rahner’s noble intention to pull down the Trinity from its abstract pedestal, Rahner has limited our understanding of the Triune God through our experience of the economy of salvation. Though seemingly benign, there is a danger of reduction in Rahner’s proposal:

Though not Rahner’s intention to eliminate the independent transcendent nature of God nor reduce theology to anthropology, which is often a pitfall of transcendental theology, the axiom can easily become Rahner’s Reduction, reducing and emptying the immanent into the economic, and thus totalizing the economic, when the first half of the corollary is used to define the second half. Rahner’s Reduction is what occurs when one fully and totally defines the immanent Trinity solely in terms of and as the economic Trinity.208


Bellini saw that in the long run Rahner’s rule confines God to our own anthropocentric categories. Thus, he proposes that Rahner’s rule should not be allowed to rule:

Rahner’s Reduction cannot be allowed to rule. It reduces and totalizes God to our condition, position, experience, and epistemic limits. We readily need an intercessor and mediator that is enfleshed in all of the limits and conditions that we call human, so that we can be fully saved to the uttermost, but a kenotic Trinity if fully located in our humanity either deifies the church, humanity or the cosmos in a pantheism that we are not ready, qualified or canonized to take on.²⁰⁹

The oneness of being and act in God’s Mission invites us into communion with the being and act of God’s Mission. As Tennent explains, “Mission is about simultaneously entering into the inner life of God as missionary God, as well as entering into the world where the Triune God is actively at work.”²¹⁰ This implies that our primary response in mission as created beings in Divine Mission is participation as highlighted by Augustine and Aquinas. Mission is not a human act that bridges the gap between God and the world.²¹¹

An important implication of the absence of breach between the economic and immanent Trinity in mission is that there should no breach between God’s action in the church and in the world. This challenges the restricted positions which confine the mission of God in the church (ecclesiocentric) or in the world (cosmocentric). The mission of God is extended to the church to become the icon of Trinitarian communion while at the same time God’s mission is actively working in the world through the movements and transformations in the socio-political order which reflects the values of the reign of God.

The reduction of missio Dei to the notion of sending due to the breach between God’s act and being is the root cause of the divergence that ensued after Willingen—the ecumenical vs classical, church-centric vs world-centric, etc. The problem of deficient trinitarianism of missio Dei after Willingen was the unfortunate dichotomy between God’s being and act

²¹⁰ Tennent, Invitation to World Missions, 61.
disguised as a trinitarian facade.212 This is demonstrated in the pattern of sending within

*missio Dei*. Flett asks:

> Did the pattern of sending proceed from God’s *being*, resulting in a missionary act that unfolded in historical process? Or did it proceed from God’s *act*, resulting in a missionary act that unfolded in the institutional life of the church?213

Placing too much emphasis on mission as proceeding from God’s act led to an ecclesiocentric and anthropocentric mission which essentially stripped mission of its theocentric origins, means and goals. Throughout the centuries this kind of mission has replaced God with the church and human agency of the source, the means and goal of mission. This also manifests traces of semi-pelagianism. Human agency and participation is both nothing and everything.

On the other hand, placing too much emphasis on mission as proceeding from God’s being led to a cosmocentric mission which promotes a *missio Dei* without church’s participation; it is not our mission, it is God’s mission. This sole emphasis on God’s action, Flett argues, devalues human action and strips the motivation for mission. An example of this understanding is Diether Manecke view of mission as “more a reference to God’s action. . than it is to an effectual activity of his community that brings about the eschatological turning point (God through us).”214 Flett argues that Manecke’s solution “would reintroduce a gap between God’s being and act for the sake of creating space for the human act. This route we cannot take, for it shifts the missionary act back into ecclesiology and soteriology as an independent and second step beside God’s own act of reconciliation.”215 As Leslie


215 Flett
Newbigin would put it: “An unchurchly mission is as much a monstrosity as an unmissionary church.”  

E. Visible-Invisible Mission

The unity of God’s being and act implies that Divine Mission is the eternal-temporal continuum which proclaims the unity of processio-missio and rejects any dichotomy between God’s inner life and God’s relations with creation. God’s Mission is both and at the same time eternal and temporal, timeless and historical. The “invisible” and “visible” missions in the Augustinian-Thomist scheme are distinct yet not separate. The dialectic between eternal processio and temporal missio corresponds to the transcendent-immanent nature of God’s presence in creation. Kelly describes Aquinas’ treatment of the missio as “a subtle interplay between presence and absence, between the visible and the invisible, and between the ‘already’ in terms of Christian experience, and the ‘not yet’ of its eschatological fulfilment.”  

The unity of the eternal processio and the temporal missio eschews any exaggeration of one to the detriment of the other, or reduction of one to the advantage of the other.

God’s involvement in temporal history as shown by the missio of the Son and the Holy Spirit is an essential dynamic of the divine life and mission. The eternal processio enters into time and space according to the fittingness of creation and humanity. History is the locus of the temporal missio where the eternal Triune God breaks into humanity. History has as its telos the participation in the Trinitarian communion. History is the dynamic unfolding of this teleological fulfilment. Thus, Divine Mission challenges all teleological frameworks of history.

God’s visible and invisible missio today is experienced in both the church and the world. The visible-invisible dynamics continues in the dynamics of the church and the

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216 Lesslie Newbigin, The Household of God 1953: 201
world—visible: church, invisible: world. There is no dichotomy between the church and the
world as there is no dichotomy between the visible and invisible Mission. The church is an
extension of Christ’s visible mission. The challenge for the church is to become performative
and efficacious signs of Christ’s visible mission. The church is the basic sacrament of the
visible mission of God.

This is the fundamental flaw of the two competing views on Missio Dei after the
Willengen conference: On the one hand is the group stressing the Missio Dei in the church
and on the other hand, is the group accentuating the Missio Dei in the world.

Missio Dei is to be part of God’s Mission in the world. The Church calls the attention
of the world to God’s invisible Mission in the world. The Church calls the world to
participate in God’s invisible mission. The invisible mission of God in the world explains the
mission of the church. In history, the visible mission of the Son was emphasized more by the
church since it highlights the church as extension of the Son’s mission. This, however, led to
the relegation of the invisible mission of the Holy Spirit. The emphasis on Son’s visible
mission also downgraded the eternal processions of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The danger
of emphasizing church’s visible mission of the Son is, as history have shown, either the
magnification of the church as manifested in Christendom or the undue emphasis of the Son
as expressed in christomonism. This is still manifested today, for example, in the Church’s
focus on mission as proclaiming Christ as the unique saviour can lead to new forms of
Christendom—triumphalism and exclusivism. Focusing too much on the visibility of God’s
mission through the church as in the Christendom model may lead to the unfortunate
devaluation of the invisible mission of God which goes beyond the church towards the whole
cosmos. As the resurrected Jesus said to Thomas “Have you believed because you have seen
me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe” (John 20: 29). By

218 Redemptoris Missio, Dominus Eiusus
these words, Jesus seems to imply that God’s invisible mission through the Son and the Holy Spirit goes beyond the church’s manifestation of the visible mission of the Son. On the other hand, the danger of relying too much on the invisible mission of the Holy Spirit in the world can encourage the disappearance of the church, and worst, the exclusion of the church in God’s mission.

The unity of visible-invisible missions which reflects the unity processio-\textit{missio} is the key framework in justifying mission today. Catholic missiology needs to go beyond the ecclesiocentric proclamation of Jesus to the invisible mission of the Son and the Spirit in the whole cosmos. Mission today needs to continue to listen to the Spirit who continue to teach the church to discover of the meaning of Jesus words and the mission of the Blessed Trinity. The invisible mission—the movement of the spirit today in in the direction of greater connection, communication, greater collaboration—chapter IV

F. Mission as Contemplation, Contemplation as Mission

Both \textit{De Trinitate} and \textit{Summa Theologiae} are some of the highest works of contemplation about the mystery of the Triune God. Merriel, for example, praised \textit{De Trinitate} not so much for its intellectual elucidation but more as a dramatic but meditative and poetic contemplation of the mystery of the Triune God.\textsuperscript{219} On the other hand, A.N. Williams tried to interpret the whole of the \textit{Summa} as a mystical theology contemplating the conditions of union with God.\textsuperscript{220} Likewise, John A. Caputo argued that it is “a great mistake to conflate the metaphysics of Aquinas with the rationalist systems of modern metaphysics, to forget its essential religious and mystical inspiration”\textsuperscript{221}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[219] Merriell, \textit{To the Image of the Trinity}, 14.
\end{footnotes}
While Augustine and Aquinas wrote metaphysical writings on the mystery of Divine Mission it also propounded a contemplative rendition of mission. They pointed out that contemplation of the divine persons is the goal of Divine Mission. Aquinas declares, “Man’s ultimate felicity consists only in the contemplation of God.” The two doctors invited us to contemplate our mission in sub ratione Dei of God’s Mission and the Divine Mission as ipsum esse subsistens of all missions. Thus, the contemplative approach of Augustine and Aquinas is essential in understanding the theocentricity of Divine Mission. They invite us to contemplate our missions as charged with the grandeur of Divine Mission.

The two doctors have shown the merit of understanding theology as contemplative wisdom. Theology is contemplation in the sense that its primary focus is God. In the light of Aquinas’ teachings, Min describes the distinctive character of contemplative theology as the awareness of our ultimate end: “Our ultimate end consists primarily in “knowing” God, not “desiring,” “loving,” or “enjoying” God… What is primary is the attainment or possession of the true good, not desiring, loving, or delighting in it.” Min regrets that this sense of the ultimate and the whole and our search for meaning in that ultimate and whole have largely been muffled as a theological topic in most mainstream progressive theologies. In this light, Min calls for a return of contemplation in theology: “Compelling as is liberation from various types of historical oppressions, contemporary theology must recover a contemplative vision of the ultimate and the whole and reintegrate its many partial and relative concerns into that vision.” In this task of contemplative revival, Aquinas becomes relevant because he “never lost his focus on the contemplative and eschatological dimensions of theology.

222 Min, Paths to the Triune God, Paths to the Triune God, 144.
223 Aquinas: SCG, III, 37.
224 Min, Paths to the Triune God, 145.
225 Min, Paths to the Triune God, 158.
226 Min, Paths to the Triune God, 158.
without which theology ceases to be theology and of which we contemporary theologians, for all our historical preoccupations, continue to need a large dose of reminder."\(^{227}\)

The dampening of the ultimate is not unfamiliar to doing and understanding mission. Modernity generated a spiritual vacuum by eliminating any sense of mystery in the world through an exceedingly rational and positivistic outlook. For a long time missiology has been seen as a practical theology—an ‘action’ theology. We have always equated mission with action or praxis. Many have learned to appreciate only the active Christian life, so much so that we have largely become a people of activism in the created realm.\(^{228}\) On the other hand, Augustine and Aquinas’ theology show that Mission is the contemplation of God’s work in the church, world, indeed, the whole of creation.

Augustine and Aquinas helps to awaken an aesthetic, contemplative and doxological dimension of theology, as well as a contemplative attitude—a sense of gratitude, awe and wonder—in mission. A contemplative approach to mission propels us to ultimately become aware of our own nothingness amidst the immense wonder and power of Divine Mission. By our nothingness, we do not have a mission but solely the Mission of the Incarnate Word who was sent by the Father to redeem the human race and the Mission of the Holy Spirit sent by the Father and the Son to sanctify the Church. The Mission of God in itself is abounding before our missions. The fecundity of Divine Mission does not primordially depend on our missions’ failure or success. No mission is ever adequate to encompass the Divine Mission. Thus, contemplation impels us to a re-examination of the motives, end and means of our mission; to become aware of any anthropomorphistic tendencies that advanced our own ideologies, strategies and programs in God’s Mission.

\(^{227}\) Min, *Paths to the Triune God*, 167.

The sense of marvel at God’s awesome Mission shifts the attention in missions away from human power as well as human sinfulness to God’s mercy and love. While not denying our sins, the focus, first of all, is God—God’s awesome compassion and mercy is far greater than our sins. A biblical example is Peter’s calling. “[T]hey caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. [W]hen Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” (Luke 5: 6 – 8). A redemption heavy theology which underscores that God became human because of our sins, the first attitude before God becomes guilt and fear. The focus becomes our sins rather than God’s grace. This ultimately drains Christianity of the wonder and awe of God’s grace and invites the Pelagian temptation of working our own salvation without the need of God’s grace.229 Proclaiming in awe and wonder focuses on God’s mighty power which is greater than all human shortcomings.

The significance of contemplation in missions is also underscored by St. John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio*. He believes “that the future of mission depends to a great extent on contemplation. Unless the missionary is a contemplative he cannot proclaim Christ in a credible way.”230 St. John Paul II repeats this conviction in *Ecclesia in Asia* when he said: “Mission is contemplative action and active contemplation. Therefore, a missionary who has no deep experience of God in prayer and contemplation will have little spiritual influence or missionary success.”231

Mission is not just an outward but inward movement. Psalm 46 proclaims, “Be still, and know that I am God!” (Psalm 46: 10). Similarly, Elijah’s experience where he encountered God at Horeb not in the fire, earthquake but in silence: “and after the earthquake

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229 One of the greatest controversies in Church history is between Augustine and Pelagianism which led to Augustine’s articulation of his greatest contribution to theology—the theology of grace.

230 *Redemptoris Missio*, 91.

231 *Ecclesia in Asia*, 23
a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.” (I Kings 19: 12). As Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra emphasise, “Mission is not primarily about going. Nor is mission primarily about doing anything. Mission is about being. It is about being a distinctive kind of people, a countercultural . . . community among the nations.”232

This also brings to understanding contemplation in a new light. Contemplation is not an esoteric and separate activity from mission but is mission itself, contemplation is mission. We can be contemplative while in mission, at the same time, we can be missionary in contemplation. Contemplation is seeing God ahead of us in the mission. Proclamation is proclaiming God-in-us, God-in-the-world. Proclamation is ultimately neither about us nor about the situation but about God in us and in the world.

A contemplative attitude to mission does not, on the other hand, dismiss the value of praxis. There is an unbreakable unity of contemplatio-missio in Missio Dei. Divine Mission fosters a spirituality rooted in the Triune God, which integrates mission and contemplation, the mystical and the prophetic, prayer and action. Seng-Kong Tan describes this holistic relationship between contemplation and mission:

God creates and missionizes from his overflowing fullness, freedom and love… As holistic self-relation and relation with others proceed from our relation with God, so genuine human missions must arise from true contemplation. Prayer and missions are not in competition. ‘On the contrary’, according to Jean Daniélou, ‘mission appears as the self-unfolding of contemplation.’233

The unity of contemplatio-missio in Missio Dei also implies that there is no split between the church and mission—between the community life and missionary life. Indeed to participate in the Trinitarian Mission is to embrace a new thinking of inclusivity and non-dualism. As Newbigin states:

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[T]rinitarian doctrine provided a new paradigm for thought, which made possible the healing of dualisms that classical thought had been unable to overcome—the dualism between the sensible and the intelligible in the world of thought, and between virtue and fortune in the realm of action.\textsuperscript{234}

The healing of dualism augurs positively for the future that through Trinitarian living and understanding there will be a reconciliation and integration of unhealthy dichotomies in the church: church and mission, doctrine and praxis, east and West, liturgy and mission, among others.

In the spirit of holistic integration in mission, Langmead also warns about a mission that is only focused on the presence or ‘living out’ of the Gospel without words or proclamation. It is a misunderstanding to think that mission is only presence and witnessing as Langmead explains,

\begin{quote}
There is always a danger for the emphasis of … embodiment to drift in this direction and to lead to a neglect of evangelism. By implication such an approach to mission says to the world, ‘Look at our lives and you will see Jesus’, rather than, ‘Look beyond us to Jesus’.\textsuperscript{235}
\end{quote}

Langmead suggests greater integration of words and deeds: “Wherever possible and appropriate, mission should involve a combination of Christlike action and verbal witness to the experience of grace which undergirds and enables Christian mission.”\textsuperscript{236} Evangelisation is not about us but ultimately about God. Langmead proposes congruence of community life, liturgy and action as key to incarnational mission:

\begin{quote}
[T]herefore, a ‘community of the incarnation’ will practise forgiveness, conflict resolution, inclusion of the marginalised, reciprocal rather than hierarchical relationships, and justice in decision-making and resource-sharing. A community embodying wholeness will also know how to worship meaningfully, celebrate joys, share suffering, express its own creativity, appreciate beauty, make music, laugh and cry.\textsuperscript{237}
\end{quote}

A contemplative attitude of living in the Divine Mission demands a constant \textit{metanoia} or conversion. Conversion is a permanent feature of the mission of the community who participates in God’s triune life and mission—the church as \textit{Ecclesia semper reformanda}

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\textsuperscript{235} Langmead, \textit{The Word Made Flesh}, 286. \\
\textsuperscript{236} Langmead, \textit{The Word Made Flesh}, 287. \\
\textsuperscript{237} Langmead, \textit{The Word Made Flesh}, 288.
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Conversion is not just personal but also ecclesial in order that the church can be more effective witnesses towards societal conversion. Conversion implies a constant realigning of the mind and heart of the missionary community with the mind and heart of the Trinitarian God. It is a constant process of decentering the church’s mission from any anthropocentric standpoint to God. The church sees and lives their mission in the Divine Mission instead of seeing and living the Divine Mission in their lives. They apply their mission in God’s story rather than applying God’s story in their mission.

Contemplation also underscores a renewed understanding of liturgy. Liturgy is the expression of the doxological aspect of mission. It is a celebration of mission that is from God, through God, with God and towards God. Geoffrey Wainwright asserts that the liturgical approach to theology is precisely the way to keep the focus of theology on God and God’s ultimate purpose in all its elaborations. For Dietrich Ritschl, theology has its origin in worship, and must maintain a “doxological” or openness which “tests all our ideas and arguments by the question whether they are not only useful to men and women but can also be offered to God as a gift.”

Holmes declares, “A missionary church worships a missionary God.” Worship and liturgy is a proclamation of God’s Mission. We can learn a lot about God’s Mission from the words, rituals, signs and symbols of worship and liturgy. Thus, Orthodox Theologians Stamoolis and Ion Bria conceived mission as the “the liturgy after the liturgy,” the natural consequence of entering into the divine presence in worship. On the other hand, liturgy

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238 This has become a popular phrase in the Catholic Church proclaiming the spirit of Vatican II in the 1960s.
241 Stephen Holmes, “Trinitarian Missiology.”
can be conceived as the mission after the mission. In this spirit, Eastern Orthodox theologian Aram Kēshishean emphasizes the Eucharistic source of mission,

Through the eucharist human beings are restored in their God-given responsibility to be ‘co-workers’ with God. This means that: the mission of the church is rooted in, and emerges from the eucharist; the eucharist is not just anamnesis, namely the remembrance of God’s saving act in Christ, but fundamentally a sharing of God’s love and promise, liberation and salvation with human beings, and a restoring of the brokenness of humanity and the integrity of creation. Therefore mission, in its genuine sense, is eucharist in extension.243

John F. Hoffmeyer has suggested that “the rhythmic movement of gathering in and being sent out is certainly embedded in our liturgy … our gathering as church is a sending and our sending is a gathering.”244 Congdon also talks about the intrinsic unity of liturgy and mission:

Here and now, worship and mission form a dialectical pair: the church not only sends out; it also gathers together. Missiologists refer to this as the centripetal and centrifugal dimensions of the church’s identity. A centripetal force is one that moves toward a center, while a centrifugal force is one that moves away from a center. Worship is the centripetal aspect of the church, while mission is the centrifugal aspect of the church. We “gather together” for worship, and are “sent out” in mission.245

G. “New Hermeneutics” for Divine Mission

The unity of processio-missio requires a new missional hermeneutics able to bridge the gap between the eternal processio and temporal missio, the immanent and economic Trinity. Bosch suggests a missiological hermeneutics that reverses the linear order of conventional mission theology—from systematic reflection in theology to application in mission: “We are in need of a missiological agenda for theology rather than just a theological agenda for mission.”246 Similarly, Christopher Wright in The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative, criticises the popular approach of using the Bible as justification for mission. Wright describes a “biblical basis of mission” as the attempt to “seek out those biblical texts which express or describe the missionary imperative, on the assumption that the

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245 Congdon, “Missional Theology.”
246 Bosch, Transforming Mission, 494.
Bible is authoritative.” Wright argues that through this kind of proof-texting, “we have already decided what we want to prove (i.e., that our missionary practice is biblical), and our collection of texts simply ratifies our preconception.” 247 Wright suggests rather the reverse; that there is a missional basis for the Bible than there is a biblical basis for mission. 248 A missional hermeneutic of the Bible “proceeds from the assumption that the whole Bible renders to us the story of God’s Mission through God’s people in their engagement with God’s work for the sake of the whole of God’s creation.” 249 In this framework, Wright argues, we will see more clearly the “big picture” of Scripture. 250

This new hermeneutics demands not interpreting the Gospel or Divine Mission in the context of our world, but to interpret the world in the framework of the Gospel. Newbigin used the notion of ‘indwelling’ as a tool for exegesis and hermeneutics. He advocates that the purpose of hermeneutics is not to primarily understand the text for its own sake, but to understand the world through the text, or to indwell the text and understand the world through it. 251 The American Lutheran theologian George Lindbeck, in his seminal work, The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age, also proposed a new biblical hermeneutics which redescribe reality “within the scriptural framework.” 252 In this scriptural context, “it is the text, so to speak, which absorbs the world, rather than the world the text.” 253 If theologians allowed the story of the Bible to become their own story, he argued,

253 Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, 118.
they would be less preoccupied with making Christianity relevant to the non-Christian world on non-Christian terms.\textsuperscript{254}

A missional hermeneutics, therefore, is not just a tool for interpretation but more importantly an invitation to conversion—conversion to God’s Mission. Jesus story and the Gospel is always what Johann Metz calls a dangerous memory.\textsuperscript{255} Consequently, the Gospel is an interruption.\textsuperscript{256} Similarly, \textit{Missio Dei} and the Gospel always re-orient our thinking in order to see from the angle and perspective of God’s story, and refocus our priorities according to God’s mission. This missional hermeneutics demands constant renewal and rethinking.

Missional hermeneutics entails a shift from anthropocentric interpretation to theocentric interpretation. Missional hermeneutics primarily seeks not to apply the Bible in our experience but our experience into the biblical story. We seek to find ourselves in God’s story rather than finding God in our story. We explore more how to apply our lives to the Bible rather than apply the Bible into our lives. This new hermeneutics necessitates new paradigms for analysis and action. In the light of this, we can critically examine some methods and strategies in missions.

A popular method of social analysis and action is so-called Pastoral Circle. The Pastoral Circle is a pastoral method developed by Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, as explained in their book, \textit{Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice}.\textsuperscript{257} This method has been used by many different faith-based communities around the world. It is known by other names as the pastoral cycle or pastoral spiral. Holland and Henriot acknowledges its roots in

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the ‘see, judge, act’ method of Cardinal Joseph Cardijn\textsuperscript{258}; the concept of praxis by Paulo Freire\textsuperscript{259}; the ‘hermeneutic circle’ of Juan Luis Segundo\textsuperscript{260}; the methodology of modern Catholic Social Teaching\textsuperscript{261}; and the spirituality of St Ignatius of Loyola.\textsuperscript{262}

Holland and Henriot describes the four parts of the Circle as: \textit{Insertion} – integrating in the lived experience of individuals and communities; \textit{Social Analysis} – analysing the root causes and values behind the experience and issues; \textit{Prayer and Theological Reflection} – discerning the issues in the light of the living faith, scripture, social teaching and the resources of tradition; and lastly \textit{Pastoral Action} – collective action as a result of all these steps in response to the issues.\textsuperscript{263} At the end of the cycle, a new experience develops which calls for further processing of insertion, analysis, reflection and planning. The Pastoral Circle does not stop without final conclusion. Thus, Holland and Henriot argues that it is more of a “spiral” than a “circle.”\textsuperscript{264}

In the light of the missional hermeneutics that Divine Mission entails, we can identify some advantages and disadvantages of this method.\textsuperscript{265} The advantages are: The pastoral circle begins with experience, responds to concrete issues, is action-oriented, and an effective vehicle for developing critical thinking. There is also the positive recognition of the local culture, context and resources as fitting starting point for collective action. The pastoral circle as a modern and scientific framework has also been proven effective.

Pastoral circle need, however, to begin with God’s Mission in the world. As a tool it lacks the affirmation of the fundamental stance and perspective of God’s mission. Pastoral

\textsuperscript{258} Holland and Henriot, \textit{Social Analysis}, 10.
\textsuperscript{259} Holland and Henriot, \textit{Social Analysis}, 8.
\textsuperscript{260} Holland and Henriot, \textit{Social Analysis}, 8.
\textsuperscript{261} Holland and Henriot, \textit{Social Analysis}, 11.
\textsuperscript{262} Holland and Henriot, \textit{Social Analysis}, 11 – 12.
\textsuperscript{263} Holland and Henriot, \textit{Social Analysis}, 8 – 9.
\textsuperscript{264} Holland and Henriot, \textit{Social Analysis}, 9.
\textsuperscript{265} It is beyond the scope of this thesis to make a comprehensive and critical examination of Pastoral Circle.
circle had a tendency in the past to make experience and collective action as the centre, and thus, reinforced an anthropocentric view of mission by interpreting the Bible and tradition through the context and experience of an individual and group. Moreover, the focus on experience and situation had veered towards relativism. When experience and collective becomes the focus, the central question is no longer the contemplation of God; mission becomes human action. It has overlooked God’s grace and Mission already present in the world. The power of the Holy Spirit to act in ways beyond human efforts and understanding was also neglected. Pastoral circle, therefore, needs to have stronger rootedness and greater acquiescence to the presence and action of the Divine Mission.

Augustine and Aquinas have always affirmed that Divine Mission is the ground upon which all missions are interpreted and practiced. Neither any culture nor any historical context should be used as universal norm even as the local culture and historical context is the starting point and basis for collective social investigation and action. The church must always be wary of equating Divine Mission with the mission strategies and programs that are in vogue in the world at any particular period. Divine Mission cannot be confined to any historical program and agenda however popular it may be. What is in vogue fades away in time but Divine Mission never fades. It is eternal.

H. Strengthening Missio Dei: From missions to Mission

Based on the above reflections, Augustine and Aquinas’ theology contributes to the strengthening of the understanding and living of Missio Dei in various ways. First the notion of divine mission by Augustine and Aquinas affirms the validity and fittingness of Missio Dei. Missio Dei is the one and true justification for missions. Second, Augustine and Aquinas’ theology strengthens the rootedness of Missio Dei in Trinitarian theology. The Trinitarian framework of Augustine and Aquinas which is in line with the Trinitarian orthodoxy confirmed the Trinitarian God as the source, means and end of missions. Thirdly,
the notion of divine mission of Aquinas and Augustine upholds the unity of God’s processio-
missio; there is no dichotomy between the inner life of God and God’s missionary outreach to
creation. Fourth, Aquinas and Augustine notion of divine mission helps to develop the true
and fitting attitude and disposition towards doing mission.

God’s mission-centred hermeneutics implies a rethinking of missiology. A rethinking
of missiology in the context of Missio Dei involves the shift from understanding missiology
as merely the discipline and science about techniques and strategies of missions to missiology
as the science of understanding and participating in God’s Mission. Missiology is the science
of discerning, proclaiming and living the Missio Dei. Missiology helps missions to draw its
source and direct its goal in the Trinitarian communion.

Missions are about understanding Missio Dei, understanding the Trinitarian
processions at any given moment, place, culture and age. It is seeking God’s will in mission.
It is participating and entering into the mystery of Trinitarian processions. It is the discovery
of the Trinitarian vestiges in the whole of God’s creation. Missions are discerning the
unfolding of the mystery of the Trinity in the lives of the missionary and people today.
Missions are doing Missio Dei from God, with God, in God and for God. Mission is all about
God. God is the ontological ground of mission. God is where every mission live, move and
have their being (Acts 17: 28). The measure of the achievements in mission is not human
standards (human mission) but God’s standards (Missio Dei).

There is no place and time in the whole cosmos that God has not acted and continues
to act. All missions, therefore, are finding Missio Dei hidden in the field of life, in the whole
cosmos. The proclamation of the Gospel is the exposition of the reign of God, work of God
present and alive even or especially in the most mundane everyday life of the people.
Missions are the programs and activities of looking, living, celebrating and doing Missio Dei
which is the hidden treasure (Matthew 13:44); the fine pearl (Matthew 13:45-46); the
mustard seed (Mark 4:30-32); the yeast (Matthew 13:33); the growing seed (Mark 4:26-29) and the good plants among the weeds (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43).

Mission is partnering with God. Mission is partnering with the Trinity. This means that Mission is doing what God is doing in the world.266 As Wright believes, “Fundamentally, our mission means our committed participation as God’s people, at God’s invitation and command, in God’s own mission, within the history of God’s world for the redemption of God’s creation.”267 This ultimately involves understanding the church’s identity in God’s mission. As Hans Urs Von Balthasar argued, we don’t know our identity, who we are, until we discern God’s mission for us.268

This means, on the other hand, that not everything is mission. Many missions driven by human ideologies, agenda and projection cannot be called mission. Mission is avoiding the Pelagian tendency which adheres to the belief that the church and missionary can do and achieve the goals of Mission through their own strategies and programs which leaves no room for God’s grace. On the contrary, Mission is, first and foremost, not about the missionary, nor about the church, nor about mission activities but about God, who is Mission and Mission who is God.

I. A Return to Metaphysics

Min argued that St. Augustine and Aquinas ideas require a classical and medieval metaphysic where one affirms the relation of creation between creatures and God, a foundation many contemporary individuals would reject.269 St. Augustine and Aquinas classical brand of metaphysics necessarily posit a supreme being as the ground of all beings.


269 Min, Paths to the Triune God, 242.
This brand of metaphysics in Western tradition has been called ontotheology most prominently by Immanuel Kant in the eighteenth century. Ontotheology infers the unity of philosophy and theology by positing metaphysics as the ontology of God or the theology of being.

Since Kant, the influence of ontotheology has declined. Friedrich Nietzsche at the end of the nineteenth century questioned the possibility of any basis for objective truth. Martin Heidegger was most vigorous in rejecting ontotheology as he argued that for a long time that Western thought has become a captive of ontotheology. He proposed that to free Western thought it is necessary to overcome ontotheology. Similarly, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida argued that the notion of being as an unchanging pure nature or essence is misguided for either historical or linguistic reasons.

The decline of the influence of metaphysics as ontotheology in theology is seen recently in the new emphasis on biblical and early-Christian studies, existentialism and phenomenology in philosophy, the social sciences as partners of theology. With the rise of sciences since the emergence of the ‘Age of Reason’, Thomas Khun asserts that increasingly, “being” is no longer accepted as the universal unifying paradigm. The emphasis on the particular

In jettisoning the ontotheology of Christian tradition epitomised in St. Augustine and Aquinas, however, modern and postmodern mission theology has been found wanting in providing a strong theocentric foundation to contemporary articulations of Missio Dei. Modern and postmodern theology has depended more on the modernist rejection and demythologization of pre-modern theocentricity. The modern rejection of God as the ipsum esse subsistens and its replacement by reason as the new ontology unfortunately released a

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270 Heidegger contends that for a long time the problem of western metaphysics has been ontotheology. In rejecting ontotheology, Heidegger asserts that ontotheology is bad ontology as well as bad theology.

pandora’s box of anthropocentric tendencies let alone the sense of vertigo and boredom left behind by postmodern purposelessness. The impact of Enlightenment’s and modernist battle cry of “death of God” has left a gaping hole that led to a nihilist and fragmented direction in theology. Humanity is damned to existence and condemned to be free, a freedom and existence with a licence for anything but a purpose for nothing.

Augustine and Aquinas’ pre-modern onto-theological framework has an important place in the understanding and articulation of the theocentricity and divine nature of Mission. As Min affirmed, theology as a human wisdom is possible only by sharing in the “light” of divine wisdom. This is affirmed by St. John Paul II in his encyclical letter in 1998, *Fides et Ratio*, where he called for the return of metaphysics in theology.

If the *intellectus fidei* wishes to integrate all the wealth of the theological tradition, it must turn to the philosophy of being, which should be able to propose anew the problem of being—and this in harmony with the demands and insights of the entire philosophical tradition, including philosophy of more recent times, without lapsing into sterile repetition of antiquated formulas. Set within the Christian metaphysical tradition, the philosophy of being is a dynamic philosophy which views reality in its ontological, causal and communicative structures. It is strong and enduring because it is based upon the very act of being itself, which allows a full and comprehensive openness to reality as a whole, surpassing every limit in order to reach the One who brings all things to fulfilment.

### J. The Shortfall of Augustine and Thomas

Augustine’s and Aquinas’ brand of theology is described by Min as cosmological, non-anthropocentric, universalist and not intentionally confined to the needs of a particular time. Using classic and scholastic categories, Augustine and Aquinas discussed how Divine Mission is the perfect, efficient, formal and final cause of the mission of the church. Augustine and Aquinas missiological discourse present a contrast to contemporary themes and approaches in missiology.

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272 Min, *Paths to the Triune God*, 137.


274 Min, *Paths to the Triune God*, 241.
Today’s mission theology is more focused on the temporal and socio-political dimensions which may tend towards anthropocentrism. Praxis theologies like political and liberation theologies or, sometimes called, theologies of hope, seek to confront society with the radical call of the Gospels and the “dangerous memory” of Jesus Christ. These contemporary mission theologies and practices present serious challenges to Augustine and Aquinas. Contemporary mission theologies start their theology in human experience rather than the premodern conception which begins with God. These theologies advocates that divine revelation never occurs in a vacuum. On the other hand, reality is presented as dynamic, evolving, changing and particular. These run counter to Augustine’s and Aquinas’ theology. Contemporary theologies frequently criticised for Augustine and Aquinas’ extremely abstract, metaphysical and esoteric language, and their classicist worldview which present reality as static, fixed and universal. Systematic theologians like Rahner, social Trinitarians and postmodern theologians of the twentieth century perceived Augustine’s and Aquinas’ theologies as completely removed from economics and politics and without any reference to the concrete clashes of the actual world, to hunger, bloodshed, class struggles, social crises, military conflicts and imperialist atrocities. Moreover, they argue that the theologies of the two doctors are not without contamination with issues of power and domination or ideology of power. Similarly, Anne Hunt comments that Augustine and Aquinas Trinitarian scheme “does not convey the mystery of the Trinity in terms of its loving engagement with us in the world of suffering.”275 No wonder, many regard Augustine and Aquinas’ ideas as alien and distant to contemporary realities. Their notion of Divine Mission, moreover, may just be utopian, that is, ‘no place’ in temporal reality.

The challenge in our appropriation of Augustine and Aquinas, therefore, is how to translate their metaphysical understanding and speaking of Divine Mission in the historical

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and social-cultural situation today. Indeed, the sapiential theology of Augustine and Aquinas is speculative, abstract and incomplete. It can serve as the first part of the task of the proclamation of *Missio Dei* but needs to be verified and applied in the actual mundane and real-life situation of the people.

