REIMAGINING MISSIONAL SMALL GROUPS THROUGH A MISSIONAL READING OF EPHESIANS AND IN CONVERSATION WITH ALAN HIRSCH, TIMOTHY KELLER, AND MIKE BREEN

by

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A dissertation submitted to
the Faculty of McMaster Divinity College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Practical Theology

McMaster Divinity College
Hamilton, Ontario
2023

DOCTOR OF PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

McMaster Divinity College
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE:	Reimagining Missional Small Groups through a Missional Reading of Ephesians and in Conversation with Alan Hirsch, Timothy Keller, and Mike Breen
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SUPERVISOR:	Dr. Lee Beach (Primary); Dr. Francis Pang (Secondary)
NUMBER OF PAGES:	vii + 174

ABSTRACT

"Reimagining Missional Small Groups through a Missional Reading of Ephesians and in Conversation with Alan Hirsch, Timothy Keller, and Mike Breen"

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This research project aims to work towards reimagining missional small groups through a missional reading of Ephesians and in conversation with three noted missional thinkers—Alan Hirsch, Timothy Keller, and Mike Breen. This project answers the following three questions: First, how does a missional reading of Ephesians expand biblically sound paradigm and praxis towards developing a missional small group ministry? Second, what insights do the three practical theologians of the missional church movement add to the missional reading of Ephesians in terms of forming missional small groups? Third, how can missional small groups be reimagined at my current local church and how can this also inform the practice of missional small groups in the wider church? Based on answers to these three questions, the project will propose a biblically informed integrative paradigm and praxis of mission that will help foster reimagining missional small groups.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation, I will offer a biblical and theological reflection on the practice of developing missional small groups, mainly through the lens of a missional reading of Ephesians, in order to reimagine missional small group practice.[1] To advance the practice of small group ministry, I will also engage in critical analyses of three key practical theologians who have been deeply engaged in the missional church movement: Alan Hirsch, Timothy Keller, and Mike Breen.[2] I aim to contribute towards reshaping a congregation through changes in paradigms and practices that are driven by reimagining the nature and task of a local church. This practice-led research project is concerned with the nature of practice—namely, small group ministry—that leads to new knowledge, which in turn will produce operational significance for that practice.

This project is based on three primary research questions. First, how does a missional reading of Ephesians expand biblically sound paradigm and praxis towards developing a missional small group ministry? Second, what insights do the three noted practical theologians of the missional church movement add to the missional reading of Ephesians in terms of forming missional small groups? Third, how can missional small groups be reimagined at my current local church and how can this also inform the

[1] I will explain below what a missional reading is and why I chose Ephesians for the project.

[2] The three represent missiologists from Australia (Hirsh), America (Keller), and the UK (Breen). They also come from different theological convictions and denominations, which will yield fruitful comparative analyses.

practice of missional small groups in the wider church—in response to the key findings from the missional reading of Ephesians and insights from the three missional thought leaders?

Outline of the Chapters

This introductory chapter provides a pastoral and theological rationale for the project, as well as a description of key concepts and methodologies used in the project. Chapter Two will present a historical and literary review on the topics of the missional church and missional hermeneutics. Chapter Three will present a missional reading of Ephesians and key principles for the missional church and small groups that emerge from this missional reading. Chapter Four will engage with the works of the three practical theologians, who will provide a theological framework and practical elements for understanding the missional church that will be used to glean insights and suggestions for the formation of missional small groups. Chapter five will synthesize all the findings from chapters three and four through theological reflection using the pastoral cycle.[3] The concluding chapter will provide a summary of the research project and identify areas for further study.

Pastoral and Theological Rationale and Goals for the Project

This section will provide pastoral and theological rationale and goals for the project, as well as why I have chosen to focus on Ephesians for a missional reading and on the small group ministry for the focused area of practice-led research.

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[3] Definitions of the terms *theological reflection* and *pastoral cycle* are provided below in the Methodology section.

Pastoral Rationale and Goal for the Project

This research project is motivated by a pastoral burden and challenge to lead my church to be shaped continually as a missional congregation. I have worked over a decade as a pastor of an English-speaking congregation of an immigrant church that is mainly made up of second-generation Korean Canadians.[4] The church's vision is to "move with a gospel-centered missional spirituality."[5] I have attempted to equip the congregation to live missionally in their personal and corporate lives. In recent years, one of the primary methods of accomplishing this purpose has occurred through small group ministry, where members not only care for one another but also participate in missional opportunities locally and globally. Whether praying for our overseas missionaries or conducting door-to-door evangelism, I have tried to incorporate outward components in our small groups with the goal of forming missional small groups.

The inquiry into enhancing small group ministry practice arises from a desire to experience a deeper and greater missional shift in my church through the small group ministry. In my attempt to make a missional shift in the small group ministry, I came to realize that practices without a firm biblical foundation and robust theological reflection may not form a healthy missional congregation. For example, making evangelism a mandatory component for small groups may not necessarily form them to be more missional. As I searched through Scripture and reflected on the fruit of small group ministry, I realized that a missional church is more than a church that is involved in evangelism, social justice, or both.

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[4] The mother church is a Korean-speaking congregation that gave birth to three English-speaking congregations and a Russian-speaking congregation.

[5] See "New Hope Fellowship," [n.d.].

A pastoral and theological conviction that undergirds this project is that reimagining a missional church must first be founded on a biblical and theological vision of God for the church. The congregation needs to understand the very nature of the church and also be gripped by a compelling vision that will cause small groups to be missional in biblically sound ways. I believe that a missional reading of Scripture, along with insights presented by practical theologians, have the potential to provide theological depth and robust praxis towards forming missional small groups.

Theological Rationale and Goal for the Project

One of the scholarly debates in the study of Paul has been the question as to whether Paul intended church communities to personally and actively sharing the gospel with unbelievers as Paul did.[6] Although the New Testament letters generally lack a specific command to "evangelize," it is reasonable to assume that Christians evangelized actively (see 1 Cor 7:12–13, 16; 14:23–25).[7] Paul's missionary vocation, according to Paul Bower, was not only to "proclaim the gospel" (1 Cor 1:17; Rom 15:20; 2 Cor 10:16) but to establish churches where Christians are nurtured into maturity (1 Thess 2:17–3:13; 2 Cor 2:12–13; 10:13–16; Col 1:24–2:7).[8] The task of the church, as implied in the letters of Paul, was more than just verbal communication of the gospel through evangelism; the church was to bear witnesses to the gospel through life together as a

[6] See, for example, *Paul's Understanding of the Church's Mission* by Robert Plummer, who argues that Paul expected and even commanded churches to evangelize. James Thompson, in his *Pastoral Ministry According to Paul* and *The Church According to Paul*, provides a contrasting view that follows Paul Bower's argument as laid out in his "Church and Mission in Paul" and "Fulfilling the Gospel." The emphasis by Thompson and Bower is more on nurturing and maturing the believers towards ongoing transformation as Paul's missionary task.

[7] See Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church.*

[8] Bower, "Fulfilling the Gospel," 189–98.

new society marked by attractive virtues as well as joyfully suffering for the gospel (Rev 12:11). The church bore witness to Jesus not simply by preaching about Jesus and the kingdom of God, but more fundamentally by being an alternative and counter-cultural community marked by life of cruciform love, integrity, and godliness. In other words, the church's witness has interrelated dimensions of presence, practice, proclamation, and even passion (i.e., suffering persecution).[9] N. T. Wright notes the following: "Some people had the specific vocation of evangelists; but the 'mission' of the church consisted of people being brought together in this 'new temple' reality. That community, in its very existence, demonstrated to the watching world a new way to be human, a way that came through following Jesus."[10] Therefore, the question is not *whether* Paul intended the church to evangelize but *how* Paul and the New Testament writers wanted the church to bear witness to Christ—methods that included evangelism but involved more than evangelism.[11]

In light of this distinction, readers of the New Testament letters must ask the following key question: *How* does God expect us to read these letters so that we can participate in his mission in our contemporary context? This question has important implications for me as I try to shift small groups to be more missional, not only in praxis but also in theological vision and biblical scope. It will also provide a necessary corrective to many of my congregation's narrow understanding of the mission of the church to be confined to evangelism. Formation of a missional small group must begin

[9] See Newbigin, "Witness in Biblical Perspective," Flemming, *Recovering the Full Mission of God*, and Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*.

[10] Wright, "Reading the New Testament Missionally," 191.

[11] Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 58.

with understanding the very nature of church and move forward propelled by God's mission as seen in Scripture.

In my attempt to answer my research questions by probing through Scripture, this project employs an interdisciplinary approach that brings together biblical theology, missiology, and practical theology. In other words, I will engage the Bible with missiological concerns and with the practice of Christian ministry in mind. There is much work to be done in this kind of interdisciplinary theological conversation. For instance, Michael Goheen, a professor of missional theology at Covenant Theological Seminary, notes that we are "still a long way from bringing biblical studies and missiology together."[12] This research project attempts to contribute to interdisciplinary research that brings together biblical studies, missiology, and practical theology.

One of this study's tangible goals is cultivating an appreciation of stronger theological foundations for the practice of developing healthier missional community. For example, the formation of missional small groups may not be about adding more outward-focused ministries, like evangelism or serving the poor, even though those practices may be elements in the formation of missional small groups. Through research and reflection, I expect to learn from a missional reading of Ephesians and engagement with three key practical theologians how the current practices of spiritual disciplines and evangelism are to be carried out, but with a greater depth of theological vision that will direct the practices with a biblically aligned missional goal.

[12] Goheen, *Church and Its Vocation*, 211.

Why Ephesians?

One of the main reasons for choosing Ephesians as the text for this project is that the relatively short letter provides one of the most comprehensive and compelling visions of a missional church. Charles Van Engen's *God's Missionary People*, which is considered to be one of the earliest books on the missional church, includes a chapter on Ephesians as the book's key biblical text. In the chapter entitled "The Essence of the Local Church in the Book of Ephesians," Van Engen observes how Paul's missionary ecclesiology is outlined in Ephesians, whereby "Paul saw the local church as an organism which should continually grow in the missional expression of its essential nature in the world."[13] Furthermore, New Testament scholar Douglas Moo asserts that "Ephesians is especially impressive for the broad canvas on which Paul paints. Paul locates the Christ event in the eternal plan of God and sets it in a cosmic context."[14] Its scope of missional vision encompasses the entire universe, including consideration of both physical and spiritual realities, as well as ethnic and ethical implications. For instance, the very first chapter of Ephesians includes a grand narrative of God's mission that spans from creation to consummation. Ephesians provides a vast, and comprehensive missional project of cosmic salvation, captured in 1:10: "to unite all things in him [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth."[15] The church is invited to participate in God's mission of reconciliation and restoration by "being ready to move with the gospel of peace" (6:15).

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[13] Van Engen, *God's Missionary People*, 47.

[14] Moo, *Theology of Paul*, 266. In critical biblical scholarship, Pauline authorship of Ephesians is debated. For different views on the authorship of the letter, see Moo and Carson, *Introduction to New Testament*, 480–86. For arguments supporting Pauline authorship, see O'Brien, *Letter to Ephesians*, 4–45. I will assume Pauline authorship and, in this research, I will refer to the author of Ephesians as Paul the Apostle.

[15] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the *English Standard Version* (ESV).

Markus Barth observes how "the movement which the epistle follows goes 'from God' (1:2), 'through the church' (3:10), to the bold and joyful ambassadorship of the Christians in the world (6:15–20)." Barth asserts that such movement in Ephesians gives "peculiar significance for all concerned with the evangelistic tasks of the church today."[16] Besides providing such peculiar insight into formation of a missional church, Ephesians is a letter considered to be "the most general and least situational," while providing ample connection to the Old Testament themes for canonical reading.[17] For this project's task of a missional reading that is undergirded by canonical interpretation, Ephesians' general nature and connection to the Old Testament make the epistle a favorable letter to study.

Why Small Groups?

This research project will address how a missional reading of Ephesians and conversations with three practical theologians help us reimagine our missional life together in small groups. A working assumption is that small groups are what church is, not just one ministry among many ministries in a local church. Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost assert that "the household church unit was the primary unit of missional community in the New Testament."[18] When we look at the New Testament writings, "church" (*ekklesia*) primarily denotes a gathering of small groups of Christ-followers who met in individual homes (cf. Acts 11:22; 1 Cor 1:2; Col 4:6; 1 Thess 1:1).[19] In

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[16] Barth, *Broken Wall*, 34. Barth's use of the phrase "the evangelistic tasks" is synonymous with "missional tasks" of the church.

[17] O'Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 49.

[18] Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping of Things*, 258.

[19] It is true that on a few occasions "church" (*ekklesia*) does refer to the collective body of all believers (e.g., Acts 9:31; 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 5:23; Col 1:18). In Paul's recount of his ministry in Ephesus, he mentions both larger gatherings in public arenas and smaller gatherings in private homes (Acts 20:20).

Paul's letters, he uses *oikos* (household or home) to refer to the places where followers of Jesus gathered. For example, Paul refers to church gatherings in the household of Priscilla and Aquila (1 Cor 16:19; cf. Acts 18:18–19; Rom 16:5), by Nympha (Col 4:15) and of Philemon (Phlm 2).[20] As Cavey and Carrington-Phillips argues, those references of house churches may be basically equated to "smaller groups belonging to a larger citywide network, such as the church of Corinth or the church at Ephesus."[21] Robert Banks argues that in the early church it is most likely that "only ten to a dozen believers, plus children, met in a typical household," and that the meetings of the house church must have been "small enough for a relatively close relationship to develop between the members."[22]

Many churches have a small group ministry. While called various names, such as "small group," "cell group," "life group," "house church," or "home church," they each share the characteristic of being small enough for each member to know each other and participate in life and mission together. Members of small groups gather "to give and receive, to teach and understand, to carry other's burdens and receive help with our own, to love and be loved."[23] At its best a small group is a microcosm of what church is—worshipping Christ, growing in Christ and participating in the mission of Christ. At its worst a small group becomes just one of many programs people sign up to have their needs met; some of them may be half-committed and willing to do away with their group involvement when life gets busy or the group does not benefit them.

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[20] This notion of *oikos* is one of the key concepts for Missional Communities that Mike Breen develops, which will be discussed in Chapter Four.

[21] Cavey and Carrington-Phillips, "Adopting the House Church Model," 159.

[22] Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, 32. According to Lampe (*Christians at Rome*, 372), a small group of Christians gathering in someone's home was probably out of "necessity than choice as there was no community real-estate in the first two centuries."

[23] Banks and Banks, *Church Comes Home*, 84.

In any church that is large enough, unless one is part of a small group, it is easy to remain a spectator on Sundays and stay aloof from the life and mission of the church. When it comes to the practice of small groups, one of the challenges is making small groups to be not just a program or event that one attends but a set of relationships formed around Christ, and a pursuit of a missional life together. In my current context of a two-hundred-member church, small groups are where meaningful relationships may be fostered, spiritual formation may be pursued, and missional participation may be encouraged most effectively. I envision small groups to be a significant space where the gospel is experienced and expressed through life and mission together.

Limitations of Scope

Given the limited space for the project it will limit its inquiry to a missional reading of one letter of the New Testament: Ephesians. In limiting the scope of the study to Ephesians in this project I admit that the project will be presenting only a representative sketch of a missional church rather than a comprehensive one. A missional reading of each and all of the letters of the New Testament will provide more comprehensive understanding. Nonetheless, covering all the letters of the New Testament is beyond the scope of this project.

In terms of practice of inquiry for the project, I will limit the inquiry to matters related to a small group ministry. Though limited, it is fitting to focus on small groups, because small groups are practically the microcosm of the whole church and they can be seen functionally as a main propeller for a missional shift for the church. One working

assumption is that for the missional shift and formation of a congregation to take place, it must begin in small groups and in a smaller scale and with steady pace.

In terms of engaging with practical theologians who provide insight into formation of missional small groups, I will limit the discussion to three key thought leaders in the missional church movement: Alan Hirsh, Timothy Keller, and Mike Breen. While they share the core vision of the missional church movement, each has made unique contribution from their ecclesial (non-denominational, Presbyterian, Anglican) and geographic (Australian, American, British) locations, respectively. While there are other practical theologians who can be engaged, I have chosen these three authors because their writings provide helpful insight into small group ministry within the missional church movement, and they are all widely read and thus influential in the field of missional church movements.

Key Terms and Concepts Central to the Project

Before describing the methodology used for this project, I will provide the working definitions of key terms and concepts that are central to this project.

Mission, Missions, and Missional

Until the 1950s, the terms *mission* (singular) and *missions* (plural) were generally used interchangeably to describe the spread of the Christian faith, usually by missionaries—persons sent by the church for cross-cultural evangelistic endeavor.[24] Since the 1960s, the term, *mission* (singular) has come to be distinguished from the term, *missions*

[24] Ott et al., *Encountering Theology of Mission*, xv.

(plural).[25] John Stott, for example, defines *mission* as "a comprehensive word, embracing everything which God sends his people into the world to do."[26] Lesslie Newbigin asserts that *mission* is an all-encompassing term that refers to "the entire task for which the Church is sent into the world."[27] *Mission* is as broad as human life—all of life is mission—because the church is sent to make known the gospel that God is restoring the whole creation. *Mission* in this project will denote the comprehensive vocation of God's people to participate in God's renewing work across the whole creation. *Missions* (plural) will be more narrowly used to denote specific efforts and activities of the church in order to carry out God's mission in the world: activities like evangelism, serving the homeless, feeding the poor, going overseas for evangelistic outreach, and such.[28] The term *missional* simply denotes "something that is related to or characterized by mission, or has the qualities, attributes or dynamics of mission."[29] Furthermore, in the missional church movement, the word *missional* is used as an attempt to move the discussion beyond a narrow definition of *mission* as merely evangelism or one among various activities and programs of a church. In light of the

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[25] See Goheen, *Church and Its Vocation*, 97–101, and Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission*, 401–35.

[26] Stott, *Christian Mission*, 35.

[27] Newbigin, *Gospel in Pluralistic Society*, 121. Newbigin was one of the first theologians who advocated distinction between mission and missions. He fought over the name of the academic journal, *International Review of Missions.* While Newbigin was the editor of the journal, there was a move to remove the final 's' from missions. He refused, however, insisting that maintaining the 's' would distinguish the task of missions form the more comprehensive mission of the church.

[28] See Newbigin, "Crosscurrents," 149.

[29] Wright, *Mission of God*, 24. Darrell Guder (*Called to Witness*, 122) notes, "By adding the suffix 'al' to the word 'mission,' we hoped to foster an understanding of the church as fundamentally and comprehensively defined by its calling and sending, its purpose to serve God's healing purpose *for* all the world as God's witnessing people *to* all the world." The word is elastic in that it means many things—from the profound to the trivial, from the deeply theological to the crassly pragmatic. Some have avoided using the word altogether and prefer to use words like *apostolic* or *witness* to capture the church's missionary vocation.

definitions above, the term *missional church* emphasizes the identity of the church as it participates in God's mission rather than activities of the church in various forms.

Missional Hermeneutic or Missional Reading

A missional hermeneutic is a method of reading and interpreting the Bible from a missional perspective. Brian Russell asserts, "a foundation of a missional hermeneutic is the commitment to *the whole of Scripture as the story of God's mission* in the world and our response to it."[30] The phrase—the *whole* of Scripture as the *story* of God's mission—in Russell's assertion reflect the significance of a canonical approach and a narrative hermeneutic that function as the foundational building blocks for a missional hermeneutic. That is, "a missional hermeneutic is part of an approach that will include the canonical and narratival."[31] The canon is not a random collection of texts; rather, it presents an overarching narrative tracing the story of creation, fall, redemption, and new creation.[32] The narratival approach enables the interpreters to discern the story of redemption from Genesis to Revelation. Martin Salter notes that "the narrative is multivocal, but, taken as a canonical whole, the Bible narrates the story of God's mission to and for the world."[33] Building upon narrative and canonical hermeneutics, a missional hermeneutic is, as Goheen argues, "a kind of biblical interpretation that views the participation of God's people in his redemptive mission as a central theme in Scripture."[34]

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[30] Russell, *(Re)Aligning*, 175. Emphasis added.

[31] Salter, *Mission in Action*, 21.

[32] The story of creation, fall, redemption, and new creation will be used as the framework for a missional reading of Ephesians in the next chapter.

[33] Salter, *Mission in Action*, 23.

[34] Goheen, *Reading Bible Missionally*, x. Christopher Wright acknowledges the limitations of any one framework (including a missional framework) for the interpretation of Scripture. Wright suggests

A missional hermeneutic uses a missional framework to interpret and apply the text of Scripture. A missional reading is *not* a matter of coming up with some "missiological implications" as a supplement to the text after exegetical work on the text is completed. A missional reading is *not* something done *after* exegesis, but rather it starts the whole interpretive process with an assumption that the Bible can be viewed as the record, product, and tool of God's mission.[35] A missional reading attempts to move beyond the descriptive task of biblical interpretation (usually associated with the traditional historical-grammatical exegetical method) and on to the prescriptive task of biblical interpretation: equipping the church for the missional task to which the canonical text instructs. Richard Bauckham helpfully defines missional reading as

> a way of reading the Bible for which mission is the hermeneutical key . . .. [It is not] simply a study of the theme of mission in the biblical writings, but a way of reading the whole of Scripture with mission as its central interest and goal . . . a way of reading Scripture which seeks to understand what the church's mission really is in the world as Scripture depicts it and thereby to inspire and to inform the church's missionary praxis.[36]

Bauckham's definition includes two important aspects of a missional reading. First, it is reading the whole Scripture with mission as a central theme. That is, mission is recognized as the central thread that informs, and helps one understand, the biblical story. In order to fundamentally shift the way we understand and apply the Bible, a missional reading *intentionally* brings the missional framework into the interpretation process.[37] Second, a missional reading entails reading Scripture to equip the church for missional praxis. Missional hermeneutics asks, "How did this or that particular text

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that a missional hermeneutic is profitable in mapping the terrain of the cannon, even though it is not exhaustive.

[35] Wright, *Great Story and Great Commission*, 1–11.

[36] Bauckham, "Mission as Hermeneutics for Scriptural Interpretation," 1.

[37] See, for example, Goheen, *Light to the Nations*, and Wright, *Mission of God*.

function to equip and shape God's people for their missional witness, and how does it continue to shape us today?"[38] It aims to equip the people of God to think and live missionally in all aspects of their lives in this world.

Methodology

This dissertation is a work of practical theology that views the Bible as normative for pastoral ministry and foundational for its practice. Because there is an inevitable gap between the biblical world of the past and the ministry practice of the present, it is necessary to acknowledge that one needs to dig deep on both the biblical data (past) and the current ministry context and issues (present). In other words, it is important to be "deeply rooted in the world of the text and in our own world to bring the two of them together."[39] Methodologies used in this dissertation will facilitate critical correlation between past and present experiences in order to answer the research questions stated above. On the one hand, digging deep into the world of the biblical text will grant strong biblical foundation in my attempt to answer the research questions. By rooting the practices of ministry in Scripture, the small group ministry will not only have strong biblical foundation, but it will also be prevented from moving in unproductive directions. Furthermore, by digging deep into the present experience and practices of missional churches and missional small groups, the dissertation will help fill the gap between the biblical data and the contemporary issues around the formation of biblically sound and contextually relevant missional small groups. Therefore, the methodology will include not only a missional reading of Ephesians, but also an integrative literature

[38] Wright, "Mission and Old Testament Interpretation," 185.
[39] Burridge, *Imitating Jesus,* 356.

review for comparative analyses and a synthesis of the works of practical theologians, and the pastoral cycle for theological reflection.

Missional Hermeneutics

The first main part of the inquiry will employ a missional hermeneutic in the reading of Ephesians. To develop a thematic synthesis, I will make use of Hunsberger's two elements: the canonical-narrative framework of interpretation, and the aim of interpretation.[40] First, the canonical-narrative *framework* of interpretation reads Ephesians through a lens of a drama of God's mission as revealed in the canon of Christian Scripture. The Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation represents itself to us fundamentally as a narrative: a historical narrative at one level, but a grand, metanarrative at another. It begins with a God of purpose and mission in creation (Gen 1:28), then moves on to the conflict and problem generated by human rebellion against that purpose which immediately highlights God's missional engagement to restore his broken creation (Gen 3–11). God's redemptive purposes are worked out through a long story of the Old Testament that reaches its climax at the coming of Christ. The story finishes beyond the horizon of its own history with the eschatological hope of a new creation.[41] This element of the canonical-narrative framework will guide the exegetical work on the letter by seeing Ephesians as a presentation of God's missional vision to restore his creation.

Second, the *aim* of interpretation reads Ephesians with the question as to how it shapes its readers in their formation as participants in God's mission to restore his

[40] Hunsberger, "Mapping the Missional Hermeneutic," 45–67.
[41] Wright, *Mission of God*, 63–64.

creation that is broken and distorted from the Fall. For example, one of the themes to be explored will be mission and unity from the second and fourth chapter of Ephesians. Christ, who is our peace, has brought about reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles, resulting in one new humanity (Eph 2:13). The church as a new society in Christ and a dwelling place of God by the Spirit is to keep the unity of peace not only for the sake of the health of the church but for the sake of God's mission through the church (Eph 4:3). In my own ministerial context, this theme of mission and unity is very important as the congregation I lead is multi-generational and multi-ethnic; danger of division and disunity amongst different generations and different ethnic groups looms large over the church.

Integrative Literature Review

The integrative literature review is "a form of research that reviews, critiques, and synthesizes representative literature on a topic in an integrative way such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated."[42] Richard Torraco notes that the integrative literature review is a sophisticated form of a research methodology that "offers much potential for changing the way we think about our work" from analyzing and synthesizing literatures into a model or conceptual framework that offers a new perspective on the topic.[43] I will use the integrative literature review methodology in order to search for a new way of thinking about the small group ministry with new perspectives and new practices.

[42] Torraco, "Writing Integrative Literature Review," 356.
[43] Torraco, "Writing Integrative Literature Review," 364.

The purpose of using an integrative review method is "to overview the knowledge base, to critically review and potentially reconceptualize, and to expand on the theoretical foundation of the specific topic as it develops."[44] Using the integrative review method, I aim to expand the theological foundation of the missional church movement and missional small groups by combining perspectives and insights from the three practical theologians and then by testing the combined perspective in light of the missional reading of Ephesians. The methodology of the integrative literature review will be used with the methodology of the pastoral cycle in order to show gaps in the works of the three missiologists and to propose a more biblically and contextually comprehensive model of forming missional small groups.

To facilitate my literature analyses, primary sources will be ordered, categorized and summarized. The analysis will then be compiled and displayed in a diagrammatic form to highlight common themes, distinctives, and gaps in a succinct manner. Doing so will reveal new knowledge about missional small groups, and point towards areas of improvement for this practice. In Chapter Four, I will present key marks of the missional church movement and corresponding missional small groups by reviewing, analyzing and synthesizing the literature by Hirsch, Keller and Breen. In Chapter Five I will employ synthesis of important elements of the three authors into an integrative summation of the findings to build a conceptual model that brings the arguments of the three practical theologians together with a missional reading of Ephesians, providing the basis for theological reflection on missional small group practice.

[44] Snyder, "Literature Review," 336.

Pastoral Cycle

As proposed by James and Evelyn Whitehead,[45] the pastoral cycle is a tool providing a method for theological reflection that interacts with various theological resources to develop new ideas that can be tested in the context of one's ministry, in order to bring about new practices or greater depth into practices in ministry.[46] They note the importance of a systematic way of doing theological reflection by asserting that "effective ministry is always an ongoing dynamic of reflection and action" that leads to "not just to theoretical insight but [also] to pastoral decision."[47] In the pastoral cycle, the process of reflection includes three stages: *attending*, *assertion*, and *pastoral response*.

Attending as the first stage of theological reflection carefully attends to relevant information available in all the sources. This stage will pull together all the findings from the missional reading of Ephesians and the integrative literature review of the three practical theologians under consideration.

Assertion will bring together information from the first stage of attending and actively engage in synthesizing the information and insights from the first stage of attending.[49] This second stage of assertion "is a dialogue of mutual interpretation that new insight is generated and the shape of pastoral response begin to emerge."[50] In this

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[45] Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*.

[46] Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*.

[47] Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, ix.

[49] By "assertion," it basically means active engagement in that it is not being passive ("non-assertive") and also not being aggressive ("too-assertive"). Two metaphors that Whitehead and Whitehead use for assertion are conversation and crucible: As a conversation "the different voices that we have heard in the attending stage are now allowed to *speak* to one another. The challenge here is to bring these separate and often conflicting voices into contact" (*Method in Ministry*, 15). As a crucible, "the diverse information is poured into a single container, where insights and convictions are allowed to interact with one another. A crucible suggests the transformation that often occurs at this stage—if we handle the volatile components with care" (*Method in Ministry*, 15).

