

THE KINGDOM OF THE TRIUNE GOD: IMPLICATIONS FOR MISSION

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Mission is God's Work

In recent times, a concept of mission, which has gained widespread acceptance, is that God is a God of mission. The term used to express this concept is *Missio Dei*.¹ That is, mission is the mission of God; it is something that God does; it is His work. In His mercy, He sends His son to rescue His people.² This concept is seen as a helpful corrective to other views of mission, which previously have been utilised, but were found lacking.³ More than this, however, this concept of mission has value, because it reflects the very nature of the Triune God.⁴

The Trinity and Mission

God's work of mission involved the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit. *Missio Dei* reveals who God is. Thus, while it is true that the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ occupy the centre of the redemptive story, this story can only be properly understood in its

¹ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1991, pp. 389-390.

² George F. Vicedom, *The Mission of God*, Gilbert A. Thiele, and Denis Hilgendorf, trans, St Louis MO: Concordia, 1965, pp 51-52.

³ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 389, provides a quick summary on this. See also H. Buehler, "Pietism's Most Challenging Task", in *The Good News of the Kingdom*, Charles Van Engen, Dean S. Gilliland, and Paul Pierson, eds, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1965, p. 235; and James A. Scherer, "Church, Kingdom, and *Missio Dei*", in *The Good News of the Kingdom*, Charles Van Engen, Dean S. Gilliland, and Paul Pierson, eds, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1993, pp. 82ff.

⁴ George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions*, Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1972, pp. 57ff.

context: the triune God.⁵ God is present in His mission in all three persons. Mission can be said to be based on the will, movement, and action of the grace and love of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁶ As Vicedom has said:

Through His Son, in the incarnation and enthronement, God makes Himself the very content of the sending. Through His Son, it becomes clear, once for all, who God is, what He is, how He works, how He thinks in regard to men, how He redeems them, what salvation He has prepared for them, how men may draw nigh unto Him, and how they are received into fellowship. . . . Mission . . . today is possible, only because God continued His sending, and, through the gift of the Holy Ghost, out of the one-time sending of His Son, made a continuing mission.⁷

It has been noted that this mission activity of God occurs within the context of a sending group (the Trinity), and a receiving group (humanity).⁸ Logically, this leads many to conclude that the Trinity is a model for the church's mission.⁹ While this is, indeed, true, what Vicedom is seeking to show is that, because mission originates in the Triune God, who sends, it must be more than just a model. As Bosch points out, the sending of the Son and the Spirit can be, and has been, "expanded to include yet another 'movement': Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, sending the church into the world".¹⁰ Because *Missio Dei* arises out of the nature of God, the mission of the church becomes participation in God's mission. The implications of this will be

⁵ Ray S. Anderson, "Mission . . . in the way of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit", in *International Review of Missions* LXXVII-308 (1988), p. 487.

⁶ John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives*, New York NY: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 69.

⁷ Vicedom, *Mission of God*, pp. 52, 54-55; see also Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, London UK: SCM Press, 1975, pp. 53-54.

⁸ Anderson, "Mission", p. 487.

⁹ See, for example, Carl E. Braaten, "The Triune God: The Source and Model of Christian Unity and Mission", in *Missiology: An International Review* XVIII-4 (1990), p. 416. A. H. Mathias Zahniser, "The Trinity: Paradigm for Mission in the Spirit", in *Missiology: An International Review* XVII-1 (1989), p. 70.

¹⁰ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 390.

discussed later. There is one more element, which must be considered first.

The Kingdom of God and Mission

As the One, who was sent, Jesus began His public ministry with a bold announcement:

“The time has come,” He said, “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:15 NIV)

From that time on, Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven¹¹ is near.” Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people (Matt 4:17, 23 NIV).

The kingdom of God was not a new theme. While the actual term is not mentioned in the Old Testament, the idea of God as King is readily found.¹² However, in Jesus, a radical shift occurred. The long-awaited kingdom had arrived, in the person and mission of Christ.¹³ His opening declaration, shown above, and the subsequent words and deeds of His earthly ministry, recorded by the gospels, suggest that the kingdom of God was a central motif for Jesus.¹⁴ In other words, Jesus saw His mission primarily as being the proclamation and establishment of the reign of God.

If, then, the kingdom of God was so central to the mission of Jesus, and, as has been said earlier, the sending of Jesus arose out of the nature of

¹¹ It is assumed here that “kingdom of heaven” and “kingdom of God” are synonymous terms.

¹² Wilbert R. Shenk, “Kingdom, Mission, and Growth”, in *Exploring Church Growth*, Wilbert R. Shenk, ed., Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1983, p. 207.

¹³ George Eldon Ladd, *Jesus and the Kingdom*, Waco TX: Word Books, 1964, p. 140.