Augustine personalist and Aquinas’ cosmological and ontological notion of Divine Mission can benefit from the liberational and contextual theologies of the twentieth century. As Min says, sapiential theology needs the shock of prophetic theology to remain attentive to the cry of the poor, oppressed, and persecuted.276 Augustine and Thomas work will remain abstract without dialogue with the present situation and expressed in various cultures and context. Even as we have already raised some concrete implications now and then, we need to contemplate further Divine Mission in today’s realities: globalization, internet age, pluralism, and others. The contemplation of Divine Mission needs to dialogue with the concerns of existential and prophetic missiologies. Through this appropriation, Divine Mission while it is profound, can, in fact, have very concrete implications for missions.

To this end, Min proposes a dialectics of prophetic theology (particular contextual theologies) and sapiential theology (universal theology);277 a dialectics between sapiential theology (medieval gift) and prophetic and contextual theologies (postmodern gift). Following the *processio-missio* continuum, the notion of Divine mission by Augustine and Aquinas and the contemporary contextual mission theologies form one continuum in the understanding and doing of mission as both need each other. Theologians and missionaries should have mind in heaven and feet on earth. The continuum of Divine mission by Augustine and Aquinas and the contemporary contextual mission theologies is the dialogue between the twentieth century notion of *Missio Dei* and the patristic and medieval sources of

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276 Min, *Paths to the Triune God*, 10.
277 Min, *Paths to the Triune God,*
mission discourse. This also conveys the integration of the classical and scholastic notion of divine mission with the postmodern and postcolonial concept of mission.

**Conclusion**

Despite the negative reception of Augustine and Aquinas’ theology, we went back to the primary text of Augustine and Aquinas’ notion of divine mission—*De Trinitate* and *Summa Theologiae* respectively. Augustine and Aquinas’ notion of mission is profoundly based on their belief that God is the source, ground and end of all beings. God as *ipsa esse subsistens* and human beings as *esse per participationem* implies that all missions are effects and images of God’s Mission and find their *exitus* and *reditus* in God’s mission.

The key to understanding divine mission in Augustine and Aquinas is a sound trinitarian theology based on the post-Nicene orthodoxy. The trinitarian theology proclaims three persons-in-relation out of one essence and nature as God. Divine Mission is conceived from the unity of *processio-missio* which expresses the unity of God’s mission both in the inner life of God and God’s life in time among God’s creation. Divine Mission also posits the unity of visible and invisible mission of God which conveys the human-divine communication and partnership in carrying out the Divine Mission.

Mission, as discussed in the notion of Divine Mission of Augustine and Aquinas, is conceived purely in God’s terms. Significantly, the discourse of Mission by Augustine and Aquinas does not contain a discourse of Mission in human terms. Thus, Augustine and Aquinas exposition of Mission is devoid of any anthropocentric tendencies.

The contemporary notion of *Missio Dei* has a lot to learn from the wisdom of Augustine and Aquinas elucidation of Divine Mission. By appropriating the concept of Divine Mission articulated by Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, we have a firmer theological grounding of *Missio Dei*. By appropriating Augustine and Aquinas, we can put back *Missio Dei* to its place as the fundamental primordial principle and end of Mission.
Aquinas and Augustine posit the ancient and medieval worldview wherein theocentricity is the order of the day. Augustine and Aquinas underscore the belief that our world is a graced world. Through Augustine and Aquinas, we have deepened the foundational meaning of *Missio Dei*.

Augustine and Aquinas is still relevant for today’s mission theology. Their notion of Divine Mission is a living tradition which continues to open up new meanings and possibilities of mission. As a living tradition, however, a constant dialogue and appropriation with the present experience and understanding of missions is highly invaluable.

Having laid down the doctrinal and systematic theological foundation as well as having established the appropriate ontological justification for mission today through the retrieval of Augustine and Aquinas notion of Divine Mission, we shall now apply the framework of Augustine and Aquinas’ *Missio Dei* in the light of contemporary challenges. This will be the subject matter of the next chapter.
Chapter III: Media in Theology of Mission

“Our Age of Anxiety is,
in great part,
the result of trying to do today’s job
with yesterday’s tools and
yesterday’s concepts.”¹

Introduction

In the previous chapter we “resourced” Missio Dei through the notion of divine mission formulated by Augustine and Aquinas. Strengthened by a more profound Trinitarian foundation of Missio Dei, our next step towards constructing a theology of mission today, is to discern Missio Dei in our world today. One of the biggest factor shaping today’s consciousness is the world of the new media.

In this chapter, we will examine the media and its significance and challenges to theology of mission. We will approach media from different perspectives in order to give a robust understanding of how media enter and apply into God’s mission today.

A. Media: The Elephant in the Room in Theology of Mission

The internet explosion today has suddenly intensified our awareness of the impact of media upon our lives and society. The Internet and its transformation has become a very real part of everyday life. We have been living in the digital environment for nearly three decades now; it is just in its early stages but the transformations it has brought are already profound and overwhelming. The new media revolution has changed the world and the church. Contemporary discourse on missiology, however, has not considerably confronted the media revolution as one of the most crucial challenges and frontiers for mission today. Benedict XVI has expressed deep

concern that the church “may be absent in the experience of many people for whom this existential space is important.”\textsuperscript{2} Similarly, Horsfield says, “The significant influence of the media culture of theology has been largely unaddressed.”\textsuperscript{3} Any consideration and investigation of mission today must study the theories of media. As the information revolution is swiftly transforming the world, doing mission can no longer ignore the new media. The new media is the elephant in the room for doing mission today, yet sadly theology of mission has superficially engaged with the digital age.

Although, in recent years there has been a slight upsurge in studies about the new media and Christian mission, many of these studies, however, examine the practical application or the effects of new media on doing mission. Likewise, a number of these studies appropriates the theories of media ecology particularly the Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan to theology. There is not enough critical reflection, however, on the methodology of theology as a media activity. Media is not just the content nor the medium but is subtly incorporated in doing theology. Christian theology as it is known today itself is a particular medium-based activity that emerged and developed within particular cultures of writing and its offspring—printing.\textsuperscript{4}

### B. Different Perspectives on Media vis-à-vis Theology of Mission: A Critical Examination

The transformations in media throughout history have led to changes in human consciousness and culture. These also brought forth changes in mission consciousness and experience. For a long time, however, media just like mission was treated as an adjunct topic, 

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{2} Pope Benedict XVI, \textit{Message for the 47th World Communications Day}. \\
\textsuperscript{4} This is an idea that is influenced by the school of media ecology. We shall expound this more when we talk about the ecological perspective of media.
\end{flushleft}
tools or means for the practical application of theories and systems of theology. To understand media beyond tools, we need to critically examine media from different perspectives and theories. These perspectives are not strict delineations and may sometimes overlap with each other in their depiction of the media. No one perspective can fully explicate the whole reality of media; we need to understand media from different angles and lenses. Our objective is to have a holistic view of media for a theology of mission today.

In recent years, there has been a renewed interest on the significance of communication and media in official Catholic Church documents. This is shown by the fact that the theme of social communication⁵ and media received much attention from the church from the second half of the twentieth century up to the beginning of the twenty-first century. These documents show that the church has a rich reservoir and resource of teaching on communications. Many lay and even the clergy are, however, either unaware or seldom draw inspiration and guidance from them even in today’s hypermediated world. We will refer to these documents as we go through each of the perspectives on media.

a. Instrumental

The most basic understanding of media is that they are instruments of communication; of transmission of message. One person develops ideas within himself/herself, and then transmits

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⁵ Franz-Josef Eilers explains why the church prefers to use the word social communication instead of media. The word social communication was introduced in Vatican II’s *Inter Mirifica*. Eilers offers three understandings for the concept of “social communications”:

1. It is just considered as a common expression for all kinds of communication including the media, especially the so-called “Mass Media”;  
2. It refers to interaction and instrumentality of the communication process especially in view of modern techniques and mass media (*actionem instrumentalem*);  
3. It refers to all means and ways of communication in human society. This way, the expression becomes open to the past as well as to the future in such a way that it includes all ways of communicating in history, with traditional communication from early non-verbal means to verbal, writing and actions. Social communications would include drama, theater, art, music, dance and all other communicative performances in human society and culture. The concept also includes the newest developments in cyber-, digital and converging communication. Franz-Joseph Eilers, *Communicating in Community: An Introduction to Social Communication* (Manila: Logos, 1996), 316.
them to another. This is the linear theory of communication which is called transmission or instrumentalist theory. The audience of the message has little role except as receivers of the message. The most popular transmission theory of communication is the “Shannon-Weaver model of communication.”

Instrumentalists see technology as neutral or benign. Nicholas Carr describe the instrumentalist perspective as seeing technology as just tools; instruments used as a means to an end, tools “entirely subservient to the conscious wishes of their users.”

Media as instrument and means for transmission of the message, raises the critical issue about the role of technology. Media in itself is also technology. Technology is an inherent dimension of humanity ever since humans appeared on earth. It is one of the outstanding qualities which made humans distinct as a species. Technology is an extension of human beings as rational creatures. William A. Stahl argued that in the past two hundred years, it has become common to define human species as *Homo faber*, “man the tool-maker,” and to identify cultures with their technology—neolithic, Bronze Age, Space Age. Those who have the latest gadgets are defined as modern while those who lack such are “old-fashioned,” “quaint” “underdeveloped” or “backward.”

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6 Claude Elwood Shannon and Warren Weaver outline the five parts of their basic communication theory:

1. An information source which produces message or sequence of messages to be communicated to the receiving terminal.
2. A transmitter which operates on the message in some way to produce a signal suitable for transmission over the channel.
3. The channel is merely the medium used to transmit the signal from transmitter to receiver. It may be a pair of wires, a coaxial cable, a band of radio frequencies, beam of light, etc.
4. The receiver ordinarily performs the inverse operation of that done by the transmitter, reconstructing the message from the signal.
5. The destination is the person (or thing) for whom the message is intended. Claude Elwood Shannon and Warren Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (University of Illinois Press, 1949), 33-34.


Technology has always been with human beings since the beginning. With the advent of new media, however, we have suddenly become aware of the hyper-technologization of our lives. The technologization has become ubiquitous in everyday life not just in communication but even in the most basic structures of our daily lives: technologically mediated basic activities like eating, drinking, sleeping, talking, walking even relationships (technologically mediated dating). We have become a *homo digitas*—technological person.

A lot of discussion on technology revolves around the utopian and dystopian view of technology. Simply put, the utopian view is the optimistic view and the dystopian view is the pessimistic view of technology. The utopian view is that technology will lead to perfect progress while the dystopian view is technology will lead to destruction. 9 Both are deterministic in their approach. The dystopian view, however, is the louder voice of the two.

Many thinkers have raised alarm about the side effects of a technology-driven culture. French philosopher and lay theologian Jacques Ellul, whom Postman calls a “Luddite” 10 criticised the danger of technoculture. In his most well-known and influential book, *Technological Society*, Ellul argues that modern society has given itself over to technique. He defines technique as “the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency (for a given stage of development) in every field of human activity.” 11 Efficiency has taken priority over people in solving problems of everyday life, i.e., output, quantity and measurable

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10 The term Luddite, used by Postman in a descriptive rather than the usual pejorative sense, comes from the Luddite movement during the height of Industrial Revolution in England. Neil Postman says it “flourished in England between 1811 and 1818 as a response to the furious growth of machines and factories. Notwithstanding the excesses of their zeal, the Luddites seemed to be the only group in England that could foresee the catastrophic effects of the factory system, especially on children. They did not want their children to be deprived of an education—indeed, of childhood itself—for the purpose of their being used to fuel the machines of industry.” Neil Postman, “Of Luddites, Learning, and Life,” *Technos Quarterly*, Winter 1993 Vol. 2 No. 4. Accessed 03/04/2013 at http://www.ait.net/technos/tq_02/4postman.php.

outcomes for everything we do; efficiency has become the new god.\textsuperscript{12} For Ellul, technique is a mindset—a scientific and technological approach to all of life. Society has embraced technology and science wholesale. Technology has taken over us rather than us directing technology.\textsuperscript{13} He argues further that contemporary society has made technology a substitute for religion. He sees ideology inherent in technology which, as a result, the adoption of particular technologies has implications for social and religious meaning and expression.\textsuperscript{14}

Building on Ellul’s ideas, Neil Postman in \textit{Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology} calls the society in which technology is deified as “technopoly.” It is a society whose culture “seeks its authorisation in technology, finds its satisfactions in technology, and takes its orders from technology.”\textsuperscript{15}

Guy Ernest-Debord a French Marxist theorist built on the concepts of Karl Marx and Georg Lukács particularly about alienation, “reification” and “fetishism of the commodity” when he wrote \textit{The Society of the Spectacle} in 1967. In this work, he postulates that life in modern society is dominated by images which he calls spectacles. These have incorporated all other forms of domination: “In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation.”\textsuperscript{16} Debord argues that the media is a big purveyor of spectacles. He contends that media is not a neutral instrument but preserves and nurtures the status quo. “If the spectacle, taken in the limited sense of ‘mass media’ which are its most

\begin{footnotes}
\item Ellul, \textit{The Technological Society}, 21.
\item Ellul, \textit{The Technological Society}, 137 – 139.
\end{footnotes}
glaring superficial manifestation, seems to invade society as mere equipment, this equipment is in no way neutral but is the very means suited to its total self-movement.”

If Debord was alive today he would have considered the Internet as a grand spectacle—calling the virtual communities and superficial connections created by social networks like Facebook and Twitter as characteristically “spectacular”.

Related to the idea of the spectacle is Jean Baudrillard’s take on simulacra. Baudrillard, in his theory of simulacra, attacks contemporary society which defines reality through terms of media claims. Baudrillard warns us about the danger of this “hyper-reality” where social reality and its ‘simulation’ in media can no longer be distinguished: “It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real.”

This blurring of the line between the real and the artificial has reinforced the seduction of surfaceness. For Jean Baudrillard, the simulacrum becomes the real; reality becomes hyper-reality. What appears on media becomes the real in actual reality. Video and editing via photoshop, for example, can manipulate images and video to make it perfectly beautiful even if it distorts the real. This happens typically among the actors and models that many idolized; we identify their faces that we see on video and photographs as their true image and identity in real life. These simulacric techniques and approach are also utilised to the hilt in advertising.

Technology will even become faster in the future; the future generation will grow with more artificial intelligence all around them. This creates further anxiety about the expanded mechanization of life, machines equalling human’s intelligence and eventually wielding power

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over humanity in the future. The fear of robots taking over humans or humans becoming just a
tiny cog in one big machine is not farfetched. Vincent Mosco, echoes this fear, in his concept of
the digital sublime which talks about the immense possibility and threat of cyberspace:
“Cyberspace has become the latest icon of the technological and electronic sublime, praised for
its epochal and transcendent characteristics and demonized for the depth of the evil it can
conjure.”19 Similarly, Henry David Thoreau expressed the fear of technology taking over our
lives two centuries ago: “Men have become the tools of their tools.”20 While Martin Heidegger
argued that technology has obliterated all distances but has not necessarily generated any
nearness.21

The utopian and dystopian ideologies are also present in church’s utilization of media as
instruments of mission. The utopian position, for example, proclaims that media technologies
will solve the problems of mission; technology is the best thing that ever happened to mission,
technology is mission’s best friend media technologies. On the other hand, the dystopian
position is technology will neither help nor promote mission; technology is the enemy of mission
as it will usher in the obliteration of mission.

Both utopian and dystopian position manifests the danger of seeing media in a
technologically essentialist way, and of seeing technology in an isolated and deterministic way.
Our position is neither utopian nor dystopian, although, we can utilize some of their insights.
We will not take the anti-technology nor the pro-technology stance. We will not take the
technocratic stance nor technological totalism but the humanization of technology. What we are
more interested is how media technology can enter and apply in God’s mission today.

Row, 1971), 165.
Church Perspective:

The Catholic Church accepts the potential good for evangelisation of the media by calling media as gifts from God. *Inter Mirifica* expresses this, “The Catholic Church, since it was founded by Christ our Lord to bear salvation to all men and thus is obliged to preach the Gospel, considers it one of its duties to announce the Good News of salvation also with the help of the media of social communication and to instruct men in their proper use.”

This is also the World Communications Day message of St. John Paul II in 1990 when the internet was only beginning to explode. Church leaders are obliged to use “the full potential of the ‘computer age’ to serve the human and transcendent vocation of every person, and thus to give glory to the Father from whom all good things come”.

The church documents asserted that it is now the duty of the church to utilise the means of social communications as gifts from God. The first fundamental teaching of the church on the media is that it is a wonderful gift of God to humanity. This highlights two fundamental principles in God’s communication: First media are gifts and secondly it is from God. Pius XII in *Miranda Prorsus* affirms this, “Those very remarkable technical inventions … though they spring from human intelligence and industry, are nevertheless the gifts of God, Our Creator, from Whom all good gifts proceed.”

Paul VI first World Communication Day statement in 1967 re-echo this: “Thanks to these wonderful techniques, [humankind’s] social life has taken on new dimensions: time and space have been conquered, and [humankind] has become as it were a citizen of the world, sharing in and witnessing the most remote events and the vicissitudes of the

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22 *Inter Mirifica* #3

23 Message for the 24th World Communications Day, 1990.

24 Pius XII, *Miranda Prorsus*, (Vatican: September 9, 1957). http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_08091957_miranda-prorsus.html#Nota%201
whole human race.”25 Fifteen years after *Miranda Prorsus*, PCSC document, *Communio Et Progressio* reiterates this fundamental teachings: “The Church sees these media as ‘gifts of God’ which, in accordance with His providential design, unite [all men and women in fellowship] and so help them to cooperate with His plan for their salvation.”26

It is in this light that the church documents underscore that media also has an ambivalent character. “We remind ourselves also that, like so many other good things in creation, they are open to misuse; and, still all together, we consider, before God, what measures may be taken to prevent their desecration.” 27

*Communio Et Progressio* counsels the church that it is reneging on Christ’s command if they did not use the media: “Indeed it would be difficult to suggest that Christ’s command was being obeyed unless all the opportunities offered by the modern media to extend to vast numbers of people the announcement of his Good News were being used.” 28 PCSC’s document *The Church and Internet* upholds this commendation and admonishes the church that it should not be hindered by fear of technology in the utilisation of the Internet: “It is important, too, that people at all levels of the Church use the Internet creatively to meet their responsibilities and help fulfil the Church’s mission. Hanging back timidly from fear of technology or for some other reason is not acceptable, in view of the very many positive possibilities of the Internet.” 29 Benedict XVI, in his message for the World Communications Day in 2013, warns of the danger if the church defaults on the new media: “Believers are increasingly aware that, unless the Good News is

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25 Paul VI, Church and Social Communication: First World Communication Day  
26 *Communio Et Progressio*, #2  
28 *Communio Et Progressio*, #126  
29 *The Church and Internet*, #10.
made known also in the digital world, it may be absent in the experience of many people for whom this existential space is important.”

To utilise the means of social communication, it is imperative that the church study, examine, as well as evangelise the social communications. *Aetatis Novae* confirms that it is now the fundamental responsibility of the church to study and evaluate the media:

As the Spirit helped the prophets of old to see the divine plan in the signs of their times, so today the Spirit helps the Church interpret the signs of our times and carry out its prophetic tasks, among which the study, evaluation, and right use of communications technology and the media of social communications are now fundamental.  

Along this line, *Communio Et Progressio* asks the theologians to take an active role:

“The whole question of social communications deserves attention from theologians particularly in the areas of moral and pastoral theology. Religious education too, ought to include instruction on the modern media and their principal implications.”  

However, *Communio Et Progressio* insists that the investigation of the new media is also an invitation to all believers: “While the individual Catholic follows the Magisterium, he can and should engage in free research so that he may better understand revealed truths or explain them to a society subject to incessant change.”  

The document also stressed the need to study social communication in the light of the social teachings of the church.

Bishops, priests, religious and laity, all in their own ways, have a clear duty to contribute to Christian education in this field. They must make this contribution with the social teaching of the Church in mind. They will of their own accord keep in touch with the latest developments in communications so as to be well informed themselves.

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30 Pope Benedict XVI, Message for the 47th World Communications Day, Social Networks: portals of truth and faith; new spaces for evangelization, 2013

31 *Aetatis Novae*, # 22.

32 *Communio Et Progressio*, #108

33 *Communio Et Progressio*, #117

34 *Communio Et Progressio*, #110
The openness of the church to media and technology, however, leans more on the instrumental side. The first question that the church, for example, often asks about media and technology is: How can it be utilised for evangelisation? Can it be an effective tool for its mission? The instrumentalist and transmission model is deeply embedded and is still the dominant model in church’s pastoral activities—catechetics, evangelisation and preaching—that media are mere tools for evangelization. Moreover, the utilization of media in evangelization employs the vertical approach of the instrumentalist perspective: from top to bottom.

The instrumental perspective has focused on either the message content or media effects. As a linear model, the instrumentalist paradigm is static and one way. Marshall McLuhan describes the instrumentalist approach—that it is “how it is used that counts,” as “the numb stance of the technological idiot.” Moreover, transmission theory does not give much attention to the receiver and inasmuch as it gives attention to the transmitter.

b. Territorial

In this second perspective, new media is not just an instrument but itself a frontier of mission. The new media is a mission territory and frontier that needs to be evangelized. In this view, media should be understood, not as tools for one person to transmit information to another, but as sites within which the proclamation of the gospel takes place. In the frontier perspective of the media, people are not simply passive receivers of messages from others, but are active participants in communication as a cultural activity. Meaning is not simply created by the person making up the message: meaning is a shared process. In this way, media is experienced not only as transmission but an interaction and relationship regarding the message of the gospel.

35 (1964:26).
Media studies in recent years has seen an evolution in communication theories from transmission to “communication-as-exchange,” and to the process of interaction. Communication is not just transmission but involves a relationship—relational. Melvin de Fleur, for example, observed the shift from the mechanical model of transmission (Shannon-Weaver, 1948) to interconnectedness, models which at first added secondary relationships such as groups, neighborhoods, and social structures (Riley in 1958), then internal relationships such as self-images, abilities, media selection and so on (Gerhard Maletzke, Hamburg 1963), until today the whole ecological system is recognized as part of the complex mix of communication experience. Stewart Hoover calls this process mediation – where individuals and societies actually alter and inform the media content as they absorb and redefine its meaning. Culturalist media studies are rooted in conceptions of the audience that shifts the focus of scholarly inquiry from the “passive” to the “active” conception of consumption… The shift has been described as a change from an “instrumentalist” or “effects” paradigm to one that stresses practices of consumption by the audience.

As a mission territory, media cannot be identified as geographical. Geography, however, cannot be the sole criterion to become a mission territory. St. John Paul II expressed the shifting focus of mission from geographical to cultural in contemporary mission in his *Message for the 36th World Communications Day*:

> [T]he history of evangelization is not just a matter of geographic expansion, for the Church has also had to cross many cultural thresholds, each of which called for fresh energy and imagination in proclaiming the one Gospel of Jesus Christ. The age of the great discoveries, the Renaissance and the invention of printing, the Industrial Revolution and the birth of the modern world: these too were threshold moments which demanded new forms of evangelization.

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37 Plude, Interactive Communication in the Church
38 Melvin de Fleur, Theories of Mass Communication (New York: David McKay, 1975).
40 John Paul II, Message for the 36th World Communications Day.
St. John Paul II also identified the “new worlds and new social phenomena” and “cultural sectors — the modern equivalents of the Areopagus”, towards which “the Church’s missionary activity ought to be directed” today.\textsuperscript{41} First of these “new worlds” is the new culture emerging in the mass media.\textsuperscript{42} The first Areopagus of the modern age is the world of communications, which is unifying humanity and turning it into what is known as a “global village.”\textsuperscript{43} The whole world of Social Communication is as a new culture in itself, a special field of mission; to be christianized and evangelized.\textsuperscript{44}

\textbf{c. Ethical}

Media are not only the transmission of content but also the promotion of an \textit{ethos}—a way of life and a set of values. Media has engendered not just \textit{techne} (skill, craft and tool) but more significantly an \textit{ethos} (way of life and ethics). Media which leads to a certain \textit{ethos}, based on the purpose and the way it is conducted, is the reason why the ethical perspective is also called the effect paradigm.

The ethical perspective is also strong in church’s position towards the media. In examining media, the church often asks: What is the impact of the content of media upon the church, for example, does it contains violence or sex? The church is always on the lookout on the media with regards to its content, for example, sex or violence. This paradigm indicates that the focus is on the message and content rather than on the medium.

Despite the ambivalent character of media, church documents on social communications insisted that the church should open herself to the media. \textit{Communio Et Progressio} affirms this,

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Redemptoris Missio}. #37
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Redemptoris Missio}, 37.
\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Redemptoris Missio}, 37.
\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Redemptoris Missio}, 37c.
“The People of God walk in history. As they, who are, essentially, both communicators and recipients, advance with their times, they look forward with confidence and even with enthusiasm to whatever the development of communications in a space age may have to offer.”

Appealing from the commissioning of Jesus to the Apostles, Communio Et Progressio impelled the church to use whatever means of social communication available to spread the gospel:

Christ commanded the Apostles and their successors to “teach all nations”, to be “the light of the world” and to announce the Good News in all places at all times. During His life on earth, Christ showed himself to be the perfect Communicator, while the Apostles used what means of social communication were available in their time. It is now necessary that the same message be carried by the means of social communication that are available today.

While condemning serious abuses, Pontifical Council for Social Communications’ The Church and Internet insists that “a merely censorious attitude on the part of the Church...is neither sufficient nor appropriate”.

d. Ecological/Cultural

Media are not just tools, territory or effects but as purveyor of transformation in culture and consciousness. Media do not just transmit message or leads to ethical/unethical values or a territory of communication but they are themselves the message, values and way of life. This is aptly contained in the famous dictum of McLuhan: “The medium is the message.” Culture changes along with every medium change in history. Every new medium creates new metaphors. Contrary to the instrumentalist and ethical position, the ecological perspective believes that technology is neither neutral nor benign; every medium carries with it subliminal meaning and intentions.

45 Communio Et Progressio, #187
46 Communio Et Progressio, #126
A leading school that embodies this perspective is media ecology. Media ecology is the study of media as environment. Media create environment and new medium creates new environment. This is articulated by Neil Postman, the man who coined the term media ecology.\footnote{Postman first introduced the term “media ecology” in 1968, in an address delivered at the annual meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English (published under the title of “The Reformed English Curriculum” in 1970). He told his audience that “the first thing to be said about media ecology is that I am not inventing it. I am only naming it.” Postman, N. (1970). The reformed English curriculum. In A.C. Eurich (Ed.), High school 1980: The shape of the future in American secondary education (pp.160-168). New York: Pitman, 161.}


As its name suggests, an essential principle that distinguishes media ecology from other fields of media studies is ecological thinking. The term ecology suggests that media is interconnected with culture and technology and the notion that media constitute an environment. As environment, media are not just mere tools made by human beings but an ecosystem which is fundamentally connected to culture, society and human consciousness. Contemporary global culture, for example, provided the impetus for the internet and the internet is changing the global culture. As Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells argues “Internet is a cultural creation. The technology to a large extent is the material expression of culture in the sense of a set of ideas, beliefs, and values.”\footnote{Manuel Castells, “The Cultures of the Internet,” Queen’s Quarterly, 109, 3 (22 Sep 2002), 333.}

The application of the notion of media as ecology can be nowhere seen as clearly as in the evolution of media in history and its impact upon culture and society. Every new medium transforms society in a whole new way of thinking, doing and being in the world. Whatever
medium is introduced, it brings with it new consciousness which often works in a very subtle manner; before we are aware of it, it has already changed us. The transformation also affects the church since the church uses the medium and at the same time lives inside the environment. Media has changed our thinking, doing and way of life, politics, culture and economic dynamics. We become what media we utilize.

Media ecology oriented investigation of history points out the essential dimension of media and technology to culture and society which divides history through the radical transformation brought about by each medium: from primary orality to literacy to print to electronic and to digital. Thus, media ecology challenges traditional social analysis which sees society only according to political, economic and cultural dynamics.

McLuhan popularized most of the ideas of media ecology. Many writers have attributed to him many of the things we now hold as common and ordinary: the internet, global village, the issue of privacy, and the online identity. McLuhan’s *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, published in 1964, is considered by many as his most influential work. It focuses on the electronic media environment, particularly television. One of the most important ideas from McLuhan is that media or technologies are extension of human beings, human capabilities, and the human body; these extensions can also be amputations, deadening us to the effects of technology; media functioning as metaphors, languages, and translators of experience. McLuhan’s argument centres on the concept that humans use technology in order to extend their bodies and senses into the environment. “All media are extensions of some human faculty—psychic or physical. The wheel is an extension of the foot; the book is an extension of the eye;
clothing an extension of the skin; electric circuitry an extension of the central nervous system.”

Following McLuhan’s aphorism that media are extensions of [human], we can say that the web is the extension of [humans] nervous system.

Another important idea is his most famous dictum, “The medium is the message,” which has directed us to the importance of the medium rather than the content. In his own words, McLuhan tried to explain the meaning of this maxim during his time when the television was exploding:

“The medium is the message” means, in terms of the electronic age, that a totally new environment has been created. The “content” of this new environment is the old mechanized environment of the industrial age. The new environment reprocesses the old one as radically as TV is reprocessing the film. For the “content” of TV is the movie. TV is environmental and imperceptible, like all environments. We are aware only of the “content” or the old environment. When machine production was new, it gradually created an environment whose content was the old environment of agrarian life and the arts and crafts. This older environment was elevated to an art form by the new mechanical environment. The machine turned Nature into an art form.

We have always focused and judged the impact of a medium—whether good or bad—on its content. McLuhan suggests that more than the content, we need to examine the medium itself. “A medium affects the society in which it plays a role not by the content delivered over the medium, but by the characteristics of the medium itself.” The medium matters as much as the content of the message; the way we deliver the message, for example, is sometimes the true message. McLuhan is trying to tell us that media is not merely seen as a medium for the transmission of message but itself a message. This becomes important in today’s hypermediated world where the medium has become more transformative than the message it has brought. The challenge, therefore, is to become aware of how a medium transforms us because we take part in it over and over until it becomes an extension of ourselves.

56 McLuhan, Understanding Media, 5.
McLuhan further develops this idea by pointing out the pervasive impact of every new medium on our lives and society: “All media work us over completely. They are so pervasive in their personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical, and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered.”

Oftentimes we have difficulty recognizing the way media work as environments because we’re so immersed in them. They are so pervasive yet hidden. The impact of media in our lives can be compared to the fish that lives in the water but is not aware of the water. The impact of media is so subtle, argues McLuhan, that we can only understand it in retrospect. This is what McLuhan calls famously called looking at the present through a rear view mirror, in reference to the experience of looking at rear view mirror of the car while driving: “When faced with a totally new situation, we tend always to attach ourselves to the objects, to the flavor of the most recent past. We look at the present through a rear-view mirror. We march backwards into the future.”

Oftentimes we have difficulty recognizing the way media work as environments because we’re so immersed in them, like the fish who is not aware of the water. The challenge, therefore, is to become aware of how a medium transforms us because we take part in it over and over until it becomes an extension of ourselves.

Finally, McLuhan argues that the acoustic values of electronic communications technology herald a return to tribalism. The ‘simultaneous sharing of experiences as in a village or tribe’ through telegraph, newspaper, radio, telephone and TV, ‘creates a village or tribal outlook,’ McLuhan says, ‘and puts a premium on togetherness’ and ‘mediocrity as a means of

achieving togetherness’.\textsuperscript{59} New media leads to retribalisation. He further says: ‘Ours is a brand-new world of \textit{allatonceness}. “Time” has ceased, “space” has vanished. We now live in a global village...a simultaneous happening. We are back in acoustic space.’\textsuperscript{60} For McLuhan-print, book is individualistic, dualistic while electronic is tribal

The questions which this book raises are ecological: How do ideas interact? Is there some sort of natural selection which determines the survival of some ideas and the extinction or death of others? What sort of economics limits the multiplicity of ideas in a given region of the mind? What are the necessary conditions for stability (or survival) of such a system or subsystem.\textsuperscript{61}

McLuhan’s ideas of the deep transformations that media brings is reinforced by the works of American Jesuit Walter Ong. Ong is most widely known for his theory on orality. Ong’s book \textit{Orality and Literacy} (1982) is likely the most widely read, cited, and translated conceptualization of orality over the last 30 years. Ong is an essential figure in twentieth-century thought because of his detailed and intellectually developed theory of sound as presence.

In \textit{Orality and Literacy},\textsuperscript{62} Ong showed the hidden yet profound influence of communication technology to our individual and collective lives. The primary focus of this book is the contrast between oral and literate cultures. Ong traced the transformation of media in history from oral to written to print to broadcast and electronic media. He argues that the development of the different media system—from primary oral, writing, printing and electronic media, communication technologies had great impact upon human culture, the way we think and act, our behaviors, our values and our attitudes. These transformations are not neutral – they have consequences. Humans have been shaped by the media they have invented.


\textsuperscript{60} McLuhan, M. and Q. Fiore. (1967). \textit{The Medium is the Massage}, 63.

\textsuperscript{61} (pp. xv-xvi)

Ong defined the first state of communication technology as primary orality which he claims to be still the majority; among the 3,000 languages that exist only 78 have a literature.\(^63\) The oral-style thinking culture emphasized the memorability of an utterance since there was no text to refer back to. Thus, information was passed on from generation to generation through poems and tales.\(^64\) The invention of writing radically changed this narrative oriented thinking. Writing did this by detaching the written text from the writer.\(^65\) This restructuring promoted the interiorization of thought and alerted us to see ourselves as situated in time. Printing facilitated further the movement of Western culture away from hearing dominated sensory world to one dominated by sight.\(^66\) Finally, in the contemporary setting, Ong claimed the emergence in Western society of what he calls a second orality which is dominated by electronic modes of communication (e.g., television and telephones). The unique aspect of this second orality is that it integrates elements from both the written and the orality mode. In the contemporary setting, Ong claimed the emergence of what he calls a second orality which is dominated by electronic modes of communication (e.g., television and telephones). The unique aspect of this second orality is that it integrates elements from both the written and the orality mode.\(^67\)

Similar to the ideas of media ecology, James Carey put forward what he called the ritual function and uses of media.

[A] ritual view conceives communication as a process through which a shared culture is created, modified, and transformed…..A ritual view of communication is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but the maintenance of society in time…..; not the act of imparting information or influence but the creation, representation, and celebration of shared even if illusory beliefs. If a transmission view of

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\(^{63}\) Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 7.

\(^{64}\) Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 30.

\(^{65}\) Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 78.

\(^{66}\) Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 117.

communication centres on the extension of messages across geography for purposes of control, a ritual view centres on the sacred ceremony that draws persons together in fellowship and commonality.\textsuperscript{68}

John Paul II in \textit{Redemptoris Missio} also acknowledges that the church needs to go beyond the transmission model of media as media have become a harbinger of the new culture.

