obscured and is now being recovered. I believe this to be the case with the term "missional."

Darrell Guder is correct when he speaks of the term "missional" as a kind of scaffolding that, at least for some of us employing the term, is holding up our ecclesiology, or theology, our interpretation of Scripture, and our theological education. There would be no need for that scaffolding if those things were already being shaped as they should be by the *missio Dei* and by a robust understanding of the church's missional nature. Speaking of theology in particular, Guder says, "If mission were truly the mother of our theology, if our theological disciplines were intentionally conceived and developed as components of the formation of the church for its biblical vocation, we would never need to use the term 'missional.'"[1] The trouble is, of course, that it is not, and so this word points us to something important that is missing. Likewise of biblical hermeneutics, Guder says that the "practice of 'hermeneutics' should be missional by its very nature. But it clearly is not, and so we must speak of 'missional hermeneutics,' propping up the enterprise with this conceptual scaffolding."[2]

The problem is that our churchmanship and our theology developed at a time when mission was not a central concern. As Lesslie Newbigin observes, "The period in which our thinking about the Church received its main features was the period in which Christianity had practically ceased to be a missionary religion. . . . It was in this period, when the dimensions of the ends of the earth had ceased to exist as a practical reality in the minds of Christians, that the main patterns of churchmanship were formed."[3] Similarly, David Bosch says of the theological curriculum: "A major problem is that the present division of theological subjects was canonized in a period when the church in Europe was completely introverted."[4]

And so I will use the word "missional" throughout this chapter as

1. Darrell Guder, "*Missio Dei*: Integrating Theological Formation for Apostolic Vocation," *Missiology: An International Review* 37 (2009): 66.
2. Ibid.
3. Lesslie Newbigin, *Honest Religion for Secular Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 102.
4. David J. Bosch, "Theological Education in Missional Perspective," *Missiology: An International Review* 10 (1982): 26.

scaffolding that draws attention to the biblical understanding of the nature of the church as it exists for the sake of the world (missional ecclesiology), to the kind of faithful theology whose content is shaped by the mission and whose goal is to equip the church for its vocation (missional theology), and to a kind of faithful biblical interpretation that takes seriously the participation of God's people in his redemptive mission as a central theme in Scripture (missional hermeneutic). Of course, scaffolding is a temporary structure that supports a building until it can stand on its own. Hopefully, someday, our understanding of church, of theology, of scriptural interpretation, and of theological education will be so suffused with our missional vocation that we no longer need the term. Perhaps, one day, we may even be able to say, as Christopher Wright often does, that to speak of "missional church" (or we might add, theology or hermeneutic) is like saying "female woman"—that's the only kind there is!

Missional Ecclesiology, Missional Theology, and Missional Hermeneutic

The theme of this book is the task of theology. And so, before speaking of how to appropriate Scripture for that task, let me offer a brief description of what I believe missional theology to be—that is, how this scaffolding can support the task of theology. This will give us a clue about what a missional approach to Scripture for the theological task should be. Bosch says of theology: "We are in need of a missiological agenda for theology rather than just a theological agenda for mission; for theology rightly understood, has no reason to exist other than critically to accompany the *missio Dei*."[5] Similarly, Harvie Conn says that the "question is not simply, or only, or largely, missions and what it is. The question is also theology and what it does."[6] If this is so, then Bosch is correct when he says that "unless we develop a missionary theology, not just a theology of mission, we will not achieve more than

5. David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 494.
6. Harvie Conn, "The Missionary Task of Theology: A Love/Hate Relationship?" *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983): 7.

merely patch up the church."[7] These are all rather bold statements, but I believe them to be correct. So, in line with them, I describe missional theology with the following five features.

Missional theology, in the first place, explores the implications of the church's missional identity as participants in the *missio Dei*. The starting point for missional theology is the central theme of mission in the biblical story. The Bible tells one unfolding story of God's mission to restore the whole creation and entire life of humankind. At the center of God's work is his election of a people: He works *in* them and *through* them for the sake of the world. This covenant people exists to participate in God's mission, to take up their role in the biblical drama for the sake of the world. Theology accompanies them on their way, taking account of this vocation and equipping them for it.

