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Missio Dei Revisited:
A Vietnamese Perspective

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Introduction

In Confucius' thought, "The way of great learning is to make bright virtue shine, to edify people, and to be in ultimate goodness."¹ Here, great learning implies that which is the purpose of learning: that one is given the opportunity to learn in order to cultivate oneself, and then to help other people so that all will get on to pursue and to be in Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. This thought is especially true in a communal life, in which the realization that all people are related to one another one way or another is prominent. This is also true in any society whenever the importance of *koinonia* community is recognized. A person cannot live her/his life in isolation as if s/he has nothing to do with others. Everyone's life has some impacts on others'. And therefore, for the good of all, when one believes that one knows what is true, what is good, and what is beautiful, one is expected to share it to others. This living philosophy extends to all aspects of life, whether it is economical, political, cultural, or religious.

It is therefore not understandable to a Vietnamese Christian if s/he is told not to share the Good News in Jesus Christ with others which s/he considers the most important thing in life. To ask him/her to stop sharing is to say that the way the Vietnamese people have been living for thousands of years is wrong and thus it needs to be discarded. This is also not understandable to those who previously did not know whom they could entrust their lives, or to those who newly converted and found in Christian tradition the

¹ Confucius, *The Great Learning*, chapter 1, verse 1. In Vietnamese transliteration, it is read: *Đại học chi đạo, tại minh minh đức, tại tân dân, tại chí u chí thiện*. Legge translated this verse as: What the Great Learning teaches, is – to illustrate illustrious virtue; to renovate the people; and to rest in the highest excellence. Cf. James Legge, D.D., *The Chinese Classics: with A Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes, Prolegomena, and Copious Indexes*,. vol. 1: Confucian Analects, The Great Learning, and The Doctrine of the Mean (London: Trubner & Co., 60, Paternoster Row, 1861), 220. Note: all quotations of Confucius and Lao Tzu in this paper are my translation from the Vietnamese transliteration, unless otherwise stated. In doing this, I am also aware of some other translations that other scholars have translated into English.

relationship with God s/he just discovered which makes them feel loved, belonged, and blessed. How can one keep silent when s/he discovers that *Trời*² (God) so loves the world including humankind that *Trời* came and dwelt among them and promised a fullness of life, both now and the next, in Him? For this reason, it is not surprising at all to see a true and devout Vietnamese Christian eagerly telling others about what s/he has discovered in Jesus. Furthermore, in spite of being culturally and historically conditioned, religious message is always universal in nature, and for this characteristic many times it is manipulated for hidden, evil purposes. The fact that no serious and committed Christian,

² *Trời*, to the Vietnamese people, is the Supreme Non-Being Being who is the Creator and Sustainer of the whole cosmos. The Vietnamese people believe that in any living situation they are under the care of *Trời*, and therefore, they recognize *Trời*'s influence on their happiness, sadness, anxiety, and safety. To them, *Trời* is the most powerful, most majestic, as in the saying, "*Trên có Trời; dưới có đất*" (There is *Trời* above; there is earth below. Or, *Trời* is above, earth is below). *Trời* is as real as the earth that they see everyday, upon which they are living. They believe in *Trời*, and feel secured in *Trời*'s care even though they do not develop a systematic, sophisticated presentation of their understanding of *Trời*. Their understandings of *Trời* are embedded in folklores, folk-poems, proverbs, myths ... (Is not that the way of the Bible?). In their understandings, only *Trời* has the authority to determine human destiny, and thus their lives are in *Trời*'s hand. If *Trời* punishes, they cannot escape; and if *Trời* defends for them, no one can harm them, or the harm is like makeup that enhances their virtues, as stated in this saying: "*Dẫu thì Trời hại mới hư; còn ai có hại cũng như phấn dôi*" (Only *Trời* can do harm; human harms are like makeup). To talk about *Trời* is to talk about *Trời*'s love, for it is very clear to the Vietnamese people that *Trời* is loving and taking care of them day by day. In any circumstances that the people enjoy their lives with good health, prosperity, safety ... or their children have good education and/or succeed, they claim it as "*Trời thương*" (*Trời* loves). "*Trời sinh voi sinh cỏ*" (*Trời* creates elephant also creates grass), or "*Trời sinh Trời dưỡng*" (*Trời* gives birth and *Trời* will take care) are sayings that are frequently spoken by the people to acknowledge *Trời*'s love and care for them, by providing them means to live. Vietnamese people also talk about *Trời*'s justice. *Trời*'s justice does not necessarily mean that people will get the results of their deeds the next day. Instead, that justice may occur at any time in human life. Whoever lives a vicious life will sooner or later receive punishment; it is just a matter of time. On the contrary, even though good people have to endure miserable lives, they will definitely be delivered and blessed. The Vietnamese people express *Trời*'s justice such as, "*Trời cao có mắt*" (*Trời* on high has eyes, or Transcendent *Trời* has eyes; this is imaginarily portrayed in the symbol of the Eye in Caodaism), or "*Ở hiền thì lại gặp lành; những người nhân đức Trời dành phúc cho*" (Living a good life will be blessed by *Trời*; *Trời* gives blessings to good people). The Vietnamese people through generations have built up for themselves a way of living according to the love and justice of *Trời*, or *Đạo Trời* (the Way of God), which is the standards for their conduct. With these understandings, the term *Trời* is used for God in the Vietnamese translation of Bible with some additions in both Protestant and Catholic Churches. The word "God" is translated as *Đức Chúa Trời* (*Đức* is to show respect; *Chúa* = Lord) in Protestant circle; and as *Thiên Chúa* (*Thiên* = *Trời*; Chinese Vietnamese) in Catholic circle.

as any other religious follower,³ claims that his/her religious message, i.e., what s/he believes, is relevant only for people within his/her religious tradition, i.e., that Christian message is only relevant for those who call themselves Christians, proves that to share, not to impose, the Christian message to other non-Christians then is both a demand and a privilege.⁴ Mission is not only Christian obligation as stated at Willengen Conference; it is also Christian nature.