[I]t is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church’s authentic teaching. It is also necessary to integrate that message into the “new culture” created by modern communications. This is a complex issue, since the ‘new culture’ originates not just from whatever content is eventually expressed, but from the very fact that there exist new ways of communicating, with new languages, new techniques and a new psychology.\textsuperscript{69}

Some church documents also proclaim that media are extensions of God’s creation. The divine communication is inherent in creation. This is what Paul VI said in his World Social Communications Day message in 1975: “We praise God for these wonderful extensions of His creation which have been brought to such perfection in our time. We recognize the powerful influence for good which, when conscientiously and responsibly used, they can exercise on the individual man and on society.” \textsuperscript{70}

\textbf{Ecological Perspective and Theology: All Theology are Mediated Theology}

An important implication of this perspective is the idea that all theology are mediated. Media did not only shape our culture, but also shape our faith, how we believe in God. Thus, Christian theology itself is a particular medium-based activity that emerged and developed within particular cultures of writing and its progeny, printing. This media-specific character of the practice of theology is generally not acknowledged within theology itself. As Paul Soukop maintains, the concerns and methods of theology change with the change in medium from

\textsuperscript{68} James Carey, \textit{Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society (Media and Popular Culture 1)}, Unwin Hyman, (reprint 1989), 43.  
\textsuperscript{69} \textit{Redemptoris Missio}. #37  
orality, to literacy, to secondary orality. Soukop adds, “Throughout its history, the structure of communication has influenced how the Church does its thinking”

**Critique of Media Ecology**

In spite of the many compelling insights that media ecology has taught us about the impact of media in our lives, media ecology can be mainly faulted for its determinism. Michael Zimmer, criticizes McLuhan and his “Medium is the Message” theory as a foremost example of technological determinism, he argues,

...an overarching thread in media ecological scholarship, exemplified by McLuhan’s (1964/1994) assertion that “the medium is the message”, the technological bias of a medium carries greater importance than the particular message it is delivering. McLuhan saw changes in the dominant medium of communication as the main determinant of major changes in society, culture, and the individual. This McLuhanesque logic, which rests at the center of the media ecology tradition, is often criticized for its media determinism. Seeing the biases of media technologies as the primary force for social and cultural change resembles the hard technological determinism of the embodied theory of technological bias.

Interestingly, McLuhan saw this problem in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. When media become an environment it itself, it puts human beings under its control. Much as the medium’s influence is pervasive, the message has its own life beyond the medium. Indeed, the new media environment is not the master of our lives. We are not hapless victims and helpless slaves of this environment. But the first thing that we need to do is to understand this new environment. By understanding this new environment we can then become effective stewards of this environment.

Media ecology scholar’s conception of history and culture exceedingly favours orality to the disadvantage of other factors (and other forms of media) like art that help shaped consciousness. Sidney Finkelstein, for example, criticised McLuhan’s conception of orality,

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71 Soukop, “The Structure of Communication as a Challenge for Theology,” 110
72 Soukop, “The Structure of Communication” 104
especially McLuhan’s overemphasis on the historical significance of the phonetic alphabet which cause him to underestimate the importance of other forms of exteriorization besides writing:

Tribal society … was not “oral” and “auditory.” It had its speech “magic,” incantations, poetic rituals, music and also its “magic” paintings, sculpture, masks and dances as well as its tools and shapely utensils. There are extraordinary cave paintings dating back 20,000 years. The tribesmen had keen, observant eyes and skillful hands as well as sensitive ears. More developed civilizations, like ancient Egypt, produced tremendous sculpture before the phonetic alphabet. 74

Jonathan Sterne claims that Ong’s concept of orality is prejudiced as it has its roots in a spiritualist theological orientation. 75 Sterne further explains, “Ong’s sensory history is the story of the fall from innocence and a possible future redemption. At the moment of Ong’s writing, he saw the construct of literacy giving way to a new electronic oral-aural consciousness consisting of a new kind of immediate co-presence.” 76

The shift in theology cannot just be accounted to a shift in communication medium. Media is only one of the factors that shaped our consciousness and culture but it is not everything.

e. Liminal

The liminal perspective of media arose especially from the experience of new media. In this perspective, media affords a kind of temporary and liminal space and time which allows people to see the world in new ways. This is appropriate as the word media comes from Latin medium which means middle or mediating principle. The notion of liminality is borrowed from anthropologist Victor Turner.

This idea originated in the anthropological study of rituals by Arnold Van Gennep in 1909 in his seminal work, Les rites de passage (The Rites of Passage). Van Gennep described

the rites of passage like coming-of-age rituals and marriage as having the following three-part structure: “although a complete scheme of rites of passage theoretically includes preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition), and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation), in specific instances these three types are not always equally important or equally elaborated.”

But the one who made liminality a popular concept was the British anthropologist Victor Turner who expanded on this concept in his ethnographical work on the Ndembu of Zambia. Unlike Van Gennep, Turner believed that the concept of liminality could be expanded beyond ceremonial rituals. He focuses entirely on the middle stage of rites of passage—the transitional or liminal stage. He says: “Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.”

Turner also points out that liminal individuals have nothing: “no status, insignia, secular clothing, rank, kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows.” The group of liminal individuals called “communitas” is not a typical social hierarchy but a communal group in which all are equal, in this sense an anti-structure. The subjects in rites of passage are “released from structure into communitas only to return to structure revitalized by their experience of communitas.”

f. Teleological

This perspective sees media as evolving; media evolves from simple to complex, from single to multiple or hypermedia. Medium, however, is neither additive nor subtractive. The

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evolution is more in the development of a profound telos and innate aspiration within every medium.

A representative of an evolutionary interpretation of media is from the French Jesuit palaeontologist Teilhard de Chardin. Many of the developments and transformations brought by the new media technologies conveyed similarities with the projections of de Chardin. Some thinkers saw parallels between Teilhard de Chardin’s notion of the noosphere and the development of the internet; for this reason many have proposed that Teilhard should be the “patron saint” of the internet.

Teilhard saw the growing consciousness of human solidarity, crucial technological progress, such as radio and television, air travel, and even the beginnings of computers. Teilhard applauded these developments and its subsequent connectivity:

Today, with the astonishing increase in the speed of transport (particularly in the air), with radio and television, each one of us can already be physically present, in practically a few hours, to any person whatsoever, anywhere at all on the surface of the earth, and enjoy verbal or visual contact with him in a few fractions of a second.\(^8\)

He also commented on the increasing interdependence resulting from the industrial enterprise and the global economy:

It is no longer possible for us to live and develop without an increasing supply of rubber, of metals, oil, electricity and energy of all sorts. No individual could henceforth manage to produce his daily bread on his own… Take simply the case of an aircraft, or a radio, or a Leica: and consider the physics, the chemistry and mechanics such things presuppose for their existence- the mines, laboratories, factories, arms, brains, hands. By virtue of its construction (and this is undeniable) each one of these devices is, and cannot but be, only the convergent result of countless disciplines and techniques whose bewildering complexity could be mastered by no single worker in isolation… Already we see in them the work not simply of man, but of mankind.\(^2\)

Evolution for Teilhard is governed by a dynamic divine spirit. The final goal of evolution, the omegalization, is Christ. Teilhard emphasized the primacy of Christ in evolution:

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the universe is about the Christ; the Christ is not about the universe. Jesus is the Alpha and Omega. In “Cosmic Life,” he writes, “The exclusive task of the world is the physical incorporation of the faithful in the Christ who is God. This cardinal task is being carried out with the rigor and harmony of a natural evolution.”83

Rather than just instruments, the church documents on social communications uphold that the media are inchoate vehicles of the Trinitarian communications. *Ethics in Internet*, for example, affirms, “Like today’s world itself, the world of media, including the Internet, has been brought by Christ, inchoately yet truly, within the boundaries of the kingdom of God and placed in service to the word of salvation.”84

**Conclusion:**

We have examined, in this chapter, the media and its significance and challenges to theology of mission. We discovered that mission today is dominated by inadequate metaphors of media. Because of this, media have been ignored as an important factor in the missionary life and practice. To examine fully the significance of media to theology of mission today we need new metaphors for media.

To give a robust understanding of how media enter and apply into God’s mission today, we approached media from different perspectives in order. Each of these perspectives contributes to the construction of the holistic picture of media. No one perspective can fully explicate the complex and rich reality of media.

Media can be instruments for God’s mission. Media is a territory where God’s mission can be found. Media can lead to new way of life and values according to God’s mission. Media is an environment where God’s mission is alive. Media is a transitional space and time that

83 Cosmic Life,” (1916) in *Writings in Time of War (WW)*, 50.
84 *Ethics in Internet*, 18.
augurs for new ways and meaning about God’s mission. Media reveals visible and invisible mission of God. Indeed, media are God’s gift.

The sense that media only plays as an external tool in theology is the instrumental approach. The instrumentalist approach reminds us that media are just tools; they must not have a hold on us, human control them. The ethical approach reminds us to be wary and critical of the control, hold and manipulation upon us and how the media are used by ideological and power-that-be forces. The ecological approach provides profound exposition of the role of media in forming culture but should be criticized for its determinism. Media is only one of the factors that shaped our consciousness and culture but it is not the only factor.

We have shown that media is more than tools, instrument, and practical application. Engaging the new media in doing mission today is not just learning the craft, acquiring the skills and applying the technique of new media but becoming more aware of how new media has changed us and the world. Doing mission in the new media is not the simplistic adoption of information communication technologies as a tool which can make our mission easier.

Having built a holistic picture of media and examined its significance for a theology of mission, we will apply this to the new media. This will be the topic of the next chapter.
Chapter IV: New Media Age and Challenges to *Missio Dei*

The only true voyage of discovery, the only fountain of Eternal Youth, would be not to visit strange lands but to possess other eyes, to behold the universe through the eyes of another, of a hundred others, to behold the hundred universes that each of them beholds, that each of them is.

Introduction

In the third century, the African Christian apologist, Tertullian, asks: “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” Tertullian was inquiring whether theology needs philosophy. Tertullian’s query became a major question in theological discourse throughout the centuries. Along the same vein, we will ask in this chapter: Does mission needs the new media today? Can mission today prosper without the new media? What can new media contribute or undermine in theology of mission today?

In this chapter, we will critically examine and evaluate the new media’s fittingness for *Missio Dei*. Fittingness here means the openness and potential as well as the threats and dangers of the new media in deciphering the mission of God—*Missio Dei*. To discern the fittingness of the new media to theology of mission, this chapter will critically examine and analyze new

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2. Tertullian's *Prescription Against Heretics*; and the *Apologeticks* of St. Theophilus Bishop of Antioch to Autolycus Against the *Malicious Calumniators* of the Christian Religion, Translated from their respective Originals, with Notes and Preliminary Dissertations, Joseph Betty, http://www.tertullian.org/articles/betty_prae/betty_prae.htm
media—its history, architecture, values, technology, and impact upon the life of individuals and society today. This thesis will argue that the new media has a significant contribution to a construction of mission theology today and thus, missiology should no longer relegate the new media.

To discover the fittingness of new media to theology of mission today, we will ask the following questions: Is God’s mission to be found/not found in the new media? In what ways can God’s mission found/not found in the new media age? How does the contemporary new media environment reveal or conceal the God’s mission? What are the dangers and potentials of new media to God’s mission in the world and the church today?

A. Describing New Media Age

Gilles Lipovetsky calls our present times hypermodernity where the dominant socio-economic system is consumerist capitalism. The main driving force of this system is hyperconsumption. Because of information explosion, today’s hyperconsumption is primarily media consumption. Media hyperconsumption has been further intensified by the new media today. Many surveys around the world have shown the increasing percentage of media consumption in the daily lives of people. Pierre Babin reckons that the modern American adolescent, reared amidst the clamour of competing mass media (such an individual will have logged some 20,000 hours of viewing by the age of sixteen). This does not only apply to affluent countries but to poor countries as well like the Philippines. Likewise, media hyperconsumption applies across generations; not only to the iGen and millennial generation but

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4 In the United States, the main research agency on media consumption is the Pew Research. In many countries of the world, including the Philippines, Nielsen is a good reliable source.

also applies to generation X and baby boomers. Thus, media is one of the most palpable part of life in our world today.

In this section, we will critically examine the new media and its significance and challenges to doing mission today based on the different perspectives on media that we discussed in the previous chapter: Instrumental, territorial, ethical, ecological, liminal and teleological. These different perspectives looks at new media through various disciplines: media studies, sociology, economics, politics and anthropology. A single discipline cannot do justice to the evaluation of new media’s fittingness or unsuitability for mission. A robust understanding of the complexity of the new media is essential to gauge its fittingness for mission today.

a) **Instrumental: New Media as Tools for Mission**

The instrumental perspective on media sees new media as important tools for mission today. The net is an indispensable vehicle for evangelisation by missionaries. How did the church utilize the new media as instruments of mission? The church has utilized the new media in mission in numerous ways.

At the onset of the internet, the church was the very first group to utilize the internet for mission. Many churches and religions were quick to jump on the new media bandwagon. Today, the new media is utilized in evangelization, formation and community building by many churches. The information revolution has led many churches and religions to begin to utilise the new information communication technologies for their mission. Almost every church and religion has set up a website in the World Wide Web. Many churches offer services online like catechism, evangelisation, pre-sacramental instructions and interactive community support. Through the internet they publish daily prayers and reflections, daily readings, podcasts,

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6 Helland, “Turning Cyberspace into Sacred Space.”
webcasts, e-learning and e-evangelisation modules, and webinars. Many have joined social networking sites like Facebook, Youtube, Google+, Vevo and others in order to connect with their members. With the continuous advancement of information technologies, especially with the advent of web 2.0, churches have been afforded the further potential of not just broadcasting but interacting with their members in real time. This has led to the formation of virtual religious communities, cyberchurches, cybertemples and even the performance of cyberrituals. Some shrines and churches has utilized the new media in reaching out to millions of people on the move, for example, overseas workers all over the world, newly arrived migrants in their new countries through online services such as live-stream masses, novenas and other liturgical services from their local churches. Some churches have organized cyber-pilgrimage to shrines in the city with interactive prayer, novena, gazing at the icon and images of the shrine. Through the new media technologies, parishes are bringing the Eucharist to places and environment that would have otherwise not had the Eucharist, like jails, slums, and far-flung barrios through live-stream masses.

The church further sees the new media for its contemporary evangelization programs as

*The Rapid Development* confirms:

In the communications media the Church finds a precious aid for spreading the Gospel and religious values, for promoting dialogue, ecumenical and inter-religious cooperation, and also for defending those solid principles which are indispensable for building a society which respects the dignity of the human person and is attentive to the common good.\(^7\)

The enormous possibilities of new media in mission is only limited to how much creativity church members have. The enormous possibilities allow the church to spread the message not just locally but globally.

\(^7\) *The Rapid Development*, 7.
Rocco Palmo enumerates the benefits of information communication technology for mission:

- a low threshold of investment, both in user knowledge and finances, especially given its reach
- the opportunity for immediate dialogue and conversation that transcends geographical and other physical barriers
- and the speed in universal adaption.

However, Catholics are lagging behind evangelicals, fundamentalists and protestant mainline churches in maximizing our presence in the web. Many Pentecostal groups, for example, have been largely using the new media for evangelization, marketing and promotion. Pope Benedict, however, encouraged the whole church to maximize the possibilities of the new media even as he warns about its dangers:

I would like then to invite Christians, confidently and with an informed and responsible creativity, to join the network of relationships which the digital era has made possible. This is not simply to satisfy the desire to be present, but because this network is an integral part of human life. The web is contributing to the development of new and more complex intellectual and spiritual horizons, new forms of shared awareness. In this field too we are called to proclaim our faith that Christ is God, the Savior of humanity and of history, the one in whom all things find their fulfillment (cf. Eph 1:10).

**Criticism of Instrumental Perspective on New Media**

There are, however, rising concerns with technology especially with hyper-technologization of almost all aspects of contemporary everyday life due to the new media. This is manifested in the enthusiasm to acquire the latest product, gizmos, and technology. Likewise, the church and concerned groups have continually objected to the relinquishing of our physical space and time to the virtual space and time of New Media. The greatest fear is that the new media will lead to technological totalism—the absolute and total usurpation of reality into the

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mechanistic system and virtual reality and the obliteration of the human dimension in daily transaction.

There are disturbing trends of utilizing the power of the new media today, apart from the connectedness which is the real reason that the technology was created. Taking selfie pictures, constant narcissistic post on Facebook walls or changing iPhones every year indicates fascination as well as threading the dangerous path of being beholden to the new technologies rather than building genuine connections. The new media came to existence not because to showcase technology or allow machines to take control over humans (which fuels dystopian rage against the machine) but to forge human connection and ultimately human fulfilment.

b) Territorial: New Media as Field or Frontier of Mission

The new media age represents significantly the space and time where the people are today. The new media as a mission field is very different from the mission field that missionaries evangelized in the modern period and postmodern period. What has changed in the mission field because of the new media?

The church has identified the world of communication as a new mission territory for the church. In Redemptoris Missio, St. John Paul II identified social communication as the new culture emerging in the mass media\textsuperscript{10} which is unifying humanity and turning it into what is known as a “global village.”\textsuperscript{11} Later in 2002, St. John Paul II called the Internet as a new forum for proclaiming the Gospel. By calling the Internet as a new forum for proclaiming the Gospel, he connects the Internet with the notion of areopagus:\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{10} Redemptoris Missio. #37
\textsuperscript{11} Redemptoris Missio. #37
\textsuperscript{12} Instead of referring to the old Greek ‘Areopagus’ like in Redemptoris Missio. St. John Paul II refers here to the Roman parallel the “Forum”
The Internet is certainly a new “forum” understood in the ancient Roman sense of that public space where politics and business were transacted, where religious duties were fulfilled where much of the social life of the city took place, and where the best and the worst of human nature was on display. It was a crowded and bustling urban space, which both reflected the surrounding culture and created a culture of its own. This is no less true of cyberspace, which is as it were a new frontier opening up at the beginning of this new millennium.\textsuperscript{13}

John Paul II also admits that “to some degree perhaps this \textit{Areopagus} has been neglected. Generally, preference has been given to other means of preaching the Gospel and of Christian education, while the mass media are left to the initiative of individuals or small groups and enter into pastoral planning only in a secondary way.”\textsuperscript{14} St. John Paul II also noted the significant influence of the new media upon the younger generation. “In particular, the younger generation is growing up in a world conditioned by the mass media.”\textsuperscript{15}

The church recognizes the new media as mission territory can be holy grounds where God is already present, proclaiming his Word, and, therefore, calling for understanding and commitment. The whole world of Social Communication is as a new culture in itself a special field of mission; to be Christianised and evangelized.\textsuperscript{16}

In the light of all of these, many church documents has called for the church to actively and positively enter and engage into the new media. Pope Benedict XVI calls the world of social media a Digital Continent, with natives, immigrants, and even missionaries. He sees the church’s mission as seeking God in the Internet, “Our pastoral presence in that world must … serve to show our contemporaries, especially the many people in our day who experience

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Redemptoris Missio}. #37
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Redemptoris Missio}. #37
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Redemptoris Missio}. #37c.
uncertainty and confusion, ‘that God is near; that in Christ we all belong to one another.’”  

The document of the PCSC, *The Church and Internet*, calls for creativity, at the same time not hanging on to fears in engaging with the internet: “It is important, too, that people at all levels of the Church use the Internet creatively to meet their responsibilities and help fulfil the Church’s mission. Hanging back timidly from fear of technology or for some other reason is not acceptable, in view of the very many positive possibilities of the Internet.”

Pope Francis summarises this positive engagement with the new media through a strong appeal for the church to continue to become citizens of the digital continent:

> Let us boldly become citizens of the digital world. The Church needs to be concerned for, and present in, the world of communication, in order to dialogue with people today and to help them encounter Christ. She needs to be a Church at the side of others, capable of accompanying everyone along the way. The revolution taking place in communications media and in information technologies represents a great and thrilling challenge; may we respond to that challenge with fresh energy and imagination as we seek to share with others the beauty of God.

The recent developments in media are not unrelated to the new developments in the area of missiology especially in the last century. There has been a drastic shift in the practice of mission from mainly proselytisation, sacramental and doctrinal activity of previous centuries to incorporating many different elements in contemporary mission such as witnessing, dialogue, justice and peace, integrity of creation, inculturation and interreligious dialogue. Doing theology of mission has also necessarily become an endeavour from a global perspective. There was also a shift in the movement of mission away from a predominantly top-down orientation. It has moved from centre to periphery, from hierarchy to lay, from west to east, from Vatican to local

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17 Pope Benedict XVI, Message for the 44th World Communications Day, The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word, 2010

18 *The Church and Internet*, #10.

19 Francis I, 48th World Communications Day - Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter

churches, from missionaries to people, from parish to villages. This movement is summed by Samuel Escobar as mission “from everywhere to everyone.”

New media as a new mission field has altered the interface of church and religion today. The face of the church has drastically changed in the midst of the global transformations brought by the New Media. A gloomy prospect for religion, in fact, is that media is slowly serving as alternative to the functions of religion in society.

New media has transformed the traditional religious faith experience. The Internet explosion has brought new configuration of approaches, attitudes and patterns in the living out of religion. It would not help if the church continue to think that all is stable and the same in the church today. Religion is transformed because of the media, as Hoover reiterates: “Something new is emerging. Whether we think of it as a new religious media culture or a new mediatized religious culture, it demands the attention of scholars and leaders in the fields of media and of religion.”

How is the church changing in the new media age? The easy access and sharing of information through social networking has led to the ordinary lay faithful becoming more informed and critical thinkers. Today, church members do not just want to passively receive what the church hierarchy feeds to them. They want to make their own decisions not just somebody in authority making decisions for them. The lay sitting on the pews are not naïve, ignorant, empty tanks waiting to be filled with the “fuel” of doctrine and will accept uncritically whatever church leaders preaches to the lay faithful. More than instructions, they demand


22 Hoover, “Media and Religion,” 17.

23 This image is similar to Paulo Friere’s banking model. In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire describes the “banking” concept of education, where “the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. They do, it is true, have the opportunity to become collectors or
relationship, interaction, participation and meaningful connections. That lay people are no longer content on the information and instructions being fed on them by church hierarchy also reflects a gap between church authority and ordinary people in perceiving the world and the faith.

Indeed, a significant transformation brought by the new media is about the perception of authority in the church. People do not turn to priests, churches, institutional religion as much as before as they can now turn to the web. The new media with its content and applications—hypertext language, websites, interactive animations, blogs, social networks, audio and video—and its non-hierarchical, acentric, and horizontal network structure, have encouraged a free-flowing search and production of new meanings about faith and religion. Media, in this regard, has become a democratic tool in terms of spiritual knowledge. Consequently, individuals today feel a greater sense of autonomy over their religious lives than in the past. As Hoover observed, the interactive nature of the Internet, the decline in centralised authority, the decline in confidence in religions as institutions, and the differentiation of centres of religious practice, are all linked to this move toward greater individual accountability and action with regard to faith.

The nature of the assembly who gather for the regular liturgical and sacramental celebrations has also gradually changed—from the traditional homogenous community in the past to a heterogenous audience today. In the early up to the first part of the second half of the 20th century, the assembly who attend the sacraments was homogenous in terms of race, faith

cataloguers of the things they store. But in the last analysis, it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system.” Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th Anniversary Edition, Myra Bergman Ramos, trans. (London: Continuum, 2000), 72.


expression and culture. In the later part of the 20th century, the assembly has become a diverse group of people not just in age, race, and economic status, but also in terms of levels of faith—active, nominal, agnostic, and seeker. Likewise, the faith experience of the assembly has been influenced by an intensely hypermediated world. The people who wrestle within themselves the God-question are most often influenced by the new media.

Peter Horsfield observed that one of the major transformations after the failure of modernity’s claim of disenchantment is a movement away from institutional-based religion towards autonomous, non-institutional spirituality that is serviced and networked by the public media. The Internet afforded a new platform for seeking information about God and spiritual nourishment beyond the church’s language and environment. More instances are being observed today where people were converted through the Internet that could not have otherwise happened in an institutional context due to certain circumstances—physical distance, bureaucratic and formal environment of the church which did not allow for a more intimate relationship with a prospective believer. These institutional limitations are negated by the new media environment: The Internet can reach the potential believer right at their very home; the Internet can offer a more personal experience, and the Internet can facilitate an interactive communication between the missionary and the potential believer. Some, who wish to return to the church or want to be baptized in the church, have chosen the internet over the more formal program like RCIA which they often found as cumbersome and user-unfriendly. An example of this is Michael Belzer’s description of the experiences of returnees to Catholic Church in Germany: “[A] growing number of people who want to return to the Church take their first step through the Internet. Shame and other reservations are more easily overcome this way and the first steps can be done

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in a certain anonymity which is preferred to the direct personal contact.” The process of conversion which begins on the Internet and formalized in the official and physical environment of the church has become more common.

Another significant impact is the incursion of the new media into the traditional values espoused by religions. A particular example of this is the impact of new media upon Islam. Many Islamic extremist terrorist organizations, like *Al Qaeda*, *ISIS*, *Al Shabab*, *Boko Haram*, list as one of their primary aims, the rebellion against Western incursion into Islamic values and way of living. Boko Haram itself literally means, “Western education is forbidden.” During the past decades, Western values and lifestyle are seen to have increasingly encroached upon Islam’s way of life. This incursion was intensified by the advent of the Internet. Easy access to videos, photos, music and the massive information that the Internet has afforded is seen as a major part of the West trying to influence and destroy Islamic way of life. Islamic traditional structures, especially those that are seen as deeply hierarchical and patriarchal, are being threatened by the democratisation processes facilitated by the Internet.

**New Media as a Collaborative Arena**

New media as a mission field is a collaborative arena. New media is instrumental in promoting collaboration as an alternative model to institutional forms of relations which goes beyond differences in political persuasions, ideologies, religion, colour and ethnicity. The


28 Although these terrorist organizations object to Western influences through the internet and its platforms, they themselves maximized these tools for their tactics and strategies.

29 Around the world, Muslims who use the internet are much more likely than other Muslims to have a favorable opinion of Western movies, music and television and are somewhat more likely to see similarities between Islam and Christianity, according to an analysis of a recent Pew Research Center survey. “Among Muslims, Internet Use Goes Hand-in-Hand With More Open Views Toward Western Culture,” *Pew Research Center: Religion & Public Life*, March 31, 2013. http://www.pewforum.org/2013/05/31/among-muslims-internet-use-goes-hand-in-hand-with-more-open-views-toward-western-culture/
Internet is truly a virtual world with virtual citizens collaborating in almost every imaginable sphere of life. Some examples of Internet driven movements of collaboration are platforms identified with collaborative consumption and crowd accelerated innovation. It has also given rise to collaborative citizenship which goes beyond the borders of states and ethnicity in the promotion of human rights, cosmopolitanism and care for the environment. The rise of collaboration engendered by the new media environment has strengthened the meaning of personhood as relationality: We are born to collaborate, we are a collective animal, and it is in our nature to collaborate.

The internet has demonstrated collaboration as an alternative model for doing things as shown in projects such as open-source development of applications like browsers, programs and websites like Wikipedia, blogs, content management systems such as Wordpress and social networks like Facebook, YouTube, Flickr and many others. The appeal of these open-source programs is that they are decentralized, free, as many people as possible are able to participate, fast and effective. Indeed, the Internet is one big collaborative project; one can say that the Internet is the biggest collaborative effort ever in human history. The World Wide Web has brought people connected to one another on many different worthy projects and causes. The Internet has facilitated people coming together to the aid of victims of disasters, scholarships for poor children and medicines for malaria in the third world. People have voiced out their support in online campaigns for environmental protection and poverty reduction. The Internet has truly ushered the age of participation.

**New Media as a Marketplace**

The new media as a mission field has turned the religious environment into a marketplace. The Internet has generated a wide range of spiritual offers and contributed to a decline of
the influence of religiously distinct societies. Pope Benedict XVI recognized this marketplace character of the new media when he said, “I wish to consider the development of digital social networks which are helping to create a new “agora”, an open public square in which people share ideas, information and opinions, and in which new relationships and forms of community can come into being.” The Church and Internet also recognises this marketplace nature of religion by pointing out the consumerist impact of the internet upon religion.

[T]he wide range of choices regarding consumer products and services available on the Internet may have a spillover effect in regard to religion and encourage a ‘consumer’ approach to matters of faith. Data suggest that some visitors to religious web sites may be on a sort of shopping spree, picking and choosing elements of customized religious packages to suit their personal tastes. The “tendency on the part of some Catholics to be selective in their adherence” to the Church’s teaching is a recognized problem in other contexts; more information is needed about whether and to what extent the problem is exacerbated by the Internet.

Stewart Hoover’s findings also support this marketplace shift in religion: “In contemporary life, the ways of being religious have moved out of the protected sphere of religious institution and tradition, and into the open ground of the symbolic marketplace,” but that marketplace is now more like a bazaar or a flea market than a department store. Horsfield also maintains that “the virtual social monopoly that churches had on religion has disappeared ... and the centre of religious activity within the society has shifted to the media marketplace.”

George Gerbner, another communication analyst, suggests that media have replaced institutionalized religion as the locale where humans process meaning in their lives. The church’s role as a dominant meaning creator agency is slowly eroding; media has become a primary creator of meanings. Tomas Halik, argues that media has become “arbiter of truth:

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30 Benedict XVI, 47th World Communications Day.
31 The Church and Internet, 9b.
32 Stewart Hoover, Religion in a Media Age in Media and Theology Project Public Lectures. Accessed 12/12/2014 at http://www.ed.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.22781!/fileManager/religion%20in%20media%20age.pdf
33 Horsfield, Mediated Spirit.
what is real, and of importance is what can be seen on the television news.” The marketplace context of religion, Horsfield suggests, challenges the church to move from a sectarian to theocentrist standpoint of being in the world today,

The changed cultural situation, along with the decline in many church institutions, offer the possibility for Christianity to be renewed by breaking away from its church-centeredness and re-focusing on what God is doing in the broader world and society. In this frame, ‘the church’ may be re-conceptualised away from being seen as an institution, to being seen as gatherings of those who identify with the name of Jesus in solidarity with all those who are working also to enable God’s vision to be implemented in the world.  

A profound basis of the shift of the religious experience from the church to the marketplace is dissatisfaction of the ordinary faithful with the traditional institutional expression of the faith coupled by a deep longing and ongoing search for a more meaningful experience of God. For many Catholics, their experience of Catholicism’s brand of Christianity which is highly sacramental, doctrinal and centralised with a uniform set of laws and rituals is no longer adequate in sustaining their religious fervour amidst the complex, global, pluralistic and digital world. Some Catholic even find the traditional religious experience as irrelevant amidst the swift changes today. In their search for deeper religious experience, Catholics turn to other brands of Christianity. They turn to the Evangelicals, for example, who offer a more personal experience of faith, religion and God. Many, however, have turned to the media to fulfil their religious needs.

This makes it harder now for the Catholic Church as it has to compete not just with other Christian denominations but also with the media. Previously, Catholicism competed with evangelicals who offer a more personal experience of faith, religion and God. Currently, Catholicism also has to compete with media for accessibility to information and knowledge about faith, religion and God. The church has to compete with TV advertisements, radio

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programs, Hollywood movies not just for attention but oftentimes for the creation of ultimate meanings.

c) Ethical: New Media’s Values for Mission

New media has not only revolutionized the transmission of content but more significantly has promoted an *ethos*—a way of life and a set of values. What are the values and attitudes that the internet has bred? Is the new media ethical as a whole?

The development and architecture of the Internet and World Wide Web highlight new values that challenge present values and ontologies. The *Core Internet Values* organisation identifies the prominent features of the internet:

> It is instantaneous, immediate, worldwide, decentralized, interactive, endlessly expandable in contents and outreach, flexible and adaptable to a remarkable degree. It is egalitarian, in the sense that anyone with the necessary equipment and modest technical skill can be an active presence in cyberspace, declare his or her message to the world, and demand a hearing.37

The Internet and World Wide Web is free—both in the economic and political sense. In the economic sense, the Internet is free as it should be accessible to everyone in the world, regardless of nationality, religion, language and political beliefs.38 It is free in the socio-political sense as it is a mass medium for self-expression where users are able to speak freely, free of any barriers and controls. No one controls the Internet. It is the biggest commons.

This brings to the fore the issue of freedom on the Internet. In spite that Internet is purportedly free, the questions is, are we really free or predetermined by the Internet? The unlimited connectedness of the internet may carry the subtle message that one needs to connect to the network in order to fulfill one’s dignity. This makes everyone a mere cog in one massive network machine which makes connection no longer human but mechanical. This will happen

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37 *Ethics in Internet*, #7.

only if we allow technology to control us rather than we control technology. The Internet does not program human beings to be connected like robots nor direct the connectedness that human beings make. The connection that people wrought on the Internet is spontaneous not mechanical; their connection is not human not technologically controlled. We are different parts of one organic body not atoms of a mechanical entity. It is essential, however, that we should not allow technology to take over. We need to think of technology as an extension, not as a substitution of ourselves.

The internet is open and transparent with no or minimal barriers to participation or access to information. Anyone, whether it is an individual, organization or company, can develop and distribute new Internet application that can be used by anyone. Anyone can develop and use open-source software or limit the well-established concept of fair use, which is essential to scholarship, education, and collaboration. There are no governmental or nongovernmental restrictions on the utilisation of the Internet. The open model of the Internet is the reason for the enormous innovation and creativity on the Internet.

The Internet as the greatest and biggest network in the world thrives on peer-to-peer or End to End Principle. It’s non-hierarchical and decentralised architecture maximizes individual users’ power to choose (or create) and use the hardware, software, and services that best meet their needs. The many-to-many architecture of the Internet makes it a powerful tool for sharing, education and collaboration.


42 “Values and Principles,” Internet Society.
Many, however, have critically raised some ethical concerns with regards to these new values brought by the internet. Since the World Wide Web has no central authority and open, it can contain both rubbish and treasure. Often, opinions given are relative; one needs to distinguish what is genuine from the bogus, what is important from what is trivial. Without careful discrimination and handling of the Internet’s content, people will have plenty of information but shallow and deceptive. This is affirmed by Anthony Rogers, “People are no longer able to distinguish what is right and what is wrong. There is a gradual eclipse of truth, of the notion of justice and peace.”

Another major complaint is the manner that technology mediated culture can easily overwhelm real-life community and human interactions. In pre-modern times, people gathered around their elders and listened to their stories. Today people gather more around media devices like TV, video, smartphone and Internet. This also occurs in the church. For example, preaching in today’s image-driven world, the presentation of the Word is through image (print, pictures or video) in contrast, in pre-modern period, in the early church, the basic presentation of the Word was oral—sound. This leads to what Ellul called the “humiliation of the word.”

The reality that people are always connected to the net became a fertile ground for data collection and data mining by marketing and advertising companies. This gives rise to the issue of incursion of privacy and too much information being collected from everyone. This puts Internet users in a constant “somebody’s watching you” mode. Siva Vaidhyanathan calls this “googlization of everything,” which has fed the suspicion that the Internet is the contemporary panopticon. Facebook management, for example, is using member’s information as target of specified advertising. Paul Budnitz claims that, “The advertisers are the customer, and the user is the product that’s being bought and sold.” With too much data gathered about people, many
fear that Google and Facebook in the future will know more about people’s lives than any other institution on earth.