[50] Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 15.

stage, the reflection will allow diversity of opinions, ambiguity, and even conflicting ideas about an issue to germinate and challenge. Whitehead and Whitehead contend that "a willingness to face diversity and to tolerate ambiguity are essential" in order for "the reflective process [to] move toward the final stage of pastoral response."[51] They suggest that the process of assertion at its best acknowledges validity of conflicting positions and negotiates toward some resolution, "one which respects the core values" of various parties "even as it requires mutual accommodation."[52]

The final stage of *pastoral response* moves "from discussion and insight to decision and action."[53] The challenge of this final stage, comments Whitehead and Whitehead, is to "translate insight into action."[54] They note that "sometimes the fruit of pastoral reflection is change, even significant transformation. Sometimes an established policy or familiar practice is re-affirmed… at a deeper level of commitment."[55] In this final stage of pastoral response, I will evaluate current practice of small group ministry and propose specific action items and a concrete plan for formation of missional small groups. One key question in this project is how missional small groups in my current church can be reimagined.

The pastoral cycle may affirm existing practices and also provide new and creative praxis as a result of theological reflection. The dynamic of theological reflection through the pastoral cycle will help the church and the ministry to move from

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[51] Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 16.
[52] Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 80.
[53] Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 13.
[54] Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 13.
[55] Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 16.

experience to insight to action. I will engage in theological reflection using Whitehead and Whitehead's pastoral cycle in Chapter Five.

Summary

This chapter has sought to provide an overview and outline of the dissertation as well as the pastoral and theological rationale for the project. It also included an explanation of the key terms and methodologies used in the project. The next chapter will provide a historical and literary review on the missional church and missional hermeneutics.

CHAPTER TWO: AN OVERVIEW OF THE MISSIONAL CHURCH AND MISSIONAL HERMENEUTICS

At the heart of the missional church movement and missional hermeneutics is the concept of the *missio Dei*, which highlights God as a missionary God. The church of God is both a product and an instrument of God's mission. God's missionary nature defines the church's missionary nature. The Bible as the Word of God is both a record of and tool for God's mission.[1] And as such, the Bible should be read by the church through the lens of God's mission. God's missionary nature is revealed in Scripture, which in turn provides a hermeneutical framework to read and understand Scripture. Prior to the twentieth century, however, such an understanding of the church and the Bible from a missional perspective was uncommon. During the twentieth century, a paradigm shift took place to connect mission, the church, and Scripture with God's inherent missionary nature. God's missionary nature was put forward, his character defining the church as missional—not just functionally but ontologically. That is, as Emil Brunner submits, "the church exists by mission, just as a fire exists by burning. Where there is no mission, there is no church."[2]

Before a missional reading of Ephesians is presented in the next chapter, this chapter will provide a historical and literary review of the development of the missional

[1] See Michael's Goheen's *Light to the World* for an overview of both the missional church and missional hermeneutics.

[2] Brunner, *Word and World*, 108.

church movement and missional hermeneutics. In the first part, I will start by reviewing the historical development behind the concept of the missional church in the 1900s, highlighting two significant missionary conferences (Tambaram and Willingen) and two key theologians (Lesslie Newbigin and David Bosch). I will then provide a review of the missional church movement's evolution and development over the past twenty years. In the second part, I will provide an overview of missional hermeneutics and a map of different approaches amongst various proponents and practitioners of missional hermeneutics.

Historical and Literary Review of the Missional Church

The Tambaram Conference (1938)

The critical starting point for the missional church movement occurred in 1938 in Tambaram, India, where the third International Missionary Council (IMC) conference was held.[3] Tambaram is identified as "the place where the journey began toward a theologically rich notion of a missionary church," and where "the elements of a missionary ecclesiology emerged that then developed in the ensuing decades."[4] Hendrik Kraemer's questions at the Tambaram Conference set the tone and trajectory for an ecumenical conversation on mission and church for the subsequent decades: "What is the essential nature of the church and what is its obligation to the world?" Kraemer

[3] The IMC was formed in 1921, following the World Missionary Conference (WMC) in Edinburgh in 1910. The IMC later merged with the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1961. The Tambaram Conference was a turning point for the missions conferences in that for the first time over half of the delegates came from non-Western churches.

[4] Goheen and Sheridan, *Becoming Missionary Church*, 19–20. The authors use the phrase *missionary church* instead of *missional church*.

answered by stating that church as an apostolic body "ought to be a bearer of witness to God and his decisive creative and redeeming acts and purposes."[5]

Kraemer gave his answer in the historical context when mission was understood very narrowly as an activity done by Western Christians in non-Western countries (i.e., cross-cultural evangelism and church planting). The dominant understanding of mission up to that point was the church's geographic expansion by propagating the gospel message to non-Western, non-Christian nations. Within the traditional Christendom framework, mission was understood as sending a missionary to a heathen territory where there was no church. What became known as the modern missionary movement emerged largely from *outside*, and to some extend *alongside*, the established churches. The church's main role was to provide Christian instruction and pastoral care, while the mission societies were to engage in foreign missions. Mission was a task carried out mainly by a missionary society, an organization parallel to a local church but separate from it.[6] The church in the West as an institution was to be mainly concerned with instructing and caring for "Christians" in Christendom society. Within that Christendom framework the church was considered to be "without mission,"[7] for the church's main task was to provide pastoral care of its members, while missionary works were carried out by missionary societies.

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[5] Kraemer, *Christian Message*, 1–2.

[6] Examples of mission societies that worked alongside the state churches include the London Mission Society (1795), the Scottish Missionary Society (1796), the Church Mission Society (1799), and the Berlin Mission Society (1824). Later, mission societies existed in two forms: one form independent of denominational churches (later taking on names like "faith mission" and "para-church organizations") and one form within denominations (later known as denominational agencies with internal governing boards). For an overview of the rise of modern mission out of the Protestant beginning, see Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 262–345.

[7] Shenk, *Write the Vision*, 35.

Tambaram marked the beginning of a new period of missionary ecclesiology (or missional church) by deconstructing the Christendom assumptions about the nature of the church and reconstructing ecclesiology to bring mission to the heart of the church's identity and purpose. That is, the Tambaram Conference united mission and the church. The Tambaram report, *The World Mission of the Church*, emphasized that "it is the Church and the Church alone" that has the task of transmitting, proclaiming and witnessing to the gospel from one generation to the next.[8] Lesslie Newbigin remarked that "Tambaram signaled the beginning of the long period of Church-centered missiology."[9] The Tambaram Conference laid the groundwork for the next watershed moment in the missional church movement at the Willingen Conference in 1952.[10]

The Willingen Conference (1952)

The fifth IMC conference in Willingen, Germany, is considered to be one of the most significant moments for ushering in the missional church movement, because it brought together a growing number of biblical, theological, and missiological insights into a coherent vision and unified framework for the missional church movement.[11] Wilhelm Anderson, building on the work of Karl Barth, proposed that both church and mission

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[8] *World Mission of Church*, 24.

[9] Newbigin, *Sign of the Kingdom*, 10. The Tambaram Conference had a formative influence on Lesslie Newbigin in formulating his missional theology.

[10] The fourth IMC meeting was in Whitby, Canada (1947), but a consistent and coherent missional ecclesiology was not formulated until the Willingen Conference. During the period between the two watershed conferences in Tambaram and Willingen, however, there were developments within mission theology, often fueled by the disciplines of theology and biblical studies that would prove fruitful for the missional church movement in later years. See Goheen and Sheridan, *Becoming Missionary Church*, 30.

[11] There were 190 delegates from 50 countries at Willingen; 40 of those delegates were from the younger churches from non-Western countries. Newbigin ("Mission to Six Continents," 178) observes that "subsequent history has shown that Willingen was in fact one of the most significant in the series of world missionary conference."

should be taken up into the *missio Dei*. Missions is not just a function of the church, nor is the church just the outcome of mission. Rather, both are grounded in the triune God in mission. At Willingen, the concept of the *missio Dei* was set forth as the source and foundation of mission. Mission, the conference argued, was rooted in the very character of God who sends the Son and the Spirit into the world for his redemptive purposes. A Willingen report stated the following:

> The missionary movement of which we are a part has its source in the Triune God Himself. Out of the depths of His love for us, the Father has sent forth His own beloved Son to reconcile all things to Himself, that we and all men might, through the Spirit, be made one in Him with the Father in that perfect love which is the very nature of God . . .. We who have been chosen in Christ, reconciled to God through Him, made members of His Body, sharers in His Spirit, and heirs through hope of His Kingdom, are by these very facts committed to full participation in His redeeming mission. There is no participation in Christ without participation in His mission to the world. That by which the Church receives His existence is that by which it is also given its world-mission, "As the Father hath sent Me, even so I send you."[12]

Willingen brought together the missional nature of the triune God with the church-centered theology of mission. Karl Hartenstein's conference report from Willingen summarized that "mission is not just conversion of individuals, not just obedience to the Word of the Lord, not just an obligation to gather the church, it is *participation* in the sending of the Son, the *missio Dei*, with the all-encompassing goal of establishing the lordship of Christ over the entire redeemed creation."[13]

Along with establishing the *missio Dei* as the source and foundation of mission, the Willingen Conference liberated mission from geographical limitations by acknowledging that Europe and North America were also mission fields. Furthermore, no longer was mission understood to be something done by the "Christian West" to the

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[12] Goodall, *Missions under Cross*, 189–90.
[13] Hartenstein, "Theologische Besinnung," 54. Emphasis on "participation" added.

"non-Christian East." Massive waves of immigration from the Majority world to the West in subsequent years further broke down those traditional categories. Geography and nationality could no longer define the locus of the church's missionary activity. The frontiers that the church was called to cross for missions included geographical as well as ideological, cultural, religious, social, and economic boundaries. This seismic shift demanded a fundamental redefinition of the mission of the church.

Concurrent with the expanded understanding of mission as participating in God's mission, along with the breaking down of the traditional categories for mission done by the "Christian West" to the "non-Christian West," the Willingen Conference would set the tone for the missional church movement in the years to come. At Willingen all the colonial and Christendom assumptions that captured mission in the earlier part of the twentieth century were shattered.

In summary, the two IMC conferences—one in Tambaram in 1938 and one in Willingen in 1952—paved a way for the missional church movement. Subsequent to those conferences, two key theologians who provided the groundwork for missional church movements and missional hermeneutics include Lesslie Newbigin and David Bosch. Before providing an overview of the missional church movement in the twenty-first century, I will highlight works of Newbigin and Bosch.

Lesslie Newbigin (1909–1998)

Lesslie Newbigin served as a missionary in India (1939–1947) and a bishop in the newly formed Church of South India (1947–1959). He then served as an administrator in the IMC and the WCC for six years (1959–1965), nine years as bishop of Madras (1965–

1974), and twenty-four years of "retirement" in Britain where he taught missiology, pastored an inner-city church, initiated the gospel and culture movement, and wrote numerous books and articles (1974–1998).[14] After returning from his lifetime of missionary work in India, Newbigin was surprised to find out how pagan Western civilization had become. He began to articulate the view that the Western world is a mission field and that the church in the West needed to adopt a missionary stance in relation to the culture. As will be seen below, Newbigin played a crucial role in forming the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN), which was the major catalyst for the missional church movement in North America and beyond in the twenty-first century.

Newbigin emerged as a prominent voice even at the Willingen Conference, for he formulated a theological framework that would provide the context for discussion of mission in the decades that followed.[15] Newbigin continued his contribution to the missional church conversation through his writings, including the book, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church*. He emphasized the inseparable reality between the church and mission: "The very general belief of Christians in most Churches that the Church can exist without being a mission involves a radical contradiction of the truth of the Church's being . . .. No recovery of the wholeness of the church's nature is possible without a recovery of its radical missionary nature."[16] Emphasizing the radical missionary nature of the church, Newbigin argued that "just as we must insist that a Church which has ceased to be a mission has lost the essential

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[14] For a comprehensive review of Newbigin's life and legacy, see Wainwright, *Lesslie Newbigin*, and Goheen, *As the Father Has Sent Me.* For Newbigin's influence on the missional church movement, see Goheen, "Historical Perspective on Missional Church Movement."

[15] Alongside Karl Hartenstein, Lesslie Newbigin was the final craftsman of the final statement at the Willingen Conference. In 1950, Newbigin emerged as a prominent voice advocating the integration of church and mission.

[16] Newbigin, *Household of God*, 170.

character of a Church, so we must also say that a mission which is not at the same time truly a Church is not a true expression of the divine apostolate. An unchurchly mission is as much a monstrosity as an unmissionary Church."[17]

Another book by Newbigin that provided a foundation for the missional church conversation was *One Gospel, One Body, One World: The Christian Mission Today*. Written in 1958, this book provided a biblical foundation for mission, stated three principles that flow from this foundation, and applied the principles to the problems challenging the missional church movement. In terms of laying the biblical foundation for mission, Newbigin wrote, "The church's mission is none other than the carrying on of the mission of Christ himself. 'As the Father has sent me even so send I you.'"[18] Newbigin's three principles for the missional church movement included the following: (1) the church and mission are inseparable; (2) the home base is everywhere; and (3) mission is to be done in partnership between the churches in the West and the East, the South and the North. In addition, Newbigin expanded the church's view of its mission's scope to include everything that the church does as it engages in God's mission to redeem his creation.

Critics raised the concern that such a broad perspective on mission threatened to dilute a deliberate action of the church to take the gospel to where it was not known. In response, Newbigin provided a helpful distinction between missional *dimension* and missional *intention*.[19] Because the church is by nature missional, everything that the church does has missional *dimension*, but not all the activities of the church have a

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[17] Newbigin, *Household of God*, 170.
[18] Newbigin, *One Body, One Gospel, One World*, 17.
[19] Newbigin, *One Body, One Gospel, One World*, 21.

missional *intention*—specific activities that have the intention of crossing the frontier between unbelief and belief in Christ. By his distinction of missional *dimension* and *intention*, Newbigin united the broad perspective on mission (that includes marketplace ministries and everything that a Christian does in this world) with the urgent need for evangelism and cross-cultural missions work.

One of the most common descriptions that Newbigin used for the church is "sign, foretaste, and instrument" of God's kingdom.[20] Each of the three descriptors is important: the church is to be "a sign, pointing men to something that is beyond their present horizon but can give guidance and hope now; an instrument (not the only one) that God can use for his work of healing, liberating, and blessing; and a firstfruit—a place where men and women can have a real taste now of the joy and freedom God intends for all."[21] That is, the church not only does *work for* the kingdom, but also itself provides an *embodiment of* the kingdom now. The order of the triad highlights the church's priority as the sign and foretaste of the kingdom through its *being* missional (emphasizing the ontological reality) before its *doing* missions (emphasizing the functional role as an instrument). In emphasizing the ontological and communal priority of the church, Newbigin designated the church as "a hermeneutic of the gospel."[22] He asserted the following: "How is it possible that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? I am suggesting that the only answer, the only

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[20] Newbigin, *Holy Spirit and Church*, 7-8. In his book *Household of God*, Newbigin used the triad "sign, foretaste, and instrument" to describe the church in the early 1950s. He uses "foretaste" and "deposit" interchangeably with "firstfruit."

[21] Newbigin, *Word in Season*, 33.

[22] Newbigin, *Gospel in Pluralist Society*, 220–33. Newbigin used the phrase "a hermeneutic of the gospel" to describe church as early as 1980 in his book *Your Kingdom Come*.

hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it."[23]

In summary, the two books Newbigin authored in the 1950s—*The Household of God* and *One Gospel, One Body, One World*—not only solidified many of the gains in the Tambaram, Willingen, and other missionary conferences in the first half of the twentieth century, but they also laid the foundation for the missional church conversation in the subsequent years. Newbigin's subsequent books and articles, which will be engaged with throughout this project, consolidated more balanced and comprehensive description of the missional church.[24] The missional church movement in the twentieth and subsequent century owes its theological foundation and vision to Newbigin. From here, I will consider a second significant figure in the missional church movement and the development of missional hermeneutics: David Bosch.

David Bosch (1929–1992)

David Bosch was a missionary-pastor in Africa and a missiologist-theologian who integrated missiology, theology, church history, and biblical studies.[25] His integrative and comprehensive understanding of mission is seen in his magnum opus, *Transforming*

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[23] Newbigin, *Gospel in Pluralist Society*, 227.

[24] Newbigin's work includes *Foolishness to Greeks* (1986), *Gospel in Pluralist Society* (1989), *Open Secret* (1992), and many other books and articles that engage the contextual issues of his day, which are surprisingly and prophetically still relevant to this day.

[25] As a scholar, David Bosch was trained in the classic European tradition and did his doctoral studies under New Testament scholar Oscar Cullmann. His thesis probed the link between mission and eschatology in the ministry of Jesus. Bosch was also influenced by Karl Barth in his systematic attempts at a theological foundation of mission. Bosch bridged ecumenical and evangelical divisions in the global church, participating in both the WCC and the Lausanne Congress. For a succinct overview of Bosch's life and works, see Livingston, "The Legacy of David J. Bosch."

Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission, written in 1992.[26] The rest of this section will present the main argument of Bosch's *Transforming Mission*.

In *Transforming Mission,* Bosch further develops Newbigin's idea of *missio Dei.* At the very outset of his *Transforming Mission*, Bosch states that "Christianity is missionary by its own nature, or it denies its *raison d'être*."[27] In the first part of the book, entitled "New Testament Models of Mission," Bosch asserts that the New Testament is a missionary document, contending that "mission was at the heart of the early church's theologizing" and that "it was a fundamental expression of the life of the church."[28] The apostle Paul, for instance, was not an ivory-tower theologian, but a missionary theologian who was compelled to theologize in the context of his missionary encounter with the world. Bosch notes that "the New Testament authors were less interested in definition of mission than in the missionary existence of their readers," and that there are "a variety of 'theologies of mission.'"[29] Bosch provides a survey of Matthew, Luke–Acts, and Paul's theologies of mission that have distinct emphasis: Matthew's model of mission emphasizes disciple-making; Luke–Acts's model of mission emphasizes forgiveness and solidarity with the poor. Paul's model of mission emphasizes invitation to join the eschatological community. As will be presented further below, the first part of Bosch's *Transforming Mission* provides a model of missional

[26] Over the course of thirty-two years, Bosch wrote six books, and over 160 journal articles and contributions to books covering almost every aspect of mission theory and practice. Lesslie Newbigin wrote on the back cover of the book that Bosch's *Transforming Mission* is "a kind of *Summa Missiologica*" that would "surely be the indispensable foundation for the teaching of missiology for many years to come."

[27] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 9.

[28] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 15, 16.

[29] Bosch, *Tranforming Mission*, 16.

hermeneutics that would further develop in the missional church conversation in subsequent years.[30]

After devoting the first part of the book to biblical materials, Bosch, in the second part, uses six major paradigms of the history of Christianity by Hans Küng in order to offer distinctive understanding of Christian mission for each era: (1) the apocalyptic paradigm of primitive Christianity, (2) the Hellenistic paradigm of the patristic era, (3) the medieval Roman Catholic paradigm, (4) the Protestant Reformation paradigm, (5) the modern Enlightenment paradigm, and (6) the emerging ecumenical paradigm. In the second part of the book, Bosch does not cover a history of mission as such but a historical analysis of the theologies of mission, charting the manner and direction of changes over the different eras of church history.

In the third part of the book, Bosch seeks to advance "toward a relevant missiology" and provides "Elements of an Emerging Ecumenical Missionary Paradigm."[31] Bosch proposes thirteen elements of a postmodern ecumenical paradigm of mission to rouse the church from its contemporary malaise: (1) mission as the church-with-others, (2) mission as the *missio Dei*, (3) mission as mediating comprehensive salvation, (4) mission as the quest for justice, (5) mission as evangelism, (6) mission as contextualization, (7) mission as liberation, (8) mission as inculturation, (9) mission as common witness, (10) mission as ministry by the whole people of God, (11) mission as witness to people of other living faiths, (12) mission as theology, and (13) mission as

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[30] Although Bosch's work was considered to be ground-breaking, it is not without weaknesses. One key shortcoming is Bosch's meager treatment of the Old Testament and omission of the whole Johannine corpus and other writings of the New Testament.

[31] By *ecumenical* Bosch does not necessarily mean the theology of the WCC. He is using the term *ecumenical* in a broader sense than that which is usually identified with the ecumenical movement of the twentieth century. Bosch brings the fruits of the discussions within Roman Catholic circles plus the WCC (ecumenical) and the Lausanne Movement (evangelical).

action in hope. As can be seen in the list of the thirteen elements, Bosch notes that we need "a more radical and comprehensive hermeneutic of mission."[32] To his critics who are concerned that his missionary paradigm is too inflated, moving close to viewing everything as mission, he responds in the following manner:

> Mission is a multifaceted ministry, in respect of witness, service, justice, healing, reconciliation, liberation, peace, evangelism, fellowship, church planting, contextualization, and much more. And yet, even the attempt to list some dimensions of mission is fraught with danger, because it again suggests that we can define what is infinite. Whoever we are, we 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. And perhaps one cannot really do this by means of *theoria* (which involves "observation, reporting, interpretation, and critical evaluation") but only by means of *poiesis* (which involves "imaginative creation or representation of evocative images").[33]

Through their extensive and comprehensive work on mission and missional church, Bosch and Newbigin provided a catalyst for the twenty-first century missional church movement.

The Missional Church Movement in the Twenty-First Century

Michael Goheen notes the two significant years in the development of the missional church movement: 1952 and 1998.[34] As noted above, 1952 was the year when the theological framework of the *missio Dei* was clearly articulated at the Willingen

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[32] Bevans and Schroeder ("Missiology after Bosch," 70) note that Bosch "was able to present a scriptural reflection that went far beyond proof-texting; his history and theology of mission is detailed, ecumenically open, and theologically rich. His thirteen paradigms have virtually set the agenda for theological and missiological reflection far into this new twenty-first century."

[33] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 512. In using *theoria* and *poiesis*, Bosch is referring to Stackhouse, *Apologia*, 85. Bosch (*Transforming Mission*, 9) goes so far as to say that "ultimately, mission remains undefinable…. The most we can hope for is to formulate some approximation of what mission is all about." For a critique of Bosch's approach and analysis of various approaches to defining mission, see Ferdinando, "Mission: Problem of Definition," 46–59.

[34] Goheen, "Historical Perspective," 62–63.

Conference. Then in 1998, the book *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* was published by the Gospel and Culture Network (GOCN), which marked the missional church movement in the twenty-first century in North America. The GOCN's work has built on what had been previously developed by Lesslie Newbigin and David Bosch in terms of explicitly connecting missiology and ecclesiology to capture the imagination of Christians in many traditions to pursue a vision for the missional church.[35]

The work of GOCN also has also taken up the questions posed in the 1950s in Willingen, which had been jettisoned by a secularized interpretation of the *missio Dei* that had sidelined the church. In the decades following Willingen's work, historians evaluates that a vision of mission championed by Johannes Hoekendijk led the missional church conversation astray by separating the mission of God from the church.[36] On the one hand Hoekendijk encouraged the church to take cues for mission from "the signs of the times" by prioritizing what God is doing in the world rather than from what God has done in Jesus Christ.[37] On the other hand, he lashed severe criticism against the church as being "immobile, self-centered, and introverted, an invention of the Middle Ages."[38] He argued that the traditional ecumenical paradigm (from Willingen) was too Christocentric and ecclesiocentric, proposing instead a new paradigm that was more

[35] It was the book that popularized the terms "missional" and "missional church" in North America and beyond. Prior to the publication of *Missional Church* in 1998, Charles Van Engen, in his 1991 book *God's Missionary People*, used the word *missional* to capture the idea that the church is missionary by nature. The term *missional* was used in a theologically substantive way by Francis Dubose in his 1983 work *God Who Sends*. In one of the book's chapters, entitled "Toward a Missional Theology," Dubose asserts the following: "What is needed is not so much a theology of mission but a *missional* theology. In other words, mission does not so much need to be justified theologically as theology needs to be understood *missiologically*" (*God Who Sends*, 148–49. Emphasis added).

[36] See Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 383–86.

[37] Goheen, "Historical Perspective," 72.

[38] Hutchison, *Errand to World*, 185.

pneumacentric and cosmocentric.[39] In other words, he argued that the church was to attend to where the Spirit was at work in the brokenness of the world and join the Spirit's mission to bring restoration and *shalom* in the world.

Hoekendijk's view was not without merit as it promoted joining the Spirit's work in the world and mobilizing individual members of the church to carry out their calling in political, social, and economic activity to relieve the victims of political oppression, racial discrimination, and economic disparity.[40] The new paradigm of Hoekendijk, however, reduced the church's role to be only an instrument in God's mission, and not a sign and locus of God's mission. Newbigin, while affirming some aspects of the paradigm proposed by Hoekendijk, vigorously opposed the paradigm for minimizing both the communal witness of the congregation as well as evangelism.[41] The missional church movement, through the GOCN, again picked up Newbigin and Willingen's vision to empower the church to participate in God's mission for the world.

The book *Missional Church* was one of the first in the series in the GOCN, which was formed in the late 1980s under the leadership of George Hunsberger to carry out Newbigin's vision of a missional church in the North American context. The book was co-authored by six participants from a variety of confessional traditions (ecumenical, evangelical, and Roman Catholic) who were devoted to the task of fostering a missionary encounter with post-Christendom North American culture.[42]

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[39] Hoekendijk, *The Church Inside Out.*

[40] See Goheen, "Historical Perspective on the Missional Church Movement," 70–75, for the critical review of Hoekendijk's contribution to the missional conversation.

[41] Three affirmations by Newbigin for the new paradigm proposed by Hoekendijk include: 1) criticism against an ingrown and insular church that neglects the injustice and brokenness of the world; 2) trinitarian framework that especially emphasizes the work of the Spirit beyond the boundaries of the church; 3) stress on the mission of the laity in their various callings in the marketplace of the world.

[42] The six participants were Darrell Guder, Lois Barrett, Ingrace Dietterich, George Hunsberger, Alan Roxburgh, and Craig Van Gelder: three from Presbyterian/Reformed backgrounds, a United

"With the term *missional*," the authors wrote, "we emphasize the essential nature and vocation of the church as God's called and sent people." They then offer five characteristics of a faithful missional church: biblical, historical, contextual, eschatological, and practical.[43]

The argument of the book *Missional Church* can be summarized in six statements. First, the church in North America is to be considered to be a mission field where people no longer have the basic beliefs and plausibility structures to understand the Bible and the Christian faith. Second, the good news of the gospel announced by Jesus as the reign of God needs to shape the identity of the missional church. Third, the missional church with its identity rooted in the reign of God must live as an alternative community in the world. Fourth, the missional church needs to understand that the Holy Spirit cultivates communities that represent the reign of God. Fifth, the missional church must be led by missional leadership that focuses on equipping all of God's people for mission. Sixth, the missional church needs to develop missional structures for shaping its life and ministry as well as for practicing missional connectedness within the larger church.

Since the publication of *Missional Church*, a plethora of books have been written on various topics pertaining to the missional church.[44] Craig Van Gelder and Dwight

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Methodist, a Mennonite, and a Canadian Baptist. They went through a three-year process that involved first framing the argument for a missiological ecclesiology (1.5 years) and then drafting, reviewing, and editing assigned chapters (1.5 years). For a critical review of the book, see Goheen, "The Missional Church."

[43] Guder, *Missional Church*, 11–12.

[44] Eerdmans and the GOCN partner together to publish a series of books on various topics within the missional church movement—for example, Barrett et al., *Treasures in Clay Jars*; Gorman, *Becoming Gospel*; Guder, *Called to Witness*; Guder, *Continuing Conversion of Church*; Hunsberger, *Bearing Witness*; Hunsberger and Van Gelder, *Church between Gospel and Culture*; Van Gelder, ed., *Confident Witness*.

Zscheile helpfully provide four main branches emerging from the conversation within the missional church movement. First, being missional is basically understood as being evangelistic. This group includes many conservatives who associate being missional with doing traditional evangelism and foreign missions. Second, being missional is essentially being incarnational. Practically, this branch promoted and proliferated the informal house church movement. Third, being missional is essentially being contextual. To be a truly missional church involves reflecting deeply on culture and discovering creative ways of communication and church practices that both adapt and challenge the culture. Fourth, being missional is being reciprocal and communal. That is, mission is not about getting individuals right with God but about incorporating them into a new community that partners with God in redeeming social structure and healing the world.[45] Key theological concepts that undergird all four branches within the missional church movement include the *missio Dei*, trinitarian missiology, kingdom of God, church and mission, the church's missionary nature, and missional hermeneutics.

Summary of the Historical and Literary Review of the Missional Church

As the historical and literary review of the missional church has shown, the concept of *missio Dei* has provided a theological framework to understand the identity and mission of the church. That the church's identity and mission are grounded in God's mission to redeem the whole creation. As such, mission of the church should not be reduced to evangelism, even though evangelism and cross-cultural ministry are very important part of church's mission. God the Father who sent the Son and the Spirit also sends his

[45] See Van Gelder and Zscheile's (*Missional Church*, 67–98) catalogue of literature for each of the four branches.

church to participate in his mission to restore the whole creation. As Newbigin asserts the church as "sign, foretaste, and instrument of God's Kingdom" is to be the agent and locus of God's redemptive work in the world. The works of Newbigin, Bosch and the GOCN in the twentieth century have refined and redirected churches in the West to be aligned to God's missional purpose for the church. In order for the church to continue to re-align to God's missional purpose, Scripture must be read through the lens of God's mission. In the next section, I turn to the development of missional hermeneutics that have helped the church to reimagine its identity and purpose according to God's mission as seen in the Scripture.