¹⁴ D. Senior, and C. Stuhlmüller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, London UK: SCM Press, 1983, p. 144. It is not necessary, at this point, to enter into a lengthy discussion of the meaning of the kingdom of God. George Eldon Ladd has a good summary of the various interpretations of the kingdom of God in his book, *The Presence of the Future*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1974, pp. 45-147. In this essay, the generally-accepted understanding that the term refers to universal reign or rule of God is assumed.

God as Triune, then it follows that the establishment of the kingdom of God is also important to the other members of the Trinity. We can even say, with Vicedom, that “the kingdom of God might be described as the goal of the *Missio Dei*”.¹⁵

The Kingdom, Trinity, and Mission

Connections between these three concepts can be identified, even in Mark 1:15, and the verses preceding it. After examining Mark 1:1-15, Newbigin lists the following three points:

1. The reign of God is announced.
2. Jesus is acknowledged as the Son of God.
3. Jesus is anointed by the Spirit to be the bearer of God’s kingdom to the nations.¹⁶

Through the empowering of the Holy Spirit, the mission of Jesus is to announce and establish the reign of God, His Father. Each member of the Trinity, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, is involved.¹⁷ This co-involvement, of course, goes beyond a mere partnership of three interested, but separate, parties. Its reality lies within the mystery of the “three-in-oneness” of the Trinity.

the Father, Son and the Spirit . . . are wonderfully united by their common historical-redemptive purpose, revelation, and work. . . . Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are “members, one of another” to a superlative and exemplary degree . . . [through] their interpenetration, . . . or *perichoresis*.¹⁸

Thus, the kingdom of God encompasses not only the saving acts of Jesus, but also “the complete dealing of the Triune God with the

¹⁵ Vicedom, *Mission of God*, p. 14; where *Dei* is understood as the triune God.

¹⁶ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995, pp. 21-23.

¹⁷ Emilio Castro, *Freedom in Mission: The Perspective of the Kingdom of God*, Geneva Sw: WCC Publications, 1985, pp. 66, 68.

¹⁸ Cornelius Plantinga Jr, “The Hodgson-Welch Debate, and the Social Analogy of the Trinity”, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton NJ: Princeton Theological Seminary, quoted in Buehler, “Pietism’s Most Challenging Task”, p. 236.

world”.¹⁹ Each member of the Trinity is involved in this mission of establishing the reign of God. To be in the kingdom of God means to experience the fellowship of the Trinity.²⁰ Boff borrows from Irenaeus the useful picture of identifying the Son and Holy Spirit as the “two hands of the Father”, sent to gather us into the communion of the Trinity.²¹ This concept was also recognised by the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Canberra. It affirmed that “the purpose of God, according to holy scripture, is to gather the whole of creation under the Lordship of Christ Jesus, in whom, by the power of the Holy Spirit, all are brought into communion with God”.²² It is necessary, therefore, to examine, in more detail, the relationship of each member of the Trinity to the kingdom of God, so as to more-fully understand the implications for mission.

The Kingdom and the Trinity

The direct linking of each member of the Trinity to the kingdom was explored many years ago by Joachim of Fiore (c1132-1202), who classified three separate kingdoms, one each belonging to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and, thus, really spoke of three different dispensations.²³ Moltmann avers that Joachim was borrowing from the eschatology of the Cappadocians. He sees great value in the concept, not because of its assignation of three separate eras of God’s rule, but

¹⁹ Vicedom, *Mission of God*, p. 23.

²⁰ G. Mar Osthathios, “The Holy Trinity and the Kingdom of God”, in *The Indian Journal of Theology* 31-1 (1982), p. 2.

²¹ Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, Paul Burns, tran., Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1988, p. 26.

²² Emilio Castro, “Themes in Theology and Mission Arising out of San Antonio and Canberra”, in *The Good News of the Kingdom*, Charles Van Engen, Dean S. Gilliland, and Paul Pierson, eds, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1993, p. 133.

²³ F. L. Cross, ed., “Joachim of Fiore”, in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 1974, pp. 739-740. The kingdom of the Father was the age in which mankind lived under the Law, and ends with the demise of the OT dispensation; the kingdom of the Son is the age of grace, and covers the NT dispensation, which Joachim believed would last until around AD 1260; the age of the Spirit was anticipated to begin at this point, and would see the rise of new religious orders, which would convert the whole world.

because its Trinitarian view of history helps to overcome the Western unipersonal view of God.²⁴

Moltmann, then, develops the idea, preferring to see the kingdoms of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit as “continually present strata and transitions in the kingdom’s history”.²⁵ He identifies the relationship between each person of the Trinity and the kingdom as such:

The kingdom of the Father “consists in the creation of a world, open to the future”.²⁶ This future entails the ultimate fulfilment of all that God has planned. As the Creator, God is Lord over all, and humanity, as created beings, are His property.²⁷

The kingdom of the Son is the “liberating Lordship” of the crucified Christ, and “fellowship with the first-born of many brothers and sisters”.²⁸ In this kingdom, believers are no longer only possessions of the Creator God, but become the children of the Father.²⁹

The kingdom of the Spirit “is experienced in the gift, conferred on the people liberated by the Son – the gift of the Holy Spirit’s energies”.³⁰ Here again, the relationship between God and humanity changes. We are not only His possessions and children, but now also become His friends.³¹

Moltmann then suggests a fourth kingdom, the **kingdom of glory**, which, in a sense, unites these three, as the “future”, anticipated in the kingdom of the Father. The kingdom of glory should be “understood as the consummation of the Father’s creation, as the universal establishment of the Son’s liberation, and as the fulfilment of the

²⁴ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, Margaret Kohl, tran., London UK: SCM Press, 1981, pp. 204-206.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

Spirit's indwelling".³² All of God's works in the world have the kingdom of glory as their goal.

In a critique of Moltmann's views on this matter, Roger Olson identifies some conceptual inconsistencies, but, nevertheless, recognises value in its contribution to a clearer understanding of the relation between economic and immanent Trinity.³³ Moltmann's work is also valuable, in that it suggests a distinct role for each member of the Trinity, in the total activity of the kingdom, and thus affirms the vital interest and participation of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the kingdom of God. It will be helpful at this point to examine, in more detail, the biblical data on this.

The Father and the Kingdom

It soon becomes clear from scripture that the Father has a unique relation to the kingdom. Jesus Himself declares that only the Father knows the time of its consummation (Mark 13:32).³⁴

The Fatherhood of God is strongly linked to the kingdom. This occurs specifically in Luke 12:32; 22:29; Matt 13:43; 25:34. The Lukan references depict the Father as the One, who gives the kingdom to Jesus and the disciples.³⁵ In Matthew, the righteous will enjoy their future salvation, by entering into the kingdom of the Father. It is the Father, who has prepared this inheritance for them. Matt 26:29 also speaks of Jesus enjoying a future renewed fellowship with His disciples in the Father's kingdom. Thus, we can say that the concept of the Fatherhood of God is qualified by the kingdom. It is the Father, who allows redeemed humanity to enter into the kingdom; it follows that those, who

³² Ibid., p. 212.

³³ Roger E. Olson, "Trinity and Eschatology: The Historical Being of God in Jurgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg", in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 36 (1983), p. 213-227, esp. pp. 220ff.

³⁴ C. Rene Padilla, *Mission Between the Times*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1985, p. 188.

³⁵ I. H. Marshall, "The Hope of a New Age: the Kingdom of God in the New Testament", in *Themelios* 11-1 (1985), p. 9.

do not enter the kingdom, will not experience the relationship of God as Father.³⁶

However, this relationship is not only future. It also has a present reality. Jesus taught His disciples to call God their Father, and to pray to Him as such (Matt 6:9, 10; Luke 11:1, 2).³⁷ This petition for “your kingdom to come”, addressed to the Father, attests that the King is a Father. Marshall suggests that this indicates that the kingdom of God is primarily concerned with the creation of a family.³⁸ While this may seem simplistic, it should be remembered that the “family of God” is an important concept for our understanding of salvation. Ladd provides a valuable connection, when he looks back to find the basis of Jesus’ teaching on the Fatherhood of God. In the Old Testament, the Fatherhood of God is a way of describing the covenant relationship between God and Israel.³⁹ Thus, when we refer to God as Father, we are addressing none other than Yahweh Himself, the God of the Old Testament, the sovereign creator and Lord of the whole universe.⁴⁰ This has salvific significance:

The ultimate source of the kingdom metaphor, at its deepest level, was the saving relationship between Yahweh and His people. Israel experienced its God as a saving God, who rescued it from slavery in Egypt, forged a covenant, and brought His people to a land of promise. This same God was recognised as the “one God”, who ruled the universe, and all peoples.⁴¹

Not surprisingly, then, it is God the Father, who is at the centre of Jesus’ teaching. Along with praying for the Father’s kingdom to come, Jesus commands His disciples to petition the Father, to cause His name to be

³⁶ Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, p. 179.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

³⁸ Marshall, “The Hope of a New Age”, p. 9.

³⁹ Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, p. 179.

⁴⁰ Castro, *Freedom in Mission*, pp. 42-47.