Some writers claim that social network has encouraged pathologies like narcissism, exhibitionism and amplified voyeurism—“look at me”—rather than real networking. Ethics in Internet observed, “Here, it was said, was a new realm, the marvelous land of cyberspace, where every sort of expression was allowed, and the only law was total individual liberty to do as one pleased.” Inasmuch as Internet is an instrument of interconnection, it has also heightened difference, individuality, ghettos, ethnocentric, fundamentalist and extremist thinking. Indeed, Internet can have a polarizing effect.

Many have also raised some questions about social networks. Is facebook the anti-social network? People spent so many hours on facebook, hours that could have been spent visiting a friend in need, or doing some good work or volunteering for a community service. People spent hours posting words and pictures of love, hours that could have been spent on hugging a friend, playing with kids, hiking and walking. Facebook is supposed to be used for networking but it is used for exhibitionism, for trolling, for fear mongering, for demagoguery/manipulation, for the propagation of the dominant culture - western culture. If there is more I and me rather than we in facebook and other social networks, then they lose their purpose as a social network.

Lastly, because of the anonymity character of the internet, illegal and immoral activities thrive in cyberspace. Due to its global reach, the Internet has been used as a weapon of mass disruption. Many people have already been victimised by virus, worms, Trojan and hacking. The proliferation of trolls who post inflammatory, inessential, or off-topic messages in an online community (such as a newsgroup, forum, chat room, or blog) have disrupted normal discussions and offended lots of people. The Pontifical Council for Social Communications’ document, The
Church and Internet points to specific problems presented by the Internet like “the presence of hate sites devoted to defaming and attacking religious and ethnic groups. Some of these target the Catholic Church. Like pornography and violence in the media, Internet hate sites are “reflections of the dark side of a human nature marred by sin”. Cyberspace has become a safe haven for producers and consumers of pornography websites which are instruments of human trafficking. It is a valuable tool for terrorist to propagate their ideology and extremist agenda. Hate sites are an essential support for their bigoted followers. Millions of innocent people are swindled, and millions of dollars are stolen from their hard earned money through emails and hacking of their bank accounts. Many websites posed grave harms especially to youth and children.

d) Ecological/Cultural: New Media as an Environment and Culture that Transforms Mission

The new media brings new culture and consciousness which transform mission, albeit, in a more subtle way. To understand new media as a new environment requires investigating the architecture of the Internet. The architecture of the Internet and World Wide Web says a lot about its transformative character. In examining the architecture of the New Media, we will focus on the basic languages of web pages, in particular, Hypertext Mark-up Language (HTML), hyperlinks and javascript. We will also discuss the revolutionary structure of the Internet through a discussion of its peer-to-peer structure.

Most websites and web pages are written using the language of HTML. HTML is a scripting language for structuring and presenting content for the World Wide Web. HTML contains two essential elements: hypertext and hyperlinks. Hypertext connotes a robust use of text that includes not only written text but also images, animations, interactive buttons, audio and
video in electronic and digital format. Web browsers like Google Chrome, Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox and Safari read the HTML to interpret and compose text, images, and other material into visual or audible web pages. HTML5 is the latest version and the fifth revision of the HTML standard. The second important element—hyperlink—makes possible a text, picture, audio and video in any webpage to link with any page or websites in the whole World Wide Web. Hyperlinks connect millions of websites and webpages making the Internet the biggest network on earth.

HTML alone does not account for the dynamic web pages we now read on the Web. Web browsers also read Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), a style sheet language which defines the look and layout of text and other material. Essential for further interactivity, web pages contain javascript, a dynamic computer programming language, which allow client-side scripts to interact with the user, control the browser, communicate asynchronously, and alter the document content that is displayed. Interactivity is a primary feature of World Wide Web, which allows for human to computer communication through a program that responds to user activity and continuous two-way transfer of information between a user and computer. Interactivity on the Internet has recently gone to a higher level with voice recognition technologies, biometrics and the emerging internet of things.

The robust character of HTML allows for multimedia content of web pages. Today’s media is a convergence of media: Interactive and hyperlinked text, animation, images, audio and video in electronic and digital form. Multimedia is multi-sensory and digital. For example, calling someone in the old media like the telephone is through a single medium, that is, audio; in

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the new media calling is not just through audio but also video and images. Computer and smartphones have provided the platform for the convergence of multimedia combining, text, audio, animations and video, TV, radio and a lot of other applications, all in one gadget.

This multimedia character of the new media are manifested in the second version of the World Wide Web that brought to an end the one-way communication era. Ana Roca Castro describes this second version of the World Wide Web,

Web 2.0 not only is a two-way engagement, but it can include three or four or five or thousands or millions of people. You can easily have one video on YouTube and soon have over one million people commenting on that video. The revolution is that the video does not have to come from a fancy Hollywood studio: Any member of the community can actually upload a video and hold the torch of fame. The notion of a community that owns and controls the media, the conversation, and — as a consequence — the influence is what’s making a big difference in this interactive Web 2.0. 44

Peter Horsfield examined some of the impact of hypertext on the production of meaning. He claims that hypertext signifies a change from a linear, structured and hierarchical forms of representing and understanding the world—the dominant way of production of meaning in the print and broadcast media (radio and TV)—into fractured, decentralised and changeable media. 45 While print encourages the ideal of the single, integral self, electronic text encourages multiple, even conflicting voices. Hypertext is networked text in contrast to the linear or hierarchical structure of print; hypertext has no obvious beginning or ending, no top or bottom. 46

A significant impact of this altered way of meaning-creation is the shift in the dynamics and relationships between the source and the recipient in the new media. Broadcast media like TV and radio have very clear boundary between producer and consumer, production and consumption and author and receiver. In New Media, there is a blurring of the lines between

46 Horsfield, “How Hypertext is Changing the Nature of Text.”
production and consumption, author and reader, producer and consumer. New media technologies afford the possibility that one cannot just consume but can also produce and create. This phenomenon have helped to unleash tremendous innovation and creativity. Before, only big media establishments can broadcast news, now everybody can broadcast news. Bloggers are being read in the same way as opinion journalists, scoop of the news are tweeted on Twitter before they are seen on TV or heard on the radio (famous examples are Osama Bin Laden’s capture and killing, Iran revolution, and Arab Spring). The thin line between production and consumption has given rise to new terms such as “produsers,” (concatenation of “producers” + “users”) and “prosumers” (concatenation of the words “producers” + “consumers”). Concatenation, in this context, implies the bridging or even the elimination of the gap between the producer and the consumer; the teacher and the student; the author and the reader. As Howard Rheingold declares, every computer is now a printing press, a broadcast station, a community and a marketplace.47

The Internet truly is, the people. The real product of Google, Facebook, YouTube, and other new media corporations is the people from every race and nation throughout the world. At the same time, however, the people are the producers. There will be no Internet if people did not participate, if people did not put information, upload pictures, and videos. There can be no Google, Facebook, and YouTube if people did not contribute and consume each other’s content.

This implies a radical transformation in the flow of power and relationship. In the old media relationship, the power relationship is vertical and hierarchical, that is, from author to reader. In New Media, there is vertical but it is more horizontal and lateral. In the old media authors are active while receivers are passive; in the New Media, authors and readers are both

active; they interact with each other. While old media is mostly uni-directional, new media can be bi-directional, uni-directional and multi-directional, that is, many to many, one to many and many to one. As a consequence, communication has become a shared production of meaning. This has encouraged co-creativity, participation and openness supported by the software that facilitates wiki-based ways of creating and accessing knowledge, social networking sites, blogging, tagging and ‘mash-ups’.  

The innovative character of the architecture and language of the internet has led to an important feature of the new media environment which is interactivity. Interactivity is one of the hallmarks of the web 2.0 (even as pundits are predicting the arrival of web 3.0 in the near future). New media have facilitated a shift from hierarchy to interactivity, from vertical to horizontal dynamics in society. The interactive culture of the new media has helped to confront all forms of deeply ingrained power relations in modernity and postmodernity—patriarchy, eurocentrism, racism, cultural hegemony, imperialism, clericalism and other vertical hierarchical systems. The absence of agenda and teleology in the Internet manifests a desire against any control from whomever, whenever and wherever. Alternatively, it has offered new alternatives of relations like peer-to-peer dynamics, commoning and other horizontal dynamics.

Church documents have pointed out the interactive nature of the Internet. The document of the Pontifical Commission for Social Communications, The Church and Internet, for example, has this to say,

Already, the two-way interactivity of the Internet is blurring the old distinction between those who communicate and those who receive what is communicated, and creating a situation in which, potentially at least, everyone can do both. This is not the one way, top-down communication of the past.  


49 The Church and Internet, 6.
This is also affirmed by Benedict XVI in his statement for the 45th World Communications Day in 2011,

> The clear distinction between the producer and consumer of information is relativized and communication appears not only as an exchange of data, but also as a form of sharing. This dynamic has contributed to a new appreciation of communication itself, which is seen first of all as dialogue, exchange, solidarity and the creation of positive relations. 50

A philosophical notion that helps to understand the shift in social relationship that new media has wrought is Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s notion of the rhizome. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari argued that the rhizome is a way of thinking that breaks from the closed systems of modern capitalist systems and allows for multiple, non-hierarchical, and lateral thinking. 51 Deleuze and Guattari explains this rhizomatic thinking,

> [T]he rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple. 52

Many media scholars have utilized Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome theory to explain the ontology of the Internet and new media in terms of its decentralised, non-hierarchical, interactive, open and non-judgmental character.

The radical model of power structure spawned by the internet is possible because the Internet was originally created as a peer-to-peer network. 53 Each peer in the network “are equally privileged, equipotent participants in the application. … It is a decentralised form of putting computers together for different kind of cooperative endeavours, such as file sharing and

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music distribution.”\textsuperscript{54} The very first applications of peer-to-peer was in internet applications, but the possibilities of peer-to-peer have become enormous. It has become a template of human relationships, a “relational dynamic” which has sprung up throughout various social fields.\textsuperscript{55}

The P2P Foundation in its manifesto describes the peer-to-peer dynamic as a network that operates not as a pyramidal hierarchy, though it may have combined elements of hierarchy, centralisation and ‘decentralisation’, It is ‘distributed’ and intelligence cannot be found at any center, but everywhere within the system. Assumed equipotency between peers implies that it starts from the premise that ‘it does not know where the needed resource will be located’, it assumes that ‘everybody’ can cooperate, and does not use formal rules in advance to determine its participating members.\textsuperscript{56}

**Peer-to-Peer (Peer-to-peer)**

Peer-to-peer social processes are person to person or people-to-people dynamics which pose as an alternative to authoritarian and centralised social structures. Whether in politics, church, business or media, people are directly interacting with one another, forming communities, transacting with each other for any purpose without the need of a central structure or authority. This is possible because new media technologies mediate and provide the platform for peer-to-peer transactions and interactions.

Peer-to-peer dynamics highlights horizontal dynamics and thinking as an alternative to modern systems, social structures and institutions that are predominantly vertical. A process of horizontalisation is prevalent on the Internet—people communicate, interact and transact with each other without passing through a central authority. Peer-to-peer dynamics is not just


\textsuperscript{55} Executive Summary, “Manifesto.”

eliminating central authority but the middle man; the internet now functions as the mediator instead of the middle man.

Peer-to-peer social processes are based on peer-to-peer technology, one of the original fundamental architecture of the Internet. Peer-to-peer architecture of the Internet has spurred social movements and collaborative dynamics all over the world. Michel Bauwens claims that peer-to-peer dynamics brought radical changes to overarching worldviews which allow for a new form of socialization that is changing how people behave towards each other.\(^{57}\) The P2P foundation headed by Michel Bauwens\(^ {58}\) gives us a tentative definition of peer-to-peer:

> It is a specific form of relational dynamic, is based on the assumed equipotency of its participants, organized through the free cooperation of equals in view of the performance of a common task, for the creation of a common good, with forms of decision-making and autonomy that are widely distributed throughout the network. This is of course a strong definition and statement, subject to a lot of refining and caveats.\(^ {59}\)

The P2P Manifesto describes the peer-to-peer as recovering the tribal model of relationship, similar to McLuhan’s notion of retribalization, amidst the prevalent centralised and hierarchical social structures from the medieval era to the present.

Though peer-to-peer is related to earlier social modes, those were most in evidence in the early tribal era, and it now emerges in an entirely new context, enabled by technologies that go beyond the barriers of time and space. After the dominance during the last several millennia, of centralised and hierarchical modes of social organization, it is thus in many ways now a radical innovative emergence, and also reflects a very deep change in the epistemological and ontological paradigms that determine behavior and worldviews.\(^ {60}\)

The characteristics of peer-to-peer reflect the core values of the Internet like decentralisation, horizontalisation and equipotency. The P2P Manifesto explains the social structure of a peer-to-peer as “a network, not a pyramidal hierarchy (though it may have

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\(^{58}\) The peer-to-peer Foundation is an international organization focused on studying, researching, documenting and promoting peer to peer practices in a very broad sense. See http://peer-to-peerfoundation.net/.

\(^{59}\) “Chapter 2,” P2p Foundation.

\(^{60}\) Chapter 2, P2p Foundation.
elements of it); it is ‘distributed’, though it may have elements of hierarchy, centralisation and ‘decentralisation’; intelligence is not located at any center, but everywhere within the system.”61

This structure is possible because of equipotency:

Assumed equipotency means that peer-to-peer systems start from the premise that ‘it does not know where the needed resource will be located’, it assumes that ‘everybody’ can cooperate, and does not use formal rules in advance to determine its participating members… Cooperation must be free, not forced, and not based on neutrality (i.e. the buying of cooperation in a monetary system). It exists to produce something. It enables the widest possible participation.62

The P2P Manifesto also explains the shift from panoptism to holoptism in peer-to-peer dynamics which allows for greater transparency: “Whereas participants in hierarchical systems are subject to the panoptism of the select few who control the vast majority, in peer-to-peer systems, participants have access to holoptism, the ability for any participant to see the whole.”63

Thus, peer-to-peer processes are offering alternative to traditional institution and systems especially those with authoritarian and centralised social structures. The concept has inspired new structures and philosophies in many areas of human interaction.64 Peer-to-peer, for example, is at the heart of the movement called Collaborative Consumption. Collaborative Consumption as a phenomenon is a class of economic arrangements in which participants share access to products or services, rather than having individual ownership.65 Collaborative Consumption tries to reclaim new ways of sharing, bartering, lending, trading, renting, gifting, and swapping online.66 Consequently, Collaborative Consumption is unsettling traditional modes of business and reinventing not just what we consume but how we consume. It is enabling “peer-

61 Chapter 2, P2p Foundation.
62 Chapter 2, P2p Foundation.
63 Chapter 2, P2p Foundation.
66 Botsman and Roo Rogers, What's Mine Is Yours.
to-peer” to become the default way people exchange — whether it’s unused space, goods, skills, money, or services — and sites like these are appearing everyday, all over the world. Some significant examples include: travel, car sharing, parking, clothing, and numerous other service and product categories. These people-to-people or peer-to-peer models create a new opportunity for individuals, communities, governments and corporations to transact and collaborate.67 There are hundreds of peer-to-peer platforms today, and every day new platform is added to the Internet. Many of these peer-to-peer platforms are possible because of new media technologies especially mobile apps.

Another paradigm of peer-to-peer is crowd sourcing—the process of obtaining needed services, ideas, or content by soliciting contributions from the crowd, usually an online community, rather than from traditional employees or suppliers.68 A famous example of crowd sourcing is US space agency NASA asking the public inputs in categorising and creating an open atlas out of an amazing collection of thousands of photos of the earth. Another example of P2P is crowdfunding (also called peer-to-peer funding). The idea is similar to crowd sourcing wherein if one has an innovative idea, s/he can ask the crowd to fund it.

In the light of the above, peer-to-peer social processes have transformed the economic sphere. The new media has become a new equalizer. Peer-to-peer platforms help to bypass capitalist powerful entities like corporations, banks and governments and set up alternative mechanism for trade and production. In this way, peer-to-peer is helping to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor. This implies, however, first of all, breaking the digital divide. The Internet is not just a communication medium but a means of production—a productive resource. It is emerging as a ‘third mode of production’ based on the cooperation of autonomous

agents. Michel Bauwens describes this ‘third mode of production’ made possible by the information technologies,

[1] If the first mode of production was laissez-faire based capitalism, and the second mode was the model of a centrally-planned economy, then the third mode is defined neither by the motor of profit, nor by central planning: to allocate resources and make decisions, it does not use market and pricing mechanisms, or managerial commands, but instead uses social relations. 69

Peer-to-peer and Collaborative Consumption show how the new media are contributing to the building of a new economics. It is fostering new values as alternative to the present values, for example, access is preferred over ownership of resources. In this way, the information economy is gradually making the transition from industrial economy. Information technologies are facilitating the move away from a market-based ethos. This in part is a response to the conviction that unbridled neo-liberal capitalism and dominance of the market economy is no longer tenable.

More and more people are joining the peer economy. A study in Malmo, Sweden, estimated 52% of the citizenry were already involved in peer production. As Bauwens declares, “We need to combine the anger of resistance movements with the productive communities already engaged in peer production, to constitute a new social force that is able to construct the society that we need.” 70

**Open-Source Politics**

New media technologies have also transformed the political landscapes in many countries around the world. New media technologies have enhanced the process of democratisation. They are contributing to the building of a new politics. This is expressed in new models of democracy like digital democracy, open government, and e-government.

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70 Bauwens, “Michel Bauwens: A Peer to Peer Economy.”
Open-source governance as a political philosophy advocates the application of the philosophies of the open-source and open-content movements to democratic principles in order to enable any interested citizen to add to the creation of policy, just like in a wiki document. Legislation is democratically opened to the general citizenry, employing their collective wisdom to benefit the decision-making process and improve democracy.\(^{71}\) Open government is the governing doctrine which holds that citizens have the right to access the documents and proceedings of the government to allow for effective public oversight.\(^{72}\) Open-source government is also realized through freedom of information laws which grants access to information of government projects to everyone. As Douglas Rushkoff explains,

> The implementation of an open-source democracy will require us to dig deep into the very code of our legislative processes, and then rebirth it in the new context of our networked reality. It will require us to assume, at least temporarily, that nothing at all is too sacred to be questioned, reinterpreted and modified. But in doing so, we will be enabled to bring democracy through its current crisis and into its next stage of development.\(^{73}\)

Through open-source politics, ordinary citizenry truly becomes active participant in the democratic processes, as Rushkoff elaborates,

> We move from simply following the law to understanding the law, to actually feeling capable of writing the law: adhering to the map to understanding the map, to drawing our own. At the very least, we are aware that the choices made on our behalf have the ability to shape our future reality and that these choices are not ordained but implemented by people just like us.\(^{74}\)

At the same time, the Internet has weakened traditional political parties. This is illustrated by Andrew Keen in his article, “Has the Internet killed politics?” where he comments on attitudes especially of young people to the most recent election in the United Kingdom (UK). Keen argues “that the highly individualized and personalized culture of the Internet—a

\(^{71}\) Rushkoff, *Open Source Democracy*, 56.


\(^{73}\) Rushkoff, *Open Source Democracy*, 57.

\(^{74}\) Rushkoff, *Open Source Democracy*, 58.
consequence of the weakening of traditional twentieth century institutions, from corporations to political parties—has changed young people's sense not only of the centrality of themselves but also of the significance of political parties and institutions.” Keen concludes that “the Internet, with its individualization and personalization, is contributing to the crisis of many political parties—particularly in the UK.”

e) Liminal: New Media as a Transitional Space and Time

New media has afforded the experience of a liminal space and time towards reconfiguring self, society and church. It is a transitional and fleeting moment from anti-structure to structure. Madge and O'Connor suggest that liminality as a concept can denote both a space and time of ‘betweenness’ which enables a more lively understanding of cyberspace; a way of thinking about cyberspace as a productive space with creative possibilities. Similarly, Dennis D. Waskill thinks that new media is an environment where people may craft representations of self and society in ways that differ - sometimes profoundly - from everyday life. Many scholars have examined how internet users actively (and often quite intentionally) reconfigure self and society in these unique social and technological environments.

The internet is like a *comunitas*—no power, no status; an anti-structure space. New media as *comunitas* is challenging the understanding of the meaning of being society and human person. New media are not just tools but harbinger of new personhood, economic, political and

76 Keen, “Has the Internet killed politics?”
77 Madge and O'Connor, Mothers in the Making? Exploring Liminality in Cyber/Space. 93.
79 Waskill, Ekstasis and the internet, 52.
cultural paradigms. The Internet is an enabler of social change; it is facilitating the emergence of a new world, society, and individual. It is changing how we think, behave, relate and live.

The liminality of new media is manifested in its revolutionary nature. New media has propelled the world to a Copernican revolution early in the twenty-first century. The media revolution has superseded the industrial revolution. The emergence of the Internet in the late twentieth century created a radical impact on the collective and individual lives of humankind comparable to the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in the fifteenth century. Its impact is not just on external structures but also on internal values and beliefs. The revolutionary changes brought by the new media are not just the question of technology or technique but more significantly about new mindset and behaviours.

Although, the media revolution is bloodless, it is revolutionizing not just global structures but everybody’s deepest values and beliefs. The most profound transformation happens in the mundane daily activities: communication, relationships within the family, work patterns, religious beliefs, individual values and attitudes, gender and sexual behaviours, parenting, couple relationship, national and ethnic identities. It is subverting old cherished meaning-giving dynamics as well as facilitating new ones with consequences both good and bad for families, communities, churches and traditions.

As British sociologist Anthony Giddens declares, it “isn’t only about what is ‘out there’, remote and far away from the individual. It is an ‘in here’ phenomenon too, influencing intimate and personal aspects of our lives.”80 “We continue to talk of the nation, the family, work, tradition, nature, as if they were all the same as in the past. They are not.”81 Similarly, McLuhan was talking about radical changes way back in the 1960’s because of the information

81 Giddens, Runaway World, 18.
explosion: “Everything is changing—you, your family, your neighbourhood, your education, your job, your government, your relation to ‘the others.’ And they’re changing dramatically.”

It is no wonder, the swift, and confusing changes which globalisation brings to our world make us think that it is a world out of control, in Gidden’s term—a runaway world.

As with any revolutionary changes, however, the new media revolution has led to several crises. The shift toward a network society has questioned traditional institutions—nation-state, church, government, corporations, education and business. The dynamics of peer-to-peer interaction is challenging the fundamental values of present systems of government, economic and socio-political structures. The inability of modern institutions and systems to anticipate the likely results of the transformations brought about by the new media has contributed to the crisis.

The contemporary crisis is present in the different dimensions of our social life. In the economic realm, the Global Financial Crisis of 2007–2008 has been considered by many economists as the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s. In recent years, many economists have questioned the merits of the free-market economy and the capitalist system. Concomitantly, the belief which deifies and idolizes the market economy is beginning to crumble. The story of unlimited growth that capitalism has so ardently acclaimed is coming to an end. Contrary to Fukuyama’s claim, capitalism does not have the final word; economic transformation is still ongoing. Consequently, alternative social structures to capitalism have emerged and still emerging. Some of these were propelled by the new media technologies.

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direction of the economy towards a sharing economy, for example, is strongly espoused by proponents of peer-to-peer movements. Proponents of peer-to-peer economy foresee a post-capitalist society, an open-source economy where sharing presents an alternative to ownership and profit-driven capitalist economy.

In the political realm, there is an explosion of democratisation by ordinary people expressing their opinions and protesting authoritarian governments. Ordinary people are making historic changes, knocking down tyrants once seen as invincible. But not just authoritarian governments, financial institutions like banks and stock markets are taking a beating from widespread global protests like the Occupy movement. No wonder, *Time Magazine* named its person of the year for 2011, the protester, to pay tribute to the millions of ordinary citizens around the globe who have taken to the streets marching for freedom and democracy. As Giddens argues, democracy is perhaps the most powerful energizing idea of the twentieth century.

Many of the recent democratisation movements were facilitated by new media technologies especially social networks like Facebook and Twitter. The new environment created by the New Media, which promotes transparency and openness, propelled citizens from all over the world to call for a more interactive and open government. Many countries in the world have enacted a freedom of information bill because ordinary citizens demanded more transparency in all government transactions. The political crisis is not so much about direct challenge to authority inasmuch as it is the shift in today’s culture from hierarchical to interactive and peer-to-peer culture.

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New Media has become an important recourse for lay people in the intermediate
situation. *Redemptoris Missio* identified a recent phenomenon in evangelization as an
intermediate situation between *ad gentes* (people who have not yet known Christ and needs to be
evangelized and baptized) and pastoral care (regular care and nourishment of active baptized
Christian communities):

> There is an *intermediate situation* (my italics), particularly in countries with ancient Christian roots …
> where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider
> themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel.

This intermediate situation finds some Catholics on the margins as their experience of
religiosity moves them further away from the official church’s religiosity. In this threshold
existence, they seek new meanings of faith and church different from the official expressions.
This in-between situation may also refer to people who are seeking new ways of faith between
different religions, people seeking new identity between cultures; new ways of belonging
between races, local and global and gender. This is the space between multiple hybridity which
has become all too common in this hyper-globalized world.

The major platform that these Christians on the margins utilized in their seeking and
production of new meanings about the faith and church is the new media particularly the internet
and its content and applications—hypertext language, websites, interactive animations, blogs,
social networks, audio and video. Internet with its non-hierarchical, acentric, horizontal network
encouraged their free-flowing search and production of meaning. It also became the new source
of information about faith and God, compromising the traditional source of authority—the
church hierarchy. In this way, the new medium of the internet has transformed their
understanding of authority and truth which empowered them to create their own meanings.

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89 Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (Latin for Mission of the Redeemer): On the Permanent Validity of the
Church’s Missionary Mandate, (Vatican, 1990), no. 33.
Ordinary faithful do not turn as much as before to priests, pastors, sisters, churches and institutional religion for information and support for their faith. Many are seeking information and support about the faith from one another through the mechanism of the new media particularly the social media. It is providing people with the space to experiment with their identity and community through virtual identities and communities. The Internet has also created a convenient platform for ordinary citizens to shop for churches; compare, study and choose a religion, or choose from within a faith tradition, in a sense, creating one’s own religion and faith. The new media with its content and applications—hypertext language, websites, interactive animations, blogs, social networks, audio and video—and its non-hierarchical, acentric, and horizontal network structure, have encouraged the free-flowing search and production of new meanings about faith and religion.

New media have also helped to foster a deeper existential crisis. The network society has questioned traditional understanding of what it means to be human and to be a society. New and retrieved old meanings of being human and the purpose of human existence have come to the fore as a consequence of the interconnected new media environment.

Consequently, the information technologies have heightened the consciousness of the present moment as a birthing and transitional existence. David Bollier and Silke Helfrich articulated the call of rebirth out of contemporary crises, “It has become increasingly clear that we are poised between an old world that no longer works and a new one struggling to be born.”

As the old order continues to look untenable, there is an ardent quest for a new economic and political vision. With the help of new information technology, a rebuilding of the

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state and government, rethinking and re-engineering of politics, economics, culture and even religion have ensued.

**A New Humanity, New Society**

New media as environment is challenging our understanding of the meaning of our being society and human person. New media are not just tools but harbinger of new personhood, economic, political and cultural paradigms. The Internet is an enabler of social change; it is facilitating the emergence of a new world, society, and individual. It is changing how we think, behave, relate and live.

The new media age is comparable to the Renaissance interlude. During the Renaissance the printing press and the literacy movement that followed influence the course of history. Renaissance which literally means ‘rebirth’, the rebirth of old ideas in a new context, conjure the same aura in today’s new media age

**f) Teleological: New Media as Evolving**

The story of the internet reveals a more profound story that goes beyond technological innovation. It is the story of humanity seeking itself. It is the story of the intrinsic interconnectedness that is a reflection of the Trinitarian communion. This can be gleaned from the history of the internet.

**Origin of the Internet: Human’s Deepest Desire for Connection**

The Internet which facilitated the new media environment is a marvel of technology. Its history, however, will show that the deepest aspiration of humankind for connection rather than technology is the greater marvel. Humanity’s drive for connection was the primary catalyst that influenced the development of the internet. As Ian Peter has said, “There had to be an Internet

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91 Rushkoff, *Open Source Democracy*, 32.
sometime, because we, as a human species, have always had this deep desire to communicate and to communicate over distance ... in our essence we are communicating beings.” 92 The history of the Internet is the story of the desire for communication and connection of many people rather than the work of autonomous and separate individual geeks driven by technology. The desire for deeper communication lies at the heart of the story of the development of the internet.

The Internet began with the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET) in 1969. ARPANET was created by the US Department of Defense’s Advanced Research Projects Agency ARPA), a small agency that has been deeply involved in the development of computer science in the United States.93 The most important innovation that ARPANET did in 1969 was to develop a variation of a technique called packet switching.94 This method was devised to interconnect computers over networks that were different to how telephone system works; a phone system uses circuit switching. The significance of this is that one can have machines talking to each other and could speak to many different computers all at the same time by sending packets out to each one of them.

In the beginning, the purpose of interconnecting computers and network was solely scientific.95 The goal of the original ARPANET was to share computing resources—called time-sharing—around the U.S. By allowing a large number of users to interact simultaneously with a single computer, time-sharing considerably lowered the cost of furnishing computing

95 This goes against popular belief that the network was designed to survive a nuclear attack. Cold war scenario was not the real purpose of the inception of the internet. Surviving a nuclear attack was not Arpanet’s motivation, nor was the building of a global communications network. (Ian Peter, “The beginnings of the Internet.”)
capability. Moreover, it made possible for individuals and organizations to use a computer without owning one, and promoted the interactive use of computers and the development of new interactive applications.96

By integrating different kinds of existing networks as well as future technologies with one common network architecture, it allowed every host to become an equal player.97 Thus, the Internet right from the beginning was conceived as a peer-to-peer system.98 Alongside peer-to-peer system is a decentralised system. In a fully decentralised system, every host is an equal participant; no hosts has special facilitating or administrative roles.99

Thus, communication without central control, decentralised architecture, highly resilient to any impediment, and open platform became the important founding principles of the Internet. Barry M. Leiner further described this innovative mechanism,

The Internet as we now know it embodies a key underlying technical idea, namely that of open architecture networking. In this approach, the choice of any individual network technology was not dictated by a particular network architecture but rather could be selected freely by a provider and made to interwork with the other networks through a meta-level “Internetworking Architecture”.100

ARPANET did not succeed in its original technological purpose, but in the process, made other significant discoveries that were to result in the creation of the first Internet. These included email developments, packet switching implementations, and development of the (Transport Control Protocol - Internet Protocol) or TCP/IP.101 The internet was a product of constant re-invention both of the technology itself and its purpose and meaning. As Janet Abbate

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101 Peter, “The beginnings of the Internet.”
argued, the invention of Internet was “not an isolated act of invention, but rather the idea that the meaning of the Internet had to be invented—and constantly reinvented—at the same time as the technology itself.”

Thus, in the process of its invention and reinvention, the Internet went beyond its technological purpose through the co-optation of technology for human purposes—mainly, communication, sharing, and interconnection. The Internet became more about human than technological achievement. Indeed, the history of the Internet is not the story of the mechanization of humanity but the humanization of technology. It is more about the story of the evolution of communication of humanity with the aid of technology. Internet is not just wires and cables but people profoundly yearning to connect with one another. Therefore, the real value of the Internet in the future, as in the past, will be about the magnitude that human beings continue to utilise technology towards the realisation of our human purpose. The greatest innovation is how technology can enhance our true identity and mission in the cosmos. More than enchantment with technology, our innate interconnectedness was the main purveyor and impetus for the internet. Internet was not a one person invention but a collaborative and interactive enterprise.

Put differently, we did not invent the internet inasmuch as the internet invented us. Humankind invented the internet and the internet awakened humankind’s profound need for connection. The story of the internet, therefore, is a human story; it is the story of humanity seeking its deepest self. In hindsight, the internet, indeed, would have to be invented because humans would always seek ways, means and technology to liberate its deepest identity. The story of the Internet demonstrates the aspiration of human beings to live as *imago Dei*—created in the likeness and image of a deeply relational and communicational God. This is why the

church documents have repeatedly spoken of media as inchoate instruments of God’s communication.

A significant phenomenon is that some people have implied religious and spiritual elements to cyberspace. They equate some elements of cyberspace like the non-hierarchical and horizontal relationship, interactivity, social networking and interconnectedness to the religious values of unity, peace and cooperation. Some heralded the optimistic view that cyberspace is the projection of unfulfilled dreams and utopian longings, which are difficult or impossible to achieve in actual space. William A. Stahl, in *God and the Chip: Religion and the Culture of Technology*, for example, believe the presence of implicit religion and unrecognized mysticism behind all the talk about computers and the Internet. Margaret Wertheim offered similar observations in her book, *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace*. She argued that cyberspace is a realm in which people are seeking what used to be called paradise. She considers cyberspace as hallowed and sacred space capable of not just informing the mind but of nourishing the soul as well. Similarly, Michel Bauwens expressed:

Partly, the infinity that cyberspace creates, functions as an ideal mechanism for the projection of our fondest hopes and deepest fears. It therefore generates an extraordinary amount of cultural energy, the fusion of techno-utopianism, the desire for the spiritual liberation from the constraints of matter, and the end of the millennium fears for the end of the world.

Equating the Internet with religion is also expressed by Jim Gilliam’s speech in a video entitled “Internet is my religion” which became viral in the internet. He declared, “God is just

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what happens when humanity is connected… Humanity connected is God.”107 The speech was given at the Personal Democracy Forum on June 6th 2011 and has been viewed more than 500,000 times in YouTube.108 Gilliam, a software developer, and evangelist, contracted a deadly cancer—Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma—when he was twenty-eight. His only survival depended upon the life of another who can give him a bone marrow. As all the odds went against his favour, he turned to the Internet. Through a vigorous campaign in the social media, his friends were able to pressure the hospital and surgeon to operate on him. This speech by Gilliam was a testimony to his belief that our life is a debt to the many lives of others.

But everything we achieve is built on the sacrifices of others. Whether it’s the freedom we enjoy because of the soldiers who fight for our country, or the scientists who invent the cures that keep us healthy. We are all connected, we are all in debt to each other, we all owe every moment of our lives to countless people we will never meet… The Internet gives us the opportunity to pay back a small part of that debt.109

This is the new religion that he proclaims—a religion of interconnectedness which he found on the Internet: “We are the leaders of this new religion. We have faith that people connected can create a new world…I have faith in people. I believe in God. And the Internet is my religion.”110 Rainn Wilson also declared strongly that the future of spirituality is the internet, “I believe the Internet is the future of spirituality.”111

B. Challenges of New Media Age to Missio Dei

Let us examine the challenges of new media to the proclamation of Missio Dei from the different perspectives.

108 Gilliam, The Internet is my Religion.
109 Gilliam, The Internet is my Religion.
110 Gilliam, The Internet is my Religion.
a) Instrumental

New media as instruments for proclaiming the Missio Dei has several implications.