Overview of Missional Hermeneutics[46]

In this section I will present an overview of missional hermeneutics by describing its historical development and mapping different approaches amongst various proponents and practitioners who utilize a missional hermeneutic.

[46] The terms *missional hermeneutics* and *missional reading* are used interchangeably to refer to the same method of reading and interpreting the Bible intentionally and purposefully from a missional perspective. I acknowledge that biblical interpretation is a complex process and involves a multifaceted collection of disciplines. At the most fundamental level, this complexity arises from the very nature of the biblical text as a collection of historical documents, a literary workmanship, and the church's Scripture. Complexity increases further because of the tripartite dynamic between the biblical text, the author and the extra-textual reality behind the text, and the reader(s) in front of the text. Interpretation's complex nature and dynamic demand multifaceted considerations and benefit from various methods employed to understand the meaning of the text—both for the past and for the present. Surveying the history of biblical interpretation teaches us that the Bible has been read from many different perspectives with many different methods for many different purposes. I agree with William Yarchin (*History of Biblical Interpretation*, vii), who observes that "for as long as people have read the Bible, they have interpreted it at many different levels of sophistication and toward many different purposes of understanding and application." For a succinct rationale for a missional hermeneutics, see Bauckham, "Mission as Hermeneutics for Scriptural Interpretation." Missional hermeneutics as a subcategory of a theological interpretation of Scripture is articulated in McKinzie, "Missional Hermeneutics as Theological Interpretation," and Bartholomew, "Theological Interpretation and a Missional Hermeneutic." For a general overview of hermeneutics, see Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, and Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*.

Missional Hermeneutics: A Brief History of its Development

It is generally agreed that the term *missional hermeneutic* was first used by James Brownson in his book *Speaking the Truth in Love*, published in 1998. However, long before Brownson used the very phrase *missional hermeneutic*, biblical scholars approached the Bible from a missional perspective and developed missional hermeneutics as they integrated missiology and biblical studies. I will provide a brief history of the development of missional hermeneutics in the twentieth century, mainly focusing on three key authors: Johannes Blauw and David Bosch, two important forerunners, then Christopher Wright, whose work on missional hermeneutics is foundational and requires more extensive coverage.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when mission was generally understood narrowly (as noted above), most of those who treated the topic of mission and the Bible were scholars in missiology but not in biblical studies. The primary approach by the mission scholars and practitioners was to use the Bible to validate the missions work they were already doing. Then in the middle of the twentieth century, a broadening understanding of mission—through the concept of the *missio Dei*—paved the way to approach the Bible from a perspective of mission.[47] One of the earliest attempts to conduct a missional reading of the Bible was Johannes Blauw's book *The Missionary Nature of the Church*, published in 1961.[48] Commissioned by the World Council of Churches, Blauw integrated biblical studies and missiology by surveying and demonstrating the centrality of mission to the main storyline of the Bible.[49] Blauw's

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[47] Cartwright, "Hermeneutics," 454.

[48] Blauw did his doctoral work merging biblical studies and missiology under J. H. Bavink.

[49] Another major work on Bible and mission was *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (1983) by Roman Catholic scholars Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller.

book provided an important biblical-theological work on missions that surveys the Old and New Testaments, making a profound and strong biblical case for the missionary nature of the church. He also demonstrated that a theology of mission cannot be separated from a theology of the church. Blauw's book is one of the fruits of the 1952 Willingen Conference where the missional nature of the church was theologically established.

A key turning point for the development of missional hermeneutics came about through the work of David Bosch, whose masterpiece *Transforming Mission* was reviewed above.[50] Bosch's approach is an important advance from the traditional "biblical foundations of mission" approach that pulled together isolated texts to support preconceived notions of mission. Bosch observes that "the argument seems to be that we already know what 'mission' is and that, once we have established the biblical validity of mission, we may proceed to the exposition of mission theory and methodology."[51] He argued that "we can no longer appeal to specific biblical statements for a one-to-one legitimation of our missionary involvement."[52] He was critical of a traditional "biblical foundations of mission" approach that sought to justify certain preconceived understanding of missionary activity from isolated texts, like Matthew 28:18–20 or Acts 1:8. Instead, Bosch attended to the "missional thrust of Scripture as a canonical whole and of a particular book as a whole literary unit."[53] Bosch's approach was to read the Bible as a missionary text that reveals God's missionary nature and the church's calling

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[50] In addition to *Transforming Mission*, here are the articles by Bosch that contributed to developing missional hermeneutics: Bosch, "Why and How of True Biblical Foundation for Mission" (1978); Bosch, "Mission in Biblical Perspective" (1985); Bosch, "Reflections on Biblical Models of Mission" (1993).

[51] Bosch, "Hermeneutical Principle," 25.

[52] Bosch, "Vision for Mission," 9.

[53] Goheen, "A History and Introduction," 12.

in light of God's mission to redeem a broken world. Such a missional hermeneutic would guide the church to discover its intrinsic missionary nature and assist the church to live out its essentially missionary calling in the world.[54] Bosch labored extensively towards a deeper biblical foundation for mission, which led to further development of missional hermeneutics. As ground-breaking as Bosch's work was, however, one of its weaknesses was the lack of his engagement with the Old Testament. Christopher Wright, as an Old Testament scholar, has filled that lack in Bosch's missional hermeneutics by establishing an Old Testament foundation to the missional reading of the Bible.

Christopher Wright has one foot in missiology and another foot in biblical studies, like Blauw and Bosch, and has advanced a missional hermeneutic by missionally reading the whole of Scripture. Wright's missional hermeneutic is delineated in his magnum opus *The Mission of God,* published in 2006. As the title of his book suggests, Wright offers a novel way of reading the Bible, an approach that sees the mission of God as the key that "unlocks the whole grand narrative of the canon of Scripture."[55] It provides the most comprehensive theological and biblical rationale for a missional hermeneutic.[56] Wright understands the Bible as "the drama" of God whose mission is comprehensive to include "past, present and future, Israel, and the nations, life, the universe and everything, and with its center, focus, climax, and completion in Jesus Christ."[57] Wright succinctly asserts that a "missional hermeneutic proceeds from

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[54] Bosch, "Vision for Mission," 9–10. See also Bosch, "Reflections on Biblical Models of Mission," 177–92.

[55] Wright, *Mission of God*, 17.

[56] Wright's most recent book, *The Great Story and the Great Commission*, provides a distillation of his missional hermeneutics, especially in the first two chapters.

[57] Wright, *Mission of God*, 22.

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 world for the sake of the whole of God's creation."[58]

Wright solidified the paradigm shift for the study of mission from "the biblical basis of mission" to "the missional basis of the Bible."[59] Wright argues that the Bible does not just "contain a number of texts which happen to provide a rationale for missionary endeavor" (i.e., "the biblical basis of mission"), but "*the whole Bible it itself a 'missional phenomenon.*'" (i.e., "the missional basis of the Bible").[60] Whereas "a biblical basis of mission seeks out those biblical texts that express or describe the missionary imperative, on the assumption that the Bible is authoritative," a missional hermeneutic of the Bible "explores the nature of biblical authority itself in relation to mission."[61] The whole canon of Scripture, argues Wright, "witnesses to the self-giving movement of this God toward creation and us, human beings in God's own image, but wayward and wonton. The writings that now comprise our Bible are themselves the product of and witness to the ultimate mission of God."[62] Furthermore, Wright asserts that "the process by which these texts came to be written were often profoundly missional in nature."[63] For instance, Wright notes the following about the New Testament itself being a product of mission in action:

> Most of Paul's letters were written in the heat of his missionary efforts: wrestling with the theological basis of the inclusion of the Gentiles, affirming the need for Jew and Gentile to accept one another in Christ and in the church, tackling the baffling range of new problems that assailed young churches as the gospel took

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[58] Wright, *Mission of God*, 50.
[59] Wright, *Mission of God*, 22.
[60] Wright, *Mission of God*, 22. Emphasis original.
[61] Wright, *Mission of God*, 51.
[62] Wright, *Mission of God*, 48.
[63] Wright, Mission of God, 49.

> root in the world of Greek polytheism, confronting incipient heresies with clear affirmation of the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ and so on.[64]

As one of the key texts for a missional hermeneutic, Wright uses Luke 24:44–47 to show "*messianic* centering and *missional* thrust of the Old Testament."[65] Luke "seems to be saying," observes Wright, that "the whole of the Scripture (which we now know as the Old Testament) finds its focus and fulfillment *both* in the life and death and resurrection of Israel's Messiah, *and* in the mission to all nations, which flows out from that event."[66] According to Wright, Luke 24:44–47 provides the hermeneutical orientation and agenda in that "the proper way for disciples of the crucified and risen Jesus to read their Scripture, is *messianically* and *missionally*."[67] Paul in Acts 26:22–23, observes Wright, shows "the same double focus" of preaching Christ to all the nations.[68] He clarifies what he means by a Christological and a missional reading of the Bible in the following manner:

> To speak of the Bible being "all about" Christ does not (or should not) mean that we try to find Jesus of Nazareth in every verse by some feat of imagination. It means that the person and work of Jesus becomes the central hermeneutical key by which we, as Christians, articulate the overall significance of these texts in both testaments. The same is true of the missiological focus.[69]

Wright notes that "to say that the Bible is 'all about mission' does not mean that we try to find something relevant to evangelism in every verse."[70] Rather, a missional reading seeks to read any part of the Bible in light of the following five topics: (1) God's purpose for his whole creation, including the redemption of humanity and the creation of

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[64] Wright, *Mission of God*, 49.
[65] Wright, *Mission of God*, 29.
[66] Wright, *Mission of God*, 30. Italics original.
[67] Wright, *Mission of God*, 30.
[68] Wright, *Mission of God*, 30.
[69] Wright, "Mission as Matrix," 108.
[70] Wright, *Mission of God*, 31.

the new heavens and new earth; (2) God's purpose for human life in general on the planet, including human culture, relationships, ethics, and behavior; (3) God's historical direction of Israel (i.e., their identity and role in relation to the nations, their worship, their social ethics, and their total value system); (4) the centrality of Jesus (i.e., his messianic identity and mission is relation to Israel and the nations); and (5) God's calling of the church—which is the community of believing Jews and Gentiles who constitute the extended people of the Abrahamic covenant—to be the agent of blessing to the nations.[71]

Wright likens a hermeneutical framework for reading the Bible as a map which is "a distortion to some degree of the reality it portrays."[72] He acknowledges that any framework to read the Bible—including a missional framework—may distort the text to some degree, but that "any attempt to summarize or provide some system or pattern for grasping it, or some structure to organize its content, cannot but distort the givenness of the original reality—the text itself."[73] Furthermore, Wright acknowledges that "no framework can give an account of every detail, just as no map can represent every tiny feature of a landscape. But like a map, a hermeneutical framework can provide a way of seeing the whole terrain."[74] A missional hermeneutic, according to Wright, does not "claim to explain every feature of the vast terrain of the Bible, nor to foreclose in advance the exegesis of any specific text."[75] Nonetheless, a missional hermeneutic provides a framework to have the major features of the biblical narrative stand out

[71] Wright, *Mission of God*, 67.
[72] Wright, *Mission of God*, 68.
[73] Wright, *Mission of God*, 68.
[74] Wright, *Mission of God*, 69.
[75] Wright, *Mission of God*, 69.

clearly and also to connect the minor features of the Bible to the main storyline of God's mission to redeem his whole creation.

In summary, missional hermeneutics—through the forerunners like Johannes Blauw and David Bosch, and more recent contributors like Christopher Wright—has solidified the missional church movement by providing a strong biblical framework and foundation for the movement. For the past twenty years, there have been further development in the areas of missional hermeneutics with different emphasis and approaches.[76] The next section will present complementary and yet distinct approaches and goals in the practice of missional hermeneutics.

A Map of Missional Hermeneutics[77]

In 2002, a group of biblical scholars and missiologists came together at the conferences of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) and the American Academy of Religion (AAR) to discuss various proposals about missional hermeneutics. What began as an informal breakfast meeting hosted by Tyndale Seminary in Toronto, Ontario became an Additional Meeting in an AAR/SBL program under the sponsorship of the GOCN. In 2009, the conversation was formalized as an Affiliate Organization in the SBL and continued annually as the GOCN Forum on Missional Hermeneutics. The forum

[76] In the important eight-volume Scripture and Hermeneutics series, at least three chapters are explicitly devoted to missional hermeneutics: Beeby, "Missional Approach;" Wright, "Mission as Matrix;" Goheen, "Bosch's Missional Reading."

[77] This section is a distillation of Hunsberger's "Mapping the Missional Hermeneutics Conversation," where he presents "four streams of emphasis" in missional hermeneutics conversation. The article is based on his paper presented at AAR/SBL in November 2008.

revealed not only a convergence of various approaches to missional hermeneutics but also divergences and different understandings as to what a missional hermeneutic is.[78]

George Hunsberger observes that various proponents of a missional hermeneutic tend to "exhibit a gravitational pull toward what is believed by the proponent to be the most essential aspect of what makes biblical interpretation missional."[79] Hunsberger surveys four different and yet complementary streams of thought about a missional hermeneutic:

1. Missional Direction of the Story: The *framework* for hermeneutics is the biblical story of the mission of God and the people of God who are sent to participate in that mission. The focus in this stream is reading the biblical narrative missionally. Prominent figures in this stream include Richard Bauckham, Michael Goheen, and Christopher Wright.[80]
2. Missional Purpose of the Writings: The *goal* of hermeneutics is to fulfill the Scriptures' function of equipping God's people to engage in God's mission. This stream highlights the purpose and aim of the Bible to be *formative*, not just informative. A prominent figure in this stream is Darrell Guder, who argues that the aim of the New Testament document is to shape the church so that it can fulfill her missional vocation.[81] This stream asks the following basic interpretive question: "How did this particular text continue the formation of witnessing communities then,

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[78] Hunsberger ("Mapping," 64) notes that the main question during the 2002–2007 period was "What *is* a missional hermeneutic?" Then, during the 2009–2014 period, the key question became "How does a missional hermeneutic play out in the actual engagement of texts?"

[79] Hunsberger, "Mapping," 49.

[80] Bauckham, *Bible and Mission* (2003); Bauckham, "Mission as Hermeneutic" (1999); Goheen, *Light to Nations* (2011); Goheen, "Continuing Steps" (2008); Wright, *Mission of God* (2006); Wright, *Mission of God's People* (2010).

[81] See Guder, "Biblical Formation and Discipleship" (2004); Guder, "Missional Hermeneutics" (2007); Guder, "Missional Hermeneutics" (2007).

and how does it do that today?"[82] The emphasis is on how the texts equip the church for mission.

3. Missional Locatedness of the Readers: The *approach* required for a faithful reading and application of the Bible is from a specific social and missional location of the Christian community. The way that a church community participates in God's mission shapes the questions that are asked of the text. Such missional questions allow the text to speak meaningfully to contextual concerns of the missional church. Michael Barram is a key proponent of this stream; his work focuses more intentionally on the community and the significance of God's people reading Scripture faithfully in light of their missional context.[83] He argues that "a missional hermeneutic should be understood as an approach to Scripture that self-consciously, intentionally, and persistently bring[s] to the biblical text a range of focused, critical, and located questions regarding [the] church's purpose in order to discern the faith community's calling and task within the *missio Dei*. Such questions will be inherently contextual."[84]
4. Missional Engagement with Cultures: The gospel functions as an interpretive matrix, which enables the canonical tradition of Scripture to engage our various cultural and social contexts. James Brownson is an important figure in this stream. Brownson's work is particularly concerned with the encounter between Scripture and our diverse contexts today in light of the Christ-centered gospel.[85]

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[82] Guder, "Missional Authority," 108.

[83] Barram, *Mission and Moral Reflection* (2006); Barram, "Bible, Mission and Social Location" (2007); Barram, "Pauline Mission" (2011).

[84] Barram, "The Bible, Mission and Social Location," 51.

[85] Brownson, *Speaking Truth in Love*. This stream emphasizes contextualizing the gospel in the contemporary context.

The emphasis of the first two streams is more on the text, whereas the emphasis of the latter two is more on the readers. The first two focus on the missional dimension of the text, while the latter two focus on the missional dynamic of the church's life and social context in which the texts are to be read and applied. Hunsberger notes that "none of these [four streams] is sufficient on its own to provide a robust hermeneutic."[86] In the next chapter, I will make use of the first two streams as the primary framework to do a missional reading of Ephesians.

Summary

This chapter presented a historical and literary review of the development of the missional church movement and missional hermeneutics. Missional hermeneutics is both the source and fruit of the missional church movement. In other words, missional hermeneutics served as the source of the missional church movement by bringing a missional framework to the reading of Scripture, affirming the missional church's convictions. It is also the fruit of the missional church movement; as a result of the movement, missional hermeneutics has gained more recognition as a valid hermeneutical framework through which the Bible is to be interpreted and applied. In addition, the missional church movement bears the burden of helping missional hermeneutics to gain not only recognition as a valid hermeneutical framework, but also appreciation as a valuable framework to read and interpret Scripture. The next chapter will apply a missional hermeneutic and present a missional reading of Ephesians.

[86] Hunsberger, "Mapping," 50.

CHAPTER THREE: A MISSIONAL READING OF EPHESIANS

This chapter presents a missional reading of Ephesians by probing what the letter says about the mission of God and our participation in it. To clarify, a missional reading of Ephesians is *not* about finding out *whether* Paul urges his readers to engage in mission—which is traditionally defined as a cross-cultural propagation of the gospel message. Within such a traditional approach, we have Robert Plummer's book *Paul's Understanding of the Church's Mission: Did the Apostle Paul Expect the Early Christian Communities to Evangelize?* As can be seen in the title of Plummer's work, the church's mission is equated with evangelism. Peter O'Brien's monograph *Gospel and Mission in the Writings of Paul* also approaches the subject of mission with the same traditional framework, equating mission with a verbal proclamation of the gospel message.[1] The church's mission is not less than evangelism, but it is much more than that, as we have seen in Chapter Two, and as will be seen again in this chapter.

A missional reading of Ephesians approaches the letter with the framework of God's mission and asks how the letter bears a *witness* to the mission of God and functions as an *instrument* of the mission of God—equipping God's people to participate in God's mission. To read Ephesians missionally, one approaches the text by viewing Paul as an apostle who forms and equips missional churches. One of the means

[1] Another monograph, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth* by Köstenberger and O'Brien, rests on the same assumption. These authors ask the following question: "Did Paul encourage believers to emulate his practice of evangelism and mission or not?" (22).

through which Paul forms and equips his churches to be faithful in their participation of God's mission is through his letters. That is, Paul's letters are mission documents. Michael Barram argues that "mission is not a discrete aspect of Paul's work, such as evangelism and initial community formation, but a principal rubric for understanding the apostle's entire vocation, including moral reflection and ongoing community nurturing."[2] In light of Barram's argument, Paul's letters can be read as witnesses to his understanding of God's mission, his role in it, and the place of his church in it. They are also to be read as scriptural texts for our own missional identity and our contemporary vocational and ecclesial self-understanding and practices. In other words, Ephesians is a letter to nurture missional churches in the contexts of its first readers and also the subsequent readers of the letter, including the contemporary church. A missional reading asks, therefore, how the letter formed and equipped God's people for their missional vocation then and how it does so today.

This chapter is divided into two parts where I will answer two questions from a missional reading of Ephesians. The first question is *what is the mission of God as presented in Ephesians?* In the first part I will answer the first question by using a canonical-narrative framework (creation, fall, redemption, and consummation) as a heuristic device to read Ephesians missionally. I agree with Christopher Wright who argues that even though "apostolic letters are not narratives, they must be interpreted within the context of that part of the biblical narrative" and that the grand narrative of creation, fall, redemption and consummation should be "the governing context for valid

[2] Barram, *Mission and Moral Reflection*, 57.

exegesis."[3] In the second part, I will answer the question, *what is the mission of God's people as presented in Ephesians?* That is, in what ways does Paul envision the church participating in the mission of God? The second part will address the church's participation in the mission of God, highlighting five key principles discernable from a missional reading of Ephesians.

Part 1: A Missional Reading of Ephesians as a Drama through a Canonical-Narrative Framework of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation

There are a variety of ways to organize the text of Ephesians. One of the most common ways to organize the letter is to see the first half of the letter (chapters 1–3) as the doctrine or theology and the second half of the letter (chapters 4–6) as duty or ethics.[4] Some scholars organize it as a series of complex chiastic structures,[5] while others divide the letter according to the conventions of Greco-Roman rhetoric.[6] As we approach the letter with a canonical-narrative framework to do a missional reading of Ephesians, we will see it as a drama.

There are a few New Testament scholars who propose reading Ephesians as a drama. For instance, Michael Gorman argues that Ephesians can be viewed as "a narration of the *drama* of the triune God's peacemaking mission and of our participation

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[3] Wright, *Great Story and Great Commission*, 14. Proposing a narrative approach to Paul's letters, Longenecker argues how Paul's letters are "the product of underlying narrative bedrock" and that they "do not simply offer independent snippets of 'truth' or isolated gems of logic, but are discursive exercises that explicate a narrative about God's saving involvement in the world" (*Narrative Dynamic,* 3–4). Although this narrative approach offers the possibility of a better understanding of the inner coherence of Paul's argument, especially from a missional perspective, I acknowledge that it does suffer from a perceived lack of methodological precision.

[4] Harold Hoehner (*Ephesians*, 64–69), for instance, organizes his Ephesians commentary in two halves: "the calling of the church" (chapters 1–3) and "the conduct of the church" (chapters 4–6).

[5] Heil, *Ephesians*.

[6] Lincoln, *Ephesians*.

in it."[7] Gorman writes that "in Ephesians we see that the *drama* of salvation is the story of divine peace initiative. Those who are reconciled to God through Christ are invited . . . to participate in God's ongoing mission of making peace both inside and outside the church."[8] In his theological commentary on Ephesians, Stephen Fowl frames the epistle as "the *drama* of salvation."[9] For instance, Fowl comments that in Ephesians 1 Paul narrates "God's *drama* of salvation, a drama that was initiated before the foundation of the world and that reaches its climax as everything is brought to its proper end in Christ. This *drama* is cosmic in its scope and consequence."[10] Fowl uses the phrase "the drama of salvation" some thirty times in his commentary.[11]

Timothy Gombis develops the idea of Ephesians as a drama to the fullest. In his monograph *The Drama of Ephesians*, Gombis presents Ephesians as "a gospel script that invites performances by communities of God's people."[12] He suggests that Ephesians is "a *drama* portraying the victory of God in Christ over the dark powers that rule this present evil age, and the letter becomes a script for how God's people can continue, by the power of the Spirit, to perform the drama called the triumph of God in Christ."[13] Gombis argues that "reading Ephesians as a *drama* opens up a more robust understanding of what Paul is doing in this letter"[14] One result of the dramatic reading,

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[7] Gorman, *Becoming Gospel*, 182. Emphasis added.

[8] Gorman, *Becoming Gospel*, 13. Emphasis added. Gorman uses the motif of "peace" to show the narrative framework of Ephesians (186–207).

[9] Fowl, *Ephesians*, 3. Fowl uses "drama" a number of times throughout his commentary on Ephesians to describe his interpretive framework of Ephesians.

[10] Fowl, *Ephesians*, 3. Emphasis added.

[11] Fowl uses a phrase "drama of redemption" interchangeably as well.

[12] Gombis, *Drama of Ephesians*, 9.

[13] Gombis, *Drama of Ephesians*. Emphasis added.

[14] Gombis, *Drama of Ephesians*. Emphasis added.

as proposed by Gombis, is the stirring of our imagination to gain "a vision for how we can play our role in this great, surprising and invigorating narrative."[15]

I take my cue from Gorman, Fowler, and Gombis to do a missional reading of Ephesians as a drama through the canonical-narrative framework of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation.[16] Through this missional reading I will delineate Paul's vision of God's mission presented in Ephesians.

God's Mission and Creation

The very first chapter of Ephesians takes the readers all the way to the beginning—even before the beginning—of God's creation project and then to the very end of God's creation project when all things in heaven and earth are gloriously united in Christ. The plan of God is devised before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4) and played out in human history. It is revealed in the pages of the Old Testament and in the New Testament, centering on the person and the work of Jesus Christ. Ephesians 1:9–10 is one key passage that answers the question "What is the purpose of God presented in Ephesians?": "He [God] has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (NRSV). A key word in the passage is *anakephalaiōsathai*, translated as "to gather up" (NRSV), "to unite" (ESV), "to bring unity" (NIV) and "to bring together" (NASB). The vision of uniting or summing up captures the heart of God's mission to restore the whole creation in relation to Christ. Gorman comments that "the divine plan of 'gather[ing] up all things' in Christ

[15] Gombis, *Drama of Ephesians*, 17.
[16] See Green, "Missional Reading," where a similar heuristic device is used.

(1:10) suggests a metanarrative of creation and recreation, and specifically bringing unity to that which is now scattered in order to restore harmony in the creation."[17] That is, God's mission is to bring "all things in heaven and earth to their proper end through and in relation to Christ."[18]

In connection to Ephesians 1:10, Ephesians 1:20-23 further elaborates the fulfillment of God's plan as it unfolds in the cosmos and through the church. Clinton Arnold comments on Ephesians 1:20-23 that "the church is Christ's fullness and that Christ is the one who is completely filling the cosmos…. Ecclesiological and cosmic perspectives are juxtaposed in a way that underlines the Church's special status, for although Christ is in the process of filling the cosmos, at present it is only the Church which can actually be called his fullness. The Church appears, then, to be the focus for and medium of Christ's presence and rule in the cosmos."[19] The word, *plērōma,* in Ephesians 1:23 has "a missionary dimension" that connects the mission of God and mission of the church.[20] Andrew Lincoln notes that "because the Church's head is head over all, and because the one who fills the church fills all things, there is now a continuity between the realm of salvation and the realm of creation, between the Church and the world. The whole created reality becomes the church's legitimate concern, and the Church symbolizes the realization of possibilities inherent in God's purposes in Christ for all creation."[21] Timothy Van Aarde argues that "the concept of *plērōma* [in

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[17] Gorman, *Becoming Gospel*, 188–89.

[18] Fowl, *Ephesians*, 47.

[19] Arnold, *Ephesians,* 119.

[20] Lincoln, *Ephesians,* 79. The word, *plērōma,* is used four times in Ephesians: 1:10 ("fullness of time"), 1:23 ("fullness of him" [Christ]), 3:19 ("fullness of God") and 4:13 ("fullness of Christ"). The verbal form of the word, *plēroō,* is used four times in Ephesians: 1:23; 3:19; 4:10; 5:18. For a helpful analysis of Paul's use of the word, *plērōma,* in Ephesians, see Gombis, "Being the Fullness of God."

[21] Lincoln, *Ephesians,* 80.

Ephesians 1:23] indicates that God's plan is to bring all of creation to the completeness of the new creation…. It is as the church reaches out with the gospel that Christ completes [or fulfills the purpose of] the church by including more and more diverse nations, cultures, people and language groups into the church. Christ continues to fill the church with his fullness (Eph 1:23), so that church can be complete."[22] In other words, Christ not only completes the church but also completes God's mission through the mission of the church.[23]

The Goal, the Scope, and the Means of God's Mission

In Ephesians 1, we see not only the goal of God's mission but also the scope and means of God's mission. The goal of God's mission is that the entire cosmos should be brought into harmonious order in Christ (Eph 1:10) and be filled with the fullness of Christ (Eph 1:21–23). The scope of God's mission is universal, including things on earth and things in heaven. Things on earth include all humanity, especially the church made up of all nations; things in heaven include powers and authorities—both good and evil spiritual forces. The means of God's mission is the church "which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Eph 1:23). God's mission and the church's mission under the lordship of Jesus is inseparable. In summary, the goal, the scope, and the means of God's mission in creation and re-creation is to bring together all of the fragmented and alienated elements of the universe to harmonious relationship with God and with one

[22] Van Aarde, "Relation of God's Mission," 296.

[23] The relationship between God's mission and the church's missions will be further elaborated in the next section.

another under the lordship of Christ. The church is intended by God to be a "foretaste of the future cosmic peace and harmony that has been the eternal divine plan."[24]

The Ultimate Purpose of God's Mission

One of the key phrases repeated in Ephesians 1 is "to the praise of his glory" (Eph 1:12, 14; cf. 1:6). The phrase reveals the ultimate purpose of God's mission as well as the ultimate purpose of humanity. Humanity was originally created to "glorify God and to enjoy him forever."[25] Human beings—as ones created in the image of God—are designed to reflect the glory of God. They would reflect the glory of God when they rule under God's authority and over his creation (including the fallen powers) with godly character and wisdom. Living under God's lordship, which is expressed in trust and obedience to his Word, human beings would have peace with God, peace with one another, and peace with the rest of the creation. In that state of peace under God's lordship, not only would God be glorified, but human beings and the rest of God's creation would flourish as they fulfilled God's creational design and purpose.

The creation project with the ultimate goal of uniting all things in heaven and on earth to the praise of God's glory implies that God's mission began with creation, not with the fall. However, the fall necessitates God's work of redemption and restoration to bring all things in harmonious unity under Christ's lordship. That is, out of the fall's brokenness and disorder, God's mission of summing up all things in Christ moves forward. That takes us to the fall and God's work of restoration in God's drama, laid out in Ephesians 2.