However, the way most Vietnamese Christians, as also other Christians in the so-called young churches (or churches in cultures where Christianity is new), share the Good News is usually violent to the local cultural and religious traditions and thus to the people, sometimes to the extent that they are considered betrayers to their own pasts which have formed their identities. The violence often comes from the ignorance or disrespect of the local cultural and religious traditions, and/or from a sense of artificial superiority usually in association of the sense of western superiority over the eastern world that the (western) missionaries brought along with them when they first came to evangelize, thinking that they could Christianize the whole world in just a generation. The dream did not come true, fortunately; for if it did, the world rich cultural and religious heritages would have been eradicated in just a few decades. But its legacy has given the young churches more than enough difficulties to deal with in their struggles for

³ Bishop Leo Nanayakkara says, “Christ is for the whole world, for all. All grace is His. So too, no Buddhist can say that the Buddha is only for them, nor can a Marxist say that Karl Marx is only for Marxists. Marx is for all; Lord Buddha is for all – the saints and sages belong to all.” Quote in Wickeri, “Toward a Kenosis of Mission: Emptying and Empowerment for the Church and for the World” in *Scripture, Community, and Mission*, ed. Philip L. Wickeri (Hong Kong: CCA & CWM, 2002), 352.

⁴ It is a moral demand because when one believes what one holds is right and true, one is expected to share it with others. Civil right and human right are good examples of this demand, and therefore humanism can also be considered religious. In light of this understanding, individualism is sinful in nature. On the other hand, when one really believes in what one states, either in stories, or creeds, or doctrines, one will experience the goodness of the sharing of these stories or creeds or doctrines, and thus the sharing is a privilege.

existence as a minor religious tradition among the rich and sophisticated cultural and religious traditions that have long histories.

How can a Vietnamese Christian, or any Christian, share the Good News in the world of plurality as today recognized without being violent to it, even when the message of the sharing is both comforting and prophetic? This paper is an attempt to show that the understanding of *missio Dei* only as God's action in the world, or as God's movement toward the world, implying that participation in *missio Dei* entails the fact that the participants will also act in the world (by words and deeds), or move toward the world, is insufficient.⁵ The good points of this understanding include a good will to make the world a better place or to save human lost souls for a future better world. This motivates countless Christians who sincerely sacrificed their lives for the welfare of the world. However, the actions initiated by this understanding in many cases are either doing violent to the world (the mission fields), or treating it as a place that needs healing solely from outside, and thus always entailing the danger of alienation for the local churches on the one hand. This understanding can also make Christians turn toward another worldly sphere and thus neglect all the sufferings of the present world on the other.⁶

To avoid being violent to the world and/or retreating from it, Christians need to have a fuller understanding of *missio Dei*. *Missio Dei* should be understood both as God's action is being done in the world, or as God is moving toward the world, and also as God's being is being revealed in the world, not from outside but from within. In term of

⁵ This kind of participation is described as actions initiated by Christians in a consortium stretching between a liberationist (or activist) and a conversionist (or evangelist) approach. See Kritzinger, "The Function of the Bible in Protestant Mission" in *Scripture, Community, and Mission*, ed. Philip L. Wickeri (Hong Kong: CCA & CWM, 2002), 20-45.

⁶ For this reason, pioneer Latin American theologians have protested the old way of understanding and doing theologies, and have developed the so-called Liberation Theologies that have deep impacts on the ways theologians around the world doing theologies today.

Christian mission, this fuller understanding of *missio Dei* will lead to two subsequent understandings of the nature and the role of the church: (1) subjectively, the church is participating with God in God's work in the world, and (2) objectively, the church is living out God's being in the world, i.e., God's being is being manifested through the church. In light of the second understanding, the church will never be the subject of God's mission, but always remains as an object of it. According to the first understanding, the church is an instrument, or a channel, of God's mission to the world. According to the second, the church is an outcome of God's being. Thus, there is a distinction between the church and the world; but there is not separation between them. By the work of sanctification and transformation of the Holy Spirit, the church, when being used for the manifestation of God's being, is becoming one with God's being. And this is the mystery of the Incarnation.

It should also be noted that, besides the inquiry of the understanding of *missio Dei* as God's being is being manifested in the world, the Asian contexts where Taoism and Buddhism have great impact on the people's thinking must be taken into serious consideration. The *Đạo* (the *Tao*) in Taoism, and the *Tâm*⁷ (the *Heart/Mind*) in Buddhism imply something intrinsic to the human heart that make it have a tendency to manifest and actualize itself in the world. It is, therefore, important for (Vietnamese) Christians to understand that Christian mission is to be witness i.e., to live God's being in the world.

⁷ The concept of *Tâm* in Asian philosophy is highly sophisticated. See Trương Hoài Thừa and others, *Eastern Philosophy: Tâm*, ed. Trương Lập Văn, trans. Tạ Phú Chính and others (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1999). For the sake of simplification and the limit of this paper, *Tâm* can be understood as (1) literally, the heart, (2) the human psychological consciousness, (3) the subjective consciousness, (4) the moral consciousness; and (5) the one ontological, unifying element of the cosmos. This last understanding of *Tâm* is highly cultivated in Buddhism. In Buddhist understanding, the whole cosmos is in the conceptual realm of the one *Tâm*. All things are the manifestation of the one *Tâm*. *Tâm* is the existential ground for all things and is thus the ontological element behind all dharmas.

To do mission (proclaim/share/work the Good News) will be the natural consequence of this living. The heart of the matter – or the central thesis of this paper – is: one can never *do* the witness unless s/he first *is* a witness.