⁴¹ Senior, and Stuhlmüller, *Biblical Foundations for Mission*, p. 144; P. D. Miller notes that this connection between God, the Father of the New Testament, and Yahweh, of the Old Testament, is important, because it undergirds the church’s connection to Israel, and to the Lord of Israel. See P. D. Miller, “A Strange Kind of Monotheism”, in *Theology Today* 54-3 (1997), pp. 293-297.

hallowed. Marshall concludes that, from this, we can say that the “character of the kingdom of God is determined by the character and activity of the Father”.⁴²

Some have taken this one step further and claimed that Kingship and Fatherhood are one and the same thing.⁴³ While this does show the close relationship between the two concepts, it fails to give proper due to the fact that the kingdom of God has come in the very person and mission of the Son, Jesus Christ. This Christ, crucified, risen, and proclaimed as Lord, has not only made it possible to enter into a relationship with the Father, who reigns, but has also defeated evil, and, at the consummation of the kingdom, will bring about a restoration of the whole creation. We will now explore further the matter of the Son and the kingdom.

The Son and the Kingdom

As Son, Jesus receives the Father’s mission to install the kingdom. This is a function of the fact that only the Son is able to reveal the Father, and, thus, only the Son is able to initiate the kingdom of the Father (Luke 10:21-22).⁴⁴

As was mentioned earlier, Jesus not only proclaimed the kingdom in His inaugural public speech (Mark 1:15; Matt 4:17, 23), He was also the very embodiment of the kingdom. Newbigin makes the interesting observation that, while Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God, the first generation of Christians spoke about Jesus. This was because the kingdom of God was no longer a vague idea, or distant hope. Now, in Jesus, it had a name and a face.⁴⁵ In His person and work, the kingdom of God has both come, and is coming.⁴⁶ Vicedom gives a helpful summary:

⁴² Marshall, “The Hope of a New Age”, p. 10.

⁴³ Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, p. 182, gives the example of T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus*, Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1935, p. 163.

⁴⁴ Boff, *Trinity and Society*, pp. 30-32.

⁴⁵ Newbigin, *Open Secret*, p. 40.

⁴⁶ J. Verkuyl, “The Biblical Notion of the Kingdom”, in *The Good News of the Kingdom*, Charles Van Engen, Dean S. Gilliland, and Paul Pierson, eds, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1993, p. 72.

He [the Son] is the one sent in the name of the Lord (Matt 21:9), to whom all regal honours are due, because of His exaltation into the highest heavens (Luke 18:38). He is the King who royally cares for His own, and returns to them hundredfold what they have sacrificed for Him (Luke 18:29). There is no power, which will not be subject to Him, and which He will not destroy when He brings the kingdom (Matt 28:19). God's reign and Jesus Christ are one and the same thing. Therefore, he who proclaims the name of Jesus, also proclaims the reign of God (Acts 8:12; 28:31). Jesus is God's answer to man's quest, and, therefore, the content of the proclamation of the kingdom (2 Tim 4:1). All of this is summarised in Colossians, where everything that is ascribed to God in the Old Testament is said of Jesus Christ Himself.⁴⁷

The kingship of Jesus is also evident in other ways. Firstly, in regards to His priesthood, Torrance claims that Christ's incarnation was the breaking-in of the kingdom of God into the Jewish cultus.⁴⁸ This is deduced from the royal nature of His priesthood, because "His word is identical with Kingly act; . . . [and] because His offering is identical with His Person. This is royal priesthood, in the coincidence of grace and omnipotence, in the identity of person and work."⁴⁹ Attention is also drawn to the clear exposition, by the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, of Christ's royal priesthood.⁵⁰ Secondly, Christ proves Himself King by being the judge of humanity (Acts 17:32). At His return, Christ will pronounce the verdict, which men and women have brought on themselves, through their attitude to the gospel, and He will carry out that verdict (John 5:22-29).⁵¹ Thirdly, the messiahship of Jesus points to Him as king. The word "messiah" has the meaning of "anointed", and was used to refer to someone endowed with the Spirit by God for a particular purpose. Marshall maintains that, in the case of Jesus, the reference is to an anointed king, and thus, in the Messiah, we see God setting up His rule, through a king, anointed by the Spirit.

⁴⁷ Vicedom, *Mission of God*, p. 23.

⁴⁸ Thomas F. Torrance, *Royal Priesthood*, Edinburgh UK: Oliver & Boyd, 1955p. 7.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 15ff.

⁵¹ Vicedom, *Mission of God*, p. 28.