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[24] Gorman, *Becoming Gospel*, 189.

[25] Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A #1. See Isa 43:7, 21; Isa 48:11; Rom 11:36; Rev 4:11.

The Fall and God's Work of Restoration

After asserting the cosmic lordship of Christ in Ephesians 1:20–23, Paul rehearses the drama of the fall and God's work of restoration through Jesus Christ in Ephesians 2, depicting two different cycles of the drama of the fall and God's work of restoration. In the first cycle (2:1–10), Paul provides a heavenly perspective of the fall and the restoration: the rebellion of humanity in partnership with "the prince of the power of the air," and the restoration of humanity who in Christ is described as already "seated in the heavenly places" (2:6). In the second cycle (2:11–20), Paul provides an earthly perspective of the fall and the restoration: the division between Jews and Gentiles, and the reconciliation that is brought about between the two groups and as an implication also between all redeemed humanity and God through Christ.

A Heavenly Perspective of the Fall and God's Salvation

In the first cycle (2:1–10), Paul portrays three evils of the old age: the fallen world, the fallen power, and the fallen humanity. The fallen world is under the fallen power that is at work in the fallen humanity. The fallen humanity is described as "dead in sins and trespasses," "sons of disobedience," and "children of wrath" (2:1–3). However, God did not leave his image-bearers under his wrath and in bondage to sin, death, and the devil. God who is rich in mercy, grace, and kindness made them "alive together with Christ" (2:5). He came to the rescue through Jesus Christ who has the power above all powers and authorities (1:20–22). God restored them through Jesus Christ with whom they have been raised up and seated in the heavenly places (2:6).

Paul uses creation language to describe the restoration of the fallen humanity: "For we are his workmanship, *created* in Christ Jesus for good works, which God

prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (2:10). As Fowl notes, "salvation in Christ inaugurates a new creation, or more properly, a renewal of the original creation. This creation is not simply the natural development of the created order. Neither is it the result of sustained human labor. Rather, this new creation is the dramatic and unanticipated renewal of all things in Christ, accomplished by God's grace through the death and resurrection of Christ."[26] And the purpose of God's new creation in Christ invites God's people, the church, to participate in God's mission by doing good works to the praise of his glory.[27] As will be seen below, in light of this perspective of the fall and the restoration, one important way for the church to participate in God's mission is through the pursuit of purity and holiness, which counters corruption and sin.

An Earthly Perspective of the Fall and God's Salvation

In the second cycle (2:11–20), Paul provides a different perspective on the fallen state of humanity and God's work of restoration. The problem addressed in the second cycle is division of humanity—between the Jews and the Gentiles. Whereas the first cycle emphasizes the alienation between God and humanity due to sin and Satan, the second cycle emphasizes the alienation between the two groups of humanity due to hostility. Gentiles are depicted as people who are "alienated from the Messiah," "excluded from the commonwealth of Israel," "strangers to the covenant of promise," "without hope and without God in the world" (2:12). The second cycle assumes the drama of the Old Testament where Jews receive the privilege of being called God's people along with

[26] Fowl, *Ephesians*, 80.

[27] Fowl (*Ephesians*, 81) comments that "participating in God's new creation in Christ opens the prospect of participating in the dramatic outworking in God's salvation."

God's commandments that set them apart from the rest of the nations. Their privilege came with responsibility to be a light to the nations, fulfilling their call to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:6).[28] In other words, their election was for mission. God elected Israel to be a distinct people as an agent of God's mission to restore and bless the nations. Instead, however, Israel became like (or even worse than) nations that did not know the LORD God. Nonetheless, just as God did not leave sinful humanity under the power of sin, Satan, and death, God did not leave his people, Israel, to the detriment of their own failures. God sent Jesus the Messiah, the true Israel, to bring peace with God and with one another. The way God brought about reconciliation was through the blood of Christ, whose death has "broken down the dividing wall of hostility" that divided Jews and Gentiles (2:14). God created one new humanity out of two separate and alienated people through the cross of Christ (2:16). The new humanity in Ephesians 2:15 recalls the image of new creation in Ephesians 2:10; it also provides a concrete description of the movement to bring all things together under Christ, as articulated in Ephesians 1:10.[29] Paul depicts the new humanity of reconciled international people of God as a holy temple—another way of describing God's mission of summing up all things in heaven and earth, since a temple is a place where heaven and earth meet. Jesus embodied that holy temple, and since the coming of the Holy Spirit to his people, the church is being built as a holy temple in and through which God's mission of bringing heaven and earth together is being accomplished. As will be

[28] See Michael Goheen's book *Light to Nations*, which provides a missional identity and call of the Old Testament people of God (the nation of Israel), which is then picked up by the New Testament church.

[29] Fowl, *Ephesians*, 94; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 145.

seen below, one important way for the church to participate in God's mission is through pursuit of unity in the body of Christ, countering alienation and disunity.

God's Mission and Consummation

God's mission and the church's participation in God's mission will continue until the time of consummation. That is, though the outworking of God's missional goal of restoring all things under Christ has begun in the first coming of Christ, it has not yet been completed. God's mission of restoring his creation is completed in two stages. The first stage is already inaugurated in Jesus's first coming; the second stage is yet to start when Jesus returns to renew all creation completely.

In Ephesians, Paul describes the tension of living in between the two stages of restoration. On the one hand, he highlights the first stage's inauguration: God's salvation has *already* begun in Jesus. Ephesians is characterized as having a strongly *realized* eschatology.[30] For instance, there is a significant stress on salvation as presented in Ephesians 2, especially 2:5, 8, through Paul's use of the perfect tense of *sōzō*, which signifies the present reality of salvation: those in Christ have *already* been saved and are being saved. His realized eschatology is also signified by the declaration that believers have *already* been raised and exalted with Christ (2:6). On the other hand, Paul highlights how God's salvation has *not yet* been completed. Although the first coming of Jesus inaugurated the new age (of righteousness and new life), it is not until the second coming of Jesus that the old age (of sin, the devil, and death) will be completely obliterated. On the one hand, the church already shared the fullness of Christ (1:23). On

[30] Peter O'Brian (*The Letter to Ephesians,* 29) notes that "the future expectation does not disappear entirely from the letter, but it receives much less attention (cf. 1:18; 4:4)."

the other hand, Paul prays that the church may be filled with the fullness of God (3:19). In one sense the body of Christ is already complete in Christ. In another sense that body is said to grow to perfection (4:13), a process that will be completed only at the second coming of Jesus Christ. Ephesians 5:25–27 anticipates the glorious future awaiting the completion of God's mission when the church will be presented in splendor and glory. God's mission of restoring all things in heaven and on earth will continue on until the second coming of Jesus, when God makes all things new.

Living in the tension of the two ages, the church continues to experience sorrow, wickedness, and corruption as well as warfare against "cosmic powers over this present darkness" (Eph 6:12). The way to overcome such trials and temptations is by the subversive way of Jesus: cruciform living that embodies purity and promotes unity.[31] Furthermore, the church has been given missions until the second coming of Jesus, so that God fulfills his mission to bring all things in unity under the lordship of Christ. As N.T. Wright succinctly articulates, "we live in between the times, between the launching of new creation and its ultimate fulfillment. This is time for missions: for the work of God, through the Spirit-filled life and witness of the church, to bring God's healing and hope to the nations."[32]

Summary

A missional reading of Ephesians as a drama through a narrative-canonical framework may be summarized in the following manner. The stage (or location) of the drama is the whole cosmos—both heaven and earth. The timeline extends from eternity past (before

[31] This point will be elaborated further in the next section.
[32] Wright, "Reading New Testament Missionally," 177.

the beginning of creation) to eternity future (after the completion of God's redemption). God the Father is the playwright and producer of the drama; God the Son is the principal actor on the world stage; God the Spirit is the director. Jews, Gentiles, and the church are other characters in the drama happening on earth; "powers and authorities" are the antagonists against whom Christ triumphs through his death and resurrection and against whom the church is to wage war.[33] Paul the apostle is a dispenser and an assistant-director of the drama in which the church is to participate. Scripture is the church's authoritative script; the gospel is the climax in the drama. The church is to participate in that "theo-drama" by being grounded in Scripture (past), being aware of our new/current situation (present), and seeing the promise of God's fulfillment of his plan (future).[34] The readers of the drama are invited to participate as performers in the ongoing drama of God's redemptive work, as they become members of the church that continues God's mission on earth while also engaging in spiritual warfare in the heavenly realms.

A missional reading of Ephesians through a heuristic device of the a canonical-narrative structure of creation, fall, restoration, and consummation shows that Ephesians was written not only to reveal God's missional plan for the world but also "to build up and energize the church to be God's people in God's world, living between Jesus's resurrection and the final renewal."[35] Paul sees himself and the church to be part of God's great mission to restore all things in Christ. This brings us to the second key

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[33] As we will be seen below, the way the war is waged is subversive, following the way of crucified Messiah.

[34] Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*. For the church to play her role faithfully and creatively, she must know what has happened thus far in terms of what God has done, what he is doing, what conflict has driven the narrative, where she is in the story, what obstacles she must overcome, and how the story will end.

[35] Wright, "Paul and Missional Hermeneutics," 181.

question of a missional reading Ephesians: how does the letter equip God's people to participate in the drama of God's mission?

Part 2: Reimagining a Missional Church from a Missional Reading of Ephesians

Having reviewed the drama of God's mission as seen through a missional reading of Ephesians, I now answer questions regarding the church's mission as presented in Ephesians. How does a missional reading of Ephesians shape us as participants of God's mission? In what ways does Paul envision the church to participate in the mission of God? First, I will show Paul's special role as an apostle and then present key elements with which a missional reading of Ephesians aims to equip a missional people.

Paul the Apostle and the Church in the Drama of God's Mission

Before answering the question regarding the church's mission, we need to understand Paul's role as an apostle. In the drama of God's salvation and restoration, Paul as an "apostle of Christ Jesus" (Eph 1:1) is sent by Christ and on Christ's behalf to spread the gospel of Christ and to plant churches who would participate in God's mission. Paul serves as a dispenser of the gospel and an assistant-director of the drama that the church is to participate in.[36] Paul's apostleship includes suffering for the gospel and for the sake of the church. He is an "ambassador in chains" (6:11) and a "prisoner of Christ Jesus" (3:1; 4:1). When we come to Ephesians 3:1–13, we see that Paul was given "stewardship

[36] Paul, as an apostle, is an assistant director because he is under the direction of the Holy Spirit, who brings to light the plan of God's drama. Paul and other apostles whose writings are canonized to be Scripture were given a special authority put in writing texts that would carry the authority of Christ to establish the church. The pastors and church leaders are best assistant directors who use Scriptures as the authoritative script. The Holy Spirit, the chief-director, uses Scripture as the script to guide and train the church—through its leaders—to play their role faithfully and creatively. See Vanhoozer's *Drama of Doctrine.*

of God's grace" by God for people to know the mystery of the gospel (3:2; cf. 6:19). God reveals the mystery of the gospel to him through the Spirit (3:3–5). God's mystery revealed to Paul is summarized in 3:6: "that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, fellow members of the body and fellow *participants* in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." This verse recaptures the drama of reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles, as outlined in Ephesians 2:11–22. Fowl notes that "In those verses Paul uses language that reflects God's choosing of Israel to speak of the Gentiles' incorporation into the divine plan of salvation. Becoming fellow heirs mean becoming fellow heirs with Jewish believers. The Jews and Gentiles coming together to be a new humanity in the church (2:16)."[37]

Paul's role, as a steward of God's mystery, is to faithfully present the plan of God's salvation (the drama) and direct the church (the performers) to play their role faithfully.[38] Paul's calling as an apostle is "to preach to the *Gentiles* the unsearchable riches of Christ" and also to "bring to light to *everyone* what is the plan of the mystery" with the purpose "to make known the manifold wisdom of God to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" (3:8–10). In those verses there is a movement in the scope of the outreach in those three verses—from the *Gentiles* to *everyone* to *the rulers and authorities* in the heavenly places. In other worlds, Paul equips the church to be captivated by the glorious gospel; the church then spreads the glorious gospel to others; in so doing, the influence of Paul's ministry through the church reaches not only all the

[37] Fowl, *Ephesians*, 110.

[38] The director is the mediator between the script and the actor. The Holy Spirit is *the* chief-director who guides and empowers the church to perform with faithfulness and creativity. Apostles are assistant directors; pastors, elders, and church leaders follow the apostolic leadership to help the church to be equipped to be the best performers of the theo-drama.

nations, but also the spiritual powers who are brought to worship the God whose wisdom topples the schemes of the enemy. Paul's role as an apostle is to equip the church to be faithful representatives of God's glory and manifold wisdom in and through their life together. As an implication, the apostolic and missionary identity of Paul is passed down to the church as an apostolic community that is sent into the world. The church has an identity of "the sent ones" (missionaries) who are to carry out the ministry of "bringing to light to everyone" the gospel of Jesus Christ (Eph 3:9).

Apostle Paul instructs, exhorts, models, and prays for the Ephesian church to participate in the drama of God's salvation and to play their role faithfully.[39] Through a missional reading of Ephesians, I observe that Paul equips the church to be faithful participants in God's mission by providing at least five key elements in the script: fostering identity formation, inspiring worship (praise and prayer), promoting unity, encouraging purity, and modeling suffering.

Identity

Paul fosters identity formation to be faithful in church's participation in God's mission. A missional church knows its identity. The church's identity serves as the foundation for the church's mission, because the church's mission flows out of the church's identity. Without knowing its identity, the church cannot carry out our task properly in accordance with God's design and purpose. In Ephesians, Paul describes the church's identity in multiple ways, both explicitly and implicitly.[40] In this section I will highlight

[39] Paul directs them in the first half of the letter (chapters 1–3) mainly through prayer and instruction then in the second half of the letter (chapters 4–6) mainly through exhortations.

[40] Charles Van Engen (*God's Missionary People*, 48–49) observes that that there are at least fifteen different word pictures of the church in Ephesians—four of which are the main metaphors: saints

six images of the church that Paul uses that are significant for reimagining a missional church: *saints* (1:1; cf. 1:4, 15, 18; 2:21; 3:8; 4:12; 5:3, 27; 6:18), *body of Christ* (1:23; 3:6; 4:4, 12, 15, 16, 25; 5:23, 30), *new humanity* (2:15; cf. 4:13, 24), *holy temple* (2:20–22), *family of God* (1:3-5; 2:18-19; 5:1; 6:23), and *army of God* (6:10-20). All six descriptions of the church's identity have missional dimensions. That is, each aspect of the church's identity provides insight into God's purpose for the church's existence in and for the world. In this section, I will elaborate on the church's identity that as rooted in God's missional nature and also intended for the church's missional purpose.

Saints

Significantly, "saints" or "holy ones" (1:1) is the first identity of the church that Paul describes in Ephesians.[41] Paul could have called them by different descriptions, but he calls the church "saints," ones who are set apart for God and his glory in this world. The term *saint* has Old Testament roots; the Israelites as God's people are called "kingdom of priest and a holy nation" (Ex 19:6; 23:22) which has a missional dimension. Their identity as "a holy nation" is based on God's gracious activity of setting the people of Israel apart and delivering them out of slavery in Egypt. In other words, fundamentally God's people are saints not because of their own moral accomplishment, but because of what God has done by his sovereign grace in delivering them from the power of sin and devil. The people of God are saved and set apart for God in order to belong to him and

(9x), body (8x), soldier with armor (8x), wife (7x). A series of lesser images embellish the major conceptions: chosen people of God (4x), sons or family (4x), workmanship, building or temple (3x), a song of praise or offering (2x), a new man or new self (2x).

[41] The word, *hagios*, translated as "saints" or "holy ones" are used in Ephesians 1:5, 18; 2:19; 3:8, 18; 4:12; 5:3; 6:18. The word is used to refer "holiness" of saints (1:4; 5:27), "holy" temple (2:21), "holy" apostles and prophets (3:5) and the Holy Spirit (1:13; 4:30).

represent him in the world, calling others to return to their Creator God. The people of God in the New Testament church are saints, because their sins have been cleansed by the blood of Christ (Eph 1:7) and they are sealed by the Holy Spirit (1:13; 4:30).

While God's people are fundamentally saints because of God's sovereign grace and his redemption, they are also called "saints" for a missional purpose: to grow in holiness and to shine God's glory to the nations. On the one hand, holiness is a given as a prior gift of God's grace. God chose his people in Christ without any of their merit. On the other hand, holiness is also a calling and a demand upon all of God's people. God's gracious election was purposeful: that they should be "holy and blameless" (1:4; 5:27). God's gracious activity and salvation moves toward a goal. Holiness is the trajectory of God's redemptive drama for his people in the world. The church is to live out its identity as people set apart for God as a contrast society, shaped by a contrast story and contrast practices, forming godly character and practicing godly habits in their life together. As will be seen further below, this pursuit of holiness by the church has a significant missional dimension as a centripetal movement of a missional church.

Body of Christ

Another key identity of the church described by Paul is the body of Christ (Eph 1:23; 3:6; 4:4, 12, 15–16, 25; 5:23, 30). Christ fills the church with his presence and power to function as his living and growing body (Eph 1:23; 4:9–10; cf. Col 1:19; 2:9).[42] Christ,

[42] There are at least three different interpretations of Ephesians 1:23, explaining how the church as Christ's body is "the fullness of him who fills all in all." Based on the analogy of Scripture and the literary context, it makes the most sense to understand the word *plērōma* in a passive sense, not as "that which fills" but as "that which is filled" and not the contents but the filled container. See Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 294–301, and Stott, *Ephesians*, 40–45.

as the head of the church, not only "fills the body with powers of movement and perception," but also "inspires the whole body with life and direction."[43] Furthermore, Christ as the head of the church provides the ultimate leadership for the church to be an extension of his life and ministry in the world. The whole body is held together as each part is connected to one another and to Christ, the head, from whom the body is energized and empowered to participate in his mission. In addition, just as a body is to grow into maturity, the church is to grow into maturity.

This identity of the church as a body of Christ is significant when we consider church's missional identity, since church as a body of Christ continues the presence and mission of Christ in the world by the power of the Spirit. In Ephesians 1:22–23, we see that the church as the body of Christ is where the "fullness" (*plērōma*) of Christ dwells. Peter O'Brien comments that *plērōma* is best understood in light of the fullness language in the Old Testament (cf. Ezek 44:4; Jer 23:24), which is often used to indicate the presence of God.[44] In Eph 2:19–22 Paul explains that God has brought Jews and Gentiles together in one new body. *Plērōma* points to the boundary-transcending power of the gospel that brings unity from enmity. Scott McKnight notes that Paul's vision of the church is "an inclusive, social-boundary-breaking fellowship of differents"[45] He then argues, ″If the church is a fellowship of differents, then the Christian life is about learning to navigate this life in the company of those who are not like us.″[46] That is, ″the

[43] Barth, *Ephesians*, 1:208.
[44] O'Brien, *Ephesians,* 149–50.
[45] McKnight, "The New Perspective," 139. By "differents" (*-ts*, not *-ence*), McKnight is referring first to Jews and Gentiles, slaves and freedman, and male and females.
[46] McKnight, "The New Perspective," 139.

Christian life is learning how to love, to live with, and to fellowship with those who are not like us."[47]

The image of the body that highlights the importance of unity and maturity holds significant missional implications. The church not only is united under Christ's headship but also grows into the full maturity of Christ's character. Without this unity and maturity in character, the church will not be able to represent Christ or fulfill the mission of Christ in the world. That is, the church will not be able to glorify God and bless the nations and surprise the powers and authorities through its mission, if it is divided and lacks the moral character that reflects Christ and his ways. This vision and direction of the church to be united and mature has a significant missional dimension and will be elaborated further below.

New Humanity

The church is nothing less than a new humanity (Eph 2:15). As a new humanity the church "shows the world a different way to be human" through doing good works (2:10).[50] N.T. Wright notes that the early church was known as "strange little communities" that surprised people in the society to find "new ways of living together" by demonstrating "an extraordinary love that flowed outward."[51] The church as a new humanity is a new society within the old age of the broken world. Paul's whole missionary work was "to bring about and, through his teaching, to sustain and shape

[47] McKnight, "The New Perspective," 139.
[50] Wright, "Reading New Testament Missionally," 189.
[51] Wright, "Reading New Testament Missionally," 189.

communities that will be new sort of *polis,* a new sort of community, a new sort of social reality."[52]

The identity of the church as a new humanity is related to the church's identity as saints and has a significant missional dimension. The church as a new humanity is to "put off the old humanity" that is "corrupt through deceitful desires" and instead "put on the new humanity, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (4:22–24). In other words, just like church's identity as saints set apart for God has a trajectory to be holy and blameless, so the church as a new humanity is to showcase what it means to be a human made in God's image, reflecting God's glory. The church is to live out its identity as a new humanity by practicing righteous and holy acts in daily and communal life together.

Holy Temple

One of the most unique descriptions of the church in Ephesians is "a holy temple" that is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ as the cornerstone "in whom the whole structure [that is, people of God from all nations], being joined together, grows into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit" (2:20–22). This image of a temple has the Old Testament root where the temple was a place where God who dwells in heaven would come to dwell with his people on earth. Furthermore, a temple in the Old Testament was also "a signpost pointing forward to the time when heaven and earth would come together in Jesus, and when, by the Spirit, they would come together in his people."[53] The church as God's holy temple is a locus of God's kingly presence in the

[52] Wright, "Reading New Testament Missionally," 190.
[53] Wright, "Reading New Testament Missionally," 184.

world, where God's rule over God's people through covenant relationship is realized. The church as God's holy temple is also a house of prayer where nations will come to commune with God. The church as a temple is not a static but a dynamic and living organism that continues to grow by including more and more people until God's presence pervades the entire earth at the end of the age.[54]

This identity of the church as God's holy temple has a significant missional dimension, reminding us of the goal of God's mission to be uniting things in heaven and things on earth under the lordship of Christ. The church is the very center in and through which God's missional purpose is fulfilled and experienced as God brings things on earth and things on heaven together in that locus. In Jesus we first see the reality of heaven and earth coming together. Then, through the Spirit of Christ in Christians who are being built together as a holy temple where God indwells his people, the church grows as a temple whereby people of all nations are living stones being built into a spiritual house by the power of the Spirit.

Family of God

One of the prominent images of the church in Ephesians is that of family. Although the letter does not use the term *family* explicitly to designate the identity of God's people, it is implied through many different theological expressions. First of all, God is referred to as Father eight times in Ephesians (1:2–3, 17; 2:18; 3:14–15; 4:6; 5:20; 6:23). He is not only the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named (3:15) but,

[54] See Beale's *Temple and Church's Mission*, where he traces the relationship of the church as temple to the church's mission through Scripture and notes the ongoing nature of the temple's construction in Ephesians 2:20–22.

more particularly, the Father of all believers (4:6) and, in a peculiar sense, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (1:3). God's eternal plan was to adopt people of all nations into his family: "In love he [God the Father] predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace with which he has blessed us in the Beloved" (1:5–6). Through Christ and in the Holy Spirit, we have access to the Father and become members of God's household (2:18–19). The identity of the church as God's family has a significant missional dimension in that the mission of God's people in a sense is to participate in God's expansion of global family with God as the Father, Christ as the older brother, and each other as siblings.

Army of God

One of the distinct features of Ephesians in the Pauline corpus is the extended teaching on the spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6:10–20. The church is described as an army of God, and its members as soldiers in the spiritual battle against "the rulers… the authorities… the cosmic powers over this present darkness… the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph 6:12). In Ephesians 6, Paul brings many of the theological and ethical concerns of the letter together and gives the final exhortation to remind the church of its calling and mission from a cosmic perspective. Timothy Gombis notes that the apocalyptic warfare Paul imagines is not aggressive, triumphalist swaggering[55] The battle happens at the level of treating believers with respect, with generosity, extending forgiveness. The whole armor of God that is provided to the church include the belt of

[55] Gombis, *The Drama,* 119.

truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the readiness given by the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:14–17). The whole armor of God is completed with prayer for all the saints and for Paul—to boldly and clearly proclaim the gospel (Eph 6:18–20).

Lynn Cohick surmises that "*battle* might be the wrong ward to use; Paul asks believers to be a 'community of resistance' as God the Father in Christ has already won the campaign against evil powers and principalities. Moreover, the church is to model Chris's life of faithful self-sacrifice (5:2) … which will include service rather than control, and vulnerability over against assertion of raw power."[56] Understood the spiritual warfare in that way, one missional implication may be pursuing more ethnically and racially integrated local church where one that does not privilege one ethnic or racial group over another. Cohick suggests that a baby step in this direction might be partnership between currently homogeneous churches within a city.[57] Another missional implication of the spiritual warfare that the church is engaged in is that we are to balance the centripetal aspect of the church's mission (being people of righteousness) and the centrifugal aspect of the church's mission (being ready to preach the gospel of peace). The majority of the letter emphasizes the centripetal aspect of the mission (unity, maturity, purity), but in this last part of the letter Paul highlights the significance of the preaching ministry that is to be exercised through the church.

In sum, a missional church knows its identity. The six images of the church—as saints, body of Christ, new humanity, holy temple, family of God, and army of God—helps reimagining a missional church. The identity of being a new society of saints

[56] Cohick, "The New Perspective," 39–40.
[57] Cohick, "The New Perspective," 41.

provides a missional impetus to be holy in relation to the world. The identity of being a body of Christ and family provides a missional impetus to pursue unity and maturity for the sake of the mission in the world. And the identity of being a holy temple where praise to God and prayer of all nations are offered provides a missional impetus to be a community that worships God. The identity of being soldiers in God's army gives the cosmic perspective in understanding church's missional calling to stand firm against the schemes of the enemy in the spiritual warfare and to push back the darkness with the light of the gospel. From the perspective of a dramatic and missional reading of Ephesians, the performers (members of the church) must know what role they are playing and understand the script and the storyline of the drama (that is, Scripture) thoroughly well, so that they can play their role faithfully and creatively, improvising as needed, because they have deeply identified with the character in the drama.

Worship (Praise and Prayer)

A missional church not only knows its identity but also knows the God they worship. The element of worship (praise and prayer) in the missional church corresponds to the church's identity as the holy temple. Praise and prayer are the heartbeat of the missional church. Paul's emphasis on praise and prayer comes across in his letter not only through *what* he instructs but *how* he instructs. The structure of Ephesians is quite instructive: a long praise in the beginning (1:3–14), followed by a prayer (1:15–23), then another prayer in the middle (3:14–21), and exhortations on and requests for prayer at the end (6:18–21). In fact, the first three chapters of Ephesians—which is considered to lay the instructional ground for the church—are filled not so much with doctrines but more so

with praise and prayer. Lincoln comments that Paul "has written to them in this particular way because he is aware that, ultimately, the profundity of their theological appreciation [the drama of the gospel], appropriated in worship [praise and prayer], will be far more effective in helping them to be what they were meant to be than merely piling moral exhortation upon moral exhortation."[58] If doctrine provides direction for our fitting participation in the drama, then it is quite significant that Paul (the assistant director) is utterly dependent on the Holy Spirit (the chief-director) to direct and equip the church (the performers) as much through prayers as instructions. In this section, I will present how a missional church is a church that praises God and prays to God.

Praise

The church participates in God's mission by being a worshipping community in the world. As it worships, it mediates the presence of God to others in the world and draws worship from them as well. As was seen above, the ultimate purpose of God's creation and re-creation is "for the praise of his glory" (1:6, 12, 14). God created the heavens and earth and all that are in them to display his glory. By God's creation design, it is most fitting for his creation to glorify him. Human beings created in God's image to reflect his glory are most fully human when they live to glorify God by being in relationship with him and by living according to his design. The goal of all of creation and the goal of the whole work of salvation is to praise and glorify God the Creator. The life in the new creation at the consummation is worship of God by every creature in the whole creation (Rev 5:13). In other words, the mission of God is to bless human beings by

[58] Lincoln, *Ephesians,* 197.

bringing them into a relationship with God in which they love, worship, and glorify him and find their greatest joy in doing so.[59] Furthermore, the church is to not only be recipients of the blessing but also be agents of God's blessing by bringing others to worship and glorify the Creator God. That is at the heart of the mission of the church. As John Piper succinctly asserts, "Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more."[60] The mission of the church will continue as long as there are people on earth who have yet to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ, to respond to him personally in joyful obedience, and to join the community of worship to praise him along with all nations and all creatures.

As Christopher Wright asserts worship is not only the ultimate *goal* of missions, but also the *means* of missions.[61] In Ephesians Paul begins his letter with a powerful expression of praise of God (1:3–14) and turns his attention again to the praise of God in his exhortation for the church (5:18–20). For the church to be missional, it is to be filled with the Spirit. One of the marks of being filled with the Spirit is "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord" (5:19). In other words, "working in and through believers, the Spirit both reforms and redirects their praise and worship to God."[62] In light of Paul's overall concern for the Ephesian church to walk in the fullness of the Spirit, the worship of the Christian community is one of the key practices and means through which the church

[59] Wright, *Mission of God's People*, 245.
[60] Piper, *Let Nations Be Glad*, 17.
[61] Wright, *Mission of God's People*, 246–47.
[62] Fowl, *Ephesians*, 178.

will be equipped to be missional. For Paul "the worshiping life of God's people and their missional function of extending that worship among the nations (such as the cosmopolitan multiethnic communities of Ephesus) were integral to each other."[63] A missional church is a worshiping church.