First of all, new media as an instrument can help change the notion of mission as just going out—the geographical notion of mission. Much of what many understand as mission still belongs to the colonial notion of mission as going out into the far distant lands and conquer it for Christ. New media changes this image of mission as well as of missionaries. Mission is not just crossing rivers, climbing mountains and travelling long distance. Mission through the new media can erase distance as mission can be done right at one’s own room. New media as instrument of mission has also democratize mission, making it more possible for mission to be done “from everyone to everywhere.”

Secondly, new media as instrument has the potential for a massive and widespread evangelisation in the church. The church, however, needs to learn the language and dynamics of this new medium. The new media requires a different language and operation from print, TV and radio. The church needs to learn the language and style of the new media. The church also needs to be ready to work within the mechanics and dynamics of the new media.

Thirdly, new media appeal to the young in the city, the present generation. St. John Paul II has noted the significant influence of the new media upon the younger generation. “In particular, the younger generation is growing up in a world conditioned by the mass media.”

The instrumentalist perspective on media cannot be ignored. Being critical of information communication technologies does not imply that we deny the efficiency and technique it brings to mission. New media are gifts from God.

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112 Redemptoris Missio, 37.
b) Territorial

As a frontier of mission, people in new media are no longer mere “passive” but “active” agents of the message and programs of mission. Unlike the “instrumentalist” paradigm where the relationship is more one way, new media as a mission field is where individuals and groups actually alter and inform the mission content as they absorb and redefine its meaning.

The new media as a collaborative environment which challenges and encourages the church to participate in the public square. The church has a role in the public square’s discussing and finding solutions to the common problems of our people—justice and peace, poverty alleviation, human rights, education, environmental protection and others. This also propels the church to collaborate and link up with people’s organizations and other agencies in advocating liberating and innovative projects that will benefit especially the poor and disadvantaged in society.

The collaborative environment also impels the renewal of the operation of mission by the church. The challenge of collaboration demands a shift from exclusivist to collaborative attitude in the missionary activity of the church. The multimedia culture challenges the church towards a collaborative mission where dialogue and interactivity become the primary relational mode. The collaborative climate of the new media further challenges the church to open her mission for collaboration and participation. Collaborative mission involves all in the church—pastors, missionaries, lay, and religious. Collaborative mission is an open-source mission where the launching of the mission is more often the beginning of the work rather than its end.

New media as a mission field offers some portals to assist the church in the shift to collaborative mission. New media can offer the church a mechanism of mission outsourcing—kind of “wikimission”. Through the new media, the church can ask its members who are also
netizens to collaborate in its mission both from the local and global scale. The church can employ crowdsourcing in mission to assist with information and technology about important issues in the mission areas like livelihood, conflict-resolution, and organising. The church can also utilise crowd-funding platforms like Kickstarter, Indiegogo, Crowdrise, and others, to support innovative projects in mission.

The heightened awareness about participation and collaboration also highlights the understanding of the Kingdom of God as the goal of mission. The collaborative climate, however, expands the church’s perspective about the Kingdom of God; it goes beyond the church as it is mainly the project of God. Although the church is the sacrament of the Kingdom—the efficacious sign of the eschatological fulfilment of the Kingdom—the church is neither separated nor dominant to the world where God’s mission or work is ever active. God is constantly preparing the world for the coming of the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is not the exclusive goal of the church but the goal of God for all religions, all cultures, all races and nations. This demands a participatory attitude in mission; the church, first of all, is a participant to God’s mission of building the Kingdom rather than the triumphalist and exclusive bearer of the Kingdom of God.

As the world moved towards greater interconnection and interaction because of the new media, postcolonial mission’s movement away from the west to new centres of mission—south, contexts and cultures—likewise reflected a desire for more interactivity in mission. Ordinary Christians gradually moved away from the institutional framework of doing mission. This propelled a shift in relationships in mission from hierarchical—which highlights the vertical dynamic of mission as sending and receiving—to people-of-God mission, which emphasizes the horizontal dynamic of mission: all are missionaries. The traditional structure of the sending
church and the receiving church is transformed as mission is carried out “from everyone to everywhere”. The traditional vertical relationship of missionary and the people is being transformed by a horizontal relationship emphasizing the mutual conversion of the missionary and the people; missionaries evangelize but are also evangelised. The notion of missionary as an exclusively professional group is gradually dispensed in favour of the missionary as the identity and vocation of all. The growing understanding of mission towards participatory mission—from “our” mission to “we” mission.

The new media negotiated religious experience challenges the institutional expressions of religions. Religion is no longer confined to the religious experience and construction sanctioned by the hierarchical church. People have an expanded experience of the sacred that goes beyond official religious institutions. The church building no longer occupies the exclusive space of the spiritual; the whole world is where God moves.

c) Ethical

The greater knowledge and interconnection brought by information technology and advanced communications has led to a sense of greater ethical responsibility. Living in the global village mediated by new media has given rise to a need for ethics in the internet called netiquette—a new way of behaving, living and doing in the midst of interconnectedness. This new ethics works against the privatisation of morality—the need to shift from “I” morality to “we” morality. Morality is not just a private affair between the individual and God but a collective enterprise. Morality is lived and practised by an individual not in isolation but as a relational being.

Moreover, the new ethics which grew out of the experience of interconnectedness requires new ways and norms for living as one world—a global ethics. This global ethics

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113 Escobar,
proclaims a common patrimony of the environment, common responsibility for the suffering in
the world, common aspiration for the building of a better world every day. Beck proposes that a
global ethical order should be based on otherness not sameness—acknowledging the otherness of
those who are culturally different, otherness of the future, otherness of nature, otherness of the

d) Ecological/cultural

The ecological perspective on new media challenges mission to consider new media not
as something out there but as in here. The transformations that new media brought to our
consciousness challenges mission as well. Every theology and mission is mediated. A major
challenge of the new media age to the church is a call for identity renewal: What is the church?
Who is the church? What is the goal of the church? The call for identity renewal challenges the
church to reclaim its original source and wellspring of meaning and traditions.

We are Born to Connect

The interconnected life which the new media heightened, calls for a life of integration
and synergy as opposed to a life of isolation and compartmentalisation. This challenges the
church to connect with the world today. The church is a significant part of this vast network. In
this hyperconnected world, the church cannot afford to be isolated. The church cannot
relinquish her prominent place, identity, and charism in this globalized and information-rich
world. Moreover, despite the often unwelcoming milieu the church finds herself in the world
today, the church cannot afford to be comfortable and self-sufficient. The church cannot isolate
themselves and insulated from the concerns and worries of the world.
The church has always encountered difficulties in connecting with the modern world ever since its inception. Vatican II was called by St. John XXIII partly because of the church’s seeming disconnect and being out of touch with the modern world. One of the manifestations of this disconnection is the language used by the church. Sometimes the language the church used in making alive the memory of Jesus is different from the language of ordinary people especially of young people. On the one hand, this manifests the church’s continuous holding on to the old set ways of Christendom. On the other hand, this also shows the church’s resiliency to the values of modernity.

The church’s endeavour to connect with the present world is not to accommodate the world or water down her teachings to make it more palatable or to be hip or cool, but in the process, adulterates the power and impact of the Gospel on our world today. The church does not merely connect with the world but more importantly the church leads the people to become aware of the deepest connection of their lives—their connectedness with the eternally interconnected Trinitarian God. The church’s prophetic mission on the Internet is how to facilitate people to a genuine connection from the virtual to the actual reality of their lives.

The challenge of making connections, therefore, demands the exposition of connections that are shallow and superficial. While social network has amplified connection it has also bolstered pathologies like narcissism, exhibitionism and amplified voyeurism. Many times, the Internet has also become an instrument of disconnection. An example of disconnection engendered by the Internet is a disconnection within one’s true identity. One of the tenets of Internet culture is anonymity. The American Association for the Advancement of Science’s conference on “Anonymous Communication Policies for the Internet” upholds that “online anonymous communication is morally neutral” and that “it should be considered a strong human
and constitutional right.”115 Many people have taken advantage of this anonymity “right” especially in commenting by using unidentifiable pseudonyms which are frequently separated and anonymous from the actual author. Freedom of expression is fundamental, however, this can be misinterpreted and lead to less accountability, deception, distortion and withholding the truth about one’s identity. A disconnect in identity ensues which raises questions between authenticity and anonymity.

Another disconnect is the disconnect between the virtual and physical reality. Online communication which harbours anonymity has endangered face-to-face communications and encouraged more impersonal interaction. This explains the irony of the hyperconnected Internet: many are connected online, in actual reality, however, are disconnected with their own family, community, and church. Thus, a significant question is: Is technology bringing us together or keeping us apart?

An important disconnect in the Internet is the digital divide. Despite the ubiquity of the Internet in all aspects of contemporary society, it excludes more than half of humankind. The digital world has engendered new “haves” and “have not”; the “haves” are the information rich and the “have nots” are the information poor. In this intrinsically interconnected world, connectivity is a fundamental human right, as UN declares. Benedict XVI expressed this same sentiment in his Message for the 43rd World Communications Day in 2009,

It would be a tragedy for the future of humanity if the new instruments of communication, which permit the sharing of knowledge and information in a more rapid and effective manner, were not made accessible to those who are already economically and socially marginalized, or if it should contribute only to increasing the gap separating the poor from the new networks that are developing at the service of human socialization and information.116

Addressing the digital divide and catering to the most abandoned in this hyperconnected world, the church can help in the advocacy for making available new media technologies to the poor.

The challenge for the church’s mission in this context is the proclamation of a genuine connection of individual with the community, the whole of humanity and with God in contrast to a superficial communication which reinforces more the individualisation, isolation and privatisation of life and faith. Preaching the Gospel in the Internet calls the individual into account and helps free the individual from the tyranny of individualism. As Bosch asserts, “The individual is not a monad, but part of an organism.”\(^{117}\) Thus, the individual must be challenged to seek the fulfilment of the self in connection with others. This demands, as Bosch writes, that the ‘psychology of separatedness’ make way for the ‘epistemology of participation’.\(^{118}\) On the other hand, there is place for solitude in genuine connection which oftentimes offers a prodigious time to experience God, as deeply spiritual mystics have attested. The rule of “I am connected, therefore I am” has privileged connection as the norm and made silence and solitude the deviant today. Thus, the challenge of evangelisation in the internet is to try to strike a creative balance between the fundamental connectedness of all beings and a healthy solitude of the individual.

The implication of connection is not just between human beings but even with non-humans and non-living things—material things, technology, nature, cosmos. Walter Ong emphasized that the development of information technologies has heightened the renewed awareness of human’s connection with the whole of cosmos. Ong elaborates,

\(^{117}\) Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 362.

\(^{118}\) Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 362.
Our present fascination with ecology of all kinds is tied in with the information explosion that has marked our age. . . . With the information explosion, we have become more and more conscious of the interrelationships of all the life and structures in the universe around us, and, with our more and more detailed knowledge of cosmic and organic evolution, ultimately of interrelationships as building up to and centering on life, and eventually human life.119

As we gain more knowledge and information through the new media, we become more aware of the smallness of our minds and the bigness of the questions we faced. The expanding consciousness that we are just one tiny dot in the universe and that we are interconnected with fellow human beings, nature and even the whole cosmos has devalued human supremacy and individual seclusion. Human beings are no longer masters and have dominion over the earth, but are connected with nature. We are stewards of God’s creation.

The renewed awareness of human’s connection with the environment sees nature as an essential part of the discourse regarding the search for alternatives to present systems. For example, in the economic discourse, Ernst Friedrich Schumacher argued for a framework that goes beyond the conventional macro-economy and micro-economy dialectics in order to include the meta-economy: “[T]he study of economics is too narrow and too fragmented to lead to valid insight unless accompanied by meta-economics.”120 By meta-economics, Schumacher suggested the inclusion of the important element of the environment in the economic equation and the search for a more sustainable and productive economic system.

The creation-centred realisation challenges humans not just to connect with nature but to learn from nature and even to live like nature, animals and plants. This is exemplified by the science of biomimetics or biomimicry which is the imitation of the models, systems, and elements of nature for the purpose of solving complex human problems.121 Biomimicry is an

approach to innovation that seeks sustainable solutions to human challenges by emulating nature’s time-tested patterns and strategies. The goal is to create products, processes, and policies—new ways of living—that are well-adapted to life on earth over the long haul. The core idea is that nature has already solved many of the problems humans are grappling with.122 Biomimicry cites actual examples of learning from nature in different fields: Energy—learning from humpback whales how to create efficient wind power; Architecture—learning from termites how to create sustainable buildings; Transportation—learning from kingfishers how to break through boundaries; Agriculture—learning from prairies how to grow food in resilient ways; Medicine—learning from mosquitos to create “a nicer needle”; Communication—learning from dolphins how to send signals underwater;123 Synergy—in the natural world, synergistic phenomena are ubiquitous … the division of labor in bacterial colonies, the synergies of scale in multi-cellular organisms, as well as the many different kinds of synergies produced by socially-organized groups, from honeybee colonies to wolf packs and human societies.124

The Internet bred interactive culture is slowly undermining the monopoly of central authority and advocating decentralisation as the new governing principle. New media technologies which favour collaboration and connectedness are facilitating the introduction of alternatives to traditional institutions and structures. Shared and participative power has become the favoured power relation in the network society. Construction of meaning has become participatory and interactive. Communication has become a shared production of meaning. As Hoover asserts,

The media today provide the context for participation in local, national and even global common cultures of shared ideas, symbols, issues and values. People want to be part of that common cultural conversation. They want to participate in interactions at work, in their neighborhoods, in their families, even at church, mosque, or temple, that are about the issues, questions and experiences that are shared in common, that is, through the media. Knowledge of what is going on in the common culture becomes a kind of currency of exchange that defines identities in contemporary life.  

The shift to interactive culture has brought a dilemma to church leaders who see their role as gate-keepers or controllers of the production and interpretation of messages while confronted with ordinary members in the church who want to share in the creation and reading of meaning. The issue is not about undermining established authority and institutions but the transformation in the flow of power from vertical to horizontal, from hierarchical to networking, from top down to peer-to-peer. The shift from a hierarchical and centralised to interactive and open systems is not a sinister plot to undermine the authority of the church, government, and corporations but rather reflects a shift in society where the new media plays a big purveyor.

**The Medium is the Message: The Church as Medium in the New Media Age**

A big challenge of the new media to mission is towards *Missio ad intra*. The new media challenges the church to strengthen its real life experience of being church and community. McLuhan’s dictum “The medium is the message,” exemplify this challenge. The church missionary work in the past, has been very heavy on content—doctrines, morality, instructions and institutional governance and consolidation, and activity—evangelisation, church building, and pastoral programs. Today’s hypermediated world challenges the church to give more attention to the medium of the gospel which is first of all their lives. The new media culture has intensified the calls for renewal in the church.

125 Stewart Hoover, “Media and Religion.”
126 Horsfield, *Mediated Spirit.*
The principle that the medium matters as much as the content in the mission of the church, is highlighted by the papacy of Pope Francis. There are many people who have commented about the new fresh breath of air that Pope Francis brought to the church today. However, Pope Francis did not really bring any new or revolutionary message. For too long many have forgotten the simple fact that the Gospel is revolutionary. Pope Francis himself admits that he is just retrieving the original message of the Bible and church doctrines. In other words, the content is the same; the fresh air that Pope Francis is bringing to the church, however, is the revitalising manner in which he speaks of the inclusive dimension of the Gospel and doctrines of the church, the simple lifestyle that he exemplify, the mercy and compassion of God that he practices and preach. These have made a big difference for many people, believers and non-believers alike, which challenged the deepest roots of their belief or non-belief.

In a generation which hungers for authenticity,\textsuperscript{127} the challenge of new media to mission is the connection of preaching with real life—the need for practising what the church preach, practicing what the church posts. The first challenge is to value the importance of ecclesial life: fellowship, celebration of sacraments, study of the Word, service and solidarity with the poor.

The first channel of the Gospel is not the hypertext or interactive forms of the new media but the church’s life. The message of Jesus remains the same but some changes are called for in the church who proclaims the message. The calls for internal renewal for all churches was echoed by Frances Forde Plude: “Every single religious group is having to reassess how to be who they are in the new electronic culture.”\textsuperscript{128} Similarly, Horsfield contends that, “In this highly competitive communication marketplace, it is crucial importance for Christian communicators to communicate in a way that is clear and attractive, setting out the distinctiveness of what one is

\textsuperscript{127} Evangelii Nuntiandi, 76.

\textsuperscript{128} Plude, ‘Wired Religion.’
saying and its relevance to the lives of the audience.” The greatest dangers for the church in this highly technologized world are either for the church to accommodate totally the world or further guard and preserve her identity by withdrawing from the world of new media. Either way, the church weakens or loses her true identity. The new media age challenges the church to reaffirm, while at the same time, reimagine her deepest identity. Evangelii Nuntiandi reminds the church of her deepest identity: “Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize.” What are the implications of the new media to this missionary identity? What new ways of living as church and mission are demanded by the new media age?

The Church as media, however, means a partaking of the medium of Jesus Christ. The true medium of God is Christ. The church is a medium only by virtue of the medium of the visible and invisible mission of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The church as medium is only possible through its participation with the medium of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the true medium of God’s Mission. There is a danger for Catholics who put heavy stress on mediation, as in the past—for example, sacraments, saints and icons. This is one of Martin Luther’s main reasons for the Reformation. The church can only serve as medium of the divine mission through Christ and the Holy Spirit. There is a radical distinction between the Church as medium and Christ as medium. Church as medium rests upon Christ as medium whereas Christ as medium extends and goes beyond the church.

New media also challenges the church to have a stronger life of witness. As St. Francis of Assisi was believed to have said: “Preach the Gospel in and out of season, and if necessary, use

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130 Evangelii Nuntiandi, 14.
131 Martin Luther's “Sola scriptura, sola fide” as the slogan of the Reformation exemplified his objection for the Catholic Church’s hierarchy and traditions as mediating one’s salvation.
words.” A stronger life of witness is needed for greater integrity and credibility of the church in doing mission in the new media age. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* stressed that “the first means of evangelisation is the witness of an authentically Christian life.”  

“132 The first form of witness is the very life of the missionary, of the Christian family, and of the ecclesial community, which reveal a new way of living. The missionary, who, despite all his or her human limitations and defects, lives a simple life, taking Christ as the model, is a sign of God and of transcendent realities.”  

133 The identity, the relationship, the way of life, the speaking, the acting, the values and attitudes, the ideas, the aura, the energy, the structures, the organization, the community of the church, are the message. “Above all, the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness. Here we have an initial act of evangelisation. All Christians are called to this witness, and in this way they can be real evangelisers.”  

134 Indeed, “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”  

135 “The Church is called to bear witness to Christ by taking courageous and prophetic stands in the face of the corruption of political or economic power; by not seeking her own glory and material wealth; by using her resources to serve the poorest of the poor and by imitating Christ’s own simplicity of life.”  

136 With stronger identity and greater integrity, the church will have a stronger credibility in offering her message and identity in the *agora* and *areopagus* of the new media.  

This implies a shift in evangelisation from instructing and teaching to demonstrating, witnessing, modelling and exemplifying. As Hipps argues, the Church as the Body of Christ, is God’s current medium and that how the church communicate and act is equally important.

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132 *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41.  
133 *Redemptoris Missio*, 42.  
134 *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 21.  
136 *Redemptoris Missio*, 43.
as what the church communicate.\textsuperscript{137} Similarly, Leslie Newbigin emphasized that the church is the hermeneutic of the Gospel.\textsuperscript{138} Newbigin is trying to argue that the way the church lives the Gospel—for better or ill—is the way that the Church teaches and proclaims the Gospel.

The new media also challenges the active and meaningful participation of all members of the church. Members of the church and the world today not only seek authenticity but also want to participate and be part of a community. People in the new media age seek not lectures or sermons but conversation, dialogue and shared experiences.

The strengthening of the ecclesial life is not, however, a withdrawal from the world and becoming insular—dealing only with internal life. As Pope Francis expressed it recently when he said, “I dream of a “missionary option,” so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation.”\textsuperscript{139} This is also essential for the success of the church’s mission in the new media.

Opening the church’s mission and life to cyberspace will demand transparency. In line with the church’s effort of opening her life to cyberspace, James Martin recommends: “Be honest about your own personal struggles and flaws. Let the audience see that you’re human.”\textsuperscript{140} The church needs to be authentic and open in sharing their grief and anxieties, pains and joys, sinfulness and redemption, hopes and dreams to the world. The human dimensions of the church’s life can help the world to understand that the church is connected to them, a part of the universal humanity and identifies with their own struggles and difficulties.

\textsuperscript{137} Shane Hipps,
\textsuperscript{138} Leslie Newbigin, \textit{The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society},
\textsuperscript{139} Pope Francis, \textit{Evangelii Gaudium}
\textsuperscript{140} McVeigh, Navigating the New Media Landscape, 71.
Despite the advanced media technologies, there is an appeal to return to a sense of mystery and the ineffable God in contemporary society. We saw how the new media has helped to provoke ideas about eternity and paradise. Some people equate elements of cyberspace like interactivity, social networking and interconnectedness to the religious values of unity, peace and cooperation. Thus, some heralded the prophetic view that cyberspace is the projection of unfulfilled dreams and utopian longings which are difficult or impossible to achieve in the physical world. Some even implied that cyberspace evokes the promise of paradise. While avoiding romantic and one-dimensional language in evangelisation, the church can take advantage of this openings in the new media to talk about the mysteries of the Kingdom of God beyond this world. This is expressed by the Pontifical Commission for Social Communications in the document, *The Rapid Development*, as it summoned the church to talk about eternal things in the new media,

> Communicate the message of Christ’s hope, grace and love, keeping always alive, in this passing world, the eternal perspective of heaven, a perspective which no communications medium can ever directly communicate, “What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him (1Cor 2:9).”

Thus, in the postmodern, pluralistic and new media milieu, the church need not withdraw from opening up dimensions of their lives which evoke a certain sense of mystery, for example, the sacraments, the vows, community life, and the mindfulness of a higher calling beyond themselves. In this way, the church are able to demonstrate Jesus’ words: “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

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The church needs to be “sacramental” in the new media age. For the church to be “sacramental” is not just celebrating the seven sacraments. The new media age demands a renewal of the sacramental life of the church. Becoming “the medium is the message” calls for enriching celebration of sacraments and liturgy where the people experience the sacraments as efficacious signs of God’s grace. This calls for a renewed understanding of the sacraments and the relationship of sacraments with mission. For the church to live a healthy sacramental life is not limited to have enriching celebrations of the seven sacraments. Many people who have turned to the new media are the same people who have lost interest in the church’s mechanical view and practice of sacraments. Emphasizing the understanding of the sacraments merely to the seven sacraments overlooks the fact that the root of the seven sacraments is Jesus and his whole life—his words and deeds. Jesus, whole life—his words and deeds is the Sacrament. As Schillebeeckx proclaims, Jesus is the original and primordial sacrament. Jesus’ whole life—his words and deeds were sacramental because they pointed to the mysterious presence and action of the Kingdom/reign of God; they revealed God, heaven and God’s reign amidst the banality and mundane life of the world. Jesus words and deeds proclaimed the reign of God which is in-breaking into the daily ordinary existence and experience of the people. In this way, Jesus’ words and deeds were counter-symbol to the dominant status quo of power, domination, wealth and anthropocentric values. All the signs and symbols “instituted” by Jesus, which are now the seven sacraments is rooted in Jesus’ symbolic and indeed, subversive words and deeds. By connecting the sacraments to Jesus symbolic act of proclaiming the mysterious presence and action of the Kingdom/reign of God, the sacraments are provocative and interruptive.

The church as “sacramental” that is called for in the new media age, is to become performative manifestations of Jesus ministry of proclaiming the in-breaking of the reign of God in the life of the people in the new media age. Missions can also become “sacramental” through the life of witness of the missionaries and exchange of gifts between the missionary and the people. These deeds are efficacious signs of God’s grace as they perform the presence of God’s grace in the life of the people and the missionary.

Return to Storytelling

Walter Ong has called the media environment today as second orality because of the prevalence of electronic modes of communication (for example, television and telephones). While the electronic medium is distinctly new, Ong calls it secondary orality because it has elements similar to primary orality like the return to myth and narrative and its interactive nature. Communities of oral cultures are small and communal. These characteristics were present in both Judaic and early Christian communities and churches. However, the unique character of this second orality is that it integrates elements from both the written and orality mode. Ong also describes the order and dynamics of primarily oral cultures where myths and narratives serve as shorthand in maintaining meaning order; where capacities of memory were limited to individual memory. The storyteller in the oral stage represents the data storage—like the computer memory of today.

Despite the advanced communication technologies, there is a clamour today for the return of orality like face-to-face and interactive communications. Horsfield affirms this,

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144 See Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 133 – 136.


While new media age is marked by the proliferation of highly technological information technologies it is at the same time a return to the human experiences which modernity had displaced but favoured in the primary orality of pre-literate age: religion, mystery, myth and magic.  

The notion of second orality also highlights the value of the story. Ong claims that the values and advantages of the story in primary oral cultures is being retrieved in today’s electronic age. This is the main feature of the secondary orality stage; while the present generation lives in highly advanced modes of communications, they hunger for story, interaction and relationships.

The return to the story is also relevant in our society today as the digital technologies has brought information overload which has shortened the present generation’s attention span. The difficulty of remembering all information has contributed to the appeal of myths and narratives and the disdain for lectures and instructions. Ong has pointed out the diminishment of remembering in the written and print culture because of the disappearance of mnemonic device and heuristics for remembering present in oral cultures. This is intensified in the digital environment. The need to recall information in the digital environment is weakened as data are now stored in the “cloud”. Students can just “google” information instead of reading books. This can promote laziness and superficial investigation of knowledge.

Professor Brian Sturm explains that storytelling is a way of thinking and organizing information, conveying emotions, and building community. Story in an oral culture is a storage of memory, a technique for passing on teachings, traditions and morals. Stories can easily be remembered even if they may contain lots of valuable information because they make connections. Another benefit of the story is its interactive character; audience create meaning as they interact with these stories. Stories do not impose; they are not authoritarian. It is not about

147 Horsfield, Mediated Spirit.


dominance but empowerment. Thus, people favour stories because it allows their identification and participation. In contrast to didactics and doctrines, the author and the reader are mutually transformed by the story.\textsuperscript{150} The appeal of the story is also evident in religion where there is a growing disdain for the preachy, dogmatic, moralistic and systematic proclamation. Stories are much favoured as they connect more with their own experiences while sermons is characterised as lecturing, explaining and moralising.

Pierre Babin and Angela Zukowski claims that filmmakers especially Walt Disney moviemakers are very effective in telling stories.\textsuperscript{151} By telling stories, they become one of the most prolific transmitters of values—whether for good or for ill. Likewise, TV shows like telenovelas and TV series, watched by millions every day, are effective storytellers and may contain implicit religious elements. “Movies are the stained-glass pictures of the twenty-first century,” said Michael Catt, pastor of the 3,000-member church.\textsuperscript{152} Tim Drake made a similar observation and took on the challenge of films for the church by utilizing the medium itself for the church’s evangelisation: “We realised that we have a generation that is influenced more by media than by the church and its pastors. We decided that we were not going to give the devil our children and grandchildren by default.”\textsuperscript{153}

In mission areas in the Philippines, some missionaries cannot start the mission activities like preaching, liturgical celebrations, and evangelisation if their favourite telenovela of the locals is showing on TV. The people are attracted to telenovela because it draws their emotion,

\textsuperscript{150} Sturm, “Storytelling Theory and Practice.”


\textsuperscript{153} Drake, “Churches Evangelize Through Film.”
and talks about their daily battles and issues, not about theories, sermons or doctrines. As Eilers explains, “The ‘new culture’ and reality of modern communication (like TV) is more determined by emotions than rationality, is more heart than head.”154

The secondary orality of the new media age challenges the church’s evangelisation towards a more narrative form of evangelisation like storytelling and theo-dramatic proclamation which makes connections, collaboration, and sharing. St. John Paul II’s *Ecclesia in Asia* affirms that, “the proclamation of Jesus Christ can most effectively be made by narrating his story, as the Gospels do.”155 In the same light, Bernard Bonnot appeals for a shift from rational to symbolical mode in evangelisation, “The challenge of today’s media culture requires that catechesis and theology move beyond an argumentative modality which appeals mainly to the mind toward the symbolic media environment which engages persons more fully.”156

Indeed, Christianity is first and foremost a story which is powerful without being dogmatic. This demands a re-affirmation of the Christian story. The stories that the church tell and the way the church tells her stories may no longer be as compelling as before. The present generation especially the generation heavily influenced by digital culture is seemingly no longer moved by stories that the church tells. A fundamental question that confronts the church in the new media age are: Does the church have a story to tell in the new media? Does the church still want to tell their story? What story of their lives as Christians will they tell the world in the new media? The danger for the church is to surrender to the present ethos because they think they no longer have an audience. This further justifies the need for the church to have a clear identity in the new media age, about who they are and what they are about.

155 *Ecclesia in Asia*, 20.
The prophetic ministry of the church upholds that religion has a place in the public square despite secularization.\textsuperscript{157} The church has something new and meaningful to say in the new media. As \textit{Redemptoris Missio} proclaims, “The Church has an immense spiritual patrimony to offer humankind, a heritage in Christ, who called himself “the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6): it is the Christian path to meeting God, to prayer, to asceticism, and to the search for life’s meaning.”\textsuperscript{158} Preaching Jesus’ infinite salvation continues to be a meaningful message despite the technological advancements of new media.

Withdrawing into its own insular lives is tantamount to saying that the church does not have a story to tell. This is somehow what is happening to the church in some Western countries—the marginalization of the Christian story or the religious story in the public square has led to the church’s retreat to its own ghetto. The continuous challenge for the church is to tell the Jesus story despite the marginalisation of the church. “Woe to me, if I do not preach the Gospel” (I Corinthians 9: 16). The challenge for doing \textit{Missio Dei} in the new media age is the continuous passing on of God’s story, Jesus’ story and how the stories of the people amalgamate into God’s story.

In the return to storytelling, the church can learn much from Jesus as a master storyteller. Jesus proclaimed the Gospel mainly through the parables. The Welsh New Testament scholar and influential Protestant theologian, Charles Harold Dodd defines the parable, “At its simplest, the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its

\textsuperscript{157} The notion that the church do not have any contribution to make in the public square of today’s secular age is challenged by Margaret Somerville in “Should Religion Be Evicted from the Public Square?” Warrane College, The University of New South Wales, 20 July 2011. Accessed 20/02/2012 at http://warrane.unsw.edu.au/f/publications/podcasts/Margaret_Somerville_Religion_Public_Square.mp3.

\textsuperscript{158} \textit{Redemptoris Missio}, 3c.
vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought.”\textsuperscript{159} Parables are metaphors about the coming of the reign of God. Parables manifest the beauty of Jesus incarnation; they portray Jesus’ keen observation of the everyday life of the people. The metaphors Jesus used in the parables are very familiar to the people in his time; it was drawn from everyday life in the first century Palestine. Jesus intended that the parables become so familiar in order to show to the people that the reign of God is unfolding right in the midst of their everyday life. In other words, Jesus was challenging the people to re-imagine their lives and discover the Kingdom of God hidden underneath their daily existence. The parables dramatize the creative tension between their quotidian existence and the reign of God. Thus, Jesus incessantly challenged his people to hear and to see the breaking-in of God’s reign in their midst: “Those who have ears, hear; those who have eyes, see!” (Mark 4: 9; 23, Matthew 11: 15, Luke 8:8). In the every day are pointers, signs and analogies of the reign of God. Another important lesson of the parable is that the Kingdom of God is \textit{now}! It is here and now. “The reign of God is in your midst” (Luke 17: 21). Although the full realisation of the reign of God is beyond this world, the people can discover and discern in their everyday life the presence of the reign of God.

Like Jesus, the church is being called to be tellers of parables in today’s new media age. Horsfield asserts that “A parabolic way of communicating religious truth has been significantly diminished within Christianity; recovering a creative use of parables may be an important strategy for communicating faith in an electronic age.”\textsuperscript{160} A parabolic way of communication does not necessarily entail repeating the parables of Jesus but by discovering new metaphors drawn from contemporary life which invites people today to re-imagine their lives and find the


\textsuperscript{160} Peter Horsfield, \textit{Mediated Spirit}.  

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treasure of the reign of God underneath their mundane existence. By using models, metaphors, symbols drawn from experience, we move from the known to the unknown, in order to arrive at a partial but more comprehensive expression of what faith means.\footnote{Anthony Kelly, “Section 1, Implications: A First Circle of Connections.”} This implies telling stories that would serve as a redescription of people’s daily existence towards a whole new world where the people experience the bounty of the reign of God in their lives. In contrast to a propositional evangelisation which always tell the people what to do or a moralistic preaching which always distinguish for them what is right and wrong, a parable model of evangelisation helps the people to re-imagine their lives and gives them the hope that they share in the fruits of the reign of God. Through imagination and narrative, preaching becomes “an offer of an image through which perception, experience, and finally faith can be reorganized in alternative ways.”\footnote{Brueggemann, \textit{The Word Militant}, 29}

Just like in the oral culture, the church needs a continuous “restorying”. In oral cultures, the efficacy of the story for its retelling from generation to generation lies in its continuous relevancy and vitality in every new situation of the succeeding generations. A classic example of “restorying” is the four Gospels of the New Testament. The evangelists came up with four Gospels out of the one Jesus story through a meaningful and creative “restorying”. In the same way, the church is called to a continuous process of “restorying” of the tradition and Scriptures afresh in the concrete and prodigious age of new media. This calls for a new meaning of religion and faith. Each one is challenged to have a wider and deeper understanding of God even beyond their religion and culture.

Storytelling upholds the resilience of the Christian story amidst the prevailing commodification, rationalization, individualisation of our world today. There are numerous threats in our media today that tries to frustrate and discredit the Jesus story, the Trinitarian story
and the stories of the people which mirrors the narrative of the Trinity. The Internet can be an important tool for this purpose as Douglas Rushkoff writes, “The Internet has given us the opportunity to challenge the storytellers who had dominated our politics, economics, society and religion and tell alternative stories which comes from our own.”

The return to narrative is further motivated by the present generation’s penchant for images, videos, animation, sounds in the new media age. Along with the appeal of the story is the compelling attraction of pictures in the new media age. Increasingly our culture has become a visual culture where “image is everything.” Every day we are bombarded by visual messages—photos, bumper stickers, posters, billboards, newspapers and magazines.

The contemporary visual culture further challenges the church’s methods and strategies for evangelisation. Preaching in today’s new media age with short attention span, needs to be more visual, narrative, and short. The body is the message in preaching—the church needs more often to cite examples from their own experiences. The appeal to image further enhances the present generation’s yearning for concrete modelling from the church. This further justifies the dictum that the lives of the church is “the medium is the message” today. In today’s visually oriented atmosphere, the church is first of all the image of the Gospel. The sort of image that people see in the church will either enrich or undermine the Gospel. In recent years, church documents have affirmed the “visual” dimension of evangelisation by stressing the living out of the Gospel rather than the presentation of doctrines and morals. Church as media of the Gospel are not just teachers which are merely transmitters but more as prophets who herald a new way of life, thinking and being for the reign of God.