For what has been stated, the paper will first investigate the appearance of the term *missio Dei* and the understandings of its meanings. In the second place, the paper will present *missio Dei* as God's being is being manifested in the world, and thus the church's mission is to live God's being in the world. Implications of this understanding in relation to the ways (Vietnamese) Christians share God's Good News will also be pointed out. Between these two understandings of *missio Dei*, an interlude about the emergence of new understandings in Christian mission serves as a transition.

***Missio Dei* as God's Movement Toward the World**

The term *missio Dei* (God's mission), usually retained in Latin form, appeared in the 1950s in the development of a theological basis for missionary activity, especially in Anglican-Protestant circles within the International Missionary Council. The concept had been highly refined in Western medieval theology to describe the activities within the Trinity itself (*ad intra*) which are expressed in God's "outside" mission (*ad extra*): the Father sends the Son; the Father and the Son send the Spirit for the redemption of humanity.⁸

However, this understanding has not always been followed in the history of the church formation. The mission, instead of being understood in the light of the activities within the Trinity, has been understood solely as something outside of it, and humanity (or the world) is that "outside sphere" for God's mission. The church, being understood

⁸ *The Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 2nd edition, ed. Nicholas Lossky. Ref. *Missio Dei*.

as on God's side, is outside of this "outside sphere" (the world) and therefore Christian missionary activities are activities that intervene into this "outside sphere." Thus there are two separate kingdoms: one is of God and the other of the world. In this dualist understanding, the enlargement of the Kingdom is identical with the enlargement of the church. This is the premise for the *ecclesio-centric* missionary activities. And thus the understanding that "The church of Jesus Christ is not the purpose or goal of the gospel, but rather its instrument and witness"⁹ has not always been understood. Instead, the church was interpreted primarily in soteriological, or cultural, or ecclesiastical terms.

Although the problem of church-centered theological understanding was identified from the time of Edinburgh world missionary conference of 1910, it can be said that Karl Barth was among the first theologians who fought against it.¹⁰ In his thought, mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; instead it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church. Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission. There is church because there is mission, not vice versa. To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love. Barth saw and later put this understanding in

⁹ Darrell L. Guder, "Missional Church: From Sending to Being Sent" in *Missional Church: A Vision For The Sending Of The Church In North America*, Darrell L. Guder, project coordinator and editor (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 5.

¹⁰ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 389-90.

profound words, “all activity of the church is mission, even if it is not expressly called that.”¹¹

At the Whitby IMC conference (1947), mission representatives proclaimed that “we have entered as never before into the reality and the meaning of the worldwide church”, and for the next conference in Willingen (1952), “the missionary obligation of the church” was chosen for the principal theme.¹² Georg F. Vicedom in his book, *Why Mission?*, summarizes what at the heart of the discussion at the Willingen Conference: “Even the Church is only an instrument in the hands of God. The church herself is only the outcome of the activity of God who sends and saves. The Conference at Willingen accepted the concept of *missio Dei* to describe this fact,”¹³ although the term *missio Dei* did not occur once in the minutes of the Conference. Vicedom is thought to have quoted this term from the pronouncement of Hartenstein, a Swiss theological reporter. To Gerold Schwarz, the concept of *missio Dei* was already coined by Hartenstein in 1934.¹⁴

In light of the above understanding, the question, “Why does the church have a mission?” would then be answered that because God had a mission and thus the church also had a mission, i.e., the church was to participate in God’s mission to the world. Other aspects of mission (Mk. 16; Lk. 4; Jn. 10, 17; Acts 1) were very much overlooked; and the so-called Great Commission (Matt. 28) seemed to be the one and only mandate

¹¹ Karl Barth, “Theology and Mission in the Current Situation,” a translation of “Die Theologie und die Mission in der Gegenwart,” *Theologische Fragen und Antworten* (Zollikon, 1957), trans. Darrell L. Guder (Handout, Princeton Theological Seminary. Fall Semester 2002. Translation in process), 2.

¹² *The Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, Ref. Missio Dei.

¹³ H.H. Rosin, ‘Missio Dei’: an examination of the origin, contents and function of the term in Protestant missiological discussion (Leiden – Nederland, 1972), 6.

¹⁴ Gerold Schwarz, “Karl Hartenstein 1894-1952: Missions with a Focus on ‘The End’” in *Mission Legacies: Biographical Studies of Leaders of the Modern Missionary Movement*, ed. Gerald J. Anderson and others (New York, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994; pp. 591-601), 593.

for Christian mission. In this light, because the church has been called to do this mission, she could not do otherwise. It was her obligation, a missionary obligation: There was no participation in Christ without participation in His mission to the world. Therefore, the mission was God's, not ours. However, the next IMC conference began to realize that to say that mission was God's exclusively was to neglect the human factor in God's mission, in which humankind has been called to participate. This realization surfaced clearly in the words of W. Freytag:

“This service of missions is human service, it cannot claim to be exclusively *the mission of God*. It has its time and is subject to the relativity of all human service. But the mission of God is more ... therefore according to how we live with Christ or do not live with Christ, we are part of God's mission or we stand in its way. Therefore a Christian life cannot be lived without the wide horizon, the view of the world which God has in mind, the world which God loves. There God's mission is going on and it will be disclosed at the Day of our Lord.”¹⁵

The mission was God's, but the church also had missions, i.e., to be God's partnership in moving toward the world. Thus we Christians found ourselves becoming participants in the search for the ways and places where God was calling us to join Him in His missionary work in the world. This new understanding came to the surface especially in New Delhi conference in 1961:

“Participation in God's mission is therefore entering into partnership with God in history because our knowledge of God in Christ compels us to affirm that God is working out his purpose in the midst of the world and its historical processes ... Christians therefore understand the changes in history in the perspective of the mission of God ... The mission of God (*missio Dei*) is to be distinguished from missions. As our present missions have sprung up as historically determined answers of the churches to challenges in the past, they may be understood as transitory forms of obedience to the *missio Dei* ...”¹⁶

It should be noted, however, that the concept of participation seems to move toward a political understanding. Because God's mission is larger than the church's

¹⁵ Quote in Rosin, 24.