Jesus' acceptance of, and self-use of, appellations, such as, "Son of David" and "Son of Man" indicate that He recognised His role as the agent of God's rule.⁵² Finally, we can note that the resurrection vindicated the kingship of Jesus, revealing Him to be the Lord of the universe.⁵³

As king, Jesus offers no definition of the kingdom, but this can be gleaned from His words and deeds.⁵⁴ The parables Jesus told, His fellowship with outcasts, His healings and exorcisms – "all of these become a cumulative definition of what the kingdom of God meant".⁵⁵ In His preaching, Jesus disclosed the riches of the kingdom: reconciliation, forgiveness of sins, mercy, grace, and power.⁵⁶ He also revealed that the kingdom of God is not like worldly kingdoms (John 18:36). It is opposed to the natural tendencies of humanity (Matt 11:29), such as self-righteousness, legalism, and hedonism. It is also different, because it is moving toward a final, future reality that will eventuate when Christ returns.⁵⁷

The kingdom finds its ultimate and most-telling demonstration, however, in the cross. Jesus steadfastly and knowingly moved towards His earthly destiny of the crucifixion. His sacrificial death revealed, simultaneously, the mystery, the love, and the power of the kingdom.⁵⁸ Any true understanding of the kingdom will, thus, be a theology of the cross.⁵⁹

Thus, the Son reveals the Father, and is devoted to instigating and establishing a kingdom of redemption and liberation, where the Father reigns as king. The exercise of kingly rule implies the use of power, and

⁵² Marshall, "The Hope of a New Age", p. 10.

⁵³ Senior, and Stuhlmüller, *Biblical Foundations for Mission*, p. 158.

⁵⁴ Castro, *Freedom in Mission*, p. 40.

⁵⁵ Senior, and Stuhlmüller, *Biblical Foundations for Mission*, p. 146.

⁵⁶ Verkuyl, "The Biblical Notion of the Kingdom", p. 72.

⁵⁷ Vicedom, *Mission of God*, pp. 23-26.

⁵⁸ Newbigin, *Open Secret*, p. 53.

⁵⁹ Verkuyl, "The Biblical Notion of the Kingdom", p. 76.

the Bible reveals that the source of this power in the kingdom of God is the Holy Spirit.⁶⁰

The Holy Spirit and the Kingdom

Jesus' awareness that the Spirit was the source of His power is clearly enunciated in the gospels. In Matt 12:28, Jesus claims that it is by the Spirit of God that He performs His miracles, and the kingdom of God has arrived (cf. Mark 3:29; Luke 12:10). It is possible to conclude from this that the working of the Spirit, in and through Jesus, constituted the actual coming of the kingdom. Marshall observes that the Spirit was promised in the Old Testament as a gift for the last days, in the same way as the kingdom of God (Joel 2:28f.). Thus he suggests that the kingdom of God, and the Spirit, are both signs of the eschatological activity of God in Jesus.⁶¹

The close connection between Jesus and the Spirit is evident, also, in the fact that "it is by the Spirit that Jesus is conceived, by the Spirit that He is anointed at His baptism, and by the Spirit that He is driven into the desert, for His encounter with Satan".⁶² This last point highlights the truth that the kingdom of God is in direct conflict with another kingdom – the rule of Satan. The power of the Spirit, at war with the power of the devil, is a dominant theme in the gospels.⁶³

Another important passage is John 3:3-5. Here, the Son of God is the agent of redemption, through whom the saving sovereignty of God is realised.⁶⁴ This redemption is described as entry into the kingdom. Entrance into the kingdom comes from God alone, and is given only to those who are born again. This new birth comes from the Spirit.⁶⁵ Thus, the Spirit makes the sovereignty of God real to the believer, by

⁶⁰ Boff, *Trinity and Society*, pp. 33-34.

⁶¹ Marshall, "The Hope of a New Age", p. 10.

⁶² Newbigin, *Open Secret*, p. 57.

⁶³ Marshall, "The Hope of a New Age", p. 10.

⁶⁴ George Raymond Beasley-Murray, "John 3:3-5: Baptism, Spirit, and Kingdom", in *The Expository Times* 97-6 (1986), pp. 167-170.

⁶⁵ Jurgen Moltmann, "The Fellowship of the Holy Spirit: Trinitarian Pneumatology", in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 37-3 (1984), pp. 287-300.

allowing him entrance into the kingdom, and by providing manifestations of the kingly power in the believer's life.⁶⁶

The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, for it is only by His enabling presence that believers may declare Christ as Lord (1 Cor 12:1-3).⁶⁷ Interestingly, the Spirit is Himself declared as Lord in 2 Cor 3:17.⁶⁸ He, too, has a claim to sovereignty in the kingdom, which is only to be expected, when considered from a Trinitarian perspective. The Spirit is God, and is revealed as such in the Bible.⁶⁹

The kingdom is given in the Spirit, for "He Himself is this kingdom, in the working of God (Matt 3:11; John 1:20, 27, 33; Acts 1:5)".⁷⁰ Pentecost occurred so that the kingdom of God could continue to be a present reality, through the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church.⁷¹ On this basis, the Great Commission can be seen to be not just a command, but a law, which expresses the nature of the church. The outpouring of the Spirit is the actualisation of the Great Commission in the life of the church. Because the church is indwelt by the Spirit, she is, by her very nature, a witnessing body.⁷²

This leads us now to briefly examine some of the myriad implications for mission, which arise from consideration of the kingdom of the triune God.