163 Rushkoff, Open Source Democracy, 32.
New media technologies offer many applications, platforms and programs for storytelling. The proliferation of digital cameras, smart phones, tablets, MP3 players and other mobile gadgets has encouraged a digital telling of stories by individuals of their everyday life. New Media also offers extensive variety of programs for storing, sharing and publishing stories. Social networking sites like Facebook, Youtube, Flickr, Vevo and many others provide these services in order for the stories to be heard and seen around the globe.

Some churches are already maximizing these new media platforms. Many parishes have created their own free YouTube channel. Through their channels, parishes present their homilies, sacraments, special messages for the week. Some parishes and communities have also asked their parishioners to give testimonies.

**Interactivity**

Interactivity has also become a feature of the missiological developments in the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century. The traditional structure of the sending church and the receiving church is transformed as mission is carried out “from everyone to everywhere”. The traditional vertical relationship of missionary and the people is being transformed by a horizontal relationship emphasizing the mutual conversion of the missionary and the people; missionaries evangelise but are also evangelised. The notion of missionary as an exclusively professional group is gradually dispensled in favour of the missionary as the identity and vocation of all. The growing understanding of mission towards participatory mission—from “our” mission to “we” mission.
The interactive culture spawned by the new media challenges the traditional notion of the church as *Mater et Magistra*.\(^{164}\) Loren Mead in *The Once and Future Church* argues that the cultural values that shaped Christianity up to the twentieth century were uniformity, universality, and permanence. These made Christian truth and institutions to present themselves as universal, timeless, and permanent.\(^{165}\) An expression of this is the image of *Mater et Magistra*. The teacher as a source of faith information has been a crucial part of Christianity since its earliest time. On the other hand, the values that the electronic culture espouses are flexibility, adaptability, change, and experiment.\(^{166}\)

The new media environment calls for a re-examination of the traditional meaning of a teacher and the fundamental structures of the Church as teacher. Horsfield inquires about the meaning of a teacher in the new media age: “Is the Christian teacher a conveyor of information? A guide on a journey? An introducer to experience? A teacher of access skills?”\(^{167}\) Eilers argued that Church leaders are not any more just ‘gatekeepers’ who determine what reaches the audience. They must be ‘guides’ through the jungle of options, inspired by the principles and visions of Christian faith.”\(^{168}\) Horsfield offers to reframe the image of teacher by drawing upon the tradition of spiritual direction. This tradition seeks to respect and serve people’s personal integrity by providing shared experience, resources and traditions that help in that journey.\(^{169}\)

\(^{164}\) Although the encyclical *Mater et Magistra* written by Pope John XXIII on 15 May 1961 bear the same name, is not an explanation about the teaching authority of the Church. The encyclical rather is about “Christianity and Social Progress”.

\(^{165}\) Loren Mead, *The Once and Future Church: Reinventing the Congregation for a New Mission Frontier*, (Alban Institute, 1991), 60.

\(^{166}\) Horsfield, *Mediated Spirit*.

\(^{167}\) Horsfield, *Mediated Spirit*.


\(^{169}\) Horsfield, *Mediated Spirit*. 
Alternative images of teacher are demanded in the new media age. For the church to be a teacher in the new media age is called to become more of a listener than a speaker. The church as teacher also calls for the church to become a communicator. While the image of teacher may evoke a one way, top-down relationship—one is the giver, the other is the receiver—the image of communicator evokes a two-way/interactive relationship—both are giver and receiver; both benefit from each other; both are partners in a horizontal relationship. True evangelising moment can only happen in an interactive encounter. This reflects more the Trinitarian ontology, the *perichōrētic* relationship of the triunity of which we are all are vestiges. The rethinking of *Mater et Magistra* does not mean, however, the abolition of the image of the church as teacher but pursuing more the example of Jesus as teacher. Jesus as teacher began where the people are and taught through stories.

To develop an interactive culture calls for confronting the continuous prevalence of hierarchical and clerical culture within the church. The retrieval of the theme of communication is valuable towards greater understanding of the renewed role of the clergy and hierarchy. In this new media age, it is beneficial for priests to understand themselves primarily as communicators and facilitators of connection rather than merely the traditional image of the teacher or guardians. The interactive culture of the new media challenges the church to integrate interactivity in her structures. The church needs to become more an organic entity true to the image of the church as the “Body of Christ” (I Corinthians 12: 27). This implies practicing the values of freedom and democracy within the church. This is affirmed by many church documents. *Aetatis Novae*, for
example, calls for a two-way communication and public opinion as “one of the ways of realising
in a concrete manner the Church’s character as communio”.\textsuperscript{170} \textit{Ethics in Communications} says:

A two-way flow of information and views between pastors and faithful, freedom of expression sensitive to
the well being of the community and to the role of the Magisterium in fostering it, and responsible public
opinion all are important expressions of ‘the fundamental right of dialogue and information within the
Church.’\textsuperscript{171}

The church needs to be open towards greater and more inclusive participation of the
whole people of God, for example, by promoting lay empowerment and more meaningful
women’s involvement, let alone the democratization of the structures of the church through
strengthening of the collegiality of bishops, local church councils—parish councils and diocesan
councils. For Martin-Barbero, the new media are one of the contemporary challenges to the old
clerical structure and control of Christianity which is paving the way for the emergence of a
genuine lay theology and practice.\textsuperscript{172} The new media environment provides a significant
platform for lay missionary involvement: “The great forces which shape the world—politics, the
mass media, science, technology, culture, education, industry and work—are precisely the areas
where lay people are specially competent to exercise their mission.”\textsuperscript{173} Promoting a more
interactive environment, the church can become a more credible agent of Jesus vision that “all
may be one” (John 17: 21); a vibrant witness of a multicultural, pluralist, polycentric, and truly
Catholic Church. This will also lead to a more robust understanding of the Catholicity of the
church. This is recently expressed by Cardinal Kasper when he said: “Catholicity includes ... all

\textsuperscript{170} The Church and Internet, 6; Aetatis Novae, 10.
\textsuperscript{171} Ethics in Communications, 26; also Aetatis Novae, 10 and Communio et Progressio, 20.
\textsuperscript{172} Jesus Martin Barbero, “Mass Media as a Site of Resacralisation of Contemporary Culture”, in Stewart Hoover and
\textsuperscript{173} John Paul II, 14th World Communications Day, 1980 - Social Communications and Family,
… Women and men, young and old, clergy and laity. The laity are not only recipients, but also actors. Not only objects, but much more, subjects in the church.”

Subsequently, the church needs a more robust theology of *sensus fidei*—the sense of the faithful. When the church preaches the dogma they do not just evangelise the people; they are also evangelised by the experiences of the people in the living out of the dogma. The life and understanding of dogma does not simply come from the deliberations from the top but the living experience of faith from below—the ordinary faithful. As *Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church* affirms,

> [T]he faithful have an instinct for the truth of the Gospel, which enables them to recognise and endorse authentic Christian doctrine and practice, and to reject what is false. That supernatural instinct, intrinsically linked to the gift of faith received in the communion of the Church, is called the *sensus fidei*, and it enables Christians to fulfil their prophetic calling.

The *sensus fidei* neither generates a new dogma nor leads to a rejection of dogma but contributes to a richer and fuller meaning of the dogma. It is in this light that *Redemptoris Missio* recognizes the significant role of *sensus fidei*:

> One finds among the people particular expressions of the search for God and for faith, both in the regions where the Church has been established for centuries and where she is in the course of becoming established. These expressions were for a long time regarded as less pure and were sometimes despised, but today they are almost everywhere being rediscovered.

This also calls for a new understanding of *Magisterium*. *Magisterium* is indispensable for the nurturing of the orthodoxy of the church. The role of *Magisterium*, however, is not just to be guardians and gatekeepers of tradition and doctrine but also facilitators of dialogue within the church. Christian life is a participation rather than reception and consumption. *Magisterium* can

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176 *Redemptoris Missio*, 48.
also serve as a unifying form of coordination which fosters the vibrant collegiality of all local churches where dialogue and interactivity in an important mode of relationship.

The importance of *sensus fidei* to the *magisterium* is highlighted in the papacy of Pope Francis, as German Cardinal Walter Kasper noted. It is in the spirit of *sensus fidei* that Pope Francis wants to create a “listening magisterium.” Kasper affirms, “He wants a listening magisterium—that makes its position … but makes its position after it has heard what the Spirit says to its churches.”

Doing mission in cyberspace is transcending traditional national borders. On the web, one’s audience is not just one community, one parish but the whole world. The adage, “think globally, act locally,” may become more like, “think locally, act globally,” in doing mission in the networked world.

The church can no longer ignore this new context which has also transformed the interface of her life and mission. As Dana Roberts commented, “Globalization forces us to conceptualize missions beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, and both to strategize and critique new forms.”

Despite the transformations wrought by the new media, however, the church continues to do missions in the traditional contexts of politics, economics and culture. The operation system of mission formed under the print and electronic mass media culture continues to be the operating system of the mission of the church in the new media age. The classic paradigm of mission influenced by the print and mass media culture is *missio ad gentes*. Thus, the new media culture further poses a challenge to the traditional understanding of mission as *missio ad gentes*.

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177 Kasper as quoted by McElwee, “Cardinal Kasper.”

e) **Liminal**

New media heightened the experience of passing from the old to the new—from old ways of thinking to new ways of thinking. The world today is at the heel of revolutionary transformations. The world is in an in-between situation which on one hand indicate self-destruction and, on the other hand, emerging and springing.

New media age is helping to recover a relational ontology which heralds a new way of being human and being society. New media technologies are facilitating the rise of emerging alternatives to traditional institutions and the dominant economic, political and cultural systems. The new media age is awakening us to the reality that we are all wired; our deepest identity is not autonomous individuals but individual-in-connection.

The new values of the new environment of the new media are reordering many areas of our way of life and social structures creating both positive and negative consequences. Horsfield commented that “the new media has created havoc in our consciousness, in work and play, in private and public life, in relations within family life, in social relationships, in generational relations, and in faith and church life.”

The architecture and core values of the medium of the Internet have altered structures of our society; it challenges current ontologies of society and human person and help propel alternative and new ways of doing, living, and relating. The architecture and core values of the Internet are serving as a metaphor for a new politics, economics, governance and relationship with nature. The values and dynamics of openness, freedom, decentralisation, peer-to-peer is instigating a web-like existence in the world. We understand ourselves as node, rhizomes and

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179 Peter Horsfield, *The Mediated Spirit.*
centre in a polycentric web-like world. The world has become an ecosystem with the internet as a major vehicle.

Traditional understanding of world, nations, and even environment has changed in the Internet based society. For example, it is undermining the concept of the nation-state. Instead of inhabiting a homogenous world, we find ourselves living in a pluralist and multi-dimensional world through the internet.

A significant realisation that emerged from the history of the Internet is the story of how human beings utilised technology to further advance the deepest human aspirations for interconnection. This story continues to evolve in the present development of the Internet and the emerging landscape that the new media technologies are helping to form. Interaction and collaboration (human values) has trumped efficiency and speed (machine values).

Information technologies helped facilitate an ontological reclamation of the individual as a connected being living interdependently and not as a separate being. The reclaimed understanding of the individual as a connected being is slowly replacing the individualism of capitalism, ethnocentrism, nationalism and particularism that have characterised so much of late twentieth century thinking and culture.\(^{180}\) The human person has become a networked individual and cooperative individual. To be human is to be connected: I am connected therefore I am.

Information technologies are also instrumental in a shift from mass society to network society. Georg Simmel, Manuel Castells, and Jan Van Dijk have directed our awareness to the rise of the network society as a consequence of the digital information infrastructure. Manuel Castells saw the rise of network society which questions traditional understanding of society based on nation-states, traditional institutions, church and others. In the contemporary society

driven by the global information technology, the network becomes the basic dynamic of society.\textsuperscript{181} This networked society stresses interactivity as the principal mode of relationship in society. Collaboration is the mode of doing things which values open-source, cooperation, and collective intelligence. In this network society, a new kind of citizenship is arising called netizens which transcend national, religious and ethnic citizenships.

Living in community today is no longer merely local but \textit{glocal}—a montage-experience of the local geographical space and technologically mediated global cyberspace. On the other hand, the new media has helped to emerge in what McLuhan calls a \textit{retribalisation}.\textsuperscript{182} This is manifested in a return to pre-modern economic models—barter, sharing, and interaction. We are becoming once again a tribe where everyone is only a shouting distance from each other through the aid of New Media.

\textbf{Doing Mission in Hyper-space and Hyper-time}

Doing mission in the new media age is doing mission in a radically reconstituted time and space brought about by information communication technologies. New media technologies have blurred the traditional notions of temporality and spatiality. Because of the Internet, space can no longer be defined merely as geographical. Cyberspace has become a natural part, an extension and enhancement of geographical and physical space. Thus, space has become both geographical and virtual, a simultaneity of virtual and actual where both strengthen and complement each other. Likewise, new media technologies has lifted many limitations on time. Before there was very clear delineations of time for work, time for rest at home; today there is a blurring between time of work and home. New media has caused a rich and expanded notion of time with the 24/7 and asynchronous notions of time. Indeed, the contemporary experience of

\textsuperscript{182} McLuhan and Fiore, \textit{The Medium is the Massage}, 63.
reality has become hypermediated-reality where time has become hypertime and space has become hyperspace.

The expanded experience of spatiality and temporality through the new media has helped to evolve a new sense of being church and experience of belonging. As Horsfield observes, “Increasingly, people are belonging to multiple communities and networks in which membership is tentative and pragmatic.” It is inciting new forms of “imagined communities” that are global in nature, for example, citizens forming ties and congregating around issues of human rights, democracy and environmental protection. William F. Fore foresee a re-imagination of community because of new media technologies, “Given the new technological era with its rapid growth of the means of mass communication, new forms of community will have be invented, identified, and constructed which take these media into account.”

A noteworthy “imagined community” constructed through the new media is virtual faith communities like prayer groups and Christian fellowship communities. These communities are organized groups with regular interactions, norms, mission and programs like ordinary communities in geographical space would have done albeit all done online. Indeed, new media is transforming our experience and understanding of community. Because of new media, we are experiencing community as a much more than homogenous, place-based, exclusive and hierarchical community. More and more, communities are formed no longer on the basis of

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183 Horsfield, *Mediated Spirit*.

184 “Imagined communities” is a concept coined by Benedict Anderson where he argues for the communal and social constructionist basis for the birth of a nation. This is created by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group. Anderson further argues that media helped in constructing this imagined communities. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 6 – 7.

185 Fore, “A Theology of Communication.”
proximity in time and space. New media has afforded the formation of community from across villages, towns, cities and nations.

There are, however, serious issues and questions about online missions and community: A fundamental question is: Is online community a real community? Can the power of God touch people online? Can sacraments, such as confession, be celebrated virtually? Matthew Tan also asks: Can the cyberchurch ever become a genuine part of the mystical Body of Christ? The church in part responds to these questions in *The Church and Internet*.

Virtual reality is no substitute for the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the sacramental reality of the other sacraments, and shared worship in a flesh-and-blood human community. There are no sacraments on the Internet; and even the religious experiences possible there by the grace of God are insufficient apart from real-world interaction with other persons of faith.

Indeed, the virtual is not a substitute to the real. The experience of mission and proclamation in the internet and social networks cannot replace the cathedrals, the liturgies, face-to-face contact and fellowship of the community. There is still a real distinction between the real and virtual. The closer the virtual mission can replicate the experience in real mission, the greater will its impact be. As Tan points out, the purpose of social media is to bring others not merely to Christ in the abstract, but to an embodied space called the Body of Christ, that is, an encounter with Christ himself. This clear direction from the virtual to the actual is echoed by Paul Teusner,

For many, the virtual provides a space to explore new forms of religious expression that can be carried into life offline, and for them the virtual church offers a glimpse for what “real” church could be like. For the same people, however, there are elements of “real” church that cannot be replicated online.

Thus, the physical, actual, real life and face-to-face contact is still more significant. This is the reminder of *Evangelii Nuntiandi* before the explosion of the internet:

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187 *The Church and Internet*
The person-to-person [proclamation], remains valid and important. The Lord often used it (for example, with Nicodemus, Zacchaeus, the Samaritan woman, Simon the Pharisee), and so did the apostles. In the long run, is there any other way of handing on the Gospel than by transmitting to another person one’s personal experience of faith? It must not happen that the pressing need to proclaim the Good News to the multitudes should cause us to forget this form of proclamation whereby an individual’s personal conscience is reached and touched by an entirely unique word that he receives from someone else.\(^{189}\)

Virtual mission, however, poses the possibility of a more expanded experience of mission. While the traditional mission is mainly geographical, doing mission in the new media age can be both geographical and virtual. New media has made possible the experience of mission from merely geographical to a fusion of geographical and cyberspatial mission. Cyberspace, however, only serves as a potential to actualize mission. Cybermission is neither a substitute nor alternative to the actual mission but an essential complement to real space and community in mission. A disembodied mission must always have the view of performing an embodied mission. Mission in cyberspace is to missionize and evangelise people towards the actual space. We need to think of technology as an extension and not as a substitution of ourselves.

In this symbiotic space of the geographical and the virtual, however, mission becomes more and more a hybrid mission, both embodied and disembodied, local and global, real and virtual. Mission today cannot just remain in physical space but needs to enter into cyberspace as well. The universal mandate of Jesus, “Go into the whole and tell the good news” (Mark 16: 15), no longer just applies to geographical space but to cyberspace as well. Cyberspace is a real space for mission today albeit with both favourable and dangerous repercussions.

The amalgamation of the real and virtual space and time in mission challenges the traditional understanding of *missio ad gentes*—territorial and geographical view of mission. Church documents have called the new media as the new *areopagus* and *agora* which is a part of

\(^{189}\) *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 46.
the expanded meaning of *ad gentes* today. New media offer possibilities to transcend the geographical limitations of *missio ad gentes*. Mission in the new media also challenges the old values of *missio ad gentes*—the linear and transmission approach to mission which implies superiority of the evangeliser over those being evangelised. Indeed the new media makes it more possible the experience that God is everywhere and God has been there even before missionaries has arrived. The fusion of both real and virtual space and time in mission in the new media age reflects the dynamics of the visible-invisible mission of God.

f) Teleological

The Internet came into being because human beings needed to find a tool and technology to express their profound solidarity. The Internet heightened the awareness of the intrinsic relatedness that is deep within humanity and all of creation. Indeed, we are already connected even before the advent of the Internet. As Kelly elucidates: “Trinitarian communion is, thus, the limitless field in which interpersonal, ecological and cosmic communion can be realised. In short, our planetary existence is a living image of the Trinity, and a progressive participation in the communal life of the divine mystery.”

The history of the Internet shows the value of appropriating technology towards making us more human. While the Internet was first invented for scientific reasons and as a technological tool, in the subsequent development of the Internet, however, the thousands of people who freely utilise the Internet turned it into a peer-to-peer facility, social networking and collaboration which heralded a new way of life. This is what happens when humans direct

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190 Kelly, *An Expanding Theology*, Sec.6.3, par.12.
technology, not technology directing humans. As John F. Kennedy said: “[Human being] is still the most extraordinary computer of all.”\textsuperscript{191}

C. Fittingness of New Media to Missio Dei

Doing mission in the new media age with the categories and approaches honed in the print and broadcast media age maybe likened to what McLuhan describes as “trying to do today’s job with yesterday’s tools-with yesterday’s concepts.”\textsuperscript{192} Avery Dulles insisted that the church “cannot wall itself up in a cultural ghetto at a time when humanity as a whole is passing into the electronic age.”\textsuperscript{193} The challenge for doing mission in the new media age is juxtaposing mission approaches and strategies with the interactive and peer-to-peer network context of the new media age.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have critically examined and evaluated the new media’s fittingness for Missio Dei. Through a critical analysis of the new media—its history, architecture, values, technology, and impact upon the life of individuals and society today—we conclude that the new media has a significant contribution to a construction of mission theology today. It pays to give attention to the new media and no longer relegate its ubiquitous impact upon mission today. This becomes important in today’s hypermediated world where the medium has become more transformative than the message it has brought.

The new media technologies are not just instruments, tools. They are not neutral. They are creating a new environment. The greatest challenge is not whether or not we can use these technologies for Missio Dei but how are they changing us; how are they revealing and


\textsuperscript{192} McLuhan and Fiore, \textit{The Medium is the Massage}, 9.

concealing the Missio Dei. Engaging the new media in doing mission today is not just learning the craft, acquiring the skills and applying the technique of new media but in becoming more aware how new media has changed us and the world. Doing mission in the new media is not the simplistic adoption of information communication technologies as a tool which can make our mission easier.

New media are bringing new meanings and radical consequence to the theology of mission today. It provides us with a new gateway for reframing the notion of Missio Dei. The new media culture has critical repercussions for mission ontologies and practical operation. New values encouraged by the new media such as creativity, imagination, openness and dialogue are beneficial to doing mission today. New media are providing a new metaphor for mission. The new culture of the new media is both a ferment and catalysis for the re-imagination of our Christian identity and mission. The new media age is an invitation to the church to a new experience and environment of thinking and doing Missio Dei. What matters most in the new media is not the content nor the technology but the symbolic and transformative meaning of the medium upon mission.

The more important question, therefore, is not how we can use and apply the instruments of the new media but how we can be present and engage with the new culture and environment of the New Media. The issue of the Internet with regards to religion and faith goes much deeper than impact on methods, strategies, way of life, moral, or new environment. It goes deeper up to the extent of conjuring mystical elements and notions such as paradise and providing a space for re-envisioning, re-imagining the faith and the church.
In sum, the new media age is fitting for the understanding, living and practising of *Missio Dei*. The new media age is a worthy translation today of the infinite translatability of *Missio Dei*. To borrow Paul Ricouer’s term, the New Media world helps to unravel the “surplus of meaning” of the *Missio Dei*. However, the new media age does not determine the *Missio Dei*; no culture and age ever is normative for *Missio Dei*.

Having shown the fittingness of the new media as a holy ground of mission, we can now initially construct a theology of mission in the new media age. This is the focus of the final chapter of this thesis.
Chapter V: Towards a Theology of Mission in the New Media Age

The age of nations has passed. Now, unless we wish to perish we must shake off our old prejudices and build the earth.¹

Introduction

Before embarking on this final chapter, let us summarize the journey we have made. We began by examining the present developments of mission and found that Missio Dei is the most significant elucidation of mission in the twentieth century. However, the Trinitarian foundation of Missio Dei has been weak and muddled which results in Missio Dei’s poor justification for mission in the twentieth century. In chapter II, we appropriated the notion of Divine mission articulated by St. Augustine and St. Thomas and concluded that they can provide a firmer Trinitarian grounding for Missio Dei. In chapter III, we examined different perspectives on media vis-à-vis Theology of mission and established that media plays a significant role in formulating a theology of mission. In Chapter IV we critically examined the new media age utilizing the different perspective on media in Chapter III and saw the fittingness of new media age for Missio Dei.

Bringing all together these findings and insights, we shall do a theological and systematic reflection on the theology of mission in the new media age in this final chapter. The proposal of this chapter is to formulate a theology of mission today by appropriating the notion of divine mission by Augustine and Aquinas vis-à-vis the new media. The main questions for this chapter are: How can we systematize theologically God’s active mission in the new media age today?

What are the implications and emerging signs in mission today because of the impact of the new media and the revival of Trinitarian theology? Finally, we will present a model of doing mission in the new media age through the example of Paul’s proclamation at the Areopagus.

A. Formulating New Media in a Theology of Mission

Our project of formulating theology of mission vis-à-vis new media is not applying God’s mission nor theology of mission in the new media age. It is not applying God’s mission in the new media field or environment but understanding and applying new media in God’s mission—new media in Trinitarian Mission. This is based on the missional hermeneutics we discussed in Chapter II, which demands not interpreting the Gospel or Divine Mission in the context of the new media, but to interpret the new media in the framework of the God’s mission. It is to understand new media through God’s mission, or to indwell God’s mission and understand new media through it.

Gathering together all the insights from all the previous chapters, we shall draw a preliminary sketch of a theology of mission in the new media age. By combining the insights from the notion of divine mission and the fittingness of the new media age, we shall describe and spell out the elements of a theology of mission in the new media age. We will also incorporate the different perspectives on media.

B. The Significance of New Media in a Theology of Mission

Our examination of the new media underscored six perspectives about the significance of the new media to mission today. First, new media can be tools of mission in the new media age (instrumental)—this is what we can call ‘proclaiming Missio Dei through’ the internet’. Second, new media can be a field or frontier of mission (territorial, albeit, virtual)—this is what we can call ‘proclaiming Missio Dei the’ internet. Third, new media can lead to harmful and/or helpful
effects: values, attitudes and way of life (ethical)—this is what we can call ‘proclaiming Missio Dei’ the internet. Fourth, new media is an environment or culture which has brought profound transformations in our individual and collective lives (ecological or cultural)—this is what we can call ‘proclaiming Missio Dei from’ the internet. Fifth, new media is a liminal space and time which helps to reimagine our being individuals and society (liminal)—this is what we can call ‘proclaiming Missio Dei out of’ the internet. Sixth, new media is an evolution of previous media which reveals the innate desire for connectedness (teleological)—this is what we can call ‘proclaiming Missio Dei beyond’ the internet.

Proclaiming Missio Dei utilizes these six perspectives. A theology of mission in the new media considers all six movements. A theology of mission in the light of the new media is more than a question of technology, efficiency, and territory and more about how to proclaim the Trinitarian fellowship already and profoundly present in the hypermediated world today. God has been in the new media age even before we entered and evangelised it. New media is not just a tool, a field, an elective, a theme to apply theology but a theology that is mediated today by new media: interconnected, interactive, collaborative and communicational theology. Thus, a theology of mission in the new media age goes further than these six perspectives. The over-all perspective is God’s mission; it is in God’s mission that we will try to understand and decipher the significance of new media for theology of mission.

C. The New Media Age in God’s Mission

A theology of mission in the new media age is foremost not about mission strategies, programs, and techniques to employ in the new media environment—but about Mission: The work of God in the new media age. Mission is cooperating with God in God’s mission and work in the new media age. Mission in the new media discerns the active work of the Holy Spirit in
the church and in the world in the new media age. It brings new insights about the mission of God through the new media age. Proclaiming the Missio Dei is allowing the sovereignty of theos and the interruptive creative power of the parakletos towards the newness of the Missio Dei in the new media age. God is at work (and has been at work all along) in in the new media culture. The New Media are holy grounds where God is already present, proclaiming his Word, and where the Holy Spirit is actively leading the church. Missio Dei is grasping the Divine Mission in order to experience the presence and activity of the Blessed Trinity in the world and in one’s personal journey. A theology of mission for the new media age is seeking to discern, comprehend, celebrate and participate in the work of God in the new environment of the new media.

Discerning, however, the work of God in the new media age can only be done through God’s own pattern/framework of mission. It is not applying our framework but God’s framework of mission. We discussed in Chapter II God’s paradigm of mission based on the notion of Divine Mission by Augustine and Aquinas. These are: Theocentric/Trinitarian, immanent-transcendent, visible and invisible mission, God’s mission as creation—redemption—new creation.

1. Theocentric-Trinitarian

Missio Dei was substantially inspired by a return to God movement, particularly the revival of the Trinity in the twentieth century. Mission in the new media will try to discover vestiges of Trinitarian communion in the new media. However, God remains a mystery and we can never completely fathom God’s mission. We cannot fully comprehend what God is doing in the new media. God only expects us to be open, to take risks and cooperate.
2. Creation-Redemption-New Creation

God’s temporal mission in God’s creation follows the pattern of creation, redemption, new creation. Creation in new media means that new media are gifts from God. Redemption in new media implies new media is in need of redemption. New creation in new media means that a transformed new media reflects the Trinitarian communion.

3. Immanent-Transcendent

The mission of God is both and at the same time immanent and transcendent. God’s mission can be the most immanent while at the same time the most transcendental. God’s Mission, in its very essence is unchangeable and eternal since it expresses the divine processions but at the same time it is infinitely diverse in its forms and expressions, corresponding to different times and places. Mission in the new media age is a microcosm of God’s cosmic mission. At the same time, God’s mission transcends new media; God’s mission is beyond the internet.

4. Visible-Invisible Mission

A theology of mission in the new media age discerns the visible and invisible mission of the Trinitarian God in the new media age. A theology of mission in the new media age will try to discern and identify the challenges and implications of the visible and invisible mission of God—that is, mission within the church and outside the church, in the world—in today’s new media age. The visible and invisible mission form one continuum and are not opposed to each other.

The first challenge is to discern and enter into the visible-invisible missio of God in the new media age. The presence and action of the visible missio in the new media age challenges the life and identity of the church—missio ad intra. On the other hand, the presence and action of
the invisible mission in the new media age challenges the dynamics and relationship between the church and the world—*missio ad extra*.

The signs of visible mission in the church are: the aspiration for renewal in the church, the emphasis of communication within the church, back to storytelling and interactivity. The signs of invisible mission in the world are in the greater communication, greater dialogue, greater interconnection, greater unity, and greater solidarity. This implies that interrelatedness will be a major area of mission, interreligious dialogue, refiguring globalisation, ecology, dialogue with culture.

How do we see these patterns of God’s mission in the different perspectives of the new media today?

**a) Instrumental: New Media as Instruments of God’s Mission**

How do we understand and apply new media as instruments in God’s mission today? New media are “God’s gift, our Creator, from Whom all good gifts proceed.”

New media is rooted in creation. New media technologies are an essential expression of our human identity—as created in the image and likeness of God. The Mission of God, however, is not totally dependent on human technology. There is even a time to shut-off media. This is not the dystopian or anti-technology stance.

A theology of mission in the new media age underscores a missiological stance on technology. It calls for the proper understanding of the function of technology in our lives, in evangelisation. It counters the technocratic approach to new media. It situates and comprehends the new media technologies in the story of God’s mission in the world—the *Missio Dei*. A theology of mission in the new media age is not about the technological marvels of new media.

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2 Pius XII, *Miranda Prorsus*. 
inasmuch as the presence of the Trinitarian, Christ’s vestiges in the new media, hence, new media are holy grounds of God’s mission. As Benedict XVI puts it, the church mission is to give a “soul” to the new media,

Priests present in the world of digital communications should be less notable for their media savvy than for their priestly heart, their closeness to Christ. This will not only enliven their pastoral outreach, but also will give a “soul” to the fabric of communications that makes up the “Web”.3

A theology of mission in the new media age understands the new media beyond its technical and practical applications towards a deeper appreciation of community, genuine interconnection and encounter. It does not merely adopt the instrumentalist position, not about fascination with technology that in the end we become slave of technology but constantly searching for the best technology to achieve our human purpose. It is not the technocratic stance nor technological totalism but the humanization of technology. Technology is at the service of Missio Dei. In technology we are not gods but a mere node in the infinite vastness of the cosmos.

b) Territorial: New Media as Field of God’s Mission

Where can we find God’s mission in the new frontier of new media?

Dialogue

The mission field of new media has become a field for dialogue at all fronts including religion—interreligious dialogue, reconciliation, political dialogue, dialogue for peace and dialogue in civil society. The interactive environment and peer-to-peer dynamics of new media propagated fertile opportunities for dialogue in all strata of society. New media has made dialogue not just a tactic or strategy but an essential attitude and a way of life in this hyperconnected world. Thus, new media has become an important field for enhancing the

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ministry of dialogue of the church especially the threefold dialogue highlighted by the Church in Asia: dialogue with the poor, cultures and other religions.⁴

**Interreligious Dialogue**

Despite the continuous religious conflicts and the rise of religious intolerance and fundamentalism in the world today, there is a growing movement of dialogue among religions and faiths. The increasing calls and efforts for interreligious dialogue continue to break down walls of prejudice and intolerance. Living in this interreligious milieu, each one is challenged to have a clearer understanding and deeper living of one’s religion. At the same time, each one is challenged to learn from the other. Everyone is challenged to have a wider and deeper understanding of God even beyond their own religion. It provides an opportunity for collective inter-edification about God as each religion reveals a special facet of the truth about God.⁵ In this interreligious milieu, therefore, dialogue all the more becomes a necessary attitude, a way of life. It challenges each one to learn the art of listening despite actual differences.

New media has intensified the experience of living alongside each other with different religions. Cyberspace has provided the space for many people to seek new ways of faith between different religions, new expressions between cultures; new ways of belonging between races, local and global and gender. Consequently, cyberspace has become a religious borderless space where people freely learn, inquire and navigate between various faiths, culture, politics, and ideologies. It is a kind of space that goes beyond one’s own religion; a universal space and experience of God. It is a common space to access the most mysterious of all the commons—

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⁴ The threefold dialogue is particularly advanced by the Asian Catholic church. In the 1974 document “Evangelisation in Modern Day Asia” the Asian bishops spoke about evangelisation as the building up of the Local Church through a three-fold dialogue with the cultures, the religions and the poor of Asia dialogue. “Evangelisation in Modern Day Asia, Statement and Recommendations of the First Plenary Assembly,” in For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991, eds. Gaudencio Rosales and Catalino Arévalo (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1992), no. 12.

⁵ *Nostra Aetate*, 2.
spirituality and faith. Eilers argued that the new media can contribute to a “deeper and better understanding of different religious beliefs and show the potential and role of religion in different cultures and societies in a new way.” If this present environment continue, we will live in a more ecumenical practice of religion and pluralistic society in the future.

The opportunities that new media has afforded for the encounter of all religions challenge old paradigms of interreligious dialogue. These openings add fervor to the ongoing search for a more meaningful paradigm for interreligious dialogue. Responding to this search, Kelly suggests “inter-hope” rather than “interfaith” dialogue as a paradigm for interreligious dialogue to emphasize the common pursuit of hope rather than the difference among all faith. Rather than the exclusive rightness of one’s religious traditions, inter-hope dialogue puts first the common belief and aspiration towards a new world beyond the sufferings and evil of this world, a world which will be realised not just through our efforts but ultimately by God. Inter-hope dialogue is the collective expression of hope as the patient expectation of a new world beyond the present world. “Inter-hope dialogue [highlights] the unimaginable ‘otherness’ of eschatological fulfillment. It looks beyond what is, to what is to come.”

**Dialogue with Culture**

*Evangelii Nuntiandi* describes evangelisation as the communication of “the Good News into all strata of humanity and through its influence transforming humanity from within, making it new.” In this light, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* challenges the church to investigate the media culture and explore possibilities of evangelising from within this culture. Mission has to engage not

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6 Eilers, From “Gaudium et Spes” to a “New Culture”.
7 Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*, xi.
8 Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*, 16.
9 *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 18.
10 *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 18.
just with the local culture but the global culture brought by the interconnections of the new media technologies. In his message for World Peace Day in 2001, John Paul II reiterates this,

Dialogue between cultures is especially needed today because of the impact of new communication technology on the lives of individuals and peoples. Ours is an era of global communication, which is shaping society along the lines of new cultural models which more or less break with past models.\textsuperscript{11}

New media have become a major vehicle for the development of a pluralistic, multicultural and remix culture. New communication technologies have created a global culture that encompasses local cultures. Once a local culture is part of the global community a process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization\textsuperscript{12} ensues as the global culture takes from and feeds to all the communities that take part in it.\textsuperscript{13} This global culture is sometimes called a remix culture.\textsuperscript{14} Remix culture presents as an alternative to the dominance in the past of monoculture like the Western culture. Although America and the west still dominate today’s culture, the global culture generated by the new media has become more and more a complex assemblage of polycentric influences, for example, the telenovelas from Latin America, Bollywood films from India, the TV show Big Brother from Netherlands, the dance and music of \textit{gangnam} style from South Korea. This indicates that within the global remix media culture there is abundant production from the top as well as from below.