Theological reflection explores this missional identity, besides, in all areas of the theological curriculum. Traditionally, the theological curriculum has manifested a fourfold division: biblical studies, systematic theology, church history, and practical theology. In all of these areas, the question is pressed: How does the centrality of mission in the biblical story affect the content of these disciplines? How do these disciplines equip the church for its ongoing mission?[8]

Missional theology, moreover, explores the significance of the missional vocation in all areas of the congregational life of the church. This includes the church's gathered or institutional life in which our new life in Christ is nurtured for the sake of the world (preaching, prayer, worship, sacraments, pastoral visitation, counseling, fellowship, formation, and so on), our new life in the midst of the world (evangelism, mercy and justice, involvement in our neighborhoods, cross-cultural missions, training laity for their callings, living as a contrast community, equipping to understand culture and other religions, and so on), and the structures that enable and equip the

7. David J. Bosch, *Believing in the Future: Toward a Missiology of Western Culture* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), 32

8. I have probed this question in a chapter titled "A Missional Reading of Scripture, Theological Education, and Curriculum," in *Reading the Bible Missionally*, ed. Michael W. Goheen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 299-329. See also, Bosch, "Theological Education in Missionary Perspective," and Newbigin, *Honest Religion for Secular Man*, 102–3.

nurturing and outward ministries to thrive (leadership, congregational, ecumenical, and financial).[9]

The fourth component of missional theology is that its goal and purpose is to form God's people to be faithful to their missional calling. Richard Bauckham laments that too often, "the academic guild of biblical scholars" has a "largely self-generated agenda [that] increasingly excludes the church from its context and implied audience." Biblical scholarship, he insists, must "address the church in its mission to the world" and even make the church in the West, which is now waking up to its mission, not simply its audience, but its primary dialogue partner.[10] Bauckham's observation is true not only of biblical studies, but of other theological disciplines as well.

Finally, missional theology rejects the notion of a *theologia perennis*—a timeless theology valid for all times and places—and is alert to the fact that all theology takes place in a particular historical and cultural context. There is no supra- or meta-cultural theology; there is only theology that reflects on the gospel in a particular context and is directed to the particular needs of a church. While the gospel has universal validity, our particular theologies do not. While particular contextual theologies may well enrich churches in other cultural contexts—in fact, they always will if they are rooted in Scripture since the gospel is universally true—they will be formed by particular historical and cultural traditions in response to the needs of the church in that setting.

There is a danger that since the very nature of theology is contextual reflection, it might become parochial and accommodated to the idolatry of particular cultures. And so missional theology will need the mutually correcting and enriching voices of Christians from other settings: from other cultures, from other historical eras, and from other confessional traditions. But theology will also require the voice

9. This is how I structured a course I taught at Calvin Theological Seminary, 2012–2015, titled "Introduction to Missional Ministry." It is also the way we structure the whole "congregational theology" component of our curriculum at Missional Training Center—Phoenix. We ask: If the church is missional by its very nature, how does that affect these areas of congregational life?
10. Richard Bauckham, "Mission as Hermeneutic for Scriptural Interpretation," in *Reading the Bible Missionally*, ed. Michael W. Goheen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 29.

of missiology as a particular discipline to offer a critical voice that can act as a gadfly or leaven to call it to its missional vocation.[11] To quote the striking words of Harvie Conn: "Missiology stands by to interrupt at every significant moment in the theological conversation with the words 'among the nations.'"[12]

What is fundamental to these five components of missional theology is the recognition of the missional identity of the church as defined by the role it is called to play in the unfolding story of God's mission. Indeed, this is the rocket launcher that sends a missional theology into orbit. As one traces the role of God's people in the biblical story and interprets the various books of the canon in this context, two things emerge. First, the Bible is a *record* of God's mission in and through his people. Mission is so central that to ignore it is to miss a very important part of the story the Bible tells. Mission is a hermeneutical key that unlocks the biblical story. Second, the Bible is a *product* and *tool* of God's mission, in and through his people. That is, the various canonical books find their origin in God's intention to shape and equip a people for his purposes. These are the two dimensions of a missional hermeneutic.