Prayer

The church participates in God's mission by being a worshipping community that praises and prays. Ephesians as a mission document is filled with prayers. The letter has prayer in the beginning (1:15–23), in the middle (3:14–21), and at the end (6:18–20). Paul models for the church how God's people are to be formed and equipped to be missional in their presence and practice through prayer.

Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1:15–23 expands the praise of God and the articulation of the drama of salvation that Paul presents in 1:3–14. His prayer for the church shows his desire to see the church grow in their knowledge and wisdom of God. Paul's mission included not just initial conversion of believers, but also subsequent maturity and greater experience of God through which the church is enabled to *be* the church that can truly serve God's purpose and participate in his mission in the world with faithfulness and power. Then Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:14–21 shows his utter dependence on God and God's power through the Spirit for the church to be strengthened and to be filled with God's love in order to be faithful witnesses in the world. Paul equips the church to be missional by praying for them and by encouraging them to pray. It is quite telling that the prayers in both Ephesians 1 and 3 are for the

[63] Wright, *Mission of God's People*, 249.

spiritual maturation of believers—for their growth in knowledge of God, for a greater experience of God's love, and for the fullness of God in the life of the church community. Within this framework of Paul's prayer for the church's maturation, he conceives of his own mission and encourages the church to pray for one another and also requests prayer for himself.

In Ephesians 6:18–20, Paul admonishes the church to pray "at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication . . . making supplication for all the saints" (6:18). Prayer is not just a part of the spiritual armor but the completion of the whole armor of God for the spiritual battle. Without prayer, the whole armor of God will not be sufficient for the church to faithfully perform in the drama of salvation. There is a close connection between prayer and evangelism, for the gospel of peace and the word of God are to be shared through the Spirit's power—through prayer. Therefore, it is no wonder that Paul, after encouraging the church to put on the whole armor of God and to pray with all kinds of prayers, requests that the church pray for him to fulfill his mission of "boldly proclaiming the mystery of the gospel" (6:19). D. A. Carson writes the following comments about Paul's request for prayer in Ephesians 6:19–20: "In the passage that provides the most explicit link between mission and prayer, Paul shows he is under no illusion that, apostles or not, he needs prayer and God's answers to such prayer if he is to prove faithful in his mission."[64] Paul equips the church to hold together the power of God, the power of the gospel and the power of prayer.[65] Carson offers a very helpful statement about the relationship between prayer and mission in Paul:

> We have tended to think of mission as a discrete project (or as discrete projects), often of a cross-cultural kind, with the result that special prayer for this isolable

[64] Carson, "Paul's Mission and Prayer," 181.
[65] Wright, *Mission of God's People*, 258.

> function is called for. But quite apart from the special calling on his own life as an apostle (indeed, as the apostle to the Gentiles), Paul sees mission in *holistic*, even *cosmic* terms. The glory of God, the reign of Christ, the declaration of the mystery of the gospel, the conversion of men and women, the growth and edification of the church, the defeat of the cosmic powers, the pursuit of holiness, the passion for godly fellowship and unity in the church, the unification of Jews and Gentiles, doing good to all but especially to fellow-believers—these are all woven into a seamless garment. All the elements are held together by a vision in which God is at the center and Jesus Christ effects the changes for his glory and his people's good. This means that thanksgiving and intercessory prayer, though sweeping in the range of topics touched, are held together by a unified, God-centered vision. Our more piecemeal approach looks for certain kinds of links [between prayer and mission] which for the apostle are embedded in a comprehensive vision.[66]

In summary, Paul was a man of prayer; he models how to be missional, including participating in God's mission through praise and prayer. The practice of praise and prayer with faith, love, and hope lies at the heart of being a missional church. After the instruction that is structured around the praise and prayer of Ephesians 1–3, Paul in Ephesians 4–5 highlights unity and purity are the two main virtues which drive the church's mission.[67] The next two sections will focus on missional dimension of unity and purity with which the church participates in God's mission in and for the world.

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[66] Carson, "Paul's Mission and Prayer," 182. Emphasis added.

[67] Wright ("Reading New Testament Missionally," 190) comments succinctly that in Ephesians 4, we hear the great appeal for unity; in Ephesians 5, we hear the great appeal for holiness; and in Ephesians 6, we hear the great warning about the spiritual warfare in which the church will be engaged if Jesus's followers pursue unity and holiness to be the missionary people spoken about in the first three chapters. If we were to break down the second part of Ephesians (chapter 4–6) based on the repeated imperative "walk," then we can divide it into five sections: (1) to walk in unity (4:1–16), (2) to walk in holiness (4:17–32), (3) to walk in love (5:16), (4) to walk in light (5:7–14), and (5) to walk in wisdom (5:15–6:9). The last three sections can be subsumed under the topic of walking in holiness.

Unity

A missional church is united for the gospel. When Paul's letter is seen to be not only explaining God's mission but also equipping the church to participate in God's mission, it is quite significant that Paul begins his major exhortation part of his letter with an admonition to pursue unity by being "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (4:3). His imperative to preserve unity is undergirded by the indicatives in Ephesians 4:4-6 that gives the ground for unity: "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (4:4–6). The mark of unity reflects the church's identity as the body of Christ, a new humanity, the family of God, and the army of God. A divided body of Christ cannot be missional; it would not have life or power. A divided church defeats the whole purpose of God's work of redemption to bring two humanities (Jews and Gentiles) into one. A divided family breaks God the Father's heart. A divided army is set up to lose the battle against the enemy. Unity under Christ for the gospel is an important mark of a missional church.

On the one hand, the unity of the church is a given reality because of what Christ has done; on the other hand, unity of the church is a mandate for the church to work on and pursue. Fundamentally, the church's unity is a given reality accomplished by Christ who "himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility" that he "might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, so making peace" (2:14–15). At the heart of God's mission is the restoration of fractured humanity reflected in the resolving hostility between Jews and

Gentiles through the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the goal of God's mission as articulated in Ephesians 1:10 is to "unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth." God carries out his mission by making known the manifold wisdom of God to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places through the church, reflecting God's work of restoration as the church lives out the reality of unity accomplished by Jesus Christ. Therefore, failure of unity in the church amounts to failure to manifest the truth and glory of the gospel of peace. In other words, division in the church does a fundamental disservice to the mission of God; by contrast, unity in the church powerfully witnesses to the world that Jesus is Lord.

Unity and peace are not only the *goal* of God's mission but also *means* through which the church participates in God's mission. As Fowl asserts, "the church's embodiment of this peace must be a crucial component in its mission."[68] Therefore, the church must make every effort to pursue unity. Ephesians 4:13–16 gives three means through which unity is pursued: 1) growth in Christ-like character ("attaining to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"); 2) growth in the knowledge of the truth ("speaking the truth in love"); 3) growth in service (exercising unique gift of each member of the church for the sake of building up the body of Christ).

In summary, unity of the church is not only the goal of God's mission but also a means through which God fulfills his mission of uniting all things under the headship of Christ. N.T. Wright notes the following:

> Although it seems odd to us that Paul never actually urges church communities to get on with the work of evangelism . . . he nevertheless clearly wants his young churches to live as a single, united communities, so fully shaped by the cross and the resurrection of God's missionary Messiah that they will in fact be shining like lights in a dark world. Actually, that is how Christianity spread.

[68] Fowl, *Ephesians*, 212.

> Some people had the specific vocation of evangelists; but the 'mission' of the church consisted of people being brought together in this 'new temple' reality. That community, by its very existence, demonstrated to the watching world a new way to be human, a way that came through following Jesus.[69]

A missional church pursues and fights for unity in order to fulfill the mission of God that brings unity of all things in Christ through the gospel of peace.

Purity

Not only is a missional church united for the gospel, but it also pursues purity by the power of the gospel. If the church's identity as Christ's body and God's army is lived out corporately in the pursuit of unity in their relationships with one another in Christ, the church's identity as saints and new humanity is lived out corporately in their pursuit of purity in their relationship to their past and the world. Christopher Wright comments that "Paul's mission had a strongly ethical content. There was mission beyond evangelism. It was the mission of teaching the new communities, or moral transformation into the ways of God."[70] In Ephesians 4:17–24, Paul admonishes the church to radically break from their past way of life marked by alienation from the life of God, which resulted in the futility of the mind, indulgence in sensuality, impurity, and greed. The church must live out their identity of being saints and new humanity by not only radically breaking from the old pattern of life before coming to faith in Christ, but also by adopting an attractive and alternative pattern of life, reflecting "the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:24).

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[69] Wright, "Reading New Testament Missionally," 191.
[70] Wright, *Mission of God's People*, 86.

The church as a community set apart for God as a holy priesthood must reflect God's holiness in their holy and distinct life together. Such reflection of God's holiness in their life together would in turn attract others to the church, the message of the church, and the Christ of the church. Paul's admonitions indicate that the pursuit of holiness as a missional church is not running away from the world but being an alternative society in the world. A missional church's posture in their pursuit of holiness in the world is to be marked with humility and hope. Stephen Fowl notes that following:

> The church cannot despair over the pagan culture around them; they cannot despise it, and they cannot abandon it even as they eschew its ways. Instead, they are to shine a light on it. This is not primarily to condemn the world. Rather, to the extent that the common life of Christian communities offers a beautiful and bright alternative, such communities can expect that the world around them will be drawn to God by what the world sees in their lives.[71]

The entirety of the church's life bears the witness of God's kingdom and Christ to the world. A missional church is called to bear witness not just with words but with deeds that arise out of their identity as saints and new humanity. Holy Spirit-empowered and transformed lives that reflect God's creational intentions will attract others to the missional church. Holiness, mission, and community are inseparably linked together.[72]

Ephesians affirms both the centripetal and centrifugal dynamic of church's life and mission in the world. The centripetal force of the church brings outside people into the church through their attractive life that is reflected through love, purity and generosity. The centrifugal force of the church sends God's people out into the world to be salt and light. Richard Bauckham notes that "normal biblical usage reserves the centrifugal image for individuals and the centripetal image for the community."[73] That

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[71] Fowl, *Ephesians*, 172–73.
[72] Russell, *Realigning*, 172.
[73] Bauckham, "Mission as Hermeneutics," 35.

is, "the church's mission requires both the individuals who, authorized by God to communicate his message, go out from the community to others, near or far, and also the community that manifests God's presence in its midst by its life together and its relationships to others."[74] A missional church attracts others to Christ and the church through their beautiful life together, while at the same time it also goes out to proclaim the gospel and to be salt and light in the world. In Ephesians 4:1–6:9, Paul equips the church to be missional through centripetal practices that embody the gospel of peace and holiness. Then in 6:10–20, Paul equips to be missional through centrifugal practices that proclaim the gospel.[75]

The proportion and weight of ethical emphasis in Ephesians shows that the formation of the church in unity and purity (centripetal movement) must be emphasized as much as (if not, more than) the outward action and verbal witness of the church in the world (centrifugal movement). From a centripetal force of the church's beautiful and attractive life, others may be drawn into its fellowship. Furthermore, the church would have the inner strength for the centrifugal dynamic of evangelism and outreach whereby the gospel is effectively communicated through both words and deeds.[76] A missional reading of Ephesians helps us to reimagine a missional church to have a strong internal power of unity and purity in their life together, which then spills over into external outflow of God's love into the world. While it is true that mission includes evangelism as one of its essential dimensions, the calling and the task of the church involves much

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[74] Bauckham, "Mission as Hermeneutics," 35–36

[75] Peter O'Brien (*Gospel and Mission*, 123–39) highlights "putting on shoes for spreading the gospel" (6:15) and "taking the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God" (6:17) to signify "aggressive proclamation." O'Brien calls Ephesians 6 "the Pauline Great Commission" whereby he means that "every Christian was (and is) boldly to make known the message of salvation in and through the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, whatever form it takes, mobile or stationary."

[76] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 414.

more than preaching the gospel to the nations. The way the church makes God's wisdom known is not just through what the church *says,* though that is vital as well, but also through how the church exists (i.e., its being), and what the church *does*, and especially how the church responds to suffering for the gospel.

Suffering

A missional church expresses its identity and participates in God's mission not only through worship and the pursuit of unity and purity, but also through participating in suffering. A missional reading of Ephesians equips the church to not only walk in unity and purity, but also stand grounded in the midst of suffering and spiritual warfare as an army of God. Being a missional church is marked by cruciformity, because in God's drama of salvation, the crucified Messiah is the main character whose life, death, and resurrection are the climax of the drama. The mission of God is about not only spreading the gospel's message of the crucified and resurrected Messiah but also embodying cruciform life through which the gospel is communicated to people of all nations as well as the powers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

N.T. Wright asserts that "For Paul, sharing in the Messiah's sufferings was not simply an incidental or accidental occasional by-product of following the Christian way. It was a necessary part of it."[77] Paul the apostle embodies suffering in his life and mission. Paul calls himself "a prisoner of Christ Jesus" (3:1; 4:1) and "an ambassador in chain" (6:20). He admonishes the church "not to lose heart at my tribulation on your behalf, for they are your glory" (3:13). Paul fulfills his ministry in the mission of God by

[77] Wright, "Paul and Missional Hermeneutics," 185.

living out the cruciform gospel through his suffering for Christ and the church. Paul understands the nature of God's mission through the paradoxical and subversive nature of the gospel whereby Jesus Christ conquered the powers and authorities through his death on a cross. Salvation from sin and Satan as well as reconciliation between God and hostile groups of people was made possible by the crucified Messiah. In light of the subversive and paradoxical gospel truth, Paul himself lives out and models for the church the cruciform life which in turn is to be lived out by God's people. A missional church should bear faithful witness to the gospel in the world by embodying the cruciform gospel in their personal and communal life together. A missional church is a suffering community for the sake of the gospel.

Summary

From a missional reading of Ephesians, we can see that Paul equips the church to have a clear identity as saints, the body of Christ, the new humanity, the holy temple, the family of God and the army of God. Out of its identity the church is called to be faithful witnesses (performers) of the drama of God's salvation by being marked by praise and prayer, unity and purity, as well as cruciform life. A missional church that worships and is equipped to be united, holy and suffering community will have the centripetal and centrifugal dynamic to fulfill the mission of God.

Conclusion

In this chapter I presented a missional reading of Ephesians with a canonical-narrative framework (creation, fall, redemption, and consummation) and answered how Ephesians bears a *witness* to the mission of God and how it functions as an *instrument*

of the mission of God to equip God's people in their participate of God's mission. In the following chapter, I will engage three practical theologians, whose works will be tested against the missional reading of Ephesians outlines above to gain greater insight into reimagining the formation of missional churches and missional small groups.

CHAPTER FOUR: MISSIONAL CONVERSATION WITH ALAN HIRSCH, TIMOTHY KELLER, AND MIKE BREEN

In this chapter, I will engage with the works of Alan Hirsch, Timothy Keller, and Mike Breen, using an integrative literature review. An integrative literature review aims to "assess, critique, and synthesize the literature on a research topic in a way that enables new theoretical frameworks and perspective to merge."[1] One of the main reasons I use an integrative literature review as a methodology, instead of interviews or case studies, is to test existing theological frameworks of prominent thinkers of the missional church movement against the missional reading of Ephesians. The findings from my analyses and syntheses of the three missiologists in light of my proposed missional reading of Ephesians may then provide an opportunity to reimagine the formation of missional small groups on the theoretical level which much of the missional small group conversation is occurring in. By doing so, this project will not only help me to guide my church better formulate missional small groups, but also contribute to move the missional small group conversation forward by highlighting areas of strength, improvement, and weaknesses in the contours of this practice as presently taught and described.

As mentioned in Chapter One, I have chosen to do an integrative literature review of Hirsch, Keller, and Breen, because they represent diverse theological,

[1] Snyder, "Literature Review," 335.

denominational and geographical backgrounds with wide influence over the global church. Alan Hirsch is a non-denominational charismatic movement leader who was born and raised in South Africa and then ministered in Australia, before coming to the U.S. to lead various organizations. Timothy Keller was a presbyterian minister in the U.S. with years of ministry experience in Manhattan, New York. Mike Breen is an Anglican pastor from the U.K. who is known for his innovative Missional Community model of multiplying disciples and churches. The integrative literature review will be organized by using Alan Hirsch's six elements of missional DNA (mDNA) as "a coherent conceptual structuring of the topic" of the missional church movement.[2] Hirsch's six "mDNA" elements will be analyzed and compared with what Keller and Breen describe as elements of the missional church movement. I will first present Hirsh's key ideas on cultivating a missional church and missional small groups, as Hirsch's ideas will be used to provide a basic framework to engage in comparative analyses of Keller and Breen's key ideas on the missional church and small groups. The chapter will conclude with a summary and syntheses of key insights from the three practical theologians for the formation of missional small groups.

Alan Hirsch (1959~)

Alan Hirsch is a thought leader in the missional church movement and a mission strategist for the global church. He has served as a pastor, church planter, professor, and founder of numerous global organizations, including *100Movements*, and *Forge Mission Training Network*, and *Future Travelers*. He has authored numerous books, and has

[2] Torraco, "Writing Integrative Literature Review," 359.

been an important voice in the missional church movement through his innovative and interdisciplinary approach to articulating key concepts in the missional church conversations.

Hirsch defines the missional church as "a community of God's people that defines itself, and organizes its life around its real purpose of being an agent of God's mission to the world."[3] Hirsch laments that many believers in the West have been under the spell of "the Constantinian captivity of the church" that has kept them from becoming genuinely missional.[4] Therefore, Hirsch suggests the Western church needs to begin "rethinking the paradigm, recalibrating the system, changing the metaphor, and reframing the story of the church."[5] He proposes that the church needs to reimagine what it means to be the church by "activating an apostolic imagination" and "developing movemental forms of the church."[6] Hirsch's proposal has three steps: imagination, shift, and innovation. That is, we must first tap into missional imagination that is shaped by "the *Missio Dei,* Kingdom of God, and incarnation" in order to rethink what we mean by the "church" and move on to imagine new possibilities.[7] He argues that "change must come from deep within inside the paradigm; anything less will simply be external and cosmetic."[8] Second, we must go through a shift process that involves "embedding of

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[3] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 82.
[4] Hirsch, *On the Verge*, 38.
[5] Hirsch, *On the Verge*, 39.
[6] Hirsch, *On the Verge*, 39.
[7] Hirsch, *On the Verge*, 57. Hirsch (*On the Verge,* 67) defines imagination as "the ability to visualize possibilities to form images and ideas in mind and to solve problems by being guided by the non-linear logic of intuition and insight."
[8] Hirsch, *On the Verge*, 57. Hirsch (*On the Verge,* 58) defines paradigm as "a way of trying to both understand our world and solve the problems of understanding by relying on a set of assumptions—which in turn help us interpret our situation and therefore give rise to possible solutions." In order to change the paradigm, knowledge and analytic reasoning is not enough. Hirsch (*On the Verge,* 67) argues that "it takes imagination to get us beyond the impasse of any prevailing paradigm to genuinely innovate and find our way into breakthrough creativity."

Apostolic Genius (with its symphony of six elements of mDNA) at the heart of the organization" as well as developing "a movemental ethos" and "apostolic movement practices."[9] After the process of imagining and shifting, we then move on to innovation by putting imagination to work.[10] The innovation process involves implementing a missional paradigm and mission-focused values in all the ministries of the church. The church as a missional movement is then to go through the ongoing cycle of imagination, shift, innovation continually—in order to continue to participate in God's mission with vibrancy.[11] The rest of the section will present Apostolic Genius, and the six elements of missional DNA (mDNA) which provide the paradigm and practice of a missional church that Hirsch envisions and helps us to reimagine what it means to be the missional church and form missional small groups.

Apostolic Genius

A key question in Hirsch's search for what constitutes a missional church is the following: How did the early church grow from twenty-five thousand Christians in 100 AD to twenty million by 310 AD? Hirsch proposes that the answer lies in what he calls "Apostolic Genius" and "mDNA." Coined by Hirsch, Apostolic Genius describes "the paradigm at the heart of apostolic movements."[12] Apostolic Genius is "a mindset, an approach, a phenomenon, a way of thinking and doing church."[13] It is "the primal

[9] Hirsch, *On the Verge*, 114. A definition of Apostolic Genius and the explanation of six elements of mDNA will be provided below.

[10] Hirsch, *On the Verge*, 207. Hirsch notes that "imagination is all about ideas and dreaming, but innovation is about implementing the ideas and beginning to live out the dream" (207).

[11] Hirsch, *On the Verge*, 47.

[12] Hirsch, *On the Verge*, 114.

[13] Hirsch, *On the Verge*, 139.

missional potencies of the gospel,"[14] and "the built-in life force and guiding mechanism of God's people"[15] that sparked and imbued "phenomenal Jesus movements in history."[16] According to Hirsch, Apostolic Genius is seen not only in the early church, but also in the Methodist church movement in the 18th and 19th century, the Pentecostal church movement and the Chinese underground church movement in the 20th century where disciples of Jesus grew exponentially in their unique historical contexts.

Hirsch argues that Apostolic Genius, that energized early Christian movement and other movements, is "actually latent in all true Christians and is… one of the works of the Holy Spirit in us."[17] Although Apostolic Genius is available to all Christians, "we have quite simply forgotten how to access and trigger it."[18] Hirsh argues the Apostolic Genuis lies dormant in so many Christians, because of the effect of the Christendom that stole the missional edge of the early church and put Christians to slumber. The solution proposed by Hirsch then is to *reactivate* Apostolic Genius that is innate in all Christians and churches by identifying and cultivating its constituent elements, so that we might once again be a truly transformative movement in the West. Apostolic Genius is the total phenomenon, and is composed of six elements which make up what Hirsch calls, "missional DNA" or mDNA.

[14] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 22.
[15] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 78.
[16] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 274.
[17] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 81.
[18] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 22.

Missional DNA (mDNA)

What DNA does for biological systems, mDNA does for ecclesial ones. Just as DNA is found in every living cell to self-replicate and reproduce, mDNA is found in every living church to self-replicate and multiply missional churches. mDNA is a concept used by Hirsch to explain "a simple, intrinsic, reproducible, central guiding mechanism… necessary for the reproduction and sustainability of genuine missional movement."[19] Hirsch contends that every church, indeed every Christian, has the full coding of mDNA and therefore has direct access to the power of Apostolic Genius. Nonetheless, for most of us in the West, unless it is pulled out of us by some challenges or crises, the latent mDNA lays buried and forgotten. Hirsch's ambition is to unearth it so that a missional church movement can be unleashed in the Western church. Hirsch argues that "Apostolic Genius (with its six elements of mDNA) provides us with the apostolic imagination needed to become apostolic movement."[20] The six irreducible elements of mDNA that constitute Apostolic Genius are: 1) Jesus is Lord; 2) Disciple-Making; 3) Missional-Incarnational Impulse; 4) Apostolic Environment; 5) Organic Systems; 6) Communitas. In the rest of this section, I will present these six elements of mDNA.

1. Jesus is Lord

"Jesus is Lord" over all of our life is the epicenter of mDNA and the most critical element of Apostolic Genius. "Jesus is Lord" captures Christocentric monotheism whereby the Lordship of Christ is to be over every aspect of everyday life for every follower of Jesus. Hirsch notes that the Jewish monotheism confesses that "God is one

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[19] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 76.
[20] Hirsch, *On the Verge*, 117.

and the task of our lives is to bring *every* aspect of our lives communal and individual, under this One God, YHWH."[21] Monotheism demands exclusive loyalty and worship from God's people; no idolatry can be admitted into the life of true worship. The incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ restructures monotheism around Jesus Christ, redefining it as "Christocentric monotheism" whereby our loyalty to God is realigned around the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Hirsch argues that "The first step in the recovery of Apostolic Genius is… the recovery of the Lordship of Jesus in all its utter simplicity."[22] According to Hirsch, the three-word faith confession, "Jesus is Lord," captures the heart of Christian faith and the gospel message. Hirsch notes that "the heart of all great movements is a recovery of a simple Christology"[23] and that Christology is the foundation for missiology and ecclesiology. It is Christology that determines missiology, which in turn determines ecclesiology.[24] In other words, what determines the identity of the church is the mission, and what determines its mission is the person and the work of Jesus Christ whose mission the church is to carry out in the world. Hirsch writes, "For authentic missional Christianity, Jesus the Messiah plays an *absolutely* central role. Our identity as a movement, as well as our destiny as a people, is inextricably linked to Jesus."[25] The other five elements of mDNA form themselves around Christocentric monotheism and are guided by it.

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[21] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 90.
[22] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 100.
[23] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 85.
[24] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 142.
[25] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 94. See also Hirsch and Frost*, Shaping of Things*, 105–14.

2. Disciple-Making

The second element of mDNA, disciple-making is closely linked to the first element. This element is how an individual believer lives out "Jesus is Lord" in all of life and within a missional community. This is the very task to which Jesus himself focused his effort and invested most of his time and energy, namely in the selection and development of his twelve disciples. In the Gospel narratives, Jesus is seen to have a small group of twelve disciples who were trained to carry out and continue his mission, after his death, resurrection and ascension. Those who confess the lordship of Jesus and share the mDNA of Jesus should and would be making disciples of Jesus, just as he did.

Hirsch observes that Christians in the West have lost the art of disciple-making, because of three primary factors: 1) they have reduced discipleship to accumulating knowledge in classrooms; 2) they have allowed cultural Christianity marked with easy-believism to dominate the church's life; 3) they have succumbed to consumerism. As opposed to knowledge-based discipleship, Hirsch proposes action-learning discipleship whereby we act our way into new way of thinking in the context of life and for life. To counter cultural-Christianity, Hirsh emphasizes the heart of discipleship to be character formation into Christlikeness: Christians must be little Jesuses in the world and the people around Christians should be able to see distinct qualities of life, reflected in their attitudes, words and actions. Hirsch is especially critical on consumerism's detrimental effect on disciple-making whereby churches are deemed vendors of religious goods and services and worship to be mere entertainment. Hirsch argues that "we simply cannot consume our way into discipleship!"[26] To recover this element of disciple-making in

[26] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 110.

mDNA church must initiate thoroughly prophetic challenge to consumerism's overarching control on our lives.

If the first element, "Jesus is Lord" is the epicenter of mDNA, Hirsh argues this second element of "disciple-making" is "the starting point" and "the most critical element in the mDNA mix."[27] Hirsh goes as far as to say that "if we fail with this element [of disciple-making], then we fail in all the others."[28] His rationale is that the missional church movement depends on reproducing churches; reproducing churches depends on reproducing leaders, and reproducing leaders depends on reproducing disciples—for disciples are ones who lead the missional church movement.

3. Missional-Incarnational Impulse

Missional-incarnational impulse emphasizes the dynamic outward thrust of being missional and deepening impulse of being incarnational. Missional-incarnational impulse contrasts the popular evangelistic-attractional impulse and mode of the churches in the West that tend to bring people into the church through some evangelistic programs or seeker-sensitive worship services. Hirsch acknowledges that the evangelistic-attractional way of doing church was effective at times, but argues that it is not the way the early church operated and it is not the way of the future to ignite a missional church movement. Hirsch proposes that the church needs move from the evangelistic-attractional mode to the missional-incarnational mode in order reactivate Apostolic Genius in churches.[29] The two impulses—missional and incarnational—work

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[27] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 102.
[28] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 102.
[29] This will be later challenged by Keller and especially when tested against the missional reading of Ephesians that shows the centripetal dynamic to be as important as the centrifugal dynamic for

together to be effective in contextualizing the gospel. Hirsh writes "whereas the missional impulse means that we will always take people groups seriously as distinct cultural systems, the incarnational impulse will require that we always take seriously the specific culture of a group people—seriously enough to develop a community of faith that is both true to the gospel and relevant to the culture it is seeking to evangelize."[30]

Hirsch contends that missional-incarnational impulse is grounded in the way God came to reach the world: "If God's central way of reaching his world was to incarnate himself in Jesus, then, our way of reaching the world should likewise be incarnational."[31] Missional-incarnational impulse has the following four dimensions: 1) *presence* (being part of the very fabric of a community we are trying to reach); 2) *proximity* (having genuine availability and regularity in the communities we inhabit); 3) *powerlessness* (being marked with humility and servanthood); 4) *proclamation* (transmitting the message of Christ faithfully). Incarnational ministry essentially means taking the church to the people rather than bringing people to church. Hirsch notes that "the incarnational practices are all about embedding and deepening the gospel in every people group so that they too might become God's people."[32]

One of the ways to apply the missional and incarnational impulse as a church is creating "Third Place Communities" (TPC). Whereas home is considered to First Place and work or school is considered to be Second Place, Third Place is where we spend our time when we have time off, whether it be pubs, cafés, sports centers, etc. Hirsh argues

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a church to be missional. That is, evangelistic-attractional impulse and missional-incarnational impulse should work together for a church to be missional.

[30] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 140.

[31] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 133.