The biggest challenge of engaging with a remix culture, a culture of connectivity and interactivity—a networked culture is proclaiming from within. Proclaiming from within the remix culture is discovering the rich and creative ways and means that people employ in the remix culture and utilising them in proclaiming the gospel. Proclaiming the good news from

\textsuperscript{11} John Paul II Message for World Peace Day 2001, No. 11

\textsuperscript{12} A term which originates from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in \textit{Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia} (2004/1980) which implies the uprooting of a sign or meaning from its original “territory” and appropriating it in a new “territory” where it is assumed.


\textsuperscript{14} Kirby Ferguson, \textit{Everything Is A Remix}, Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=coGpmA4saEk
within the remix culture of the new media also demands a renewal within the church. David Bosch, in describing church’s mission into the diverse cultures, writes that it is not so much “a case of the church being expanded, but of the church being born anew in each new context and culture.”¹⁵ This is applicable in the media-heavy remix culture albeit challenging especially for churches who have become accustomed to the traditional institutional style of church.

**New Media as Agora**

Despite these, the church documents on social communications regards new media as gifts and holy ground where God’s Mission can be discerned, discovered and lived. The new media as areopagus and agora is an important field for the promotion of Gospel values. God is already at work in the new media in many ways that the church needs to discover. Thus, the challenge to the church is how to recognise and nurture the seeds of the Gospel already growing in the Internet and how to bring out the good news from the Internet.

The church documents on social communications warn of the danger of not engaging the new media environment by proclaiming that if the church does not engage, media wins by default. This danger is expressed by Pope Benedict XVI, in his Message for the World Communications Day, 2013, “[U]nless the Good News is made known also in the digital world, it may be absent in the experience of many people for whom this existential space is important.”¹⁶ The active engagement of the church with the new media is reiterated by Pope Francis as a missionary presence of the church in the web:

> As I have frequently observed, if a choice has to be made between a bruised Church which goes out to the streets and a Church suffering from self-absorption, I certainly prefer the first. Those “streets” are the world where people live and where they can be reached, both effectively and affectively. The digital highway is one of them, a street teeming with people who are often hurting, men and women looking for

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¹⁶ Benedict XVI, *Message for the 47th World Communications Day*. 
salvation or hope. By means of the internet, the Christian message can reach “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).17

Doing mission in the field of new media is not merely contextualization nor employing the see-judge-act approach. Even before we enter into the new media, God is already working there. Doing theology of mission in the new media is seeking the presence of God’s mission in the new media. In this way, contextualization and see-judge-act acquire a new meaning: Contextualisation becomes reverse contextualization; is not applying God’s mission nor theology of mission in the context of new media age. It is not applying God’s mission in the new media field but applying new media in God’s mission—new media in Trinitarian Mission.

c) Ethical: New Media as Vehicles of Values, Attitudes and Way of Life in God’s Mission

New media are purveyors of new values and attitudes in God’s mission. The internet has introduced new values which challenges the values of modern institutions including the church. The church needs to discover God’s mission in these values. The connectedness, interactivity, dialogue, collaboration, and networking engendered by the new media age is an analogia entis of the non-linear and non-hierarchical model of mission in the Trinitarian processions. Thus, new media are holy grounds where God is already present, proclaiming his Word, and making God’s presence alive through the Holy Spirit—as several church documents have declared. At the same time the church is challenged to promote ethics and help form the moral conscience of netizens—citizens of the internet—in the light of God’s mission.

Despite the many offerings that the new media presents, however, lots of people feel anchorless and yearn for genuine wellbeing and connection in the web. This is evidenced by the

proliferation of addiction, pornography, superficial connection and exhibitionism on the web. This is “the plentiful harvest” (Matthew 9: 38), openings for mission in the new media that the church is being sent by Christ today. The challenge for the church is how to provide a positive presence and empowering engagement and a genuine anchor for people in the new media age. The challenge for the church is how to act as a spiritual guide and director in the new media by quenching the longings of the present generation for the unknown not through accommodation but a confident and hopeful proclamation of God’s voice in the midst of their longings and anxieties. Despite the evils in the internet, the church can inspire and guide people to discover how the internet is graced by God. The new media has the potential for leading people to a more profound and genuine engagement with the meaning and purpose of life in God.

The new media also challenges the church to serve as a reliable and compassionate witness in the internet. A particularly significant way of offering such witness will be through willingness of the church to give oneself to others by patiently and respectfully engaging their questions and their doubts as they advance in their search for the truth and the meaning of human existence.18 As Pope Francis has said, “Let our communication be a balm which relieves pain and a fine wine which gladdens hearts.”19 This should not, however, inhibit the church to engage strongly with moral evils which the internet has bred like addictions and pornography. An example of an ingenious way to confront pornography was the case of a Christian denomination who posted ads in pornography sites. This denomination firmly believed that people who frequent pornography also has a deep longing for intimacy and even spiritual fulfilment. Placing itself at the heart of the struggle of believers with the sinful condition in the

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18 Benedict XVI, 47th World Communications Day.
19 Francis I, 48th World Communications Day.
internet is an essential mission of the church in the new media age. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* calls this evangelisation in the new media as “piercing the conscience” of each individual:

[T]he use of the means of social communication for evangelisation presents a challenge: through them the evangelical message should reach vast numbers of people, but with the capacity of piercing the conscience of each individual, of implanting itself in his heart as though he were the only person being addressed, with all his most individual and personal qualities, and evoke an entirely personal adherence and commitment. 20

Another challenge for the church in the new media is the propensities of people towards being resigned to the permissiveness of relativism and the despair of nihilism they find in the internet. While recognizing the internet’s spiritual resource, the church needs to challenge netizens to go beyond a relativistic and individualistic spiritual brand of faith and religiosity. The Church needs to offer its own communal life as antidote to individualisation and relativism. In an environment where there is pervasive interconnectivity but also disconnection, the church can proclaim the true meaning of connection that counters pathologies like exaggerated individualism, narcissism, and exhibitionism.

Postmodern influence on spiritual life has reinforced the understanding of the individual as isolated and atomic self. Capitalism has also encroached upon religion by regarding religion as a private property. Tracy cites example of this in the present American spectacle which he calls the popular and privatistic gospel of self-fulfillment. 21 Church documents has constantly spoken against this by preaching a new humanity made in the likeness of the Trinitarian communion. Benedict XVI proclaims that “in Christ we all belong to one another.” 22 This new humanity can only be achieved not through an isolationist and privatised path but through the individual’s connection with the community, the whole of humanity and with God. The understanding of personhood as collective and relational encouraged by the return to Trinitarian

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20 *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 45.

21 Tracy, “Defending the Public Character of Theology,”

22 Benedict XVI, *44th World Communications Day*. 

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orthodoxy and the environment of new media can challenge the individualisation of postmodern systems.

The need for new ethics that arise from the experience of interconnectedness in the internet—netiquette—has also raised awareness against the privatisation of morality. This highlights the need to shift from “I” morality to “we” morality. Morality is not just a private affair between the individual and God but a collective enterprise. Morality is lived and practised by an individual not in isolation but as a relational being. Moreover, the new ethics which grew out of the experience of interconnectedness requires new ways and norms for living as one world—a global ethics. This global ethics proclaims a common patrimony of the environment, common responsibility for the suffering in the world, common aspiration for the building of a better world every day. Beck proposes that a global ethical order should be based on otherness not sameness—acknowledging the otherness of those who are culturally different, otherness of the future, otherness of nature, otherness of the object and otherness of other rationalities.23

The notion of the commons that the new media has helped to revive can be a valuable counter-culture to the individualistic route of the faith. The idea of commoning can raise awareness that the spiritual life, the liturgy, priesthood, and church are commons. Indeed, the greatest commons is God, the Trinity. The problem with religions in the past is that they have placed enclosures to these spiritual commons through an exclusivist attitude and understanding of God. The dynamics and processes of peer-to-peer challenge these church’s enclosures as well as help to reclaim the spiritual commons.

d) Ecological/cultural

How do we understand and apply new media as an environment in God’s mission today? New media is a new environment which brings forth profound transformations for God’s mission. Mission is being transformed as the medium is transformed.

The medium of new media fosters a return to the sacramental, doxological worldview of divine mission. New media environment helps to awaken and reinforce a sacramental worldview and lifestyle. Sacramental worldview is contrasted with scientific worldview which is the dominant worldview today. Living a sacramental worldview means viewing the world as sacrament. Sacraments are moments in time where the invisible grace of God is made visible and tangible.

e) Liminal

New media as liminal entity has helped to facilitate rethinking and reimagining of the identity of church and understanding of mission.

Rethinking Church: Church-in-Mission as Icon of Trinitarian Mission

Doing theology of mission in the new media age implies a rethinking of the church, a rethinking of ecclesiology. The present church structures may no longer be tenable for Missio Dei and the new social environment which new media helped to usher. What does being church means in the new media age? What are the implications of a missional church in the new media age?

Rethinking church through the new media will involve a direct confrontation with the hierarchical church—a very vertical church. The new media age is a direct challenge to the church to come out of its ghetto, to engage in the marketplace of ideas, to not be content with authority and power over its members, to go beyond hierarchy, to not just be content with
maintenance and fortifying its physical structures, to be concerned not just with juridical, canonical regulations, it is a call to mission.

New media challenges the ecclesiocentric view of mission which is one of the most fundamental motivations for the emergence of Missio Dei. The church is not the source nor the end but channel of God’s mission. Whitworth reiterates this shift in understanding from an ecclesiocentric to theocentric mission, “The church does not have, in and of itself, a mission and is no longer understood to be the authority or ‘sending’ agent for mission.” Only by virtue of Missio Dei that the church becomes missionary by its very nature. This implies a fundamental reorientation of the church’s self-understanding. The church is neither the source nor the end but channel of God’s mission.

In living out their participation with the medium of Christ, the church sees themselves not just as transmitters of the Gospel but more importantly as purveyors of the new life that the Gospel they proclaim. This reiterates the principle that the church is the first locus of Trinitarian mission. The church is a communion communicating the message of God, first of all, through their own lives. The message of the church-in-mission in the new media age is the life of participation with the Trinitarian God. The church is the first example and model of the Trinity.

Because the church is the icon of the Trinitarian communion, the church should mirror the Trinitarian perichōrētic communication. Thus, the church by her very nature is communicative; her purpose is to communicate and form communion according to the Trinitarian communion. This was echoed by Dulles when he declared to the American Bishops

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in 1971 that “the Church is communication.” The church, however, is neither the source nor the goal of communication. The church is the steward and channel of God’s communication.

The church, however, points to the world the beauty of God’s communication. The true essence and goal of communication can only take place in a community, more appropriately through the body of Christ. As Fore contends, “[T]he church is the community which possess the greatest potential for communication about God.” Communication is towards building community not to nurture private individuals in isolation. The root word of communication is the same as community and communion. Communication cannot be validated unless it is affirmed in and through the life of persons in community. Thus, Lonergan reminds us that “A community... is an achievement of common meaning.” The Church’s post-conciliar teaching points out that, ideally, “communication” should result in “communion”, whether the communication is interpersonal or “mass”.

If the Church is the continuation of God’s communication through revelation and incarnation, the ways and means of God’s communication must also be reflected in her, especially in her leaders. They are required to develop communicative attitudes which go beyond technical skills which are to be practiced and reflected on different levels and the different means of communication. Concomitantly, Bernard Häring’s argues that to align with God’s communication, the church is not just a teaching church but also a listening church: “A

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26 Fore, “A Theology of Communication.”
27 Fore, “A Theology of Communication.”
teaching Church that is not, above all, a learning, listening Church, is not on the wave-length of divine communication.”  

Häring further maintains that the church should practice what he preach in communication by nurturing a dialogical style in her own structures: “Churches have to develop a dialogical style that invites everyone to participate trustfully.”  

Plude laments that the first serious blockage towards a communicating church is the lack of dialogue within the church even as media technologies have created a global “talk-back” culture. She challenged the clerical and hierarchical structure of the church that has preferred one way and top-down communication flows. “Unless churches today come quickly to truly value feedback and two-way communication, religious authority will remain under siege just when global problems cry out for prophetic wisdom and courageous Gospel witness.”

The church is a sacrament of the *perichōrētic* communication of the Trinity. In order for the church to become efficacious and performative signs of God’s communication, the church is called to imitate Jesus’ example in communication. The church can do this by entering the world of the ordinary people, not just teaching or preaching from the top but going down to where the people are. The church as efficacious and performative signs of God’s communication is a community where the individual is valued for who s/he is. At the same time, the individual finds his/her fulfilment within the community lived out according the *perichōrēsis* of the divine Trinity.

**“Redogmatisation”**

The new media interactive culture also challenges the church’s attitude and practice of dogma. The current focus of dogma has been about the church, moral laws and juridical decrees.

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which focus more on the institutional nature of the church. Thus, in the modern and postmodern period, doctrine has always been identified with authority, power, and control.

This is not the understanding of dogma in the early church. Dogmas were, first and foremost, the proper contemplation of God. To be dogmatic in the original experience of the church is to correctly understand how the one true God communicated God’s self to humanity despite that we cannot fully know God. Dogmas, first of all, are neither about the church but God’s revelation—about the Trinity.

The new media culture arouses the need to return to God in dogma. The church needs to go beyond the understanding of dogma as about the church, moral laws and preservation of its institutional legacy. Instead, the church needs to revitalise the Trinity in evangelisation and cease relegating the doctrine further more. This will imply retrieving the early church’s attitude and living of dogma. Thus, a “redogmatisation” as it were is needed. “Redogmatisation” is neither the teaching of a new dogma or a new Gospel: “Jesus is the same, yesterday and tomorrow” (Hebrews 13:8), nor about relevance and accommodation to the world to make the dogma palatable. “Redogmatisation” is the return to the centrality of Trinity in theology and mission. “Redogmatisation” is the return to the proclamation of the Trinity, rediscovering and seeking the new faces and presence of the Trinity in our lives and in the world. It is not just the return to God in theology and mission but the return to God in catechism, in Canon Law, even return to God in the Bible.34

The challenge for the church is to return to the first five centuries of the early church where the central question is who God is and clarify the implications of this question to their lives and situation. Like Augustine and Aquinas, the church needs once again to be intoxicated

34 This challenges the Protestant’s core slogan for the reformation—sola scriptura—which betrays the danger of confining God to the scriptures.
with God. The church can learn from Augustine and Aquinas by understanding the real meaning of life and the world in their *exitus* and *reditus* in God.

“Redogmatisation” is giving due honour to dogma which is about God. Proclaiming dogma is not just through words and doctrines formulated in abstract language. The proclamation of the Trinity needs to be proclaimed more in the language of the people today; seeking the analogicity of the Trinity in the practical and mundane life of the church today. As *Evangelii Nuntiandi* enunciates,

> Yet, one can never sufficiently stress the fact that evangelisation does not consist only of the preaching and teaching of a doctrine. For evangelisation must touch life: the natural life to which it gives a new meaning, thanks to the evangelical perspectives that it reveals; and the supernatural life, which is not the negation but the purification and elevation of the natural life.35

Dogma is most effectively proclaimed today in the medium of the church—the living action and witness of the church, through icons, sacraments, missionary activity of the church. They express the dogmatic truth when they become efficacious and performative signs of the Trinitarian communion. This again expresses the principle: “the medium is the message.” An effective mission in the new media age is preaching and evangelising about God is to start not with abstract doctrines and juridical morality but with life, witnessing, story, and establishing relationship and community.

**Rethinking missiology**

How does the new media influenced environment contribute to a rethinking of missiology? Mission in the new media requires rethinking of missiology where media becomes an important factor in shaping theology. It also takes into significant consideration the role of media in the situation of the people that missionaries enter into. Doing missiology in the new media implies some adjustments in methods and strategies in evangelisation.

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35 *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 47.
A significant impact of the new media in doing theology of mission today is not the “what” (content) nor the “who” (personnel) but the “how” of theology. The medium is the message. The challenge of the new media age is more in the “doing” dimension, in other words, the method and process of theology. This is particularly illustrated by Teusner,

> As life online becomes an increasingly important part of our lives offline, and as we are given greater permission to share our own views about God and the world in Web 2.0, theologies developed in the cloisters of the seminary will have little relevance. Instead, questions of how God is and acts in the blogosphere and out of it will produce new conversations and directions for religious expression and action.\(^{36}\)

New media will continue to challenge the methods and practices of a theology that is top-down. Theology as God-talk implies that everybody is a theologian; everyone has a theology. From passive receptors of knowledge about religion, the ordinary faithful has become more active creators and “remixers” of theology in the new media age. In an interactive new media environment, theology does not start from the premise of power but assumes that in the body of Christ, the Church, are all partners. Clergy and lay are both producers and consumers. Everybody is an evangeliser to everybody. All lay members of the church can become evangelisers, theologians and missionaries in the digital continent. Thus, evangelisation needs to invest in building long-term relationships, where everyone can have access to church’s life and mission.

Church documents (specifically *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and *Redemptoris Missio*) and theologians have always said that everybody can be an evangeliser, theologian and missionary. More than ever, today is an auspicious time to realise this because of the new media technologies. Everyone can even be an evangeliser, theologian and missionary not just in one’s locality but throughout the whole world. This further challenges the culture of clericalism which,

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36 Teusner, “Religion 2.0.”
unfortunately, remains strong in the church today. Clericalism upholds that only clerics can be true evangelisers.

This is a greater challenge for bishops, priests, and religious. Besides being evangelisers, theologians and missionaries in the digital continent, they are called to guide and support the lay members of the church so that they may become effective evangelisers, theologians and missionaries in the digital continent. The church should all the more lend support and guidance to all its member in order that they may become effective evangelisers, theologians and missionaries. The task of the professional theologias is to guide the “theologianhood” of all believers. This would imply more formation, evangelisation programs and actual practicum in the online and offline time and space.

The sharing in evangelising ministry of all believers and the interactive character of evangelisation also calls for a rethinking of the role of the magisterium. The challenge to the Magisterium is how to guide and mentor the digital missionaries and evangelisers so that they will not distort the Trinitarian dogma and remain along the sure path of “thinking with the Church” (*sentire cum Ecclesia*). The church recognized the problem that in the over-eagerness of believers to evangelise through the internet, they may divert from the orthodoxy of the church’s traditions in the internet:

The proliferation of web sites calling themselves Catholic creates a problem of a different sort… “[I]t is confusing, to say the least, not to distinguish eccentric doctrinal interpretations, idiosyncratic devotional practices, and ideological advocacy bearing a ‘Catholic’ label from the authentic positions of the Church.”

The church proposes a solution to this problem through

A system of voluntary certification at the local and national levels under the supervision of representatives of the Magisterium might be helpful in regard to material of a specifically doctrinal or catechetical nature.

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37 *Redemptoris Missio*, 36b.
38 *The Church and Internet*, 8d.
f) Teleological

How do we understand and apply new media as evolving in God’s mission today? The Internet profoundly represents humanity seeking God. The story of the Internet is not about the triumph of reason, science and technology inasmuch as it is about humankind seeking deeper connections. Thus, new media are not just instruments for transmission of the Gospel. A theology of mission in the new media is sorely deprived if the church only focuses on the technical and practical aspects of new media. The challenge of new media upon mission is not the simplistic adoption of new media as technology. The challenge of new media is a meaningful transformation in the life and mission in the church brought about by the ongoing creative presence of God’s mission in our world and church today.

D. Communication Theology: Divine Mission from a Communicational Perspective

Augustine and Aquinas’ notion about the intrinsic analogicity of being of the whole of creation implies that there is a deep interconnectedness that binds together all human beings and the whole of creation as a reflection of the interconnectedness of the Trinity. New media technologies have been important instruments in retrieving this profound mystery. Indeed, the new media are gifts from God in the way that they heighten the awareness about the *analogia entis* of all creation with the interconnectedness of the Trinity. The profound interconnection of all creation is a fundamental expression of the invisible mission of God.

New metaphor for Divine mission today—from Missio Dei to Communicatio Dei; from sending, vertical and hierarchical (mission) to interactive, collaborative, interconnected and horizontal (communication). From sending to communicating

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39 *The Church and Internet*, 11d.
New media highlighted the theme of communication in theology of mission, in fact, the whole of theology. Communication here understood is not just a theme outside of mission but an intrinsic part of mission. Mission is a mediated event, mission is a communication event.

New media has highlighted the importance of communication in mission. The new media environment has intensified the depiction of the world as a communicational milieu. Communication is a central concern of the church in the twentieth century. The invisible mission of God in our world today is manifested in the growing desire for interconnections, yearning for genuine communications, dialogue in all strata of life, collaboration, acceptance of the otherness and the rise of the Internet. The mission of the church, the Missio Dei in today’s media age is the mission of communication.

Communication is at the heart of God, of Church, and of the world. Communication is integral to who the church is and what the church is about; it is integral to all theology. In this light, we understand communication, first and foremost, as communication of God. God’s communication is the ipsum esse subsistens of all communications. All communication participates in the communication of God in Godself and God for us. All human communication is an analogy of God’s communication.

New media has also emphasized a communicational perspective on divine mission. Communication can enrich the understanding of Divine Mission. The processio and missio in God fittingly demonstrates God’s self-communication in the immanent and economic Trinity. Today’s accelerated development towards greater communication and interconnection in the church and in the world gives a new understanding to mission. Although both the terms mission and communication cannot fully capture God’s qualities, communication adds a revitalising dimension to the understanding of divine mission. Mission, especially in modernity, was equated
with a one way, linear and top-down relationship in modern colonial mission. Whereas, communication connotes two way, interactive, and self-giving approach to mission. Integrating communication in mission is more in line with God’s mission characterized by the perichōrētic dynamic within the Trinity: Each of the Divine Person is selflessly directed to the other. Each Persons is equal, united yet different.

Proclaiming Missio Dei in the new media age re-orient the practice and understanding of mission. It entails a shift from transmission and ethical to communicational and transformational mission. It encourages the church to see mission from new angles and perspectives. This also implies understanding new media through Divine Mission. The media contains inchoate kernels of Divine Communication. Rather than just a tool for communication, the new media is more importantly an invitation to conversion—conversion to Missio Dei. New media are gifts, therefore, are holy ground and worthy frontier of mission.

Communication mirrored in God’s Trinitarian and perichōrētic communication is not primarily about passing information but a sharing of oneself to the other, the entering of one into the other, in short, towards building genuine communion. As Eilers said, the Trinity is not monarchic, but a sharing God, interacting and participating with each other. His communication is not like the old transmission model but a novel cultural model. “God’s revelation and communication is not passing on of ‘information’ but it is a dialogic process with concrete effects on life like the sacraments and on the relation of men with the ultimate being.”40 In God’s self-communication, God shares not data or information about God but God’s very own person and life. Applying communication to evangelisation is to understand evangelisation not primarily

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as propositions or information but about sharing God, sharing one’s life in God and experiences of entering and participating in God’s Trinitarian life.

Mission as communication is discovering the Trinitarian communication that is inherent in communication. It is in this light that Kelly proposes a shift in theology from “faith seeking understanding”—*fides quaerens intellectum*—to “faith making connections.” Communication is about community, relationships, connections, interaction, listening and speaking. Communication is the interaction of partners in a mutual exchange of gifts and message. Trinitarian communication promotes unity in diversity, ecumenical dimension, sharing and relationship, equality, love, liberation, prophetic words, which all come together and which are all principles of Christian Communication.

All communications have their *exitus* and *reditus* in God’s communication. The mission of communication proclaims the origin—*exitus*—of all communications in the Trinitarian communications and prepare the world towards greater and deeper connection with the triune God. There is an inherent seed of the Trinitarian communication in every communication. The mission of communication proclaims the fullness—*reditus*—of all communication in the unfolding of the mystery of the triune God. History is moving towards more meaningful communication patterned after the divine communication. Thus, as *Aetatis Novae* proclaims, history’s true *telos* can be found in the divine communication:

> Human history and all human relationships exist within the framework established by this self-communication of God in Christ. History itself is ordered toward becoming a kind of word of God, and it is part of the human vocation to contribute to bringing this about by living out the ongoing, unlimited communication of God’s reconciling love in creative new ways. We are to do this through words of hope and deeds of love, that is, through our very way of life. Thus communication must lie at the heart of the Church community.

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41 Kelly, “Section 1, Implications: A First Circle of Connections,” *An Expanding Theology*.

42 Oomen, *The Concept of Trinity*, 75-82.

43 *Aetatis Novae*, 6.
God’s communication is far from being fully developed and practiced in the church and in the world. There is a lacuna of communication in evangelisation in the Catholic Church. There is a deficiency of communication both in the church and in the world. There is a deficiency of meaningful communication both within the internal and external dynamics of the church. Despite the church documents’ insistence on the importance of communication, communication has not exerted sufficient influence on the method, perspective and approach of mission. The transmission model of communication is deeply embedded and is still the dominant model in church’s pastoral activities—catechetics, evangelisation and preaching. Preaching, teaching, and proselytising—the traditional mission of the church is heavy on transmission, content, and weak on witnessing.

Communication is an essential element of mission in the new media age. Indeed, communication is an integral dimension of all the activities of the church today. To be a missionary in the digital continent is to be a communicator. As the world will become even more interconnected, the demand for communication in the life and mission of the church will become bigger in the future. The goal of communication and making connection in the new media age is to proclaim the origin of all communications and prepare the world towards greater and deeper connection with the triune God. Doing Missio Dei in today’s new media age is imitating the model of communication of the Trinity.

There is a strong urge to communicate within us because we are created in the image and likeness of an utterly communicable God. All human communication is made in the image and likeness of divine communication: all human communication is grounded in the communication among Father, Son, and Spirit. But more than that, Trinitarian communion reaches out to humankind: The Son is the Word, eternally “spoken” by the Father; and in and through Jesus
Christ, Son and Word made flesh, God communicates himself and his salvation to women and men… Communication in and by the Church finds its starting point in the communion of love among the divine Persons and their communication with us.44

A theological grounding of doing a theology of mission in the context of new media essentially requires a communicational theology of mission.

**a. Trinity as Communication: Basis of Social Communication**

At the core of the church’s documents on social communication lies a profound theology of communication rooted in the understanding of God as Trinity. *Communio Et Progressio* proclaims, “[A]ll communication … find their source and model in the central mystery of the eternal communion between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who live a single divine life.”45 John Paul II in *Dominum et Vivificantem* also expresses the Trinitarian roots of communication:

> God, who is infinite Spirit, comes close to the visible world. The Triune God communicates himself to man in the Holy Spirit from the beginning through his “image and likeness.” Under the action of the same Spirit, man, and through him the created world, which has been redeemed by Christ, draw near to their ultimate destinies in God.46

Bernard Häring in *Free and Faithful in Christ* affirms the Trinitarian foundation of communication as proclaimed in the church documents, Jesus, the Word incarnate, reveals the divine life as communication, sharing. He prays, “All that is mine is thine, and what is thine is mine” (John 17:10). His sharing of himself and of all the truth arises from the total sharing between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is sharing, communication.47

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44 *Ethics in Communications*, 3.
46 John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 64d.
b. Divine Mission as Communication

God’s *processio* and *missio* manifests God’s intra-trinitarian and extra-trinitarian communication. The eternal processions—*processio*—in God’s triune life are acts of communication. Augustine and Aquinas describes that the *processio* of the Son who proceeds from the Father, is an act of the communication of the intellect, the uttering of the Word. While the *processio* of the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, is an act of the communication of the will, the love between the Father and the Son. The Father is the source of all communication in Godself and God-for-us. Likewise, the temporal missions—*missio*—are acts of communication. *Missio* is God’s self-communication to God’s creation. God’s *missio* of self-communication is through two visible modalities: The Son’s incarnation and the Holy Spirit’s sanctification. The *missio* of the Son is God’s self-communication to humanity by becoming human like us through the incarnation. The *missio* of the Holy Spirit is God’s self-communication to humanity to be the paraclete and sanctifier of the souls of the just by descending upon the apostles as tongues of fire on Pentecost. Therefore, communication is a fitting expression of divine mission both in its *processio* and *missio* dynamics.

God as one essence and three persons is ontologically relational and communicational. The three persons are subsistent relations. The three persons are one yet distinct because they are relational. Being one nature and essence and three persons at the same time is only possible because God is relational. The circumincession of the three divine persons where each person mutually indwells in each other and makes room for the other is an act of perfect communication. Therefore, God is pure communication. God’s *esse* is communication both in Godself and God for us. God’s communication in Godself and in creation is one continuum of communication, neither independent nor separate.
The *missio* of creation, redemption and sanctification is God’s self-communication in order to invite the whole of humanity to partake in the communication of the three divine persons. This is conveyed by *Dei Verbum*: “Through divine revelation, God chose to show forth and communicate Himself and the eternal decisions of His will regarding the salvation of [men and women]. That is to say, He chose to share with them those divine treasures which totally transcend the understanding of the human mind.”

“God truly reveals himself as one who desires to communicate himself, making the human person a participant in his divine nature.”

God’s communication, therefore, is deeply embedded in all of the cosmos; the divine communication is a fundamental principle of all creation. Communication, interrelatedness and making connection is the essence of creation. Anthony Kelly profoundly expressed this, “The divine communal life is the relational ground of a cosmos of growing connections and relationships.” This is also expressed by Gerard Manley Hopkins to what he poetically refers to as “There lives the dearest freshness deep down things.”

William Fore sums it up by saying that “Everything—atoms, animals, human beings, nature and the universe—is interrelated. And communication is the fundamental process by which these relationships occur. Communication is a fundamental given of existence, essential to the nature of being.” The whole cosmos is embodied with God’s communication. Thus, all creation are *analogia entis* of Trinitarian communication.

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49 *Dei Verbum*, 36b.

50 Kelly, *An Expanding Theology*.


c. Processio as Communication

God in Godself is intrinsically and utterly a communicating God. The eternal processions in Godself are about communication. Several theologians have articulated this in recent decades. Avery Dulles, for example, describes the Trinity as “communication in absolute, universal perfection, a totally free and complete sharing among equals. In generating the Son as Word, the Father totally expresses himself ...” and “the Holy Spirit completes the intradivine process of communication.”53 In view of this, Dulles calls Christianity “preeminently a religion of communication, for God in his inmost essence is a mystery of self-communication.”54 Similarly, Bernard Häring affirms that communication is constitutive of the mystery of the Triune God:

. . . Communication is constitutive in the mystery of God. Each of the three Divine Persons possesses all that is good, all that is true, and all that is beautiful, but in the modality of communion and communication. Creation, redemption, and communication arise from this mystery and have as their final purpose to draw us, by this very communication, into communion with God. Creating us in his image and likeness, God makes us sharers of his creative and liberating communication in communion, through communion and in view of communion.55

Jesuit Cardinal Carlo Martini also described the intrinsic and eternal communicative nature of the Trinity:

The intimate life of God as far as we can comprehend in this world is a profound and ongoing inexhaustible communicating between the divine persons. The Father ‘speaks’ the Son and in doing so he generates and communicates everything he is and he has. The Son calls the Father and gives himself in totality with perfect obedience. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son and is the living bond, the perfect and personal fruit of the love dialogue between Father and Son... From the Gospel word transpires that sense of profound communion and the exchange which lives in mystery of God and which is at the root of all our human communication.56

Similarly, Leonardo Boff described the act of communication within the Trinity as eternal, no beginning and no end, God is forever communicating:

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The Trinity is an eternal communication of life. The Christian God is eternal communion of the divine Three—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are eternally pouring forth, one toward the other, so much so that they build a single movement of love, communication, and encounter.57

Communication in the Trinity reflects the *perichōrētic* relationship of the Divine Persons. Thus, God’s communication is *perichōrētic* communication. The *perichōrētic* character of God’s communication makes room for the other, is intimate, and at the same time, reciprocal. Communication in God is not utilitarian, not out of necessity, not about power and domination but about giving and sharing life. In short, God’s communication is a perfect communication in perfect harmony and love which makes them one.

**d. Missio as Communication**

God’s communication in the economic Trinity mirrors the communication of the immanent Trinity. The temporal *missio*—creation, redemption and sanctification—form one continuum of God’s communication which reflects God’s inner communication. Dulles affirms this,

> The entire work of creation, redemption, and sanctification is a prolongation of the inner processions within the Trinity. Creation is ascribed to the Father, who thereby fashions finite images and vestiges of his son. Redemption is attributed to his Son, who communicates himself to human nature in the Incarnation. Sanctification is appropriated to the Holy Spirit who communicates himself to the Church, the communion of saints.58

Eilers explains that God’s self-communication is not a communication of knowledge or information about God but God’s revealing and giving of very self. “God is not only revealing truth as something of him but He is revealing Himself. In this understanding, Revelation is a person to person, a subject to subject, an “I” to “Thou” encounter.”59

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59 Eilers, *Communicating in Community*, 50.
e. Creation: All Creation as Vestiges of God’s Communication

The overflowing communication of God showers upon God’s creation, as Boff expressed it, “God is … overwhelming communication into which we ourselves are plunged.”\(^{60}\) This is the implication of the Divine Persons creation of humanity: “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness” (Genesis 1: 26). This is affirmed by John Paul II in *Dominum et Vivificantem*: “Let us make [humankind] in our image, after our likeness.” “Let us make”: can one hold that the plural which the Creator uses here in speaking of himself already in some way suggests the Trinitarian mystery, the presence of the Trinity in the work of the creation of man?\(^{61}\)

We are created in the image and likeness of God implies that we are created to communicate in the way God communicated in the immanent and economic Trinity. Humankind’s creation as image and likeness of divine communication is expressed by Federation of Asian Bishops Conference Roundtable discussion on “Social Communication in Religious Tradition of Asia” in 2005: This communicating God also creates man in “His image and likeness” which must be considered the reason why human beings are also able to communicate.\(^{62}\) It is within this vision that the means of social communication fall into their proper place. They help human beings share their knowledge and unify their creative work. Indeed, by creating humankind in His own image, God has given us a share in His creative power. And so humankind is summoned to cooperate with fellow human beings in building the earthly city.\(^{63}\)

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\(^{60}\) Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, 13.

\(^{61}\) *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 12a.