⁶⁶ J. E. Yates, *The Spirit and the Kingdom*, London UK: SPCK, 1963, p. 202.

⁶⁷ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Relevance of Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission*, London UK: Edinburgh House Press, 1963, p. 74.

⁶⁸ Admittedly, it is not exactly clear what Paul meant when he referred to the Spirit as Lord. A good summary of the various views can be found in D. Greenwood, "The Lord is the Spirit: Some Considerations of 2 Cor 3:17", in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* XXXIV-4 (1972), pp. 467-472. The view of Greenwood is ostensibly that κύριος (*kurios*) here refers to Yahweh, and πνεῦμα (*pneuma*) refers to the Holy Spirit. This is very similar to the view of James D. G. Dunn, "2 Corinthians 3:17: The Lord is the Spirit", in *Journal of Theological Studies* 21-2 (1970), pp. 309-320.

⁶⁹ Boff, *Trinity and Society*, p. 34.

⁷⁰ Vicedom, *Mission of God*, p. 56.

⁷¹ Padilla, *Mission Between the Times*, p. 191.

⁷² Harry R. Boer, *Pentecost and Missions*, London UK: Lutterworth Press, 1961, pp. 217f.

Implications for Mission

The principal implication for mission is, of course, that the work of the church in mission is to participate in the proclamation, and establishment, of the reign of the Triune God.⁷³ The church is to witness to the kingdom, not only because of her spirit-filled nature, as mentioned above, but because the kingdom is a gift to be shared.

Kingdom as Gift

The Son received the kingdom as a gift, and in turn, gives it to His disciples.

And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:29, 30, NIV).⁷⁴

Jesus can give the kingdom, because it is His to give, as a gift from the Father. There are several points to draw from this:

1. The kingdom is not man's to take; nor can it be forced on anyone – humans have freedom to accept the gift or refuse it.
2. Jesus gives the kingdom of God to liberate men and women from the kingdom of darkness.
3. Service in the kingdom becomes a gift.
4. Jesus shares His regal authority with His disciples, as participants in His mission.⁷⁵

⁷³ Newbigin, *Relevance of Trinitarian Doctrine*, p. 50.

⁷⁴ Luke 12:32 indicates that the Father also gives the kingdom to believers.

⁷⁵ Vicedom, *Mission of God*, pp. 26-27; Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: vol 2: 9:51-24:53*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1996, pp. 1739-1740; John Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol 35C, Dallas TX: Word Publishing, 1993, pp. 1064-1068; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (X-XXIV)*, Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1985, pp. 1414-1419.

Kingdom Mission

The church's work is not primarily either preaching the gospel, or the planting of churches in every people group, or the translation of scriptures, or the provision of services, or whatever else may be promulgated as mission, but it is living in the reality that God is King. All of these things are valid, but only have any true value in the light of the kingdom. Scherer maintains that the call of Lausanne II for the "whole church to take the whole gospel to the whole world" can only be realised in the "eschatologically-grounded *kingdom* context of the mission of the Triune God".⁷⁶ This shapes our mission, for it compels us to remain focused on the King.

This correct emphasis should bring at least three results:

1. **Mission work will be rooted in prayer.** God, the King, is at work in the lives of people and nations, to bring about His rule, long before we arrive as missionaries. It is not that the church moves God around the world, but instead "God moves the church around the world, through the ongoing activities of all three persons of the Trinity".⁷⁷ Prayer is essential, not only as a recognition of His prevenience, but to ensure that our mission work follows His lead.
2. **There will be a sense of urgency to our work.** The King is returning to consummate the kingdom, and we are to be preparing for His return.
3. **We will avoid becoming self-centred, as individuals, and as churches.** Our thoughts will be preoccupied with bringing those who do not know Christ as Lord into the kingdom of the loving and merciful God.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Scherer, "Church, Kingdom, and *Missio Dei*", p. 84.

⁷⁷ Braaten, "The Triune God", p. 425.

⁷⁸ These three points are taken from Paul G. Hiebert, "Evangelism, Church, and Kingdom", in *The Good News of the Kingdom*, Charles Van Engen, Dean S. Gilliland, and Paul Pierson, eds, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1993, p. 160.