I have now erected a missional scaffolding in a preliminary way for three interrelated things: an ecclesiology that sees its missional identity as central to its being; a theology that works out the implications of this identity to form the church for its vocation; and a hermeneutic that reads Scripture as a record and tool of God's mission, in and through his people. In fact, if we were now to take the time to trace historically a small slice of the concept of mission in the twentieth century, we would see precisely this. That is, the development of the *missio Dei* and a consequent missional ecclesiology in the middle part of the twentieth century has led inexorably on to questions about the significance of this missional identity for theology, for theological education, for the life of the church, and for reading Scripture. A missional ecclesiology has, in turn, led to a missional theology and a missional hermeneutic. A missional approach to

11. Bosch, "Theological Education in Missionary Perspective," 27.
12. Harvie Conn, *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds: Theology, Anthropology, and Mission in Trialogue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 224.

Scripture for the task of theology comes by way of a missional hermeneutic.

Messianic and Missional Reading of Scripture

It is not just the accidents of twentieth-century mission history that lead us to read Scripture in a missional way. Jesus himself points us to a narrative reading of Scripture with mission at the center. At the close of Luke's Gospel, the resurrected Jesus met with the disciples and "opened their minds so that they could understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45). To speak with contemporary terminology, Jesus gives them a hermeneutical key to unlock the biblical story. That key is disclosed in his subsequent words: "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (vv. 46–47). In these words, Jesus offers a twofold hermeneutical key.[13] The first is messianic: the Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day. The second is missional: and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations. The grammar of Jesus's words is clear: both Christ *and* the subsequent mission of the church are referred to in "This is what is written" that is now being fulfilled. Together, they form a key to interpret the Scriptures.

The Old Testament story is one of restoration and renewal. God set out on the long road of redemption to restore the whole creation, a people from all nations, and the whole of human life from sin and its effects. Jesus stood with the other Jews of his day in reading the Old Testament as a story waiting for an ending. According to Jesus's words, that story finds its climactic telos in himself, Jesus the Messiah who accomplishes this salvation. "What is written" is fulfilled by the work of the Messiah, especially in his death and resurrection. However, the Old Testament story is also one of the restoration and renewal *of all nations through God's chosen people*. The whole Old Testament story

13. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 30, 41.

has in view, from the outset, the salvation of all nations, indeed, of the entire creation. And this will be accomplished through a chosen people. God's particularist means in choosing Abraham and Israel ultimately have a universal goal in the salvation of all nations. Thus Jesus discloses the climactic moment of the Old Testament story, not only in how salvation has been accomplished (in the Messiah), but also in how that salvation is to now include all nations through his chosen people (in mission). "What is written" is fulfilled by the work of Jesus and by mission of the church to the ends of the earth.

These words of Jesus invite a twofold response as we read Scripture, and both are important for appropriating and approaching Scripture for the theological task. The first is to look back and read the Old Testament story with a messianic and missional lens. The second is to look forward and read the New Testament with the same lens. In other words, if we are to read the Bible aright, we must recognize, not only the centrality of Christ, but also the essential missional thread that weaves its way through the whole Scripture. A missional hermeneutic is not simply a matter of tracing the theme of mission throughout the biblical story the way we might trace, say, the theme of work or marriage. Rather, it posits mission as an indispensable lens for reading the whole. Richard Bauckham puts it nicely when he says that a "missionary hermeneutic . . . is a way of reading the Bible for which mission is the hermeneutical key. . . . A missionary hermeneutic of this kind would not be 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."[14]