¹⁶ Ibid., 29.

mission, the church participates in the much more comprehensive liberation work of God. If mission is basically understood as God working out his purpose for his creation, the church does not have a separate mission of its own. It is called to participate in God's mission with the purpose of "humanization."¹⁷ Humanization can be understood as civilization, and this makes evangelization and colonization look no different.

Because of this reason, in his paper "Notes on the Meaning of Mission(ary)", Hoekendijk has taken the trouble to subject the 'classic' concept *Missio Dei* to a short but most pertinent criticism: "In contemporary missionary thinking we may notice several attempts to connect the traditional anthropocentric conceptions of the Mission by an increasing emphasis upon the *Missio Dei*. Very often, however, this simply means a back-reference to God's prevenient initiative, merely a theocentric preface to an unaltered anthropo- or ecclesio-centric text; God is recognized in an almost deistic fashion as the great Inventor and Inaugurator of the Mission, who has since withdrawn and left the accomplishment of the Mission to His ground personnel."¹⁸

An Interlude: The emergence of New Understandings

The understanding of the mission of the church has been shifted essentially and remarkably when Christians, especially the later generations, in the young churches around the globe with the help of missionary pioneers from the old churches such as Roland Allen realize that the church's evangelism has usually been carried out in colonial or imperialistic ways, even though they do not deny that there were many missionaries

¹⁷ Ibid., 30.

¹⁸ Ibid., 33.

who stood in the side of the colonized.¹⁹ This theme has been treated sufficiently in other authors and need not be repeated here.

Another factor for this shift is the realization that the Gospel has no culture, and its cultures are the peoples' local cultures. It cannot be denied that cultures are not neutral, and often in many cases they are destructive. However, not everything in a culture is evil, for it is believed that there are many aspects of a given culture that are constructive. Culture, if looked at as God's gift given to humankind to uphold and sublimate their communal lives, is something that needs to be cherished as humankind themselves. And if so, Christians need to have a more positive look at it.

The new understanding of peoples of other faiths has also contributed to the reexamination of the understanding of *missio Dei*. If Christians believe that all peoples on earth are created in *imago Dei*, and that God loves all of them, not just those who call themselves Christians, they need to have a different look at people in other religious traditions. These people, created in the image of God, are looking for a union with the Transcendent. Christians have no right, nor sufficient knowledge, nor authority to define the way God is working among God's creatures. As Jesus' saying, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn. 14:6)²⁰ cannot be understood literally that if a Christian comes to the Father, s/he has to walk through Jesus' physical body. Instead, s/he has to walk, not just to confess, in the Name of Jesus Christ, i.e., in the Way, the Truth, and the Life. It is a blasphemy and hypocrisy if one

¹⁹ A good example was an LMS missionary, John Smith, who laid his life in the fight against the colonial authorities to defend for the slaves in British Guyana in the early nineteenth century. See D. Preman Niles, *From East and West: Rethinking Christian Mission for Today* (Revised Script), 71-72.

²⁰ All scriptural quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) unless otherwise stated.

claims to walk in the Name of Jesus Christ, but does not do so in the Way, the Truth, and the Life. It is an undeniable fact that there are many people who call themselves Christians, i.e., who confess Jesus' Name, but they do not walk in his Name, i.e., in the Way, the Truth, and the Life. There is the one and only Name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved, and that Name is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Thus, it can be said that even a non-Christian could come to the Father if s/he is walking in the Name of Jesus, i.e., in the Truth, the Way, and the Life. This is also what Paul argues: "From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of their place where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him – though indeed he is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:26-27). This is, however, not a denial that people in all religions – including Christianity – often confuse the Way, the Truth, and the Life with the human ways, human truths, and human lives. In addition to that, they can also take on demonic, fanatical, and illusional qualities. But these two observations should not lead to a presupposition that God's Presence – which can also be called God's Grace – is absent in people of other faiths. If understood in a correct and humble way, the search for the Transcendent in other religious traditions should be recognized and appreciated.²¹ Very often do Christians call themselves God's children, and then behave as if they were Gods, considering people of other faiths – and also other Christians who have different understandings from theirs – as fuel for maintaining fire in hell. This kind of understanding comes from a sense of pride and complacency, forgetting the role of the Holy Spirit in the work of sanctification and transformation of believers. This

²¹ Roger Haight, S.J., *Dynamics of Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), chapters 1-4, is a good reference for the discussion here.

understanding also creates unnecessary conflicts and sometimes hostility between Christians and people of other faiths, and thus becomes a destructive hindrance for the witness of the former.

The above observations have resulted with a new and friendly understanding of peoples of other faith traditions. There is an increasing realization that peoples of other faiths are also God's peoples, and that God is also working among them in ways that are beyond our human understanding. Indeed, this is also what Luther has suggested, and he called it God's "irregular grace."²² There are many cases in both Testaments where God calls other peoples besides the chosen Israel God's peoples.²³ In this light, Christians cannot keep their prideful and complacent attitude toward others but instead realize that

"Mission, God's self-revelation as One who loves the world, is central to the nature and purpose of the Church. The Church is sent out in mission to the world, empowered by the Holy Spirit, announcing the gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed, and witnessing to the reign of God. The Church is engaged in the *missio Dei*, not because it claims to have all the truth, but because we as the Church are part of the body of Christ, and mission is part of who we are."²⁴

These new understandings pose new questions for the nature of the church, its missions, and its role as witness. The church is not simply a sociological or organizational necessity that has the (colonialist and/or imperialist) power to send out mission workers to heal the world – both physically and spiritually – in the name of God.