Repentance

This last point leads to an issue of vital importance in a correct understanding of kingdom and mission. Jesus' opening proclamation (Mark 1:15; Matt 4:17) not only announced the kingdom, but declared that repentance was necessary to enter into it. Wherever the church proclaims the reign of God, that declaration must include a call to repentance and conversion.⁷⁹ Unbelievers belong to the kingdom of the world/devil, which is opposed to God's kingdom.⁸⁰ There must, by necessity, be a change of allegiance for those who wish to enter the kingdom of God.⁸¹ This repentance is more than just a change of allegiance, though. In the context of Western culture, it is a call to leave the misery and futility of selfish individualism, and enter into the joy of Trinitarian fellowship.⁸² From a Melanesian perspective, it is a call to leave the fear and destructiveness of animism, and enjoy the protective power of the Triune God, who created all things, defeated death, is actively engaged in battle with the forces of the other kingdom, and will ultimately be victorious in restoring all creation under His rule.

Mission and Social Responsibility

Because the kingdom of God is the mission of the Triune God, it is concerned with the whole of reality, and it is through each member of the Trinity that the kingdom reaches every community and every person.⁸³

The mission of the church is a continuation of the mission of Jesus, who inaugurated the kingdom. The church must reflect the values of the kingdom. In the early church, this was seen, not only in the preaching of the gospel, but in signs and wonders, and in a radical kingdom lifestyle (Acts 2:42-44; 4:32-37). Through the empowering of the Holy Spirit, the early church began to taste the reality of the kingdom, and be a credible sign of the kingdom. As the community of the kingdom, indwelt by the Spirit, the church is obviously called to impact every area of life. The church is not only to proclaim Jesus as Lord, but to do the

⁷⁹ Senior, and Stuhlmüller, *Biblical Foundations for Mission*, p. 146.

⁸⁰ Vicedom, *Mission of God*, p. 32.

⁸¹ Castro, *Freedom in Mission*, pp. 61, 68.

⁸² G. Mar Osthathios, "The Holy Trinity", p. 2.

⁸³ Castro, *Freedom in Mission*, pp. 66, 68.

good works, prepared in advance for her by God (Eph 2:10). Social action is, thus, not something to be tacked on to the “real” work of mission, but is an integral part of living in the kingdom.⁸⁴

There must be caution here. McQuilkin rightly warns that if social action is given the same emphasis as evangelism, then history shows that the former will crowd out the latter.⁸⁵ This, however, is more likely the result of ignoring the need for a call to repentance, which often occurs in programmes of social action.

The nature of the kingdom of God, as an expression of God’s ultimate kingship over the whole creation, demands that social responsibility be an integral part of mission. In the kingdom, word and deed are united. The gospel is the good news of the kingdom, and good works are signs of the kingdom.⁸⁶

Humanity’s greatest need is to be redeemed from sin, and brought into the kingdom of God, through an encounter with Jesus. The gospel is the story of how this need has been met, and so, it must be widely, and openly, proclaimed.⁸⁷ Sadly, this need is not always felt by unbelievers, and, instead, other needs are given priority, for example, nutrition, health, etc. However, because God’s kingship is universal, these needs are also enveloped by the kingdom, and so, the Holy Spirit is able to use the meeting of these needs as a demonstration of God’s kingly power.⁸⁸ Any social action, therefore, if conducted in an understanding of the kingdom, is not in competition against evangelism, but partner with it.

⁸⁴ Padilla, *Mission Between the Times*, pp. 191-193.

⁸⁵ J. Robertson McQuilkin, “An Evangelical Assessment of Mission Theology of the Kingdom of God”, in *The Good News of the Kingdom*, Charles Van Engen, Dean S. Gilliland, and Paul Pierson, eds, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1993, pp. 176-177.

⁸⁶ Padilla, *Mission Between the Times*, p. 197.

⁸⁷ Avery Dulles has a helpful chapter on the church as herald of the kingdom, discussing both the strengths and weaknesses of an emphasis on gospel proclamation in missions. Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, Dublin Ire: Gill & Macmillan, 1987, pp. 76-88.

⁸⁸ Padilla, *Mission Between the Times*, p. 198.

Dialogue in Mission

Dialogue is valuable, not simply because of the pluralistic world, in which we live, but because it can remove prejudice and misunderstanding between adherents of differing faiths.⁸⁹ However, in the face of the prevailing radical theocentrism of people such as Paul Knitter and John Hick, the Trinitarian understanding of God must be guarded, as the way, in which the Christian speaks of God.⁹⁰

Newbigin echoes this thought, suggesting that “the Trinity provides us with the true grammar of dialogue”.⁹¹ From this he posits the following:

1. God is the Father of all humanity, and so, we share a common nature with those of other faiths, with whom we enter into dialogue. We meet them at a particular place in time and history that is under the Father’s providence and rule.
2. We take part in the dialogue, as members of the body of Christ, who have been sent into the world by the Father to continue the mission of Jesus. Like Jesus, we must identify with those to whom we are sent, yet remain obedient to the King.
3. We participate in dialogue, believing that the Holy Spirit is able to sovereignly use what is said, to glorify Jesus and bring conversion.⁹²

Dialogue is also valuable, because it encourages us to cast our nets wider, reflecting the inclusive nature of the kingdom. The invitation to enter the kingdom is to be given to all the nations (Matt 28:18-20), and this is reflected in Jesus’ use of the messianic banquet theme, and the Gentiles’ favourable response to it (Matt 8:11; 22:1-14; 25:1-13; Luke 14:1, 15-24; 15:6, 9, 22-24; 22:16, 28-30). This is seen by some as a

⁸⁹ Verkuyl, “The Biblical Notion of the Kingdom”, p. 78.