Scripture as a Record of God's Mission in and through His People

Scripture is a historical record of God's mission to restore the whole creation from sin through the mission of his chosen covenant people. Bauckham further identifies two approaches in biblical scholarship that are especially favorable for developing a missional hermeneutic

14. Bauckham, "Mission as Hermeneutic," 28.

—narrative and canonical. We may also observe that the biblical theology movement dominated the ecumenical tradition in the 1940s and 1950s, and was a major factor in the rise of the *missio Dei* as the framework of a missionary ecclesiology at the Willingen conference of the International Missionary Council (1952). Like both the narrative and canonical approaches to Scripture, biblical theology attends to Scripture as one unfolding story of God's redemptive work in history. The redemptive-historical tradition of Dutch Calvinism, which shaped the missional hermeneutic and theology of folks such as J. H. Bavinck and Harvie Conn, also reads Scripture as a canonical and narrative whole. A missional hermeneutic is dependent upon reading Scripture in this way—as one unfolding story of redemption.

We can briefly highlight three important components. The first is the importance of the Old Testament in a missional hermeneutic. Johannes Blauw rightly observes:

> When we speak about the Church as "the people of God in the world" and enquire into the real nature of this Church, we cannot avoid speaking about the *roots* of the Church which are to be found in the Old Testament idea of Israel as the people of the covenant. So the question of the *missionary* nature of the Church, that is, the real relationship between the people of God and the world, cannot be solved until we have investigated the relation between Israel and the nations of the earth.[15]

Attending to the centrality of mission in the Old Testament will mean that by the time we reach the mission of the new covenant people, it is fully informed by several millennia of Israel's history that have shaped the identity of God's people as a light to the nations evident across the full spectrum of their lives.

The second feature is the scope of the salvation that is central to and the goal of the biblical story. A "soteriological self-centredness"[16] has marginalized the cosmic scope of the biblical story and has led to an emaciated understanding of mission, which, in turn, shapes a missional hermeneutic. Newbigin complains that we have abstracted

15. Johannes Blauw, "The Mission of the People of God," in *The Missionary Church in East and West*, ed. Charles C. West and David M. Paton (London: SCM, 1959), 91.
16. G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 211.

the individual from God's bigger story that gives the person's story meaning. Many read the biblical story, he says, starting with the question of individual salvation, and in so doing, privatize God's mighty work of grace and talk "as if the whole cosmic drama of salvation culminated in the words, 'For me; for me.'" This is a perversion of the Gospel, he says.[17] But not only have we isolated the individual from the cosmic scope of the biblical story, we have also diminished the central role of the community of which the individual is a part. This way of reading Scripture has deeply influenced our theology.

The logic of the biblical story that will nourish a robust missional hermeneutic and rich theological reflection is cosmic-communal-personal. God's redemptive goal is a *cosmic*, creation-wide renewal; he chooses a *community* to embody and make known that future salvation; and we are *personally* summoned to respond to God's Word, join this community, and take responsibility for our role in the bigger story. This places the people of God at the center of the story with the vocation of embodying a creation-wide, cosmic salvation.

And so these first two observations lead to the third, a point that I have already alluded to—the centrality of a people chosen for the sake of the world.[18] Somehow Israel was to be God's solution to the sin that infected his very good creation as a result of Adam's rebellion. Both election and covenant have a missional aim—the restoration of all creation and a people from all nations. God employs a particular means to accomplish his universal purpose; he walks a particularist road to reach a universal destination. I noted above Blauw's insistence of the importance of not bypassing Israel as a people of the covenant. Indeed, the covenant emphasizes the election of a people to serve God's purpose to recover his world. Both election and covenant are fundamentally missional. Election was never about Israel being chosen for its own sake—that was a distortion—but always for the sake of the world. Likewise, the purpose of the covenant was that Israel might be

17. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 179.
18. Cf. Michael W. Goheen, *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

a light to the nations. To forget the missional aim of the covenant, says Tom Wright, is to "betray the purpose for which that covenant was made. It is as though the postman were to imagine that all the letters in his bag were intended for him."[19]