Rather,

It is essential to the *missio Dei*. The witness to God's loving and saving work in history is through the people God calls and sets apart for this mission. Every mission community is a historical witness to the work of God being carried out; it is concrete evidence of God's

²² Martin Luther, "Lectures on Genesis, chapter 21-25" in *LW*, 4:42-44, 7:103ff.

²³ For illustration, cf. Isaiah 19:22-25; Jonah 1-4; Acts 10.

²⁴ Philip L. Wickeri ed., "The People of God Among All God's Peoples: Frontiers in Christian Mission": Report from the Theological Roundtable Sponsored by the Christian Conference of Asia and the Council for World Mission, November 11 – 17, 1999 Hong Kong (Hong Kong: The Christian Conference of Asia and the Council for World Mission, 2000), Section 1.3.1.

purposeful action. This is what the Holy Spirit does: it forms mission communities so that the gospel may be incarnated in particular places, to be the witness to Jesus Christ. Any understanding of the Christian church which does not emphasize the concrete and historical reality and the centrality of local and particular communities is docetic: it is not taking with great seriousness God's mission and the incarnation of that mission in Jesus Christ and his church.²⁵

The shift also happens in the concepts of the so-called mission field. In light of the new understandings, the mission field begins from within the church, for the church is the first one that needs conversion. The World Conference on Mission and Evangelism at San Antonio (1989) resonates what the Melbourne Conference (1980) has stated: "Any call to conversion and to the service of the Reign of God 'should begin with the repentance of those who do the calling, who issue the invitation'."²⁶ Stuttgart Consultation (1987) states: "We cannot share the gospel without sharing ourselves. We live by the gospel of an incarnate Lord; this implies that the gospel has to become incarnated in ourselves, the "evangelists."²⁷ "The heart of the church's evangelistic ministry is its own continuing conversion to the fullness of Christ and his mission."²⁸

In this light, Christians are the first who need to convert, for conversion is a process of change in which Christ is formed in one's life. This is what Paul concerned: "My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you" (Gal. 4:19). What a Christian offers to others must be what s/he lives and experiences. The Christian message, or the Christian mission, first of all has to be directed toward God, not others. The ultimate goal of Christian mission is to glorify God

²⁵ Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 145-6.

²⁶ *New Directions in Mission & Evangelization 1: Basic Statement*, ed. James A. Scherer and Stephen B. Bevans (Marynoll: Orbis Books, 1992), 74.

²⁷ *New Directions in Mission & Evangelization 1: Basic Statement*, 66.

²⁸ Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, 144.

in one's whole life by every act and contemplation. When mission is directed toward others, the problem of church-centered missionary activities will surely arise. Conversion will then mean the expansion in number of a church, a denomination, or Christendom, and there is no line between evangelism and politics. In light of new understandings, Christian mission needs a new form and a new understanding of its nature: A new form in which the perfection of love moves from our selves to the world, i.e., the church-centered approach moves to the margin-centered one; and a new understanding of its nature in which conversion moves its focus from non-Christians to Christians.

***Missio Dei* as God's Being Manifested in the World**

Being brought up in a indigenous church with a theology that has been deeply influenced by Greek philosophies on the one hand and understandings that come from Vietnamese rich cultural heritage on the other, the question of the relationship between God's being and His Church on a small scale and between God's being and the whole world on a larger has come to my mind very early. It also implies the relationship between the church and the world, in which Vietnamese Christians struggle day by day. This question gets even hotter within myself in these years that I am being systematically trained theologically, and that becomes an impetus for the making of this essay. It is not, however, that I feel satisfied with what I am writing, but rather it serves to prove that I have been struggling with the question and now try to put it on paper. Although the essay is written from a Vietnamese perspective with illustrations that come out from the church in which I grew up, it is an undeniable fact that the theology is not so much different with other Asian ones, or with other theologians' who have close contact with Asian cultural heritages.

In order to get to the heart of *missio Dei* as God's being is being manifested in the world, it is necessary (1) to inquire a new understanding of the relationship between the transcendent and the imminent attributes of God in relation to the world from a Vietnamese perspective; (2) to have a close and careful look at the role of the disciples in Jesus' mandate in Acts 1:8; and (3) to study the implications in the Apostle John's teaching about what he calls, "God is love." The scriptural passage in 1 John 4:7-21 will play the main role for the third task. The study of this passage and its implications will serve as a conclusion of this paper.

One word to take heed: because this paper is written from a Vietnamese perspective, the arguments in this section will be based mainly on the Vietnamese cultural heritage and on the contextually-conditioned interpretation of the Scriptures and Christian theological heritages. This is in agreement with Professor Chung's statement, "Doing theology in an Asian context shows us an interpretation of the gospel different from Western theology."²⁹ This is, however, not to say that the paper will be free from the rich theological heritage from the West that the author has grown up with. Indeed, it should not be done in that way. There are so many things in the West for Eastern people to learn, and vice versa.³⁰ What is done is an attempt to show to the people from whom the author was born and grew up what they have understood the Gospel and have lived for it in a systematic way at the first place. Only from then does the paper attempt to address the outside world to show how the Vietnamese people have understood the

²⁹ Paul S. Chung, *Martin Luther and Buddhism: Aesthetics of Suffering* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), xix.

³⁰ In writing these lines, I am also aware of the rich cultural and theological heritages of African and Latin American peoples.

Gospel and have lived with it. The readers have the right to judge from their own perspectives. With this in mind, we now proceed to our first task.