[32] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 137.

that the church should leverage Third Places and build TPCs with the missional-incarnational impulse, since missional engagement may be most effective in social spaces where relationships can be built organically and evangelism and discipleship can follow once relationships are established.

4. Apostolic Environment

A missional church requires a missional leadership and ministry model. Hirsch contends that missional ministry and leadership that creates *apostolic environment* is one of the keys that unlocks the missional church movement.[33] By apostolic environment Hirsch means having five-forms of church ministry and leadership, based on his interpretation of Ephesians 4:11–16 where apostles (A), prophets (P), evangelists (E), shepherds (S) and teachers (T)—APEST—are fully utilized in the church to "equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph 4:11).[34] Hirsch provides following unique qualities of each of the five gifts: "Apostles are architecturally and missionally oriented. Prophets are questioners of the status quo, demanding faithfulness. Evangelists are recruiters of the cause—the infectious people. Shepherds (pastors) care and create community. Teachers bring wisdom and understanding."[35] Hirsch argues that without all five ministries and leadership exercised to foster all five ministries of APEST, the church cannot mature and thrive as a missional movement.

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[33] Hirsch equates missional with apostolic and uses the two terms interchangeably. He (*On the Verge*, 133) writes, "missional church *is* apostolic church" in that "the Latin word *missio* has the same meaning as the Greek word *apostello*, 'sent'!"

[34] By apostolic ministry Hirsh means a function and not an office. There is a debate as to whether the passage is referring to *offices* or *gifts* of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. For critical engagement of the text of Ephesians 4:11–16, see Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 538–47.

[35] Hirsch, *On the Verge,* 134.

He observes that many churches in the West have inherited the Christendom model of church that is led by only shepherds and teachers (ST) and neglects the ministry of apostles, prophets and evangelists (APE). Hirsch argues that such a practice "has been disastrous for the local church and has damaged the cause of Christ and his mission."[36] Hirsch asserts that the roles of APEs are significant to create a missional movement dynamic, because APEs tend to do more *extending* ministry, whereas STs tend to do more *sustaining* ministry. If only STs take on the leadership position—which is the norm in many churches in the West—then churches will tend to be in the maintenance mode and not grow outward with the missional-incarnational impulse.

Although all five ministries in dynamic relation to one another "are absolutely essential to vigorous discipleship, healthy churches, and growing movements," Hirsch argues that the apostolic ministry is foundational to create and sustain a missional movement.[37] An apostle, according to Hirsch, is "the custodian of Apostolic Genius and of the gospel"[38] who imparts and embeds mDNA. At its heart, "the apostle is a pioneer, and it is this pioneering, innovative spirit that marks it as unique in relation to the other ministries."[39] A key apostolic task is to "create environments wherein the apostolic imagination of God's people can be evoked, the spiritual gifts and ministries developed."[40] According Hirsch, without apostolic ministry the church either forgets its high calling to be missional or fails to implement it successfully.

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[36] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 169.
[37] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 159.
[38] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 153.
[39] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 155.
[40] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 162. Apostolic task includes pioneering into new territories with the gospel through church planting and overseas missions. It also includes renewing established churches and denominations to break out of a common maintenance mode and into a missional movement mode.

5. Organic Systems

If the apostolic environment is an essential element of mDNA in terms of leadership and ministry model, then organic systems, according to Hirsch, is an essential element of mDNA in terms of appropriate organizational structure for a missional movement to grow and spread exponentially. Hirsch argues that the living organic systems approach, as opposed to a mechanistic institutionalized approach, can be seen in the metaphors Scripture uses for describing the church (e.g., body, vines, and living temple).[41] Hirsh is not against structure, for all living systems require some form of structure to maintain and perpetuate their existence. What he is against is institutional*ism* where the instituted structure moves beyond providing structural support and structure becomes centralized governance. Hirsch argues that we need to "move away from institutional forms of organization and recover a movement ethos if we are going to become truly missional."[42]

Hirsch contends that the church as organic systems flourish through a relational network, rather than institutional structure. That is, a missional church as a movement should have a network structure, where power is decentralized and responsibility is diffused throughout the organization. One concrete expression of network structure in organic systems is small groups that share the apostolic movement ethos around Jesus and his mission.[43] Hirsch asserts that the organic systems, plus movement ethos that expresses itself in network structure will result in exponential growth when it is given

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[41] For example, the metaphor of body is used in 1 Cor 12:12–13; Rom 12:4–5; Eph 1:22, 2:19–22, 4:4, 5:23; Col 1:24. The metaphor of vine is used in John 15:1–8. The metaphor of living temple is used in Eph 2:19–22; 1 Pet 2:5.

[42] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 187.

[43] More on this below under a section, "Hirsch on Missional Small Groups."

the right conditions for reproducibility.[44] The right condition for Hirsch is not a safe environment, but chaotic and challenging circumstances, like that of persecutions, where Apostolic Genius imbedded in each Christian may be awakened. [45] Such a necessary condition leads to the sixth and the final element of mDNA.

6. Communitas

Hirsch argues that for a church to be truly missional, it must cultivate a culture of *communitas.* Communitas is adapted from the work of anthropologist Victor Turner, who used the term to describe the experiences that were part of the initiation ceremonies of young African boys.[46] It describes the dynamics of community inspired to be on a mission. Communitas describes a unique experience of togetherness that shares ordeal, suffering and adventure and is driven by mission.[47] In communitas friends become comrades.

Communitas is seen in the early church as well as the churches under persecution in the modern-day China and Afghanistan. It is contrasted with the many churches in the West where convenience and security are the norm and the common pursuit. Hirsch laments that the Christians in the West have structured community in isolation from any real engagement with the world, and as such they are missing a communitas experience that takes them out of our safety zones into risky engagement

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[44] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 216.

[45] Hirsch (*On the Verge*, 46) proposes a "chaordic approach" where there is enough "order" at the center to give common identity and purpose while granting enough "chaos" to give permission to creativity and innovation.

[46] Turner, *The Ritual Process.*

[47] *Communitas* is linked with the experience of liminality, which describes a threshold situation of danger and disorientation where *Communitas* may emerge.

with the world.[48] In the West under the influence of consumerist mentality (that values comfort and convenience) and the middle-class lifestyle (that pursues safety and security), the church has become a spiritual hospital at best and an entertainment center at worst. In such a kind of community where people "gather and amuse," they move away from the missional mindset of "me for the community and the community for the world" to a consumptive mindset of "the community for me."[49] In order for the church to recover the missional edge, it must provide opportunities for members to face challenges together for the sake of the mission. Hirsch argues that unless the church moves intentionally from community to communitas, it will lose its missional impact and be slowly destroyed.[50]

Hirsh on Missional Small Groups

When it comes to formation of the missional small groups, Hirsch observes that the New Testament church was a network of fluid small groups with all six elements of mDNA. While there were bigger "hubs" like Antioch, Jerusalem and Rome, the majority of churches were house churches. Instead of going to church on Sundays and being disconnected from the rest of lives from Monday to Saturday, these home churches were fluid groups of believers who were dynamically involved in all spheres of life together. Hirsch argues that it is within such a network structure that Apostolic Genius seems to manifest more fully. When a church runs with organic system around "natural discipling friendships, worship as lifestyle and mission in the context of everyday life" instead of

[48] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 231.
[49] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 218–19.
[50] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 220.

"buildings, worship services and pastoral care," it is not only in tune with the actual rhythms of life itself, but also "in the right condition for reproducibility and exponential growth."[51]

A small group is where covenant and obedience-based discipleship is lived out together. Hirsch calls it a "T.E.M.P.T." group where the acronym stands for five core practices: "Together we follow" (T) emphasizes facilitating maximum participation by all people in the small group. "Engagement with Scripture" (E) puts Scripture at the center to integrate all of life. "Mission" (M) focuses on serving others outside the group. "Passion for Jesus" (P) is to be expressed in prayer and praise. "Transformation" (T) aims for character development through accountability. Hirsch emphasizes that in small groups mission is the central practice that binds other practices. Hirsch argues that small groups are to become "the actually primary experience of church rather than just being a program of the church." [52] Furthermore, he suggests that small groups meet weekly, tribal groups (a collection of small groups in a region) meet monthly, and all the tribes meet biannually in a movement-wide network. The primary expression of discipleship, worship, and mission would thus take place at the level of small groups, while the regional (tribal) coordination would ensure healthy development of leaders and the network. Hirsch rejects historical denominationalism and other centralized forms of authority and organization. Hirsch espouses this "house church" or "simple church" model to facilitate the missional church movement. In such a model small group ministry takes the primary importance in the formation of a missional church.

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[51] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 185, 216.
[52] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 46.

Timothy Keller (1950–2023)

Timothy Keller was an American pastor, theologian, apologist, and church-planting movement leader. He was the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, which he started in 1989. Over three decades of his ministry at Redeemer, the church grew to a weekly attendance of 5,000 people and established other ministry centers, like Redeemer City to City (CTC), Redeemer Counseling Services, Hope for New York, Center for Faith & Work, etc. After stepping down as Senior Pastor of Redeemer in 2017, he transitioned to serve full-time in Redeemer CTC, a ministry that has helped start more than one thousand churches in more than one hundred fifty cities, and train or reached more than seventy-nine thousand leaders. Keller also co-founded the Gospel Coalition (TGC), "a fellowship of evangelical churches in the Reformed tradition," has taught in various institutions, and have written numerous books.

Keller is considered to represent "the best of 'missional' thinking … that is suited to the pluralistic cityscape of the post-Christian West."[53] Goheen and Sheridan assess that "Keller's missionary reorientation to the local congregation" have led to "a breadth and integration of the various aspects of a missionary church that is unmatched among most contemporary authors on this subject."[54] They observe that Keller's "rich experience of planting and pastoring a church in the major urban setting of New York City, along with his ability to reflect on his experience in his reading and writing on his ministry, has provided a valuable and rich resource for what a missionary church can look like."[55] Keller's key ideas on the missional church movement are mainly reflected

[53] Leeman, "Book Review: Center Church," para. 11.
[54] Goheen and Sheridan, *Becoming Missionary Church*, 207.
[55] Goheen and Sheridan, *Becoming Missionary Church*, 207.

and presented in his book *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City,* which has three main parts. The first part, "Gospel" provides doctrinal foundation, examines the nature of the gospel, and sets the gospel apart from religion (legalism) and irreligion (relativism). The gospel is the foundation of the missional church and the missional church movement. The second part, "City," provides a theological vision to proliferate the gospel in the city, and focuses on contextualizing the gospel which is neither assimilating to culture nor withdrawing from the culture, but is both affirming and confronting culture with the gospel. The third part, "Movement," provides Keller's critical engagement with the missional church movement, and articulates the marks of a missional church that proliferates the gospel movement in the city.

In this section, I will present Keller's critical engagement with the missional church conversation, his description of the six elements of a missional church, and missional small groups. Throughout the presentation I will provide comparative analyses between Keller and Hirsch.

Keller on Three Concerns in the Missional Church Conversations

On the one hand, Keller expresses much appreciation and agreement with those in the missional church conversation, especially around the key notions such as the church as a contrast community, contextualization of the message, and for justice *as well as* church growth. On the other hand, Keller has at least three concerns with the missional church conversation.

First, Keller is critical of some proponents of the missional church movement who tend to have a narrow vision of what being missional is. For instance, conservative evangelicals narrowly equate being missional with being evangelistic. Liberal counterparts narrowly equate being missional with being communal and participating in social justice.[56] Keller corrects the narrow understanding of being missional by both conservative and liberal, noting that a missional church is much more than an evangelistic church or social justice church. Instead, a missional church is one that has fundamentally reformulated its ministry philosophy—as Keller says, "absolutely everything it does in worship, discipleship, community, and service—so as to be engaged with the non-Christian society around it."[57] For example, if the church's worship is missional, it would make sense to nonbelievers in that culture, even while it challenges and shapes Christians with the gospel. If the church's discipleship is missional, it would include addressing the needs of the local community and practicing compassion and justice, even while it teaches people how to contextualize the gospel. I believe that Hirsch would agree with Keller's first concern, as outlined above.

Second, Keller is critical of some constituents in the missional church conversation who lack a clear understanding and articulation of the gospel. For example, Keller analyzes Dieter Zander whose article, "Abducted by an Alien Gospel," has no mention of the cross or why it was necessary for Jesus to die.[58] He considers this to be a very serious problem, especially of those who see being missional as primarily being communal. Keller observes that many in that camp tend to present the mission of the

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[56] See footnote 45 in Chapter Two where I summarize four branches in the missional church conversation as presented by Van Gelder and Zscheile's *Missional Church*, 67–98.

[57] Keller, "Missional Church," 1.

[58] Keller, *Serving Movement*, 45–52.

church to be mainly about incorporating people "into a new community that partners with God in redeeming social structure and healing the world," but who do so without emphasizing the need for each individual to be restored in their personal relationship with God.[59] They tend to redefine sin and salvation completely in terms of corporate or horizonal terms. In so doing, they tend to exclude the classic doctrine regarding sin as an offense against God's holiness that incurs his righteous wrath, as well as the traditional doctrine of the substitutionary atonement that emphasizes God's radical grace. As a result, the need for personal reconciliation with God through faith and repentance is virtually eliminated in many proponents of the missional church conversation.[60] Although Hirsh's vision for the church's missions is clearly centered around Christology ("Jesus is Lord" over all of life), it is noticeable that he does not emphasize the wrath of God, substitutionary atonement, and radical grace in his presentation of the gospel. In fact, there is absence of emphasis on the gospel in Hirsch's overall treatment of the missional church whereas in Keller's not only is the gospel foundational (taking up the one third of the book, *Center Church),* but its implications are emphasized throughout the treatment of various topics, including small group ministry.[61]

Third, Keller is critical of some proponents in the missional church conversation who tend to lean towards a particular *form* that a missional church should take. This last concern is a direct criticism of Hirsch who (as described above) insists that to be missional is to be "smaller, more diverse, less organized, life-oriented… relational, faith

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[59] Keller, *Serving Movement*, 42.

[60] Keller, *Serving Movement*, 46.

[61] It must be noted that Keller's description of the gospel is quite specific in emphasizing the doctrines in the Reformed tradition. For Hirsch it is the doctrine of Christology that takes the central and foundational place, whereas for Keller it is the gospel. For a critical analysis of Keller's point, see Goheen and Sheridan, *Becoming Missionary Church*, 185–251.

communities, not requiring their own specialized church buildings"[62] Keller argues that the idea that "the missional church is the smaller house church" is shortsighted, and that "no single form of church (small or large, cell group based or mid-sized community based) is intrinsically better at growing spiritual fruit, reaching non-believers, caring for people, and producing Christ-shaped lives."[63] Keller observes that each approach to church—the small, organic, simple incarnational church, and the large, organizational, complex attractional church—has vastly different strengths and weaknesses, limitations and capabilities, whereby all kinds are thriving and all kinds are failing. For Keller the missional church can take many different forms; what makes a church missional is not the form, but something deeper in terms of the theological vision and overall ministry philosophy. I now turn to what makes a church missional, according to Keller.

Keller on Six Marks of a Missional Church

Whereas Hirsch proposed six elements of mDNA Keller proposes six marks of a missional church that will "reach and disciple unchurched, nontraditional nonbelievers in our society."[64]

1. Confronting Idols

First, a missional church must confront society's idols. In the modern West one of the most prominent idols include happiness and self-actualization of the individual, manifested in materialism, consumerism and greed that lead to injustice. This first mark

[62] Hirsch and Frost, *Shaping of Things*, 211.
[63] Keller, *Serving Movement*, 44–45.
[64] Keller, *Serving Movement*, 52.

is basically in line with Hirsch's first element of "Jesus is Lord" that demands exclusive worship of and loyalty to Jesus. Whereas Hirsch uses Christology to counter idolatry, Keller uses the gospel to do the same. That is, what is distinct in Keller's approach in confronting idols is his intentional focus on the gospel. Keller argues that "the classic messages of substitutionary atonement and forensic justification" provide "both a strong theological basis and a powerful internal motivation" to confront the idols, "to live more simply and to do justice in the world."[65] Idols are confronted by the gospel message that changes people's hearts, desires and choices.

2. Skillful Contextualization

Second, a missional church must contextualize skillfully and communicate in the vernacular. That is, the church must recognize that traditional and even most of the more recently formulated and popular gospel presentations will fall on deaf ears for most Westerners. People in the post-Christendom societies do not share the concepts of God, sin and salvation that were part of the plausibility structure in Christendom. What is needed is not changing the classic Christian doctrines, but contextualizing the gospel by using the vernacular so that people understand the message of the gospel, even if they are not fully persuaded by them. An important practice of the contextualizing the gospel is connecting with the culture by "carefully challenging, yet also appealing to the baseline cultural narratives of the society around them."[66] Keller suggests that contextualizing the gospel includes at least three steps of *entering, challenging* and

[65] Keller, *Serving Movement*, 52.
[66] Keller, *Serving Movement*, 42.

retelling the culture's stories with the gospel.[67] First, we are to *enter* the culture's story by showing sympathy toward and deep acquaintance with the existing culture's hopes, dreams, and fears reflected in the literature, music, movies, and etc. Second, we are to *challenge* the culture's stories by showing how the culture's longing for and pursuit of the good, freedom, justice, and beauty fails apart from Christ. Third, we are to *retell* the culture's story with the gospel by showing the fulfillment of those longings through Christ. Keller's second mark of a missional church is in line with the third elements of Hirsch's mDNA, "missional-incarnational impulse." Both Keller and Hirsch emphasize entering into people's lives with our presence through "incarnational lifestyle." Keller, however, puts more emphasis on the verbal witness of the gospel compared to Hirsch.

3. Equipping the Whole People of God for a Missional Living

Third, a missional church must affirm that all Christians are people on mission in every area of their lives and therefore equip them to think Christianly about everything. According to Keller, three important aspects of equipping the members for missional living include: (1) bearing witness to the gospel in their webs of relationships; (2) loving their neighbors and doing justice within their neighborhoods and city; and, (3) integrating their faith with their work in order to engage culture through their vocations.[68] Keller emphasizes that Christians must be equipped to live a missional life outside the walls of the church and to work with Christian distinctiveness in the public square. He suggests that Christians in the marketplaces must learn to live in the tension of embracing cultural practices that are under common grace on the one hand and also

[67] Keller, *Serving Movement*, 53.
[68] Keller, *Serving Movement*, 53.

rejecting any practices that are against the gospel truth. Furthermore, they are to work towards renewing the cultural practices to be aligned to God's values and vision of restoring all creation.[69] Keller's third mark of a missional church is in line with Hirsch's second elements of mDNA, "discipleship," which emphasizes embodying the message of the gospel in every area of life. What is distinct in Keller's third mark is its unique emphasis on equipping God's people to integrate their faith in their work in order to engage culture through their vocations.[70]

4. Serving for the Good of the Society

Fourth, a missional church must be a servant community that works for the common good of society. To be missional requires that Christians are equipped to not only bear verbal witness to the gospel, but also to do deeds of compassion and justice in their neighborhoods and the city. Keller asserts that a missional church must be "deeply and practically committed to deeds of compassion and social justice than traditional liberal churches, and more deeply and practically committed to evangelism and conversion than traditional fundamentalist churches."[71] The church's servant posture and sacrificial work towards the good of the city will attract others to Christ. This fourth mark of a missional church is in line with Hirsch's missional-incarnational impulse (the third element of mDNA) that penetrates into the life of the society, serving the need of the people as well as sharing the good news of the gospel.

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[69] For Keller's treatment of faith-work integration, see Keller, *Every Good Endeavor.*

[70] Keller, *Serving Movement,* 164. Undergirding this mark is Keller's emphasis on the priesthood of all believers in all areas of life: Keller argues that "we must overcome the clericalism and lay passivity of the Christendom era and recover the Reformation doctrine of 'the priesthood of all believers.'" (Keller, *Serving Movement*, 53).

[71] Keller, "Missional Church," 3.

5. Intentional Engagement with Nonbelievers

Fifth, a missional church must be, in a sense, 'porous' by including nonbelievers and doubters as much as possible in the church, so that they can see the gospel being fleshed out in life together. Keller argues that we should "expect nonbelievers, inquirers, and seekers to be involved in most aspects of the church's life and ministry—in worship, small and midsized groups and service projects in the neighborhoods."[72] However, this fifth mark is only possible if the church has the first four marks of being a missional church where "almost all parts of the church's life" are ready to "respond to the presence of the people who do not yet believe."[73]

This fifth mark is one of the distinctive marks in Keller, comparted to Hirsch's missional church framework that is critical of a evangelistic-attractional model. Hirsch emphasizes, through his notion of the missional-incarnational impulse, that the church should enter into people's spaces or create "Third Place Communities." Keller would not necessarily disagree with Hirsch's approach, but as a Presbyterian pastor in an established denomination, Keller works within the institutional church and partnering organization to attract non-believers, skeptics, and seekers into the life of the church, and ultimately to Christ. Keller's approach shows that there are different models of engaging non-believers. In fact, an evangelistic-attractional model works well in churches that are more established but are intentionally missional. There is no one-model-fits-all approach when it comes to engaging the people outside the church.

[72] Keller, *Serving Movement*, 54.
[73] Keller, *Serving Movement*, 54.

6. Pursuit of Unity with other Churches

Sixth, a missional church should practice Christian unity on the local level as much as possible. In Christendom contexts it was common, and sometime even necessary, for a church to distinguish itself over against other churches by highlighting differences in theologies or practices. However, in post-Christendom contexts where churches are marginalized in the society, Keller argues that it is important that churches not spend their energy criticizing other churches. Rather, churches of all stripes and denominations must work together for gospel ministry in the city. A missional church would thus partner and collaborate with other churches and organizations to reach the people of the city and to facilitate a citywide gospel movement.[74] In arguing for collaboration, Keller asserts that "There simply is no one denomination or tradition that is historically strong in all of these areas—evangelism *and* formation, …mercy and justice *and* faith and work integration, *and* historic Christians sexual ethics. Who is sufficient for these things? No one of us, or no one church."[75] This final mark is unique to Keller, though one may argue that it is in line with Hirsch's fifth element of mDNA, "organic systems" where he emphasizes network structures for the gospel movement.[76]

In summary, Keller's six marks of a missional church have many overlaps and complementary features with Hirsch's six elements of mDNA.[77] There are some unique

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[74] Keller notes the gospel city movement is made possible ultimately by the work of the Holy Spirit, but is also made possible by gospel ecosystem that is made up of interdependent organizations, individuals, and ideas. See *Serving Movement*, 235–47.

[75] Keller, *How to Reach*, 58.

[76] The sixth and the final mark of a missional church alluded to a movement dynamic in a missional church, as a missional church has a movement dynamic not only inside itself, but also beyond itself, so it will naturally be involved in church planting. That is, for a missional church, church planting is natural and organic, not special or episodic. See, Keller, *Serving Movement*, 216–33.

[77] One of the key differences that was not mentioned in presenting Keller's six marks of a missional church in relation to Hirsch's six elements of mDNA is Hirsch's "Apostolic leadership" and APEST leadership and ministry structure. Keller suggest a tripartite model of ministry and leadership

features that Keller highlights that Hirsch does not, like pursuit of unity with other churches, and evangelical-attractional model of reaching non-believers. A more in-depth comparative analyses will be done below and in the next chapter. For now, I turn to Keller's vision of small groups ministry.

Keller on Small Group as a Part of Integrative and Balanced Ministry

According to Keller, it is important that small group ministry is understood in relation to other ministries of the church. In promoting and cultivating a missional church, Keller emphasizes pursuing an integrative and balanced ministry, centered around the gospel. Keller writes,

> Because the gospel not only converts nonbelievers, but also builds up believers, the church should not have to choose evangelism over discipleship. Because the gospel is presented to the world not only through word, but also through deed and community, we should not choose between teaching and carrying out practical ministry to address people's needs. Because the gospel renews not only individuals but also communities and culture, the church should disciple its people to seek personal conversion, deep Christian community, social justice, and cultural renewal in the city.[78]

That is, anything less than an integrated, multifaceted ministry fails to accurately depict the complexity of the gospel. Additionally, from the integrative ministry perspective, the elements of a missional church must be present in every area of the church, whether it be worship, discipleship, missions or small group ministry. In explaining the importance

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(prophet, priest, and king) and works with a traditional leadership model of 'Pastor-Teacher' to be the main facilitator and equipper to form a missional congregation. Keller agrees with Hirsch, however, that "the current model—that all ministry roles and leadership power reside in the ordained minister/pastor—is neither biblical nor able to promote renewal and movement dynamic" (Keller, "Response to Alan Hirsch," 267). Keller is open to "varied, multi-role Christian ministry" that has similarities to Hirsch's APEST model. Keller acknowledges that though the apostolic office had ceased, some have unusual gifts of leadership that should be recognized. Hirsch comments that "the wonderful irony is that though Keller admits to being something of a cessationist regarding his theology of Ephesians 4, he remains one of the best examples of today's apostolic leaders" (Hirsch, "Reflections on Movement Dynamics," 263).

[78] Keller, *Serving Movement*, 103.

of the balanced and integrative ministry of a missional church, Keller describes four ministry fronts: 1) Connecting people to God (through evangelism and worship); 2) Connecting people to one another (through community and discipleship where small group will play an important part); 3) Connecting people to the city (through mercy and justice); 4) Connecting people to the culture (through the integration of faith and work).[79] It is the second ministry front, "Connecting people to one another," where the small group ministry would be practiced. However, it must be highlighted that one cannot consider the small group ministry independently from other ministry fronts, for all ministries are intricately interconnected, such that "success on any one front depends on success in the other fronts of ministry."[80] Keller argues that "if we don't make a strong effort to do *all* of these in some way at once, we won't actually do *any* of them well at all."[81] Integrative and balanced ministry means placing small group ministry on an equal platform with large group worship gatherings, mercy ministries and faith and work ministries, and other ministries of the church. All ministries, including small groups, exist to move the church forward in its mission.

When it comes to small group ministry, Keller notes that forming a missional small group goes beyond any program. What makes a small group missional is "not necessarily one which is doing some kind of specific 'evangelism' program (though that is to be recommended)."[82] Keller writes the following six characteristics of a missional small group: 1) group members love and talk positively about the city/neighborhood; 2)

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[79] Keller notes that church planting may be added as the fifth element, since a missional church has a movement dynamic not only inside itself, but also beyond itself. When evangelism and discipleship done at a local church is done at a city level in a larger scale, it becomes a church planting movement.

[80] Keller, *Serving Movement*, 104.

[81] Keller, *Serving Movement*, 104. Italics original.

[82] Keller, "Missional Church," 3.

they speak in language that is not filled with pious tribal or technical terms and phrase, nor disdainful and embattled language; 3) they apply the gospel to the core concerns and stories of the people of the culture; 4) they are interested in and engaged with the literature and art and thought of the surrounding culture and can discuss it both appreciatively and yet critically; 5) they exhibit deep concern for the poor and generosity with their money; they exhibit purity and respect with regard to opposite sex, and show humility toward people of other race and cultures; 6) they do not bash other Christians and churches.[83] Those six elements reflect the six marks of a missional church noted above. If the six characteristics are embodied in small groups, Keller argues that "seekers and non-believing people from the city will be invited and will come and will stay as they explore spiritual issues."[84] If the marks are not there, it will only be able to include believers or traditional "Christianized" people.

Table 1: Six Marks of a Missional Small Group by Keller

Six Marks of a Missional Small Group	**Corresponding Six Marks of a Missional Church**
Love the people of the city and talk positively about the city/neighborhood	Skillful contextualization; Serving for the good of the society
Speak in the vernacular	Skillful contextualization; Intentional engagement with non-believers
Apply the gospel to the concerns and stories of the people in the city	Skillful contextualization
Engage with the surrounding culture with appreciation and constructive criticism	Skillful contextualization; Equipping the whole people of God for missional living
Care for the poor; generosity with money, sexual purity, humility towards other races	Confronting the idols; Serving for the good of the society
Pursue unity with other churches	Pursuing unity with other churches

[83] Keller, "Missional Church," 3.
[84] Keller, "Missional Church," 3.

Mike Breen (1958~)

Along with Alan Hirsch and Timothy Keller, Mike Breen is considered to be one of the most prominent thinkers and practitioners in the missional church movement. He has been involved in leading discipleship movements throughout post-Christendom Europe and the U.S. for more than 30 years. Having been ordained as a minster in the Church of England, he started out as a curate in Cambridge in 1984. Then from 1987 to 1991 he served as an Anglican priest in a very poor section of London called Brixton, where he infused a small group ministry with a missional intentionality. This experience and practice of missional small groups at Brixton was the seedbed of Missional Communities which came to full fruition in his next ministry at Sheffield.[85] From 1994 he served as the senior rector of St. Thomas in Sheffield where he formed clusters of twenty to forty people of multiple small groups together for missional purposes. These mid-sized groups of Missional Communities began to grow and multiply to make St. Thomas the largest church in England by the turn of the decade. During his time at Sheffield, he also began The Order of Missions (TOM), which grew to become a global network of missional leaders who share the values of living in "purity, accountability and simplicity" as an evangelical monastic order. In 2004 Breen moved to the U.S., and partnered with the Leadership Network to lead an initiative into church planting movement in Europe. Through his leadership, more than seven hundred churches were planted in three years. Since 2008 he has been leading 3D Movement (3DM), which helps established church and church planters to cultivate a

[85] "Missional Communities" are also called "clusters" and will be explained further below. Breen shares the stories of his ministry at Brixton and Sheffield in chapter one of his book, *Multiplying Missional Leaders,* as well as in Part 2 of his book, *Leading Kingdom Movements.*

discipling and missional way of being church. Currently he serves as the teaching pastor at Apex Church in Dayton, Ohio, while leading Discipling Culture Collective (in which 3DM is a part) that offers coaching and consulting to help create a discipling culture in churches. Breen has taught at Fuller Theological Seminary, and has written a series of books on the missional church. In this section, I will present Breen's key ideas and principles for formation of the missional church, founded on the Great Commission of "making disciples." I will also provide Breen's unique contribution to formation of missional small groups through what he calls, "clusters" or a mid-sized group of "Missional Community." Throughout the presentation I will provide comparative analysis between Breen, Hirsch and Keller.