The unfolding of Israel's history is rooted in the Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants. Together, they set a narrative trajectory for the rest of the Old Testament. God calls Abram and sets out a twofold blueprint for redemptive history: first, he promises to restore the blessing of creational life to him and his descendants, so that, second, they might be a channel of that blessing to all nations (Gen 12:2–3; 18:18–19). Blessed to be a blessing—that is the identity of God's chosen people from the beginning. At Sinai, on the heels of rescuing Israel from the dominion of Egyptian idolatry, he calls them to be a holy nation on display to all peoples and a priestly kingdom that mediates God's blessing to the nations (Exod 19:3–6). Israel is given the Torah so that they might "function as a people who would show the rest of humanity what being human was all about" (Exod 20–23).[20] The remainder of the Old Testament is a commentary on how well Israel fulfilled this calling for the sake of all nations.

Israel failed, treating both election and the covenant as an exclusive privilege. Called to model God's original creational design for human life in the midst of the nations, Israel was unfaithful to that commission, served idols instead of the living God, and thus, rather than being the solution, became part of the problem. The lifeguard God sent out to save the drowning world now also was drowning. But God promises through his prophets that his plan to bless all nations and restore the whole creation *through his chosen people* will not be foiled; he will gather and renew his people to successfully complete their missional role.

In keeping with God's promise, Jesus takes upon himself Israel's vocation to be the light of the world. In his ministry, he gathers the

19. N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 108.
20. Tom Wright, *Bringing the Church to the World: Renewing the Church to Confront the Paganism Entrenched in Western Culture* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1992), 59.

scattered sheep of Israel, inviting them to join him afresh in their vocation, and showing and teaching them what that would look like. In his life, death, and resurrection he fulfills the covenant, dealing with the sin of the world, including the sin and failure of Israel so that they might now fulfill their original calling. The newly gathered and renewed Israel, the new covenant people of God, is the beginnings of the new humanity restored in Christ, called now to fulfill their original vocation, which they had failed to attain. Jesus sends them to the nations to continue his own mission, the original mission of Israel. "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21) defines the very identity of this disciple community. They are to discharge their mission to the world as he had to Israel.

With the outpouring of his Spirit, God calls into being the eschatological people of God, the restored Israel for the sake of the world. This renewed Israel transformed through Jesus, and by the Spirit, is sent into the world. It is now a nongeographically based and multiethnic people called to continue Jesus's mission, to witness to his reign in life, word, and deed to the ends of the earth. And it is this mission that gives the church its very identity. The church is called to make known the end of universal history as a sign, foretaste, and instrument of the kingdom. It is a sign and foretaste of the goal of salvation history: it is to be a preview of what God will do for the entire cosmos. But the church is also an instrument, the means by which God's renewing work comes into the world.

This all too brief summary of the biblical story highlights the centrality of mission—God's mission, in and through his people. And it is essential to stress again that mission is not simply a subsidiary theme in the biblical narrative, but a hermeneutical lens on the whole of Scripture. And so, our approach to Scripture for the theological task must take seriously this missional direction and framework of the biblical story. "A missional hermeneutic," says Christopher Wright, "will work hard to read any text in the [scriptural] canon within this overarching framework, discerning its place within that framework, assessing how the shape of the grand narrative is reflected in the text

in question, and conversely, how the particular text contributes to and moves forward the grand narrative itself."[21]

Scripture as a Tool of God's Mission in and through His People

Scripture is not only a *record* of God's mission, in and through his people, to bring salvation to the world; it is also a *tool* to effectively bring it about. Or perhaps better, Scripture is a toolbox with many genres, all of which function to bring salvation through faith in Jesus the Christ. They don't just tell us the story but also take an active part in actually accomplishing it. Thus the nature and authority of Scripture may be understood in terms of its place and role in this story, or as Tom Wright puts it, biblical authority is a "sub-branch . . . of the mission of the church." He continues: "God's self-revelation is always to be understood within the category of God's mission to the world, God's saving sovereignty let loose through Jesus and the Spirit and aimed at the healing and renewal of the creation."[22] To rightly understand the nature and authority of Scripture, then, is to understand its formative role, how it powerfully works to shape a faithful people, and through them, to bring healing to the world. To miss this role and purpose of Scripture is to misunderstand how we are to approach and appropriate it.