\(^{63}\) *Communio Et Progressio*, 7
This helps to develop a new theological anthropology—we are a communicating being, we are born to communicate. All creaturely communication share in God’s communication. To communicate is to dialogue, interact and form communion. Human communication, however, pales in comparison to God’s communication. Thus, “we human beings are not the creators but rather are bound together as part of creation along with all other parts of creation, in mutuality.”64

This theological anthropology challenges contemporary understanding and practice of the faith and morality as private and individualistic. The contemporary obsession with private faith and morality which only involves me and God, reinforced by the “existence before essence” ideology of existentialists, is untenable. Personal salvation and morality is not exercised as person-in-isolation. The individualistic view of faith and morality also paves the way for a reinterpretation of the meaning of sin.

f. Sin: Fallen Nature of Communication

Communication as the essence of existence also implies a new perspective on sin or the sinful condition in the light of God’s communication. Sin is not merely the individual breaking of rules. In the communicational perspective, sin is seen as the opposite of communication—the decision and act of separation and isolation. It is the refusal to be in communion with God’s creation, fellow human beings and God, in effect, sin is the turning away from the relational nature of human existence as imago dei. Moreover, sin results in the breakdown and failure of communication. Evil is seen as the corruption of God’s communication. We see examples of the breakdown of this communication in marriage break-ups, division within the family, conflicts

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64 Fore, “A Theology of Communication.”
and wars because of the refusal for dialogue, intolerance to differences and subjecting of the other to sameness.\(^{65}\)

In this light we can also understand the meaning of original sin: Because of sin, the capacity for dialogue at both the personal and social level has been altered, and humanity has had to suffer, and will continue to suffer, the bitter experience of incomprehension and separation.\(^ {66}\) Oomen articulates several examples in the Bible, “Eating the forbidden fruit by Adam and Eve in Eden, the killing of Abel by Cain (Gen. 4:1-16), the sin of pride in Babel (Gen. 11) destroys communication. Sin breaks the relationship and communication dies.”\(^ {67}\) Reflecting the fallen nature of our existence, human’s mode and understanding of communication becomes limited and many times flawed. The sinful condition can also be applied in the new media—the greatest temptation in the utilisation of the new media technologies is the temptation to make technology like gods—allowing technology to have power, authority and control over humanity.

In this light, we can likewise understand conversion in communicational perspective. Conversion is returning to God’s communication and communion with creation, with fellow human beings and with God. Conversion is the constant evaluation and imitation of human’s communication with God’s \(\text{perichōrētic}\) communication. Indeed, history is the story of humanity’s progress and evolution in communication which is teleologically directed to God’s communication.


Like communication, conversion is not just one way; conversion is relational. It is not just the offer of gratuitous, unconditional and free love of God to humanity but also human beings’ deliberate and free acceptance of God’s grace into their lives. Conversion is a two-way communication between God and humanity: God’s free offer of grace and humanity’s free acceptance of the gift.

**g. Redemption as Communication: We are Reconciled from Lost Communication**

Jesus Christ redeemed creation from all forms of separation from God and from one another. He is the redeemer of the fallen nature of communication and separation between God and humanity as a result of the original sin. The price of that redemption is Jesus’ life as the perfect ransom in order to secure the freedom of creation held in bondage by separation. Jesus as atonement reconciled the broken communication between God and creation. In the words of *The Rapid Development*,

Thanks to the Redemption, the communicative capacity of believers is healed and renewed. The encounter with Christ makes them new creatures, and permits them to become part of that people which he, dying on the Cross, has won through his blood, and introduces them into the intimate life of the Trinity, which is continuous and circular communication of perfect and infinite love among the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.  

Jesus also taught us about God’s communication. Jesus is the revealer of the communication within the Trinity. He is the divine insider of God’s communicational life. Without Jesus we would never ever understood or know God’s Trinitarian communication.

The communication between God and humanity has thus reached its perfection in the Word made flesh. The act of love by which God reveals himself, united to the response of faith by humanity, generates a fruitful dialogue. Precisely for this reason, making our own in a certain sense the request of the disciples, “teach us to pray” (*Lk* 11:1), we can ask the Lord to help us to understand how to communicate with God and with other human beings through the marvelous communications media.  

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69 *The Rapid Development*, 5.
Christ is both and at the same time, the medium and the message. In Jesus, the medium and the message has no dichotomy and does not limit each other. Christ is both the content and the dynamic source of the Church’s communications in proclaiming the Gospel.\(^{70}\)

The redemption of Christ also showed that Christ is the fullness of God’s communication. He is the communicator \textit{par excellence} through his incarnation. Jesus incarnation is a model of perfect communication through Jesus’ emptying of power and entering our world and becoming like us:

While He was on earth Christ revealed Himself as the Perfect Communicator. Through His “incarnation”, He utterly identified Himself with those who were to receive His communication and He gave His message not only in words but in the whole manner of His life. He spoke from within, that is to say, from out of the press of His people. He preached the Divine message without fear or compromise. He adjusted to His people’s way of talking and to their patterns of thought. And He spoke out of the predicament of their time.\(^{71}\)

The mystery of the Incarnation constitutes the climax of … divine self-communication.\(^{72}\) Christ communication as incarnation is totally self-emptying, kenotic. This is beautifully proclaimed by St. Paul,

\begin{quote}
[T]hough he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. (Philippians 2: 6-8).
\end{quote}

Redemption as communication is a proclamation of good news—the liberation from the fallen existential human condition of our lives.

\textbf{h. Pentecost as Communication: Holy Spirit New Creation as Goal of Communication}

The Spirit is the means of the communication of love between the Father and the Son.\(^{73}\)

At Pentecost, the visible \textit{missio} of the Holy Spirit manifested as tongues of fire which came upon

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\footnotesize\cite{Aetatis-Novae-7,Communio-Progressio-11,Dominum-et-Vivificantem-50a,Atkinson-Trinity-Pentecost-76}
\end{flushright}
the apostles on the upper room. When the Spirit descended upon the apostles they were able to communicate the Good News of Christ to the diverse, multi-lingual crowd who had gathered in Jerusalem.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. (Acts 2: 1-4)

Eilers explains that the Holy Spirit at Pentecost re-opens the communication channels closed since Babel, re-establishes the easy and authentic rapport between people in the name of Jesus Christ, and thus, the Church emerges as “sign and instrument of communication with God and of the unity between [people].”

The Church understands it, the history of human communication is something like a long journey, bringing humanity “from the pride-driven project of Babel and the collapse into confusion and mutual incomprehension to which it gave rise (cf. Gen 11:1-9), to Pentecost and the gift of tongues: a restoration of communication, centered on Jesus, through the action of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit empowered and bequeath the courage to the church to proclaim the gospel of Jesus. “[Y]ou will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1: 8). The church was born on the day of Pentecost, the feast of Pentecost as the redemption of communication by God through the Holy Spirit. John Paul II in Dominum et Vivificantem proclaims,

The Church, therefore, instructed by the words of Christ, and drawing on the experience of Pentecost and her own apostolic history, has proclaimed since the earliest centuries her faith in the Holy Spirit, as the giver of life, the one in whom the inscrutable Triune God communicates himself to human beings, constituting in them the source of eternal life.

74 Eilers, Communicating in Community, 56.
75 The Church and Internet, 2; Communio et Progressio, 10.
76 Dominum et Vivificantem, 1e.
The Holy Spirit is God’s continuing self-communication until the return of Jesus. The Holy Spirit will communicate throughout history until the end the continuous understanding of the visible *missio* of the Son. “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (John 14: 26). The Holy Spirit is the decoder of the Word and will make possible the indwelling of the divine persons in our souls through sanctifying grace. This is the invisible *missio* of the Holy Spirit.

Christ never left the church. He assured the apostles and the church that he will be with them for all ages to come, “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28: 20). The incarnated visible body of Christ has ascended but He is continuously sent to us and to the world. Christ continues to communicate with us, albeit no longer through the visible body of His incarnation but the invisible *missio* of His presence until the end of time.

The most significant sign that Christ’s communication continues until today is the church—the body of Christ. The invisible *missio* of Christ’s communication is most alive in the church. The church is the sacrament of God’s communication by becoming efficacious and performative signs of the words and deeds of the temporal *missio* of the Son. Christ’s endless presence in the church is affirmed in *Lumen Gentium,* “Christ, the one Mediator, established and continually sustains here on earth His holy Church, the community of faith, hope and charity, as an entity with visible delineation through which He communicated truth and grace to all.”

The church, however, can only become the sacrament of Christ in this world and keep the invisible *missio* of the Son alive without the power of the Holy Spirit. Before Christ ascended, He and the Father sent the Holy Spirit upon the disciples. He promised that the Holy Spirit will be the advocate of his body, the church.

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77 *Lumen Gentium,* 8a.
I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you (John 16: 12-15).

However, the ascension of Jesus made possible the coming of the Holy Spirit.

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you” John 16: 7.

Thus, the invisible missio is alive in the world through the continuous movement and communication of the Holy Spirit. The movement of the Holy Spirit is behind movements that promote the values of the reign of God like justice, peace and integrity of creation. The Holy Spirit is alive in the world and in all creation through movements towards greater connection, collaboration and dialogue. The invisible missio is also alive among the least, the last and the lost. The poor are sacraments and signposts to the kingdom; “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God.” (Luke 6: 20). “[H]as not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?” (James 2: 5). “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matthew 25: 40).

E. Paul’s Proclamation in the Areopagus as a Model for Mission in the New Media Age

Paul’s preaching at the Areopagus is one of the most celebrated text in the New Testament about mission. It serves as enlightening paradigm of mission in the new media age. As described in Acts 17: 16-34, St Paul went to the Areopagus as the public square where people could come and listen.

Proclamation of the gospel, following the example of Paul’s proclamation at the Areopagus, is communicating the gospel from within the culture, faith, symbols and context of
those who are evangelised. Paul’s preaching at the Areopagus can teach the church valuable lessons for doing mission in the new media age. What are these lessons?

1st Lesson: Paul went out of the church and went to the marketplace to converse and discuss with the people (Acts 17: 16-17).

Paul went out of the church and went to the market. He was not content with remaining inside the temple. While Paul spent time teaching in the synagogue, the most significant time was spent in the marketplace and at the Areopagus. St. Paul in Athens is a model of proclaiming the good news outside of the church, into the marketplace and in the public square.

The mission field of the new media is more of an agora and areopagus. As Benedict XVI said “I wish to consider the development of digital social networks which are helping to create a new “agora”, an open public square in which people share ideas, information and opinions, and in which new relationships and forms of community can come into being.”

Hoover echoes similar view, “In contemporary life, the ways of being religious have moved out of the protected sphere of religious institution and tradition, and into the open ground of the symbolic marketplace.” Bishop Julian Porteaus identifies today’s areopagus as the new media: “The new media invites contemporary evangelisers to go to the virtual Areopagus. The new public square is the World Wide Web which has two billion people participating. This is the new location for the Catholic faith to be proclaimed. This is the Areopagus of the third millennium.”

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79 Stewart Hoover, “Religion in a Media Age in Media and Theology Project Public Lectures”
80 Julian Porteaus, Evangelizing the Digital Continent, Word Made Flesh and “Shared” Among Us, Braddon, Canberra: Australian Catholic Bishop’s Conference Communications Office), 19.
It is not science, secularisation and atheism but the media—both mass media and new media—that is the closest competitor of the church for the creation of spiritual meaning today. Internet has become the new battleground for ultimate ideas and meaning. New media has even co-opted religious symbols and language. The mission field in the new media age has, therefore, become more of an areopagus and agora than ad gentes.

Despite these, the church documents on social communications regards new media as gifts and holy ground where God’s Mission can be discerned, discovered and lived. The new media as areopagus and agora is an important field for the promotion of Gospel values. God is already at work in the new media in many ways that the church needs to discover. Thus, the challenge to the church is how to recognise and nurture the seeds of the Gospel already growing in the Internet and how to bring out the good news from the Internet.

The church documents on social communications warn of the danger of not engaging the new media environment by proclaiming that if the church does not engage, media wins by default. This danger is expressed by Pope Benedict XVI, in his Message for the World Communications Day, 2013, “[U]nless the Good News is made known also in the digital world, it may be absent in the experience of many people for whom this existential space is important.” The active engagement of the church with the new media is reiterated by Pope Francis as a missionary presence of the church in the web:

As I have frequently observed, if a choice has to be made between a bruised Church which goes out to the streets and a Church suffering from self-absorption, I certainly prefer the first. Those “streets” are the world where people live and where they can be reached, both effectively and affectively. The digital highway is one of them, a street teeming with people who are often hurting, men and women looking for salvation or hope. By means of the internet, the Christian message can reach “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

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81 Benedict XVI, *Message for the 47th World Communications Day*.

“Publicness” of the Faith

In doing mission in the new media, the church becomes aware that she is addressing the whole world not just her particular congregation or the Christian churches in general. The internet provides a platform for the church to justify her mission and charism for the world not just for her own community. In this light, a theology of mission in the new media age is not just for the church but for the whole world.

New media encourages what David Tracy calls the “publicness” of theology and faith.83 New media reinforces the public foundation of theology—a theology for the whole world. New media affords the platform for theology to go public, for every believer to make his/her computer “a printing press, a broadcast station, a community and a marketplace”84 for his/her faith or religion. New media has become a global pulpit for the gospel. As John Paul II affirms,

Immediate access to information makes it possible for [the Church] to deepen her dialogue with the contemporary world...The Church can more readily inform the world of her beliefs and explain the reasons for her stance on any given issue or event. She can hear more clearly the voice of public opinion, and enter into a continuous discussion with the world around her, thus involving herself more immediately in the common search for solutions to humanity’s many pressing problems.85

New media has heightened the awareness that, indeed, we live in a pluralistic society. The church is addressing more and more a pluralistic, multicultural, multi-religious, secular, and postmodern society in their preaching and mission. Thus, pluralism, ecumenism and dialogue are


84 Rheingold, “On Collaboration.”

85 John Paul II, Message for the 24th World Communications Day, 1990.
primary areas of engagement in mission now and in the near future. As Tracy contended, “[T]here can be no return to a pre-ecumenical, prepluralistic, ahistorical theology.”

The “publicness” of theology and faith implies that the church does not engage with the Internet mainly to win converts for the church but to participate in the building of a better world which mirrors the Trinitarian communion. Rather than proselytization, a more fitting evangelising agenda in the internet is the proclamation of hope; evangelising media is the witnessing to the hope that is in us. The primacy of hope in proclamation was highlighted by Peter in addressing newly baptised Christians in the early church: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade” (1 Peter 1: 3-4). Later, in the general letter, Peter enunciates the implication of this baptism as witnessing into the living hope of one’s faith: “Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3: 15).

Hope widens copiously the scope of mission beyond the church. Ultimately, the mission of hope ushers us towards the Kingdom of God beyond the present church and the world. It is in this spirit that the church is called to become the “light and salt” of God’s kingdom in the world (Matthew 5:13-16) through an active involvement and collaboration with the whole of humanity.

2nd Lesson: Start where the people are (Acts 17: 22 – 23)

St. Paul used the language of the Athenians. Doing mission in the new media admonishes the church to speak the language of the times, to enter into the culture of today’s

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86 Tracy, “Defending the Public Character of Theology.”
87 The nature of first Peter as a baptismal sermon is a major bone of contention in the exegesis of 1 Peter. See Wayne A. Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 40-43.
generation and discover the vestiges of the trinity in their culture and context. Rather than disparaging their belief system or condemning their religiosity, Paul recognizes there is something genuine in their religious aspirations and felt needs, and he uses them as stepping stones for communicating the gospel (Fernando 1998:479-481). 88

Evangelisation environment through the new media has become a conversation and storytelling characterised by dialogue not monologue, interactive not authoritative, collaborative not monopoly, horizontal not vertical. Moreover, evangelisation has become more interreligious, inclusivist, and dialogical.

3rd Lesson: The culture and context of the people contains seeds of the presence and action of the mission of God. (Acts 17: 26 – 28)

Paul’s proclamation at the Areopagus is an expression of the inchoate nature of cultures and beliefs—reaching its full potential in God’s mission. Ethics in Internet affirms, “[T]he world of media, including the Internet, has been brought by Christ, inchoately yet truly, within the boundaries of the kingdom of God and placed in service to the word of salvation.” 89

This calls for a renewal of the understanding of evangelisation/proclamation in the new media age. We do not directly bring God to the people; we go via the Holy Spirit who is present in the souls of the just. Proclamation is about God, God in us and God in the people. The Holy Spirit is moving and leading us through the people, the world, and the church.

4th Lesson: Evangelization is the proclamation of a God who “moves and lives” in every place and time oftentimes in mysterious ways.

Paul exposition is primarily theocentric. It focuses on God’s character, revelation in nature, and relationship to humanity. This seems to be Paul’s characteristic approach to people

89 Ethics in Internet, 18.
without a biblical heritage (cf. 14:15-17). His deeper purpose is to confront and correct their understanding of God at a fundamental level. He accomplishes this not by overtly attacking specific pagan doctrines, but rather by positively confessing the God of the Scriptures.

5th Lesson: Despite all odds, Paul did not shy away from proclaiming Christ (Acts 17: 32 – 34)

Church documents have spoken about the danger of omitting proclamation in dialogue. Post-Vatican II documents on dialogue and inculturation have strongly reminded the church of the danger of over-emphasizing dialogue at the expense of proclamation. Moreover, as Arthur argues, the approach that views other religions as missions equal to the mission of the Church does not do justice to Jesus’ claim to uniqueness, nor the Trinitarian nature of God. Even as dialogue demands sincere listening, it should not stop the church from proclaiming Christ. On the contrary, it challenges all the more the church to vigorously proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This brings out the value of the creative tension between dialogue and proclamation. The creative tension between dialogue and proclamation is articulated by the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conference:

Dialogue and proclamation are integral but dialectical and complementary dimensions of the Church’s mission of evangelisation. Authentic dialogue includes a witness to one’s total Christian faith, which is open to a similar witness of the other religious believers.

The changes in the media environment have direct implication for evangelisation. There is a discrepancy between church’s evangelisation method and contemporary culture. The

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90 Flemming, “Contextualizing the Gospel in Athens,” 203.
91 Flemming, “Contextualizing the Gospel in Athens,” 204.
92 *Ad gentes*, 11; *Lumen Gentium*, 17; *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 22; *Redemptoris Missio* 4 - 11 and *Dominus Iesus* 5- 8; 13 - 15.
church’s evangelisation, shaped by print culture, is proclaiming to people today who are shaped by the electronic media. Evangelisation that we understand today is very much shaped by the influence of print culture/old media. The influence of old media remains strong in the church and mission today. Many in our church today still see evangelisation, proclamation, programs and services mission as one way, the church are the givers, the people are receivers, the church teach, the people listen, the church instruct, the people follow, the church have the answers the people have the questions, the church have the authority, the people have the obligation.

Evangelisation in the holistic sense should appeal to all senses, living and dynamic reality of people today. Multimedia expression and communication can help to capture the living and dynamic reality of life. Evangelisation today does not address the intellect, but the senses and the heart; does not aim at understanding but seeing, hearing, empathizing and believing.

The proliferation of new media has awakened the church to the realisation that evangelisation is about communication, connecting and interacting with the people of God not merely transmission and instruction. Connecting is an essential value for evangelisation today. People in today’s hypermediated world yearn for relationship and interaction.

A communicational reshaping of evangelisation in the new media age implies a shift from a transmission and instrumentalist model to an interactive and relational model of evangelisation. Evangelisation in the Internet is not just the transmission of information and knowledge about the faith, but more importantly, the witnessing to the Trinitarian way of life as the model of interconnection. Bishop John Wester, in an address given to the American Bishops in June 2012, illustrates this shift: “We used to ask ourselves, ‘What do we need to tell people?’
Now we also have to ask ourselves, ‘What do people want to hear from us?’ This underscores the importance of interaction towards building community in evangelisation. The church can only proclaim, do and live the *Communicatio Dei* as a community, as a church not as isolated individuals.

**Conclusion**

We have attempted to articulate some preliminary theological and practical considerations for doing theology of mission in the new media age. We did this by appropriating the notion of divine mission by Augustine and Aquinas vis-à-vis the new media. We discuss the implications and emerging signs in mission today because of the impact of the new media and the revival of Trinitarian theology in mission. We also combined the insights from the notion of divine mission and the fittingness of the new media age in spelling out the elements of a theology of mission in the new media age. We also incorporated the different perspectives on media.

A theology of mission in the new media age is not applying God’s mission in the new media field or environment but understanding and applying new media in God’s mission. We discerned the mission and work of God in the new media age through God’s own pattern/framework of mission. A theology of mission in the new media age is not applying our framework but God’s framework of mission.

We are awed and amazed at the wonderful technologies that new media has afforded us for mission. They are wonders and gifts of God. Mission, however, in the new media is not about the new media technologies. It is about God who is inviting us through the new media to share and participate in God’s Trinitarian communion.

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New media have become more than a mission field because it has changed the way the church do mission, their missionary identity and the relationship between missionary and the people. Technology changed not just the church’s way of doing mission but also their lives. These new technologies, inasmuch as they provided new techniques for mission, are more significantly contributing to and deepening a new understanding of mission.

The new media age offers a favourable clearing for the proclamation of Missio Dei. The new spatiality and temporality of the new media, while containing both opportunities and threats, has redefined elements of Missio Dei—dialogue, evangelisation and the process of theology. It offers fertile possibilities for new ministries, new methods and new programs. Far from obliterating it, new media can inspire the missionary dimension of church and Christian life. The new media is stimulating the church to become missionary in a new way. The new media age is an exciting age for Christian mission: the disintegration of borders in the new media age demands a more inclusive mission. Thus, the new media age is both an exciting and exacting time and space for Missio Dei. The new media age is a kairos\textsuperscript{96} for Missio Dei.

Although Missio Dei is immanent in the new media age, it goes beyond the new media age. God’s mission is beyond the internet, beyond the new media. We are however, called to be pioneers, in today's media age by applying the new media in God’s mission.

\textsuperscript{96} Kairos (καιρός) is an ancient Greek word. In classical rhetoric, it is interpreted as the opportune time and/or place, the right or appropriate time to say or do the right or appropriate thing. See “Kairos,” Grammar.com. Accessed 13/12/2014 at http://grammar.about.com/od/il/g/kairosterm.htm.
Conclusion

“The end of my labors has come. All that I have written appears to be as so much straw after the things that have been revealed to me.”

The primary research of this thesis has been the exploration of the essential elements of a theology of mission in the context of today’s new media age.

The systematic theological reflection of mission vis-à-vis today’s new media age is connected with and is a continuation of the ongoing conversation on Missio Dei. The systematic theological reflection of mission in the light of today’s new media age involved the critical examination of the new media, its culture and the subtle transformations it brought to global structures, faith and our personal lives today. This also involved a re-appropriation of the rich theological tradition of mission particularly of the patristic and medieval tradition as expounded by St. Augustine and St. Thomas. Likewise the church’s teachings and recent direction towards social communication contributed to the framing of a theology of mission in the new media age.

The thesis investigated the essential considerations and elements of a theology in the new media mainly through library research. It also used other methods such as content analysis of church documents on mission and social communications and surveys on new media. The thesis went back to the primary source of De Trinitate and Summa Theologiae by Augustine and Aquinas respectively. In investigating the new media, the thesis took an inter-disciplinary

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1 This is St. Thomas Aquinas reply to his secretary and friend Brother Reginald’s pleading to Aquinas to keep writing and finish the Summa Theologiae. Aquinas’ reply was prompted by a kind of mystical event near the end of his life. On the feast of St. Nicholas in 1273, Aquinas was celebrating Mass when he received a revelation that intensely affected him that he wrote and dictated no more. Despite the immensity and profundity of his project in the Summa Theologiae, he called it mere straw compared to the mystical event he experienced. After a few months, Aquinas died leaving his great work the Summa unfinished.
approach borrowing insights from new media studies, philosophy, sociology, economics and communication theology.

This study rediscovered *Missio Dei* as the most significant notion of mission of the twentieth century—the return to God in mission. *Missio Dei* as a theological concept of mission developed not in isolation but at the very heart of the whole movement of theology in the twentieth-century. The most significant theological renaissance is the recovery of the Trinity and the development of many new insights about the Trinity. *Missio Dei* is just one of the expressions of an inner longing to return to God not just in mission but in the whole of theology. Inspired by the revival of Trinitarian theology and the flourishing of contextual theologies, the notion of *Missio Dei* came to being.

In the Catholic tradition, however, the exact phrase *Missio Dei* is never mentioned in any Catholic church documents. *Missio Dei* is not endemic in the Catholic church, although, recent Catholic missiologists have jumped on the *Missio Dei* bandwagon. However, the spirit and essence of *Missio Dei*, particularly its theocentric emphasis in mission, is expressed numerous times in many church documents.

Competing views on *Missio Dei* after its inception, has exposed the superficiality of *Missio Dei* in providing a substantial ontological justification for today’s understanding and praxis of mission. The discourse on *Missio Dei* was divided into two directions: On the one hand is the group stressing the *Missio Dei* in the church and on the other hand, is the group accentuating the *Missio Dei* in the world. Moreover, the Trinitarian foundation for *Missio Dei* was weak and muddled. Thus, the twentieth-century notion of *Missio Dei* was foundationally
inadequate and deficient in depicting the return to God in mission. Hence, Missio Dei suffered an impasse.

To help resolve the impasse we retrieved the patristic and medieval tradition of mission as elucidated by Augustine and Aquinas. Despite the negative reception of Augustine and Aquinas’ theology, we went back to the primary text of Augustine and Aquinas’ notion of divine mission in De Trinitate and Summa Theologiae respectively. The two doctors showed us that the key to understanding divine mission in these text is the trinitarian framework of divine relations.

Mission, as discussed in the notion of Divine Mission of Augustine and Aquinas, was conceived as purely God’s Mission. The discourse of Mission by Augustine and Aquinas did not have a discourse of Mission as human mission. Thus, Augustine and Aquinas exposition of Mission was devoid of any anthropocentric tendencies.

Our project of ressourcement of Augustine and Aquinas notion of Divine Mission has deepened our understanding of the Trinitarian foundation and enhanced the prospects for Missio Dei today. This thesis’ contribution was not so much the exegesis of St. Augustine and St. Thomas works inasmuch as the ressourcement and dialoguing of their works with contemporary mission theology. We saw how Augustine and Aquinas can help rectify some deficiencies of contemporary missiologies. By appropriating the concept of Divine Mission articulated by Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, we have a firmer theological grounding of Missio Dei. By appropriating Augustine and Aquinas, we can put back Missio Dei to its place as the fundamental primordial principle and end of Mission.

On the other hand, we saw the need to dialogue and connect Augustine and Thomas’ abstract, universalist, theocentric and intellectualist theology with contemporary contextual and
prophetic mission theologies. Augustine and Aquinas’ notion of divine mission needs to be concretised in the real life situations and particular culture and context in every age. In an ideal world, the notion of Divine mission by Augustine and Aquinas and the contemporary contextual mission theologies form one continuum in the understanding and doing of mission today; both support and need each other.

We have applied the framework of divine mission by Augustine and Aquinas especially the visible-invisible missio to contemporary realities. The explorations on the notion of divine mission by Augustine and Aquinas and the teachings on social communication have provided a strong foundation for examining the significance of the new media age to a theology of mission today. We discovered that a relevant expression of the mission of God is communication. This is affirmed by recent church documents’ emphasis on social communications as centered on the communication of the Trinitarian God. God is intrinsically a communicating God both in Godself and God for us. This also applies to God’s mission: The divine mission—processio-missio—is communication, the eternal processio is communication and the temporal missio is an act of communication. The missio of God as communication is evident in the continuum of God’s work in time and in the two modalities—visible and invisible from creation to redemption and sanctification. In the light of all these, we saw that communication is an essential dimension of mission today and a fitting expression of the mission of God. Thus it is appropriate to proclaim that Missio Dei is Communicatio Dei.

We have discerned the signs of the visible and invisible missio of God in the new media age. We have discovered the signs of visible missio in the church in the new media age in the return to the Trinity, the rediscovery of parable and storytelling in evangelisation, the emphasis on witnessing and sacramental life. We have also discerned the invisible missio of God in the
new media as the interconnectedness, the interactivity, peer-to-peer dynamics, the retrieval of the commoning, as well as the new values of decentralisation, horizontalisation, and open-source. We have discovered as well signs of distortion of the divine communication and of the intrinsic relationality of all beings in the new media like technologicalism, pathologies like narcissism, the superficiality the internet as claimed by the notions of simulacra and spectacles and the dark side of the internet like pornography, fraud and many forms of extremisms. Thus, the culture of the new media is both a ferment and catalysis for the re-imagination of Christian identity and mission. The new media age has created chaos in our consciousness, in work and play, in private and public life, in relations within family life, in social relationship, in generational relations, and in the faith and church life. At the same time, new media has inspired creativity, innovation, interactivity and collaboration from people across nations, religions and cultures.

We have elaborated on the qualitative characteristics of Trinitarian mission to enable practical discernment of how one knows what God’s mission is in any situation. We have identified useful theological criteria for the discernment of God’s mission in the new media age. We have provided clearer understanding of the Trinity as a basis for discerning the Missio Dei in the unlimited number of actual and possible activities of new media technologies, structures and practice—avoiding the reduction and exaggeration of any of the persons in the trinity in mission. We have articulated some criteria for the people of God to make any discernment about how God’s giving and receiving are to be seen in new media, and therefore what their ethical response should be. We have provided criteria for building a theology for discerning the mission of God in the new media age.
New media has augmented our experience of physical reality with virtuality. We have recognised that the commingling of cyberspace and physical space is a critical context for doing theology of mission today. The dialogue and conversation between contemporary mission and the intersection of the actual and virtual world of our present reality is essential to constructing a theology of mission in the new media age. With the massive movement of peoples, urbanization, and explosion of information technology, the concept of space as “frontiers” of mission is no longer just geographical but is also cultural and spiritual.

The examination of new media has also led us to the six levels of understanding the significance of the new media to mission. First, new media can be tools of mission in the new media age (instrumental)—this is what we can call ‘proclaiming Missio Dei through’ the internet’. Second, new media can be a field or frontier of mission (territorial, albeit, virtual)—this is what we can call ‘proclaiming Missio Dei the’ internet. Third, new media can lead to harmful and/or helpful effects: values, attitudes and way of life (ethical)—this is what we can call ‘proclaiming Missio Dei the’ internet. Fourth, new media is an environment or culture which has brought profound transformations in our individual and collective lives (ecological or cultural)—this is what we can call ‘proclaiming Missio Dei from’ the internet. Fifth, new media is a liminal space and time which helps to reimagine our being individuals and society (liminal)—this is what we can call ‘proclaiming Missio Dei out of’ the internet. Sixth, new media is an evolution of previous media which reveals the innate desire for connectedness (teleological)—this is what we can call ‘proclaiming Missio Dei beyond’ the internet.

The challenges of the new media have shown that the new media evoke new meaning and radical consequences to the theology of mission today. It provides new gateway for reimagining the notion of Missio Dei. Indeed, the internet is not just a marvel of technology but a holy ground
which is an indispensable frontier for mission today. The New Media age, therefore, is fitting for the understanding, living and practising of missio Dei. The New Media age is another worthy translation of the infinite translatability of missio Dei.

All these explorations have helped to form an initial shape of a theology of mission in the new media age. A theology of mission in the new media age is not primarily about missions—strategies, programs, and techniques to employ in the new media environment, but Mission—the Missio Dei, the work of God in the new media age. A theology of mission is understanding the Missio Dei, understanding the Trinitarian processions at any given moment, place, culture and age. It is seeking God’s will in mission. It is participating and entering into the mystery of Trinitarian processions. Thus, Mission is comprehending the work of God in the new environment of the new media.

This understanding involved reflecting, discerning and reflecting systematically on the work of God in the new media age. A theology of mission explicates how God’s visible and invisible missio challenges the understanding and doing of mission in today’s new media age. This entailed some re-imagination of mission, missionary, church-in-mission and Missio Dei through a confluence of Trinitarian theology, communication theology and the new media age.

Thus, the new media age offers a clearing for developing new meaning of Missio Dei. The new spatiality and temporality of the new media, while containing both opportunities and threats, is redefining Missio Dei. It offers fertile possibilities for new ministries, new methods and new programs. Far from obliterating it, cyberspace can inspire the missionary dimension of church and Christian life. Indeed, the new media age is both an exciting and exacting time and space for Missio Dei. The new media age is a kairos for Missio Dei.
Another contribution of this thesis is to suggest a shift in missiological hermeneutics. This new hermeneutics demands not applying or interpreting the Divine Mission in the context of new media age, but to interpret the new media age in the framework of the Divine Mission. Rather than just investigating the technical and practical implications of mission in the new media, this thesis focused on the foundational and theological dimension of a mission in the new media age. Rather than simply applying mission to new media and bringing God and the gospel to the media—the transmission approach, we engage with the new media to discern, discover and live the mission of God—the communicational approach.

In the light of this missional hermeneutics, we have emphasized throughout this thesis a missiological stance on technology. We have painfully argued against a technocratic approach to new media. We have laboriously situated and comprehended the new media technologies in the story of God’s mission in the world—the Missio Dei. We have advocated a missiological approach from simply a technological application of the new media to a discovery of the Trinitarian, Christ’s presence in the new media—new media as holy ground. Thus, a theology of mission in the light of the new media is more than a question of technology, efficiency, and territory but more about how to proclaim the Trinitarian fellowship already and profoundly present in the hypermediated world today. God has been in the new media age even before we entered and evangelised it.

This thesis has also highlighted the theocentricity—the centrality of the trinity in the life and mission of the church today. This thesis has advocated strongly for an ongoing renewal and retrieval of the trinity.

This study has challenged some pre-existing views. Despite the aversion of modern and postmodern theology to Augustine and Aquinas, this thesis have shown the viability and
significance of their classical and medieval Trinitarian framework in understanding more profoundly the Missio Dei. This study has also shown how to dialogue Augustine and Aquinas theology with the complex reality of the new media. Consequently, this thesis have proposed a rethinking of Catholic missiological notions such as missio ad gentes, evangelisation and mater et magistra in the light of the new media environment. This study has also raised some issues about the deficiency of the theocentricity and Trinitarian dimension in Catholic missiology.

This thesis has investigated the new media in a general manner but has helped to open up many areas and possibilities for future research on new media and contemporary missiology both from a theological and empirical approach. For example, this study has instilled significant interest in peer-to-peer and commoning dynamics; this can inspire others to do further research about their significance to religion, mission and theology. This study has merely scratched the surface regarding collaboration in mission through the internet or wikimission, blogging as evangelisation, and the liminal nature of the new media age; thus, others may take interest in pursuing empirical research in these areas. Likewise, this study has shown that much study still needs to be done in investigating people who turned to the internet for information, support and community life of their religion and faith. This research have also provoked the potential of further studies on the viability and non-viability of the Internet in a secularized environment as already lesser people go to physical churches and a study of the contemporary culture as influenced by the new media like the remix culture.

This study also has opened up possibilities for further research on the viability of St. Augustine and St. Thomas notion on divine mission to other holy grounds of mission like inculturation, interreligious dialogue, justice and liberation projects. Another theological project
for further exploration is the theme of mission as communication and the examination of the many church documents on social communications vis-à-vis mission.

This research has merely scratched the surface of the theme of theology of mission in the new media age. This thesis, however, has contributed to breaking new ground in missiology as the new media is a fairly new mission field. If only this thesis has instilled genuine and significant interest in the further investigation of new media as a new frontier of mission and the retrieval of the rich tradition of Augustine and Aquinas in mission, then this thesis has fulfilled its purpose.

In the end this thesis is a reformulation of new media in a theology of mission not a theology of mission for new media age.
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