Missional Church through Building a Discipleship Culture

Breen defines mission as "God's activity of love towards the world."[86] God's mission is based on who he is as "a sending God, a going God, a God who incarnates himself into a specific time and context, so that every person may come to know and love him."[87] Working with the theological framework of *missio Dei,* Breen notes that the church's mission is grounded in God's mission and that all Christians are sent out for God's mission in the world.

At the heart of Breen's thesis on cultivating a missional church is discipleship.[88] Breen argues that the formation of a missional church is a fruit of good discipleship. The

[86] Breen and Absalom, *Launching Missional Community,* 21.
[87] Breen and Absalom, *Launching Missional Community,* 21.
[88] A series of books on missional community by Breen begins with first one entitled, *Building Discipling Culture: How to Release a Missional Movement by Discipling People like Jesus Did.* Subsequent books in the series build upon that foundational notion of "building a discipling culture" towards establishing the missional church.

church need cultivation of inner strength—through discipleship—to produce the external fruit. Breen observes that church leaders who did not want their churches be "inwardly-focused" ironically stopped investing in discipling people in their churches so they could focus on "people outside their churches."[89] Without discipling people inside the church, however, there would be no missional impulse or centrifugal force to make an impact outside the church. Breen argues that "our chief concern must be the inner world, living out of a place of sustained connection with the Father."[90] It is faithful discipleship that leads to fruitful missions. Without strong discipleship, there is no mission nor church. Breen asserts, "if you set out to build the church, there is no guarantee you will make disciples. It is far more likely that you will create consumers who depend on the spiritual services that religious professionals provide."[91] Cutting right through the missional church conversation around how missional churches and missional small groups are formed, he diagnoses that "the problem is not that we have a 'missional' problem or a leadership problem in the Western church. We have a discipleship problem. If you know how to disciple people well, you will always get mission."[92]

Breen takes his cue from Jesus's own model that focused on discipling his twelve disciples and from the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20) whereby "making disciples" of all nations is at the heart of Jesus's mission in the world. Breen's theological logic is such that at the heart of *missio Dei* is discipleship which will result

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[89] Breen, *Building Discipling Culture*, 12.
[90] Breen, *Building Discipling Culture*, 17.
[91] Breen, *Building Discipling Culture*, 11. This comment is very similar to Hirsch's diagnosis and proposal that emphasizes disciple-making as a key element in mDNA.
[92] Breen, *Building Discipling Culture*, 12.

in the formation of a missional church. Breen's emphasis on discipleship is in line with Hirsch's emphasis on the disciple-making element being "the starting point" and "the most critical element in the mDNA mix."[93] It is also in line with Keller's third mark of a missional church being "equipping the whole people of God for a missional living." One thing that distinguishes Breen from both Hirsch and Keller is the vehicle of forming a missional church, to which I now turn.

Missional Community as the Vehicle of the Missional Church

Whereas Hirsch advocates small and organic house churches to be the catalyst and agent of activating a missional church movement, and Keller deprioritizes a form or size of a church and emphasizes the gospel and the theological vision to be worked out in any form or size of missional church, Breen argues that a mid-sized group with a missional vision is the most effective vehicle to bring about missional church movement. Originally called a "cluster," Missional Communities are "a group of approximately twenty to forty people who are seeking to reach a particular neighborhood or network of relationships with the good news of Jesus."[94] Breen notes the following features about Missional Communities:

> With a strong value on life together, the group has the expressed intention of seeing those they impact choose to start following Jesus, through this more flexible and locally incarnated expression of the church. The result will often be that the group will grow and ultimately multiply into further Missional Communities. They are most often networked within a larger church community (often with many other Missional Communities). These mid-sized communities, led by laity, are 'lightweight and low maintenance' and most often gather both formally and informally numerous times a month in their missional context[95]

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[93] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 102.
[94] Breen, *Leading Missional Communities*, 6.
[95] Breen, *Leading Missional Communities*, 11.

Missional Communities gather around a vision for mission from the inception of the group formation. The outward-focus to reach out to those outside of Missional Communities is not just one aspect of the group but the core purpose of the group's existence. The key purpose for Missional Communities is sharing the gospel and making disciples among the people of a specific neighborhood or network of relationships. Missional Communities emphasize living among and working with the people or place they are seeking to impact. This 'incarnational principle' (similar to Hirsch's "missional-incarnational impulse") helps prevent Missional Communities from "becoming a series of service projects performed by people who are disconnected relationally from those they are serving."[96] Such an emphasis on relationship-based evangelism fosters integrity of life, because people would not be interested in hearing the gospel unless the life of the Missional Community members are attractive enough to make them curious or to lend their ears to hear the gospel. Like Keller's balanced approach to reach the lost that includes doing good works and sharing the good news, Missional Communities' relational approach necessitates bearing witness to Christ through the demonstration through good deeds and proclamation of the good news.

What is unique about Missional Communities is that they intentionally form a mid-sized group of 20–40 people.[97] That is, Missional Communities are bigger than small groups (4–12 people) and smaller than the whole church (of more than 50 people). They seek to be small enough to care for one another, but also big enough to dare to do

[96] Breen, *Leading Missional Communities*, 9.

[97] Missional Communities can be either a new church plant or more commonly, a subset of a larger gathered church. Missional Communities are similar to what Hirsch calls "Tribal Groups" as a collection of small groups, but also different from Tribal Groups, because they are formed with a missional purpose together as a mid-sized group.

something missional together.[98] Why mid-sized groups? Why not just make small groups more missional? Breen offers both empirical and sociological reasons. First, empirically transitioning small groups to be missional fails in many churches because there is "never enough momentum due to the size."[99] According to Breen, group size matters to create a missional dynamic and to sustain missional movement. Breen's observation is that small groups are great for mutual care, but not for doing missions on their own. That is, small groups are "small enough to care, but not big enough to dare."[100]

Second, sociologically Breen uses Edward Hall's concept of proxemics to distinguish between four spaces that have different purposes: 1) Public space is for celebration involving more than hundred people (e.g., Sunday corporate worship); 2) Social space is for Missional Community of twenty to fifty people; 3) Personal space is for small groups of three to twelve people; 4) Intimate space is for one to two people.[101] A healthy church community will provide at least the first three types of spaces for people to access and experience different kinds of engagement and relational dynamic.[102] Breen acknowledges that "the challenge for church leaders is to offer high quality experiences in the different spaces, notably weekend services, Missional Communities, and small groups."[103] Most churches invest a lot on gatherings in public

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[98] Within a Missional Communities there are small groups for personal relationships, mutual support and challenge.

[99] Breen and Absalom, *Launching Missional Community*, 49.

[100] Breen and Absalom, *Leading Missional Community*, 7.

[101] Breen and Absalom, *Launching Missional Communities*, 43–52. Cf. Hall, *Hidden Dimension*. See Myers, *Search to Belong* which articulates the four spaces and applies Hall's concept of proxemics to church and especially to small group ministry.

[102] Intimate space cannot be organized, but comes about through organic means. The smaller the group, the harder it is to organize it on behalf of someone else.

[103] Breen, *Launching Missional Community*, 49.

space (e.g., Sunday worship) and in personal space (e.g., small groups), and not so much on social space where the lost can be reached through meaningful engagement. In a large group of more than 50 people, it is challenging to foster meaningful connection and personal care and support; in a small group of 3 to 12, it is challenging to have missional resource and impetus. In a mid-sized group of 20 to 50 people, where people can have a sense of belonging—along with a missional purpose and practice to impact a particular network of relationships or neighborhood, they can foster meaningful connection and have resources for missions together. As such, Breen acknowledges that the size of the group can help make Missional Communities be a catalyst for missional church movement. I now turn to what undergirds formation of a healthy and thriving Missional Community as proposed by Breen.

Breen on Six Key Elements for Formation of Missional Communities

Breen proposes that there are four elements that contributes to the formation of a thriving Missional Community.[104] In order to do comparative analyses of the literatures by Breen vis-à-vis ones by Hirsch and Keller who have provided six elements or marks of a missional church, I have come up with six elements by adding two more elements out of repeated themes in Breen's books on Missional Community.[105]

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[104] Breen, *Leading Missional Communities,* 13–39. The four elements include discipleship (framework), the gospel (core foundation), person of peace (strategy), organized and organic (structure).

[105] Breen's books include *Building Discipling Culture*, *Leading Missional Communities, Multiplying Missional Leaders, Leading Kingdom Movements, Launching Missional Communities: A Field Guide,* and *Family on Mission.* A series of books on Missional Community by Breen begins with *Building Discipling Culture.* Subsequent books in the series build upon that foundational notion of "building a discipling culture" towards establishing Missional Communities.

1. The Gospel

The first element is the gospel. Breen asserts that Missional Communities are to be a community of the gospel. The gospel is to be the center of a Missional Community, since it exists not only to draw people into new life in Christ, but also to have the gospel be "fleshed out in community."[106] Breen argues that the heart of the gospel is receiving and experiencing a new life in Jesus Christ. The gospel is not mainly about "going to heaven" when a person dies. Rather, the gospel is "the good news that you can begin a new kind of life with God *right now* by placing your trust in Jesus and his words."[107] Unlike many in the missional church conversation who neglect the substitutionary atonement aspect of the gospel, Breen follows Keller in emphasizing Christ's substitutionary death as an important aspect of the good news, alongside Christ's victorious resurrection.

Breen brings two focal points together in presenting the gospel: first, the good news of Christ's substitution on our behalf, how he took on the wrath we deserved (which Breen captures with the notions of "covenant"), and second, Jesus' victory over the powers of darkness, defeating the enemy who held us in bondage (which Breen captures with the notion of "kingdom").[108] Furthermore, Breen ties the gospel in with mission by noting how the gospel is not only an "invitation to participate now in the life of God," but also "joining him in what he is doing right now on earth."[109] Breen uses the concepts of *covenant* and *kingdom* to bring together our calling into a relationship with

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[106] Breen, *Leading Missional Communities*, 21.
[107] Breen, *Leading Missional Communities*, 21.
[108] Breen, *Leading Missional Communities*, 23.
[109] Breen, *Leading Missional Communities*, 22. Although Breen attempts to present the gospel in its many facets, using the concepts of covenant and kingdom, in so doing, he falls into the danger of conflating the gospel (what God has done through Christ for us) with the gospel implications (what we get to do as ones who are called and saved, including participating in God's mission).

God (covenant) and the responsibility of representing God to others (kingdom) in order to capture the missional dynamic of the gospel. Breen summarizes that "Jesus built a discipling culture by bringing to those who followed him an invitation to a Covenant relationship and a challenge to join God in the mission of the Kingdom."[110]

2. Person of Peace (POP)

The second element for the formation of Missional Communities is a Person of Peace (POP). This element is a distinct element that Hirsch and Keller do not include in their elements of a missional church. This concept of a POP emerges from Jesus's instruction in Luke 10:1–16, and is a simple biblical strategy of seeking the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Missional Communities intentionally seek God's prior work in the neighborhood or network of relationships by looking for a POP, who is not a believer yet, but is very open to Christians and Christian message. Breen suggests that "finding a Person of Peace means discovering where God is already at work in the neighborhood or network of relationships you are seeking to reach."[111]

POPs are people who welcome, receive, serve, listen and respond to a Christian who approaches them. That is, they are spiritually open and possibly people to whom Jesus is revealing himself. Once a POP is recognized, the Missional Community is to "stay and intentionally invest into that relationship to see where God will take it."[112] Members of the Missional Community are to build relationship with the POP and

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[110] Breen, *Leading Missional Communities*, 22. Covenant and Kingdom are two key theological concepts that undergirds Breen's theology of missional church. He has written a book, *Covenant and Kingdom* that reads the whole Bible through the lens of covenant and kingdom.

[111] Breen, *Leading Missional Communities*, 32.

[112] Breen and Absalom, *Launching Missional Communities*, 12.

through the POP enter into relationship with others in the POP's network of relationships. Breen says that POPs "will in time prove to be a gatekeeper into a whole network, or neighborhood, of relationships."[113] That is, "as Jesus moves through you to change them, they will then introduce you to their network of relationships, granting you favor, access and opportunity with those people."[114] In this model of relational evangelism and outreach, members of Missional Communities are encouraged to be out of their Christian bubble and comfort zone to engage with people outside of the church. They are also encouraged to engage people in their normal lives more intentionally as they work, study, shop, play sports, be in children's school or after-school programs, meet the neighbors, etc. Missional Communities that intentionally seeks POPs in their daily lives will cultivate missional life that is not a program or event but a lifestyle with eyes wide open to see where and how God is already at work in the mundane everyday life. This second element is in line with Hirsch's "missional-incarnational impulse," and the notion of "The Third Place" to intentionally connect with those outside the church community.

3. Common Rhythms

The third element for the formation of Missional Communities is having common rhythms that members of Missional Communities regularly participate in. Healthy and thriving Missional Communities are to have the three-dimensional pattern of living a balanced life that includes healthy relationship with God through worship and prayer

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[113] Breen and Absalom, *Launching Missional Communities*, 12.

[114] Breen, *Leading Missional Communities*, 39. Biblical examples include Cornelius who opens the door for the gospel for his extended families, and Lydia in Philippi where her entire household comes to faith.

(Up), with one another in the church community through discipleship and mutual care (In), and with the outside the church community through service and evangelism (Out). Breen makes a case that Jesus himself "lived out his life in three relationships: Up—with the Father; In—with his chosen followers; Out—with the hurting world around him."[115] A Missional Community too must have the rhythm of life that includes all three aspects of *Up, In* and *Out*, if it is to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.[116] The outward movement is to be undergirded by the practice of worship and prayer as well as strong relationships within the Missional Communities. This is similar to Keller's emphasis on having an integrative and balanced ministry without which none of the church's ministries, including small groups, will work well.

4. Extended Family on Mission

The fourth element for the formation of Missional Communities is its central identity as an extended family on mission. Family is the primary metaphor for Breen in understanding the identity and mission of the church.[117] It is an *extended* family, however, and not a *nuclear* family, that is on mission together. According to Breen, Missional Communities are not the end goal, but simply a structure that helps to get the true goal, which is *oikos. Oikos,* as noted in Chapter 1, is a greek word used in the New Testament to refer to "households," which were essentially "extended families who functioned together with a common purpose."[118] Breen observes that "in the early

[115] Breen, *Building Discipling Culture*, 67.
[116] Breen, *Building Discipling Culture*, 70.
[117] Mike Breen wrote *Family On Mission* with his wife Sally Breen. The book highlights this element of the Missional Communities being an extended family on mission.
[118] Breen, *Leading Missional Communities*, 4.

church, discipleship and mission always centered around and flourished in the *oikos*."[119] Breen asserts that "Missional Communities are the training wheels that teach us how to ride the bike of *oikos*. They are the scaffolding that allows us to rebuild the household of *oikos*. Missional Communities are the cocoon that allows the butterfly of *oikos* to emerge"[120]According to Breen, the goal is not to run a program called "Missional Community." Instead, the goal is to learn how to function as an extended family on mission. This means relationship (family) and purpose (mission) are both important in building a Missional Community. Relationship without purpose, or purpose without relationship, will make the church weak.

5. Organic and Organized

The fifth elements for the formation of Missional Communities is being a community that is both organized and organic. If a Missional Community is a vehicle and the destination is *oikos* (extended family on mission), then this element of being "organic and organized" is about the *texture* of the family life together. The texture of the Missional Community is primarily organic. In a family there is an organic 'lifestyle' that members of the family participate in together. Families fundamentally live together, not hold events together. Breen writes, "Being part of a family is a much more comprehensive and meaningful reality than simply attending events together."[121] On the most fundamental level Missional Communities would never work if we try to "add them on" to our lives or if we treat them as "programs or a series of events."[122] Healthy

[119] Breen, *Leading Missional Communities*, 4.
[120] Breen, *Leading Missional Communities*, 6.
[121] Breen, *Leading Missional Communities*, 37.
[122] Breen, *Leading Missional Communities*, 37.

families, however, also have organized components (like eating out or going on a vacation together) in the midst of the organic reality of 'life together. Family life *does* involve events, but we think of them differently because of the life we are living together. Breen notes that families exist along "a continuum of the organized and the organic, the structured and the spontaneous aspects of life together."[123]

The organic texture of a missional movement is in line with Hirsch's fifth element of mDNA, "organic system." Whereas Hirsch tends to emphasize organic over organized, Breen brings more balanced approach to holding the two in tension, similar to Keller who describes the church as "organized organism."[124]

6. Discipleship

The sixth and the final element for the formation of Missional Communities is building a discipleship culture. With this element Breen's thesis on the formation of a missional church comes full circle. If a Missional Community is a vehicle and the destination is *oikos,* then discipleship is the engine that will help the vehicle get to the destination. As noted above, according to Breen, there is no mission nor church without discipleship.

At the heart of fruitful missions is cultivation of a discipling culture where people understand clearly that they are called to be disciples, *and* make disciples of Jesus.[125] Breen defines discipleship as "learning over the course of our lives to become people who have both character and competency."[126] As can be seen in the definition,

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[123] Breen, *Leading Missional Communities*, 38.

[124] Keller, *Serving a Movement*, 202. In describing movement dynamics of the missional church, Keller, like Breen, emphasizes that the church is both "a vital organism and a structured organization" and we must hold them together in creative tension in order to avoid institutionalizing the church and to promote missional movement.

[125] Breen, *Leading Missional Communities*, 15.

[126] Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leader*, 14.

one of the key pair of values for discipleship are *character and competency*. That is, disciples are to grow into Christlikeness in their character to be like Jesus and in their competency to be able to do the things that Jesus did. Another key pair of values to cultivate missional disciples are *invitation and challenge*. For discipleship to take place, a church needs to have a culture that emphasizes both high invitation that values relationship and high challenge that demands obedience to God's word. Only when the church has both high invitation and high challenge, does it establish a discipling culture where people grow to become more and more like Jesus in their attitudes, thoughts, words and actions.[127]

In order to cultivate discipling culture—with high invitation and high challenge––through which character and competency are cultivated, Breen argues there needs to be a discipling vehicle to facilitate the process. Breen calls such a vehicle, "a huddle" which is discipleship group of four to ten people. Whereas a small group is for anyone to join, a huddle is only for leaders and future leaders of missional communities and those invited by the huddle leaders. Huddles are distinct from small groups in that "the leader [of a huddle] acts as the primary discipler of the members of the group and not as a facilitator." That is, the leader of the huddle is fully committed to raising disciples who can multiply disciples, huddles and missional communities. Huddle leaders play a significant role in cultivating a discipling culture and creating a missional movement. Breen asserts that "you don't get a discipling culture unless someone takes the responsibility to lead it. The leader of a Missional Community needs to be a disciple-maker, not merely an event-organizer."[128] In order to have a strong relationship and

[127] Breen, *Building Discipling Culture*, 16–20.
[128] Breen, *Leading Missional Communities*, 19.

accountability within huddles, the leaders' lives are to be not only accessible to the members but also worth imitating by the group members. Strong discipleship and strong leadership create a movement-dynamic in the church, which grows missional disciples who are empowered and equipped to make more disciples and more Missional Communities.

Critical Analysis and Summary

This chapter engaged with the works of Alan Hirsch, Timothy Keller, and Mike Breen—all of whom have contributed significantly to the conversations regarding the missional church movement and how to cultivate missional small groups and communities. Each of them provides key elements that foster the missional church and missional small groups. I used Hirsch's six elements of mDNA as a baseline conceptual structure from which I compared and analyzed the works of the three thought leaders of the missional church movement. As I have shown, there are many common themes that bring together Hirsch's six elements of mDNA, Keller six marks, and Breen's six elements of a missional church. Two key elements that are prominent in all three missiologists are the gospel as the foundation of the missional church,[129] and discipleship as the engine that drives the missional church and small groups. In terms of contextualizing the gospel, Hirsch, Keller and Breen have their own distinctive emphasis: Hirsch, through the element of missional-incarnational impulse, emphasizes centrifugal dynamic of a missional church movement. Through the mark of skillful contextualization along with serving the good of the society and intentional engagement

[129] Hirsch's expression of the gospel is the first element of mDNA, "Jesus is Lord."

with non-Christians, Keller emphasize both centripetal and centrifugal dynamic of a missional church movement. And through the principle of a Person of Peace (POP) to reach a particular neighborhood or a network of relationship, Breen emphasizes a personal approach to evangelize and make disciples. In terms of structure for the missional church movement, Hirsch leans more on organic systems, while Breen and Keller espouse organized systems utilized alongside organic systems.

One final, seventh, element that was not mentioned in the integrative literature review of three authors, but is highlighted by all three authors, is the role of the Holy Spirit. Hirsch contends that Apostolic Genius with the six elements of mDNA is the truest expressions of people who have the Holy Spirit.[130] It is the Holy Spirit who ultimately reactivates the missional church movement through the six elements of mDNA. Keller uses the analogy of gardening to highlight the human *and* divine work in the missional church movement: "A garden flourishes because of the skill and diligence of the gardener *and* the condition of the soil and the weather."[131] The first set of factors (the skill and the diligence of the gardener) is what people contribute to the missional movement, but the second set of factors belongs completely to God and his grace—without which the human contribution amounts to nothing. Keller therefore concludes, "we cannot produce a gospel movement without the providential work of the Holy Spirit."[132] Breen uses an analogy of the fuel for the car to emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit. If the Missional Community is the vehicle and discipleship is the engine, then "the Holy Spirit is the fuel in the engine, and the prayer is the internal combustion that

[130] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 245.
[131] Keller, *Serving Movement*, 240.
[132] Keller, *Serving Movement*, 241.

makes the whole thing go!"[133] The missional churches, missional small groups and missional communities are built by the power of the Holy Spirit through the labor and prayers of people who seek to faithfully follow Jesus and build up the body of Christ.

Below is a table (Table 2) that provides the summary and relationships between Hirsch's six elements of mDNA, Keller's six marks of a missional church and Breen's six elements of launching and growing a missional community. In the next chapter I will continue with the integrative literature review analysis by synthesizing findings from a missional reading of Ephesians (Chapter 3) and findings from the conversation with three practical theologians (Chapter 4) to propose ways to reimagine the formation of missional small groups.

Table 2: Summary of Hirsch, Keller and Breen's Elements of a Missional Church

	Hirsch	**Keller**	**Breen**
1	Jesus is Lord	Confronting Idols	The Gospel
2	Disciple-making	Equipping the whole people of God for Missional Living	Discipleship
3	Missional-Incarnational Impulse	Skillful Contextualization; Serving for the Good of the Society; Intentional engagement	Person of Peace
4	Apostolic Environment	(Integrative and Balanced Ministry)	Common Rhythms
5	Organic Systems	(Organized & Organic)	Organized & Organic
6	Communitas	Pursuit of Unity with other Churches	Extended family on mission
7	Work of the Holy Spirit through prayer		

[133] Breen, *Leading Missional Communities*, 46.

CHAPTER FIVE: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

This chapter brings the findings from Chapters Three and Four together through a theological reflection method, using the pastoral cycle devised by James and Evelyn Whitehead. There are three stages in the process of theological reflection using the pastoral cycle: attending, assertion, and pastoral response.[1] I will use the three stages of the pastoral cycle as the main framework for the forthcoming reflection. I will also incorporate critical analysis and synthesis of the integrative literature review methodology to show gaps in the literature of the three missiologists in light of my missional reading of Ephesians. I will conclude by proposing a new conceptual framework and practices that will help reimagine a missional church and missional small groups.

Attending

Attending is the first stage of the pastoral cycle, whereby one carefully attends to relevant information available from all the sources in research. In this first stage of theological reflection, I will first attend to the findings from the missional reading of Ephesians and its implications for small group ministry, and then attend to the paradigm

[1] Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry.* See introduction chapter under methodology section for an explanation of the three stages.

and practice of the missional church and missional small group presented by Hirsch, Keller, and Breen.

Attending to the Findings from a Missional Reading of Ephesians

A missional reading of Ephesians shows a grand vision of God's mission to redeem the whole creation from its brokenness and how the church is to be equipped to participate in God's mission by having the gospel as the foundation, knowing the storyline of the Bible and its place in the story of God's redemption. Furthermore, the missional reading of Ephesians shows how the church is to be equipped with clear identities that lead to practices of worship (praise and prayer), the pursuit of unity and purity, and even willingness to suffer for the gospel. That is, out of the understanding of its identity and its place in the story of God's redemption, the church participates in God's mission by pursuing unity and purity, and living a cruciform life of worship and service.[2]

Paul the apostle equips the church to be faithful representatives of God's glory and manifold wisdom in and through their life together. It is interesting to observe that much of Paul's emphasis in Ephesians is on holistic discipleship that embodies the gospel through character of unity, purity and suffering.[3] A missional reading of Ephesians affirms both the centripetal and centrifugal dynamics of the church's life and

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[2] As noted by Dwight Zscheile ("Missional Theology," 28), "without cultivating a renewed identity as a community of disciples, the church loses its ability to witness to salvation in Christ and serve in God's world. Yet that very cultivation occurs in part through witness and service as the church and its members discover their identity in participating in the triune God's communal mission in all of creation."

[3] Christopher Schoon (*Cultivating Evangelistic Character*, 7) calls such embodiment of the gospel, "an evangelistic character in their life together." By "evangelistic character," Schoon basically means the character of Christ. He argues for "a shift in academic dialogue regarding evangelism, so that the emphasis rests on a community's capacity to faithfully embody Jesus' character in their relationships with each other instead of on an individual's capacity to solicit momentary conversions" (7). I find Schoon's argument to be in line with the missional reading of Ephesians.

mission in the world. The proportion and weight of ethical emphasis in Ephesians shows that the formation of the church in unity and purity (centripetal movement) must undergird the outward action and verbal witness of the church in the world (centrifugal movement). When the church has the inner strength through a life of unity and purity, it will have the power for outward missional impact even through suffering.

Overall, the findings from a missional reading of Ephesians affirm many aspects of a missional church as presented by Lesslie Newbigin. For instance, Newbigin's notion of the church as "sign, foretaste, and instrument"[4] of God's Kingdom corresponds to the identity of a missional church as saints, new humanity (sign), holy temple (foretaste), body of Christ, family of God, and army of God (instrument). As saints who are also new humanity through new birth by the Holy Spirit, the members of the missional church reveal God's Kingdom on earth through their distinctly holy life and their life *together* as a contrast society. As the holy temple where God's presence is experienced in their gatherings of worship, the church is a foretaste of what the fullness of God's kingdom will be at the consummation. As the body of Christ, family of God and army of God, the church is an instrument of God's kingdom to continue the work of Christ in the world, to invite people of all nations to join God's family, and to engage in the spiritual warfare until all powers and authorities will finally submit to the lordship of Christ.

In terms of implications for formation of missional small groups, from a missional reading of Ephesians I see that formation of missional small groups will have the foundation of knowing God's story that the church is part of, knowing its identity as

[4] Newbigin, *Holy Spirit and Church*, 7–8.

missional people, and pursuing spiritual formation that embodies the gospel by growing in the life of worship, pursuing unity and purity, as well as being willing to suffer for the gospel together. I will come back to the application of a missional reading to small group ministry in the pastoral reflection section below.

Attending to Findings from the Conversation with Hirsch, Keller, and Breen

The paradigms and practices of the missional church and missional small groups, as presented by Hirsch, Keller, and Breen, show that the formation of missional small groups is undergirded by a theological vision that is comprehensive and integrative.

Alan Hirsch

Hirsch's paradigm of Apostolic Genius highlights that the missional church and missional movement is made possible by the inherent power that is latent in the gospel and is in all Christians who believe the gospel and are filled with the Spirit. What is needed is (re)activating what Hirsch refers to as *Apostolic Genius* by helping Christians to reimagine what it means to be church and by cultivating six irreducible elements of mDNA: 1) Jesus is Lord; 2) Disciple-Making; 3) Missional-Incarnational Impulse; 4) Apostolic Environment; 5) Organic Systems; 6) Communitas. Hirsch emphasizes that "all six elements have to be activated and correlated in ways that usher the entire system into a new form of *ecclesia*, a new and yet ancient way of being the church—that of apostolic movements."[5]

[5] Hirsch, *On the Verge*, 124–25.