(1) It is under the influence of Greek dualist philosophies that the doctrine of God's immanent and transcendent attributes has been understood in dualist tension. Consequently, Christians have difficulties to grasp what makes the transcendent God have anything to do with the immanent God, i.e., what is the relationship between God and the world, between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world. Very often does the church teach that God is in one realm and the world in another. This understanding misleads one to believe that God is dwelling at some place absolutely external to the world and outside of history, and from that place the Son and the Holy Spirit were sent into the world. God's self-revelation has been understood as if God were entering into the human sphere (the world), and because of this "entering into," God brought the church out of the world so that God will send it back into the world to do God's mission. The church has been understood that she, being redeemed because of her confessions, was independent of God's mission and thus could take initiative to participate in God's mission in the world by her willingness.

The argument is not to deny that God is transcendent to the world, however. But God is transcendent to the world precisely because God is immanent in the world. God is both transcendent to and immanent in the world does not mean that God is entirely outside of the world and then has some influence or presence upon the world that we call God's immanent attribute. On the contrary, God is immanent in the world means that the totality of God is with and in the world, and in a sense, God is "one" with the world but not confused with the world. In many cases the fear of pantheism and panetheism

prevents any attempt to understand that God is [one] with the world. In fact, this fear has no basic ground because the world has no life of its own. The world does not and cannot exist apart from God. It exists because it has that which makes it exist. The life of the world is continuously received and renewed from its source, i.e., God, for God is Life. In other word, God is the only one who exists, and this is why God's declares, "I AM WHO I AM," (Ex. 3:14) because there is no other who exists as God's peer, and God is God because there is no other gods, so that this can be seen as the first doctrine, or the first Commandment: "You shall have no other gods before³¹ me" (Ex. 20:3). The reason for the Commandment is simple: because there is no other gods besides God.

Thus, to emphasize on the transcendence of God without the understanding that the totality of God is also with and in the world is to assume that the world can exist apart from God, and this misleads to a wrong-understanding that human beings are other gods besides God, for they can exist apart from God. Whenever the world, or any being, thinks that it can exist apart from God, the Fall is there. The Fall of the first human couple happened when they tried to be like God, i.e., to exist independently from God. The world can exist only and solely because "God himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things" (Acts 17:25). Not only does God give life and breath and all things, He also gives Himself to the world, i.e., He is with and in the world, and for that reason the world comes into existence. And although God is [one] with the world, what humans can see with their eyes is not God, for God is that which makes the world exist, and is not that which exists as the world exists. The world is existing because God is making it in that way, i.e., God is continuously [one] with it. And when God is doing, the world is done.

³¹ Or *besides* (NRSV).

When God *does*, we *are*. For this reason, the fact that the world lives (exists) demonstrates that God (Life) is revealing and manifesting Himself through what we can see with our eyes and call it the world. In other words, the world is the witness of God's doing. *Missio Dei* in the relation to the world is what God is doing in that immanence, i.e., God is revealing Himself as *Emmanuel*, "God [is] with us."

For this reason the Vietnamese people understand and recognize the divine nature of the whole world, and that is why they worship their dead ancestors, or the nation heroes, or mountain, or trees, or rocks. These people, mountain, trees, rocks become the objects of worship because Vietnamese people believe that these visible beings' being is divine. In other word, the divine being is being manifested in the world. This understanding helps Vietnamese Christians easily come to the realization that they are not, and cannot, exist independently from God, but rather their being are in God and of God. And because of that they can say "Amen" with Calvin's prayer, "We are not our own; We are God's." This understanding also helps retain and promote the communal spirit within the community against the lure of individualism.

(2) With what has been presented in (1) in mind, now we can go on to our second task, i.e., to have a close and careful look at the role of the disciples in Jesus' mandate in Acts 1:8. Right before his ascension, Jesus said to his disciples, "You *will receive* power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you *will be* my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." It is very clear that the disciples play just a passive role in Jesus' mandate. They are to receive the power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them; and in that power they will be witnesses of Jesus, i.e., of what God has done in the Lord Jesus. Jesus' mandate is that the disciples will receive power in

order to *be* witnesses. His mandate does not teach that they will receive power in order to *do* witnesses, although this can be its natural consequences. To be a witness emphasizes on the passive role of Christians, i.e., the work is of the Holy Spirit, so that when people look at these Christian witnesses, they see Jesus, i.e., they see the Truth, the Way, and the Life. To be a witness is to be overlooked so that what it stands for will become prominent. That means when people look at these Christian witnesses, they see no one but the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul portrays this image as, “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.” This is not the merit of the witnesses themselves. It is the *missio Dei*: the work of the Triune God. *Missio Dei* will never be the work or activity of the church, nor the work or activity of any individual Christian or Christian community.³²

The history of the mission of the church has shown that the church arbitrarily and complacently changed the focus of the mandate, however. Jesus’ mandate focuses on the power of the Holy Spirit and the object of that power: the Christian persons. The church has changed the focus of this mandate to the human power and the object of that human power: Christian activities. Jesus’ mandate is to *be*; the church has changed it to to *do*. Being has been replaced with doing, and the person with the activity. Thus for thousands of years the church has chanted Decarte’s slogan, “I think therefore I am,” repeatedly and

³² Barth’s insight, “all activity of the church is mission, even if it is not expressly called that,” is excellent but it can be misleading in a way that it easily misleads the church to believe that Christian activity defines the Christian witness. While Barth recognized the inseparability between the church and the world in his argument, “What mission is and seeks to be is the church as it turns to heathens, and thus to those away from and outside of it. What is out there is also, of course, in here” (Karl Barth, “Theology and Mission in the Current Situation,” 2), he still understood the church’s mission as activity: “What is mission? Certainly it wants to be an activity of the church, even if that is only indirectly expressed in organizational form. To say “an activity of the church” implies a certain form of confession of God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ, a certain form of that human activity that wants to understand itself as obedience towards the mandate of Jesus Christ as Lord, an attempt to do all his will, which is to pass on his message, the message about him as the Lord, as the Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer of humanity” (Karl Barth, “Theology and Mission in the Current Situation,” 2). In Barth’s understanding, Christians are to do mission, i.e., activity that brings about the recognition of God outside/within the church, because the church is a church of and for heathens. Activity, then, becomes the norm and definition for the “heathen Christian” mission.