And so, an essential question to ask of the text of Scripture, according to Guder, is, "How did this written testimony form and equip God's people for their missional vocation then, and how does it do so today?" He goes on to rightly draw out the implication for all biblical studies: "All the resources of historical, critical, and literary research on the biblical testimony can and must contribute to the church's formation by illumining all the dimensions of this fundamental question."[23]

21. Christopher J. H. Wright, "Mission and Old Testament Interpretation," in *Hearing the Old Testament: Listening for God's Address*, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew and David J. H. Beldman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 184.
22. N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God* (SanFrancisco: HarperOne, 2011), 27–29.
23. Darrell Guder, "From Mission and Theology to Missional Theology," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 24 (2003): 48.

Formation for their missional calling—that is why the various books of the scriptural canon were written. Again, what we mean by formation for mission is not an equipping to carry out various evangelistic and outreach activities. Rather, the vocation of God's people is to be a distinctive people embodying God's original creational intentions for humanity as a sign and preview to the world of where God is taking the whole creation. God works redemptively, first of all *in* his people, and thereafter *through* his people. So, the scriptural books were written to form God's people to be a distinctive people, ultimately for the sake of the nations.

The biblical books are *products* of God's mission in and through his people. They arise out of various needs, threats, and crises that face God's people in the course of living out their calling. Moreover, the various books of the canon are *tools* of God's mission; they form and shape God's people to be faithful to their vocation. For example, the Pentateuch is addressed to a people in danger of being engulfed by the pagan religions of the ancient Near East: thus Genesis 1 is a polemic against ancient Near Eastern creation myths that enables Israel to understand the true God, what it really means to be human, and what the world is really like; and the redemption of Israel from Egypt is portrayed as God's victory over the Egyptian gods. The Torah is designed to shape Israel into a people who embody God's creational purposes for human society in a particular cultural and historical context. Historical and prophetical books are addressed to a people in a crisis of faith so as to shape their identity and call them to faithfulness in a new setting: 1–2 Kings and Jeremiah address a people in exile who wonder what they are doing there after God's promises about a people, land, king, and temple seem to be null and void; Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles, and Haggai are addressed to a postexilic people struggling to understand why the grand fulfillment promised earlier in Scripture has not materialized. The prophets are covenant enforcers who call Israel back to their original vocation by warning them of judgment and nurturing hope by forming their imagination with God's marvelous future. The psalms form a covenant mind-set and identity in various

ways by giving Israel songs and words for their worship, including pointing them to the nations as the horizon of their vocation.[24] The wisdom literature forms a people to live in accordance with the wisdom of God's creation order across the whole spectrum of human life. The Gospels craft their narratives to proclaim and witness to the Christ event in a way that equips the church for faithful witness. The Epistles address the church in various contexts, bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to bear on their particular context so that they might be a faithful preview of the kingdom. And so on. The Scriptures form Israel and the church to be a faithful covenant people *for the sake of the world*.

I. Howard Marshall draws out the hermeneutical implication for the New Testament in a comment that could also be extended to the Old Testament: "A recognition of this missionary character of the [New Testament] documents will help us to see them in true perspective and to interpret them in the light of their intention."[25] The first step in hermeneutical obedience to discern what the particular text is trying to do. And so, in our approach to Scripture for the theological task we must constantly ask: What is this text trying to do? How is this text or book or genre functioning to equip God's people for their missional calling, then and now?