In terms of the formation of missional small groups, it must be undergirded by the holistic paradigm which includes all six elements. One unique feature of Hirsch's model of missional small groups is organic system around "natural discipling friendships, worship as lifestyle and mission in the context of everyday life" instead of "buildings, worship services and pastoral care."[6] Hirsch espouses a simple church model through small groups to facilitate the missional church movement. What drives Hirsch's search for the missional DNA is multiplication and expansion, but one has to be cautious of pursuing exponential growth without proper emphasis of orthodoxy and orthopraxy along with a pursuit of mature character and healthy community.

Timothy Keller

For Keller, the gospel is central and foundational for the missional church movement. One thing that is very distinct in Keller compared to Hirsch and Breen is that he presents his case and vision for a missional church in his book, *Center Church*, only after providing a thick description of the gospel (e.g., gospel theology, gospel renewal, and gospel contextualization). He presents the gospel in the first part of the book by using a narrative framework and propositional truths.[7] He also uses three key metaphors (home/exile; Yahweh/covenant; kingdom) to capture the essence and the storyline of the gospel from creation and fall, to the Old Testament history, Jesus, and the consummation.[8] With the gospel foundation, Keller provides six marks of a missional church and missional small groups that will reach and disciple nonbelievers in the post-

[6] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 185
[7] Keller, *Center Church*, 29–37.
[8] Keller, *Center Church*, 39–44.

Christendom context of the Western society: 1) Confronting idols; 2) Skillful contextualization; 3) Equipping the whole people of God for a missional living; 4) Serving for the good of the society; 5) Intentional engagement with nonbelievers; 6) Pursuit of unity with other churches. What is distinct in Keller's approach to cultivating the missional church is the centrality of the gospel. For example, in terms of the first mark of "confronting idols," Keller argues that "the classic messages of substitutionary atonement and forensic justification" provide "both a strong theological basis and a powerful internal motivation" to confront the idols, "to live more simply and to do justice in the world."[9]

In terms of the formation of missional small groups, Keller argues that what makes a small group missional is not adding some outward-focused component to the small group ministry, but having characteristics that goes beyond any program. The six marks of a missional small group basically corresponds to six marks of a missional church as was seen earlier in Table 1. In fact, Keller argues that the six marks of the missional church must be present in every area of the church, whether it be worship, discipleship, missions, or small group ministry. Furthermore, missional small groups cannot be implemented without formation in other ministry fronts with missional intentionality, because all ministries are intricately interconnected. As Keller notes, "success on any one front depends on success in the other fronts of ministry."[10] Sunday corporate worship, weekend social gathering, weekday small groups, various discipleship classes—all have to share the same missional intentionality, so that non-believers are reached with the gospel. Keller argues that "if we don't make a strong

[9] Keller, *Serving Movement*, 52.
[10] Keller, *Serving Movement*, 104.

effort to do *all* of these in some way at once, we won't actually do *any* of them well at all."[11]

Mike Breen

Mike Breen provides six elements for cultivating a missional church: 1) Gospel; 2) Discipleship; 3) Person of Peace; 4) Common rhythms; 5) Organized and organic; and, 6) Extended family on Mission. The main contribution of Mike Breen in the missional church conversation is his emphasis on discipleship. Breen argues that without strong discipleship, there is no mission nor church. That is, the formation of a missional church is the fruit of good discipleship. It is faithful discipleship that leads to fruitful missions. Breen asserts that "the problem is not that we have a 'missional' problem or a leadership problem in the Western church. We have a discipleship problem. If you know how to disciple people well, you will always get mission."[12] Furthermore, what is unique about Breen's way of cultivating a missional church is the mid-sized Missional Communities that is arguably the most effective vehicle to engage in missions. Whereas Hirsch advocates small and organic house churches to be the catalyst and agent of activating a missional church movement, and Keller deprioritizes a form or size of a church and emphasizes the gospel and the theological vision to be worked out in any form or size of missional church, Breen argues that a mid-sized group with a missional vision is the most effective vehicle to bring about missional church movement. Another unique element of a missional church according to Breen is the Person of Peace (POP) who

[11] Keller, *Serving Movement*, 104. Italics original.
[12] Breen, *Building Discipling Culture*, 12.

plays a critical role in penetrating a neighborhood or a network of relationships with the gospel message.

For Breen, small groups are not ideal to cultivate a missional church. Breen's observation is that small groups are great for mutual care, but not for doing missions on their own. That is, small groups are "small enough to care, but not big enough to dare."[13] According to Breen, group size matters to create a missional dynamic and to sustain missional movement. Breen advocates for the mid-sized Missional Communities— an extended family (*oikos*) on mission—to be the most effective vehicle to reach the people with the gospel.

Assertion

In the stage of assertion, I bring together information from the first stage of attending and synthesize the information and insight before reaching the third and final stage of pastoral response. In this second step of reflection, I will incorporate the integrative literature review methodology to organize a conceptual classification of constructs based on the missional reading of Ephesians and the elements of a missional church presented by the three authors. In analyzing and synthesizing all the data I will make use of a table (Table 3, following page) to affirm harmonious voices in the literatures of Hirsch, Keller, and Breen with the missional reading of Ephesians, as well as to reveal gaps in their literatures in light of the principles extracted from Ephesians. The comparative analysis and synthesis of the marks of a missional church from the missional reading of Ephesians and the three key authors have the potential to help my church as well as

[13] Breen and Absalom, *Leading Missional Community*, 7.

Table 3. Synthesis of Marks of Missional Church from a Missional Reading of Ephesians vis-à-vis Hirsch, Keller and Breen's Elements of a Missional Church

	Ephesians	**Hirsch**	**Keller**	**Breen**
Mark 1 (Foundation & Framework)	The drama of God's salvation with gospel as the climax	Jesus is Lord	(Gospel)	Gospel
Mark 2 (Identities)	Saints; Body of Christ; New Humanity, Holy Temple; Family of God, Soldiers	—	—	Extended family on mission
Mark 3	Worship (Praise and Prayer)	(Prayer)	(Prayer)	(Prayer) Common Rhythms (Up)
Mark 4	Unity	Communitas	Pursuit of Unity with other Churches	Common Rhythms (In)
Mark 5	Purity	Disciple-making	Confronting Idols; Equipping the whole people of God for a Missional Living	Discipleship
Mark 6	Suffering	Communitas	—	—
Contextualization	—	Missional-Incarnational Impulse	Skillful Contextualization; Intentional engagement with non-believers; Serving the Society	Person of Peace; Common Rhythms (Out)
Systems/Structure	—	Organic system; Apostolic Environment	(Organized & Organic); (Integrative & Balanced Ministry)	Organized & Organic

other churches reimagine missional small groups and formulate better groups by ensuring that all of the Ephesians' marks are accounted for—which currently is not being done consistently, at least by these three important pastor-theologians whose works have influence over the missional church conversation. To help the process of analysis and synthesis, Table 3 brings the marks of missional church from a missional reading of Ephesians and from the integrative literature review of the three authors:

First, all three authors emphasize the gospel as the epicenter (Hirsch) or the foundation (Breen and Keller) for a missional church and missional small groups. Nonetheless, it is observable that the three authors do not articulate the gospel in the same manner. Keller spends the largest space to articulate the gospel as the foundation for the missional church movement in the first part of the book, *Center Church.* Hirsch's first element of mDNA, "Jesus is Lord," does not necessarily provide a thick description of what the gospel is—in the way Keller does. Breen's articulation of the gospel with two key concepts of covenant and kingdom also lacks theological rigor and depth. When compared to a missional reading of Ephesians through a canonical-narrative framework, I observe that both Hirsch and Breen's articulation of the gospel lacks comprehensive vision of God's mission that has the goal of redeeming the whole creation. Either the gospel is assumed or not comprehensive enough in their presentation. It will require a more comprehensive articulation of the gospel to be faithful participants in God's mission to restore the broken creation, and not limit our participation to evangelism.

Second, it is interesting to observe that identities of a missional church, as derived from Ephesians, is conspicuously missing in the three authors. Breen makes the use of "family on mission" as one prominent image to capture the imagination of the

readers to understand their identity. Both Hirsch and Keller do not explicitly articulate multi-faceted identity of a missional church. By utilizing identities found in Ephesians, there is potential to help reimagine a missional church and missional small groups according to the identities which God offers all those in Christ.

Third, there is a significant lack of emphasis on worship in the missional church conversation of the three authors, particularly when compared to the missional reading of Ephesians. While they all mention the significant role of the Holy Spirit and the importance of prayer, praise and prayer do not seem to take the dominant place that they should take in the missional church conversation. If devotion to Christ and dependence on the Holy Spirit is what fuels the missional church movement, this is a significant gap in the literatures, especially in Hirsch. Having said this, through the common rhythm of Up/In/Out, Breen does emphasize the importance of pursuing intimacy with God through prayer. It could be that for Keller, who argues for a balanced and integrative ministry, small groups as a ministry front of "connecting people to one another" are not meant to do everything; worship (praise and prayer) is something that is emphasized in the ministry front of "connecting people to God."

Fourth, all three authors share the Ephesian mark of unity, but with different scope and emphasis. Hirsch's element of communitas emphasizes unity that is wrought by shared experience of challenges, and even persecution. Keller's mark of pursuit of unity with other churches envisions a city-wide gospel movement for which unity amongst churches and Christian organizations is indispensable. Breen's principle of common rhythm of Up/In/Out includes the importance of cultivating good relationship within the community (In) and with God (Up) in order to reach out to people in the

world (Out). One thing that comes as a caution in small group ministry is that small groups can be insular, not just towards people outside the church, but even people inside the church, if it becomes too focused on itself. I believe it is important for small groups to be intentional in pursuing unity with other small groups within the church and share the vision of the gospel movement in the city, as Keller rightly suggests. It is in this way that unity can be practiced as a key mark of a missional church and even a missional small group.

Fifth, discipleship is a prominent element in all the literature and in the missional reading of Ephesians. The missional reading of Ephesians shows the formation of a missional church that is marked by life together in pursuit of purity and maturity in character, which is a succinct description of the goal of discipleship. Hirsch has discipleship as the key element of mDNA and emphasizes that it's obedience-based discipleship (not merely knowledge-based discipleship) that leads to life transformation. Breen proposes discipleship marked by high invitation and high challenge to grow and mature into Christ-likeness in both character and competence. Keller considers training to integrate faith and work as the essential part of forming a missional congregation who are missional in all facets of life.

Sixth, the mark of suffering from Ephesians is not strongly emphasized amongst the three authors. Hirsch's element of communitas—which describes a shared experience of an ordeal, suffering, and adventure—is the exception. The conspicuous absence of suffering in describing a missional church in the literature may be one significant missing piece to the missional small group conversation.

Seventh, even though my missional reading of Ephesians did not consider contextualizing the gospel, the three authors provide ample descriptions of how to reach out to others with the gospel. Hirsch's missional-incarnational element of mDNA priorities presence in the community one is trying to reach and leverages the Third Places (TTP) to connect and engage with non-believers. Breen's Missional Community similarly has a key element of finding a Person of Peace (POP) who will pave a way for the Missional Community to enter into a network of relationships that it is called to reach. Keller assumes that non-believers are in the midst of the church community's life and ministry (e.g., Sunday worship and small groups) and that the church needs to have the posture of humility, openness and readiness to build relationship with them, engage in meaningful conversation and share the gospel that provides subversive fulfillment to all human longing.

Lastly, what the missional reading of Ephesians did not cover in terms of structure, all three authors agree having organic system, but Breen and Keller bring greater balance by emphasizing both organic and organizational aspect of a church as a missional movement.

Pastoral Response

The final stage of the pastoral cycle, pastoral response, moves "from discussion and insight to decision and action"[14] In this final stage, I will evaluate current practice of small group ministry in light of the assertion stage above. Using my present ministry context as an illustrative example throughout, I will then reflect on and suggest possible

[14] Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 13.

ways forward using a framework of paradigm and practices, which will help foster a reimagining the missional church and the formation of missional small groups.

Paradigm

In order to bring about a change in a church or in a small group, there first needs to be a paradigm shift. I agree with Alan Hirsch who asserts that "a change must come from deep inside the paradigm; anything less will simply be external and cosmetic."[15] In order to go through a change in paradigm, we need more than knowledge accumulation; along with new knowledge we need to tap into the imagination that shapes and ushers a new paradigm. A paradigm operates with imagination, stories, and metaphors.[16] A paradigm shift comes about by seeing reality through an alternative story. Therefore, to introduce a new paradigm one must begin by reframing the story of the church as a missional movement from creation to new creation, and by emphasizing the metaphors that give missional identity and purpose for the church and for small groups.

First, the grand-narrative of creation, fall, restoration, and consummation must be repeated in various avenues of teaching in order to provide the overarching framework within which the congregation members understand their place within the grand-story of God's mission. The grand-narrative of God's mission needs to seep into the imagination of the church members, so that they learn to "indwell" the story, and seek to make their lives "being made relevant to the Bible" instead of trying to make the

[15] Hirsch, *On the Verge*, 57.

[16] For the relationships between paradigm, imagination, stories and metaphors, see Hirsch, *On the Verge*, 53–81. Hirsch writes (*On the Verge,* 57) that "telling a different story is reframing the central story that defines our understanding of church. This will seep into ethos and practices."

Bible relevant to their lives.[17] Furthermore, the gospel must be articulated in ways that will create greater passion for God's glory and clearer vision for God's kingdom. Many people in the church live with an understanding of the gospel that emphasizes forgiveness of sins but does not include being called to participate in God's mission in the world. Predominant paradigm of salvation must be countered with the whole gospel, which includes not only being saved from sin (past) and waiting for the consummation (future), but also living out the faith missionally as a church here and now (present). By telling the story of God's mission from the Bible, and from the stories of the church history and the contemporary church, missional small groups can better know that the salvation story demands participation in God's mission in the present. In other words, the church must know the grand narrative of the Bible, as well as its location in the historical moment and in a particular missional context. N.T. Wright suggests that a church's task "is to discover, through the Spirit and prayer, the appropriate ways of improvising the script between the foundation events and charter [that is, the Old Testament and the New Testament] on the one hand, and the complete coming of the Kingdom on the other."[18] My responsibility as a pastor is to form people to know God's story and their place and calling within that story. Along with a large group gathering on Sundays, small groups should be one prominent space where God's story is rehearsed and the stories of members within God's story are shared to encourage one another to be faithful performers in the drama of God's redemption.

Second, the Christian identities that ground and empower the church to be missional must be emphasized. From a missional reading of Ephesians as well as

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[17] Greenslade, *A Passion for God's Glory*, 42–43.
[18] Wright, *The Last Word*, 126–27.

engagement with the three authors, we see that merely adding a component of evangelism or some kind of an outward activity into small groups will not automatically form missional small groups. Rather, missional small groups are formed by fostering identities that translates to missional living. Three key metaphors that provide identity of the church from a missional reading of Ephesians are: saints who are set apart for God, sons and daughters who invite others to join God's family, and soldiers who fight against the evil powers. In other words, the church is God's family in motion, set apart to participate in God's mission to restore God's creation for his glory, fighting against the schemes of the enemy, and inviting others into God's family and God's mission. Implications for small groups include cultivating greater understanding of identity of saints who are called out to live a distinct life in the world as an alternative community with values of practices that are attractive and yet sometimes counter-cultural. Saints in motion will be marked by humility which is practically expressed in lifestyle of repentance. As a family of God small groups will be marked by genuine care and concern for one another's well-being and regularly practice table fellowship. As ones who are engaged in the spiritual battle, small groups will be a "community of resistance" that is marked by treating others with respect, generosity and mercy.[19] I need to provide a more comprehensive and balanced set of identities that can help my people reimagine what it means to be on mission with the identity of being a community of saints who are also family of God, engaged in a spiritual battle.

Furthermore, all three authors concertedly present the identity of God's people as missionaries. Hirsch's six elements of mDNA, especially the elements of communitas

[19] Cohick, "The New Perspective," 40.

and missional-incarnational impulse, highlights that Christians are disciples of Jesus, and that disciples of Jesus are missionaries in the world. Keller's six marks of a missional church assumes Christians living in the world with the identity of a missionary who is to engage the people in the culture with humility, curiosity, and generosity. Breen's six principles are driven by the mission to reach non-believers with the gospel, especially by actively looking for a person of peace. In summary, along with the Ephesian mark of six identities, the identity as a missionary sent into the world must be cultivated through instruction and practice.

Practice

Along with a paradigm shift by tapping into stories and metaphors, there must be new practices to bring about formation of missional small groups. Changes come from both inside-out (through change in paradigm) and outside-in (through developing practices). That is, not only does one think his or her way into a new way of acting; one also acts his or her way into a new way of thinking.[20] From the analyses and syntheses of the missional reading of Ephesians and the integrative literature review of Hirsh, Keller and Breen, there are five key practices that I believe will contribute to the formation of missional small groups.

First, having a regular rhythm of praise and prayer, for these are what fuels and sustains missional zeal. Praise rehearses the gospel story and celebrate God's work of grace in people's lives. Prayer puts them to utter dependence for God to do his work of salvation and missions. Praise and prayer as key practices put Christ at the center and

[20] Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 122–25.

leads participants to keep hearts of gratitude (past and present grace) and anticipation (future grace), as well as postures of humility (utter dependence on God for everything) and mutuality (dependent on others to pray together). I have been observing how praying together in small groups for the past few years has deepened not only relationship amongst the leaders, but also their desires to serve others outside of their small groups. One concrete practice that I plan to implement is to have small group members to pray for specific individuals or people groups, so that they are intentionally thinking about and caring for others outside their small group through their prayers together.

Second, being more intentional in discipleship that focuses on character formation and cultivation of missionary identity. This practice is undergirded by the Ephesian mark of identity and purity, and is inspired by all three authors' emphasis on discipleship and missionary identity. Discipleship should be focused on obedience and character formation rather than knowledge accumulation. Small groups should be a place where people are first discipled to know their identity and to pursue holiness together. One of the key marks of holiness is humility. And as noted above, practice of repentance, and confession is one concrete practice to grow in humility and holiness. Small groups must cultivate a culture of vulnerability where members can confess and lament over personal and corporate sins together.

Third, intentionally seeking to cultivate communitas. The mark of suffering from the missional reading of Ephesians was conspicuously absent in the three authors, except for Hirsch whose notion of communitas challenge the church in the West to step out of its comfort zone. This works against the Western middle-class and consumeristic

value of comfort, convenience, safety and security. However, in order for my church and many churches in the West to experience a breakthrough and reimagine a missional church, I believe small groups must be an open group where new members (believers and non-believers) are welcome. In my context where the majority of members are second-generation Koreans, it also means pursing to be a more ethnically and racially integrated local church. Furthermore, small groups should be given opportunities to have liminal experiences together. I have witnessed that groups where members go through some hardship together (e.g., health issues or marriage issues) grow together in their pursuit of God (Up) and in their care for one another (In). If I were to bring more balance and integration to small groups by including some outward focused component, some groups may experience the formation of communitas. In my context, this may include praying for persecuted Christians together in small group. It may also include connecting small groups to a refugee family and extending hospitality and caring for their needs. It may also include going on a short-term mission trip together.

Fourth, being good disciples in real life. As noted above, it is quite conspicuous that all three authors are very intentional about reaching non-believers with the gospel through word and deed, individually and as a community—whether it be small groups or mid-sized groups or a Sunday large group gathering. What is interesting to observe is that in Ephesians there is not a heavy emphasis on reaching non-believers actively, except for the passage on the spiritual warfare that includes being ready with the gospel of peace and taking up "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph 6:15, 17). What I have learned from a missional reading of Ephesians is the importance of offering a thick description of the gospel and God's work of salvation, which is

appropriated by life lived in pursuit of purity and unity. I believe that what this shows is that one of the effective ways to bear witness to Christ and the gospel is to be the best disciple one can be—not just individually, but corporately, especially in our relationships within a small group of believers. It is the centripetal aspect of a missional small groups that will energize its centrifugal aspect. Furthermore, if Richard Bauckham's notion that "normal biblical usage reserves the centrifugal image for individuals and the centripetal image for the community"[21] is correct, then missional small groups must prioritize its life together and its relationship with one another. This is affirmed by Jesus's word in John 13:34–35, where he tells his disciples, "A new command I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Fifth, pursuing unity within small groups and beyond small groups. Unity is a distinct mark from a missional reading of Ephesians. It is not highlighted much in the three authors, except Keller who includes "pursuit of unity with other churches" as a distinct and important mark of a missional church and missional small groups. Small group members must be careful not to become insular in their attempt to care for one another. Small groups must recognize that they are a part of a greater body of Christ, whether it be a Missional Community of a mid-sized group or a local church of a large congregation. Not only that, but small groups must share the vision of a gospel movement in the city and not lose sight of the greater body of Christ locally and globally. In my local church context where there are many small groups that tend to not

[21] Bauckham, "Mission as Hermeneutics," 35.

associate with one another, it would be a good practice for our small groups to begin regularly connecting with other small groups and be intentional in pursuit of unity within the body of Christ. The missional dimension of unity is affirmed in the prayer of Jesus for his disciples in John 17:21, where he prays to the Father, "that they may be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." For the world to believe in Jesus, disciples are to be united with Christ and with one another. Unity is not just the goal of God's mission as was seen in Ephesians 1:9-10, but also means of God's mission to let the world know that Christ is the Lord and Savior.

In an attempt to form missional small groups within a span of three-year period, I propose the following focus in terms of paradigm and practice. In the first year the foundational work of the paradigm shift will be done by focusing on God's story and on two key identities of being saints and a family of God. Key practices will include reading through the Bible with the meta-narrative framework and praying together.[22] The group can start praying for one person who may become the person of peace (POP). In the second year, paradigm focus will be on pursuing unity and purity, along with two key identities of being a new humanity and a new temple. Key practices will include confession of sins, along with hospitality and fellowship where group members open up their homes and invite POPs in their social gatherings. In the third year, paradigm focus will be on liminal experiences and cultivating communitas with emphasis on the identity as a body of Christ and an army of God who are called to engage in an intentional life of

[22] Bartholomew and Goheen's *The Drama of Scripture* may be used as a guide to read the Bible through the missional lens.

service and sacrifice. Key practices will include serving others together, going on a short-term missions and/or making connections with network of POPs.

Table 4. Three-Year Plan for Formation of Missional Small Groups

	Paradigm Focus	Key Practices
Year 1	God's Story Identity as saints and family of God	Word Prayer Prayer for POPs
Year 2	Unity & Purity Identity as new humanity & new temple	Confession of sins Hospitality & fellowship Making connections with POPs
Year 3	Liminal experience & communitas Identity as Christ's body & God's army	Short-term missions locally or globally Serving others together Connections with network of POPs

Summary

Through the integrative literature review and theological reflection using the pastoral cycle, which includes the process of attending, assertion and pastoral response, I have

analyzed, synthetized, and reflected on ways forward to help the church reimagine a mission that works towards the formation of a missional small groups, with an emphasis on my present ministry context. As much as the works of Hirsch, Keller, and Breen have provided helpful insights into reimagining formation of missional small groups, the comparative analysis of their work with the key marks from missional reading of Ephesians showed some significant missing pieces that must be taken into consideration when formulating missional small groups. From the critical analysis and synthesis seven key elements that will help churches to form missional small groups include the following: 1) comprehensive and compelling vision of the gospel; 2) dynamic identity as God's family set apart for God's mission in the world; 3) rhythm of praise and prayer that fosters greater devotion to Christ and greater dependence on the Spirit; 4) intentional discipleship that focuses on character and identity formation; 5) pursuit of communitas; 6) being good disciples in real life; 7) pursuing unity beyond small groups.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter I will provide summary of the research project and identify potential contributions as well as areas for further research.

Summary of the Research Project

This research project worked towards reimagining missional small groups through a missional reading of Ephesians and in conversation with Alan Hirsch, Timothy Keller and Mike Breen. It attempted to answer the following three questions: First, how does a missional reading of Ephesians expand biblically sound paradigm and praxis towards developing a missional small group ministry? Second, what insights do the three practical theologians of the missional church movement add to the Ephesians missional reading's foundational lessons to form of missional small groups? Third, how can missional small groups be reimagined at my current local church and in other churches in response to the key findings from the missional reading of Ephesians and insights from the key theologians?

First, a missional reading of Ephesians provided a comprehensive biblical framework to understand the mission of God as well as five key marks of a missional church that include identity, worship (praise and prayer), unity, purity, and suffering (Chapter Three). Second, the engagement with the aforementioned three practical theologians showcased six common elements of a missional church from each of them.

There were many shared elements amongst them, but when tested against the marks of the missional church from Ephesians there were some significant gaps that need to be taken into account in order to improve the formation of missional small groups (Chapters Four and Five). For example, the three missiologists share the foundation of the gospel, but lack a comprehensive vision of God's redemption of the whole creation seen in the missional reading of Ephesians. They share the importance of prayer, though none of them emphasize it as a distinctive mark of a missional church. What is conspicuously missing is the robust articulation of the mark of suffering, though Hirsh notionally touches on this mark. Third, a theological reflection using the method of the pastoral cycle, combined with the integrative literature review, guided me to develop a paradigm and practices that I believe can help the church broadly, and my current church specifically move towards reimagining missional church and missional small groups (Chapter Five).

Potential Contributions

I believe the project makes at least three contributions in the areas of missional hermeneutics, the missional church movement, and small group ministry. First, in using missional hermeneutics as a foundational biblical interpretive scheme, my project has showcased how a missional reading may be done in the service of understanding the mission of God and equipping the church to participate in God's mission. George Hunsberger noted in 2016 that "continuing work [on and with a missional hermeneutic] is needed in order to discern and elaborate the way in which each of the biblical writings can be understood in light of this divine purpose to form the people of God in and for

their witness."[1] This project contributed to further work in missional hermeneutics by offering a missional reading of Ephesians. The missional reading of Ephesians in this project has affirmed the value of applying missional hermeneutics, especially as it provided a biblical foundation and framework to analyze the missional church conversation with the marks of a missional church gleaned from the reading.

Second, through the integrative literature review, this research project brought together three influential voices in the missional church conversation. The analyses and syntheses of the work of Hirsch, Keller, and Breen provided opportunity to affirm common elements that foster formation of a missional church and missional small groups. The integrative literature review of the three missiologists affirmed that the gospel is the foundation for the missional church movement and that discipleship plays a prominent role in forming missional people and missional small groups.

Third, the comparative analysis of the literature by three practical theologians and the missional reading of Ephesians revealed significant missing pieces in the missional small group conversation that could help churches, including my own, formulate better groups by ensuring that all of the Ephesian marks are accounted for—which currently is not being done consistently by the practitioners I have engaged in this project. For example, the two marks from the missional reading of Ephesians that are conspicuously lacking in the literature of the three missiologists are using biblical images to form missional identity and addressing the participation in suffering for the

[1] Hunsberger, "Mapping," 55. In recent years there have been various attempts at a missional reading of books of the Bible. For example, see Green, "Reading James Missionally;" Flemming, "Exploring a Missional Reading of Scripture: Philippians as a Case Study;" Flemming, *Foretaste of the Future: Reading Revelation in Light of God's Missio*; Davy, *The Book of Job and the Mission of God: A Missional Reading*; George, *Called into the Mission of God*; Kwon, *A Missional Reading of the Fourth Gospel*; Lee, *Mission as Integrated Witness.*

gospel. This gap instructs church leadership in the West to consider the place of identity formation, especially as informed by Ephesians, in the process of forming missional small groups. It also challenges the Western middle-class value of comfort and convenience as well as the consumeristic mentality that pursues safety and security—which fall short of the mark of suffering seen from the missional reading of Ephesians.

Areas of Further Research

Even though the research project made contributions in the areas mentioned above, it also shows the need for further research in a number of areas. I will limit my suggestions to three areas. First, I see the need for more missional readings to be applied to other letters of Paul, as well as other books of Scripture, in order to provide a more comprehensive presentation of the missional church. As noted in the introductory chapter, in limiting the scope of the study of Ephesians this project presented only a representative sketch of a missional church rather than a comprehensive one. Missional readings of other letters of the New Testament will compare and complement each other to provide a fuller picture of what the missional church is and provide greater insight into reimagining missional small groups.

Second, I see the need for integrative literature review of other practical theologians and missiologists, especially from non-Western contexts. As much as the three authors' literatures have been found helpful, they are all from the Western church context with their inherent cultural limitations. Literatures from Asian, African and Latin American missiologists, especially where suffering is the norm, may provide different and refreshing insights into the missional church conversation and may show

that the elements of missional church in the non-Western context are more in line with the marks of the missional church seen from the missional reading of Ephesians.

Finally, given the integrative nature of the church's ministry, it will be necessary to consider other key practices (or ministry fronts), like corporate worship, and process how those practices interact with the small group ministry towards formation of missional culture and church ethos. As Keller emphasizes, missional small groups cannot be implemented without formation occurring through other ministry fronts with the same missional intentionality, because all ministries are intricately interconnected. Integrative studies and research on worship, leadership development, pastoral care and other components of pastoral ministry need to be researched further, so that the missional shift is made in tandem with other ministries within a local church. And by doing so, the whole church can be formed by the whole gospel, for the sake of the whole world, and be sent on mission by our missional God.

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