complacently with a little change: “I do therefore I am.” The reason for this chant is that the church has not wanted to be the object of *missio Dei*. She wanted to be its agent, so that she could arbitrarily and pridefully give it to others as she willed. And she did not stop there; for she also wanted to be the subject of *missio Dei*. She wanted to be the center of *missio Dei*. She wanted to be self-centered, so that she would become the source of *missio Dei*, i.e., that she wanted to become that which sent out activities. She wanted to expand her kingdom and her power which were understood in number and territory. She wanted to fill the whole earth, the whole cosmos. She acted as if she had had all the knowledge, even the absolute knowledge of what was good and what was evil. In her pride and complacency, the church wanted to become like God; and the church’s members have usually acted in Adam’s way: we just swallowed what the church fed us. The Fall happened not only in Eden; it also happened in the church. The prophetic voice of the Gospel needs to be proclaimed more in today’s situation: and it needs to be proclaimed first and foremost in and for the church’s situation.

One of the most sinful things that have happened in the churches in Vietnam is the judgment of the *missio Dei* by making it identical with the membership of the churches, or of the local congregations. Because of this understanding, almost all of the congregations propagate to their members that they need to do anything by any “right” means under any circumstances³³ to gain more people into the church, and that is that they are enlarging God’s Kingdom. It is very troublesome to find that many local churches, including the one in which I was brought up, plan the quota for conversion and make it *the* agenda for the activities of their “Christian” life. In their complacency, the

³³ For example, 1 Cor. 9:22; 2 Tim. 4:2 are very often interpreted in this understanding.

churches are acting as if they were the agencies at best, and the subject at worst, of the *missio Dei*.

For this reason, the church was the first among what needs to be redeemed; and the Christians are the first among those who need to be redeemed. Thus the work of redemption begins with and directs to the church in the first place, and this work is still being done. The church is still being called to continuous conversion, i.e., to be in a way that her being is a witness for the power of the Holy Spirit of God that is forming the Way, the Truth, and the Life. In relation to the work of God – the *missio Dei* – the church will do nothing, because all things have been done by the power of the Holy Spirit of God. What the church does is that which flows naturally from the work of *missio Dei*. It is terribly wrong when the church attempts to convert others; and it is even terribly worse when she plans and makes a goal to have a number of people convert. As long as the church does these things, she is taking the place of God, i.e., she wants to be like God. She does not want to remain as a created; she want to be a creator so that she can *do* by her own (colonialist and imperialist) good will. The church needs to repent for her pride, to convert from her wrong doing, and to learn to *not-do* and *not-speak*, i.e., to be passive and submissive. Only when does the church *not-do*, the power of the Holy Spirit of God begins to manifest, and the world will see her Lord Jesus Christ instead of seeing her. Only when does the church *not-speak*, the power of the Holy Spirit of God begins to speak, and the world will hear her Lord's voice through her. Indeed this is what Lao Tzu calls for in his teaching of *wu wei*:

Therefore the Sage manages affairs with *wu wei* (not-doing),
and uses not-speaking to teaches;
All things take their rise without [his] intervention;
Give life without claiming possession;

Acts without expectation;
Accomplishes without abiding.
Because without abiding,
Never be left behind.³⁴

Only when is the church a witness – *not-do* and *not-speak* – God’s being is manifested in and through her. What, then, is the meaning of Christian doing (deed) and Christian speaking (word). The above understandings of not-doing and not-speaking are not to deny the importance of Christian deed and Christian word. However, Christian deed and word are important precisely because their nature and source are in the not-doing and not-speaking. As in Lao Tzu’s thought, “All things in heaven and earth are produced by being; and being is produced by non-being,”³⁵ Christian deed and word are important when not-doing and not-speaking are their nature and their source, i.e., when Christians not-do and not-speak, God’s being will flow through them so that what they do and speak are not of their own, but of God, and thus theirs have the importance of those of God. Christian not-doing and not-speaking require an attitude of obedience and submissiveness. This attitude of obedience and submissiveness does not mean that Christians have to go against their human will. In humility, i.e., in the recognition and realization that they are just creatures, Christians will experience what they will is in what God wills, and thus what they do and speak from their not-doing and not-speaking is natural. This is what Lao Tzu implies in the term *tự nhiên* (nature, natural, naturally, the way it is) (chap. 25, 37, 51). At this point, Confucius resonates what Lao Tzu teaches about this doctrine of not-doing and not-speaking:

The Master said, “I would prefer not-speaking.”
Tsze-kung said, “If you, Master, do not speak, what shall we, your disciples,
have to record?”

³⁴ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, chapter 2.

³⁵ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, chap. 40.

The Master said, “Does Heaven speak? The four seasons pursue their courses, and all things are continuously being produced. Does Heaven speak?”³⁶

When I was about ten years of age, one of my family’s neighbors was Miss Liêu who was so much elegant and graceful. She was a person of very few words, and she had a look of deep love and compassion. I thought that she would have a very bright future. In a few years, however, she left my home town and I heard that she went to serve in a leper house in a remote place. To a young mind as mine at the time, her decision was not easily understood. But it has been going with me since then, and whenever I think of a Christian life, she is one of the figures that first appear in my mind. I had a chance to meet her the first time after more than twenty years from the day she left. She was still the same: a person of very few words and a look of deep love and compassion. The only difference was a harsh sign that time has left on her. She did not speak much, but her compassion and love has been heard not only in the country, but also half of the earth away, and it is strongly possible that it is also well heard in other places. I am not sure if she ever reads St. Francis of Assisi’s saying, “Preach the Gospel at all times, and when necessary, use words,” but I am sure that she lives well with it.