Implications of a Missional Reading of Scripture for Theology

Scripture is the main source for theology. If mission is a central theme in the biblical story, then this will form a missional theology. Two distinctions are important if we are to properly understand the word "missional" as an adjective to describe theology. The first, introduced by Lesslie Newbigin in the middle part of the previous century, is between missionary dimension and missionary intention.[26] He is reflecting on the nature of mission itself rather than theology. There

24. The "nations" are mentioned some 175 times in the Psalms.
25. I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 35.
26. Lesslie Newbigin, *One Body, One Gospel, One World* (London: International Missionary Council, 1958), 21, 43–44.

are intentional activities such as evangelism, church planting, and works of justice and mercy that have as their express intent the purpose of making known the gospel in word or deed. However, most of our lives are not aimed deliberately at that goal. Yet all of our lives have a missional dimension. That is, every part of the life of the Christian community—individually and corporately—witnesses to the renewing power of the gospel.

This distinction may also helpfully be applied to theology. Missiology deals explicitly and intentionally with various issues of the missional task of the church. However, not all theology will have mission as its explicit subject matter. Yet theology should have a missional dimension; mission is "not simply yet another subject but a dimension of theology as a whole."[27] Mission raises new questions and formulates different approaches to the same subject matter. It brings missional questions to bear on the work of the various theological disciplines. It reframes but does not replace theology as it has developed historically. It brings new perspectives, new questions, and new light to familiar issues and themes. It is, to quote Conn again, a matter of *interrupting the theological conversation among the various disciplines with the reminder "among the nations."*[28]

The second distinction important to understanding the adjective "missional" is between the goal and content of theology. Theology must be missional in the sense that its *goal* is to equip the church for its missional calling. Theology plays a role in the formation of leaders and a congregation to more faithfully embody the gospel for the sake of the world. Both phrases are held together: formation "to embody the gospel" and "for the sake of the world." But theology must also be formed in its *content* by the central theme of mission. How does the category of mission shape the various aspects of theological reflection? For too long, theology has primarily treated "to embody the gospel" and neglected "for the sake of the world."

Karl Barth critiques a theology that has forgotten mission as "pious

27. Bosch, "Theological Education in Missionary Perspective," 26.
28. Conn, *Eternal Word*, 224.

and sacred egocentricity."[29] He asks a deceptively simple question: What does it mean be a Christian? The "classic answer" is to be a recipient and possessor of the *beneficia Christi* (benefits of Christ). He lists these benefits: regeneration, conversion, peace with God, reconciliation, justification, sanctification, forgiveness of sins, empowerment to live a life of liberation, beloved of God, freedom, adoption as God's children, hope of the resurrection of the body, foretaste and heirs of eternal life, and a new obedience. All these come by grace as gifts of God in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit in response to repentance and faith. It is this, he says, that inspires the theology of the church. It is the way the New Testament has been approached and appropriated in theology.

"There can be no disputing," says Barth, "that something true and important is meant and envisaged in all this."[30] Yet it would be all too easy to make the reception, possession, and enjoyment of these benefits what is essential to being a Christian. Barth wonders: Can it really be the end of Christian vocation that I should be blessed, that I should be saved, that I should receive, possess, and enjoy all these gifts and then attain to eternal life without any regard for others? Does this not smack of a pious or sacred egocentricity? Would it not be strange and even contradictory that the selfless and self-giving work of God should issue in a self-seeking concern with our own salvation? Would not this egocentricity stand in stark contrast to the being and action of the Lord? Would this not turn the church into an institute of salvation that forgot its very missional purpose in the world? Does this not make us *pure* recipients and possessors of salvation?[31]

Conclusion

If, on that final day, the church is found to be a pure recipient and possessor of salvation, it will be justly judged for neglecting its calling given by its Lord. Theology will play a role in forming the church:

29. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, pt. 3.2, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (1961; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), IV/3.2: 554–69.
30. Ibid., 563.
31. Ibid., 568.

it may either either foster this pious egocentricity or help equip the church for its missional calling. But to faithfully fulfill the latter, it must recover a missional approach to Scripture—a covenant people chosen and blessed for the sake of the world.