⁹⁰ Braaten, “The Triune God”, p. 420.

⁹¹ Newbigin, *Open Secret*, p. 183.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 183-187; this conversion may be in both the unbeliever and the Christian. The Holy Spirit may well use the dialogue to profoundly change believers, and bring them into a richer relationship with the Father.

corrective to the motif of eschatological pilgrimage of the nations to Zion. The Gentiles come to Zion, not in subjugation, but to share fully in the joy of the kingdom.⁹³

Unity

The attitude of non-cooperation, competitiveness, and divisiveness that exists in some regions between mission organisations, as members of the church, is unacceptable within God's kingdom. The unity of the church is based on the Trinity (Eph 4:4-6).⁹⁴ The Trinity is a community of divine persons, existing in unity. This divine community in unity, established and maintained by love, constitutes the plan for humanity.⁹⁵ The church, as participant in the mission of God, is to display the unity, which is a "prefigurement of the unity of humankind, which God is working to bring about".⁹⁶ Thus, failure on the church's part to display unity is an abrogation of the divine intention, a denial of the triune nature of God, and irreconcilable with the proclamation of the kingdom.

It almost goes without saying that a lack of unity invariably arises from a lack of holiness on the church's part. The church must constantly strive to imitate her Lord, so as to avoid this, and other hindrances to her witness.

Optimistic View of History

In light of this, it is reassuring to note that the teaching of Jesus displayed a positive, hopeful view of history.⁹⁷ Conzelmann contends that the parables of growth, told by Jesus, are not so much to do with the way the kingdom grows, as with the assured harvest, and, therefore, speak of the final triumph of God's Lordship.⁹⁸ Elsewhere, in

⁹³ Senior, and Stuhlmüller, *Biblical Foundations for Mission*, p. 153.

⁹⁴ Braaten, "The Triune God", p. 424.

⁹⁵ Castro, *Themes in Theology and Mission*, p. 135.

⁹⁶ Braaten, "The Triune God", p. 424.

⁹⁷ Senior, and Stuhlmüller, *Biblical Foundations for Mission*, pp. 155-156.

⁹⁸ Hans Conzelmann, *Jesus*, Philadelphia PA: Fortress Press, 1973, pp. 74-81.

apocalyptic discourses, such as Mark 13, Jesus displays the conviction that the coming of the kingdom will mean victory over evil and death.⁹⁹

Conclusion

This theme of hope is a worthwhile one on which to conclude. The kingdom of God originates in the Father; Christ initiated it in history, and the Holy Spirit is here to carry forward its consummation, until its final fulfilment when Christ returns.¹⁰⁰ The Trinitarian basis of the kingdom means that it is not a vague, unknown entity, nor is it an ethereal dream. The kingdom of God has come, and is coming, because its full and final establishment is the goal of the Triune God.

For the church, this is cause for celebration, and reason for hope. God's motivation for His mission is love (John 3:16). The Christian knows that this love is all-conquering, and so, in turn, God's love motivates the Christian to hope that sharing this love will bring conversion, and entry, into the kingdom. This hope leads Christians to believe that they can change the world, and so, they go out into the world, as God's agents of transformation, participating in God's work of restoring all of creation under His rule.¹⁰¹

Emilio Castro summarises this well:

The kingdom of God is . . . the historical manifestation of His trinitarian love. God is in command; He speaks; He preserves; He purifies; He will judge; He will complete. . . . As a priestly people, fulfilling our vocation, we obey our calling, by pointing to Jesus the King, in whose life every life can find a new beginning.¹⁰²

And so we pray, "Come Lord Jesus".

⁹⁹ Senior, and Stuhlmüller, *Biblical Foundations for Mission*, p. 156.

¹⁰⁰ G. Mar Osthathios, "The Holy Trinity", p. 10.

¹⁰¹ Charles Van Engen, "Faith, Love, and Hope", in *The Good News of the Kingdom*, Charles Van Engen, Dean S. Gilliland, and Paul Pierson, eds, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1993, pp. 260-261.

¹⁰² Castro, *Freedom in Mission*, p. 88.

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