(3) Now we turn to our final task: to study the implications in the Apostle John’s teaching about what he calls, “God is love,” by looking at chapter 4, from verses 7 to 21 in the Apostle’s first Epistle. Let us now look at our passage:

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹ God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we love God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. ¹³ By this we know that we are abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the

³⁶ Confucius, *Analects*, Book XVII: Yang Ho, chap. 19.

Savior of the world.¹⁵ God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God.¹⁶ So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.¹⁷ Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world.¹⁸ There is no fear in love, but perfect love cast out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.¹⁹ We love because he first loved us.²⁰ Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers and sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.²¹ The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

Because God is Love, love is the natural outcome of *missio Dei*. It is nonsense if we say that we have the Love, and that we can love whom we want to love. No one can force her/himself to love others. God is Love, and because of that no one can have (possess) Love. Instead, we can only be in Love (in God), and Love flows naturally through us. When we say we love someone, that means we are in the Love and the Love manifests Itself in and through us toward that person. When a woman says to a man, or a man says to a woman, that "I love you," it is because s/he is "in Love." That means Love is with them, and only under this condition can a man or a woman say, "I love you." If a man is not in Love and says to a woman, "I love you," he is a liar, or the saying is just a nonsense wish. In this sense, when we are in Love we are participating in the *missio Dei*, and becomes one with it. When we are in Love, i.e., when the power of the Holy Spirit which is the power of Love comes upon us, we are the witnesses of Jesus, i.e., we are the witnesses of Love. This is what it means when Jesus says, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:34-35). We can love one another because we are in Love and Love is in us, i.e., we love because God first loved us. This is what the church and her members are called for: Be in Love so that we can love. We love only when Love is with us. And

when Love is with us we will be the witnesses, i.e., we will be loving. The channel participates with the Source and becomes one with It: This is the mystery of the Incarnation. To be witnesses, or to be Christians, is to be loving by and with God's Love. This is what Luzbetak observes, "Christianity is by its very nature a faith of love (Mt 22:34-40; Jn 13:14f, 34; 15:9-17), whose adherents are to be recognized by their Godlikeness that is reflected especially in their genuine care and active compassion for others."³⁷ This call of Love is also expressed in the words of the Nestorian Bishop of Nisibis in the 13th century:

"The Gospel calls us to love. And love includes the believer and the unbeliever, the near and the far, the friend and the enemy. And this love is like unto the love of the Most High Creator in its characteristics, for He makes His sun to rise and sends down his rain upon the good and the wicked. And the Gospel incites both enemies and friends to do good works, and urges enemies and friends to love in the same way."³⁸

When Love manifests Itself in us, we will be Its witnesses. That means, Love is in triumph. And that also means we are in triumph: we are triumphant over ourselves, i.e., over our pride and complacency in order to remain as creatures. This triumph is in contradiction with the triumphalistic attitude which can be seen in Christians in both North and South parts of the globe. Whenever Christians are not witnesses, i.e., when we are not in the process of conversion in which our selves are being defeated, and when we direct the conversion to others in the sense that their conversion is our victory in and for Christ, we are in this triumphalistic attitude and are perishing. Whenever we are marching as soldiers to others and to the world in order to make Jesus Christ the Victor, we are in this triumphalistic attitude and are perishing. Jesus is the Victor because he is

³⁷ Louis J. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology* (New York: Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1988), 4.

³⁸ Quote in Wickeri, "Toward a Kenosis of Mission: Emptying and Empowerment for the Church and for the World" in *Scripture, Community, and Mission*, ed. Philip L. Wickeri (Hong Kong: CCA & CWM, 2002), 352.

the defeated to the world – he is the one that the world crucified him on the cross as a criminal. Jesus is the Victor because he is the loser: he could not save himself from the cross so that the world would believe in him (cf. Matt. 27:41-44; Mk. 15:29-32; Lk. 23:35-39). However, Jesus is the loser to the world because he is the Victor to himself, i.e., he is triumphant over his will so that the will of the Father manifests through him (cf. Matt. 26:36-46; Mk. 14:32-39; Lk 22:39-45). Jesus is the loser to the world in order that God’s grace is not cheap: because it requires the sacrifice of Love. Jesus is the loser to the world so that he is the Victor of and for the world. It is God’s victory: the victory of Love. And Love is the Victor because Love has laid down Itself (Jn. 1-18).

In this victory Christians are triumphant, not to others but to ourselves. We are triumphant because it is possible for us to defeat our self-glorification since our Victor e`auto.n evke,nwsen (Philippians 2:7), and only by defeating our self-glorification can we empty ourselves and be empowered for a Kenosis of Mission.³⁹ We are triumphant because we submit our will to God’s will so that God’s will manifests in and through us. And God’s will is God’s love: it is Love Itself. When Love manifests Itself in and through us, i.e., when the power of the Holy Spirit comes upon us, we Christians will be witnesses, i.e., we will be overlooked, and we will become non-being. The world will no longer see us, i.e., we lose our being. Or if we are left with any bit of being, we have no form or majesty that the world should look at us, nothing in our appearance that the world should desire us. We will be despised and rejected by the world; men and women of suffering and acquainted with infirmity. We will be despised

³⁹ Philip L. Wickeri, “Toward a Kenosis of Mission: Emptying and Empowerment for the Church and for the World” in *Scripture, Community, and Mission*, ed. Philip L. Wickeri (Hong Kong: CCA & CWM, 2002), 340-64.

as those from whom others hide their faces. And yet if Love is with us, we will not open our mouth; like lambs that are led to the slaughter, and like sheep that before their shearers are silent, so we will not open our mouth. We are not ourselves any longer. We cease to be. As such, we will give up any attempt to strive to be. Because when we strive to be, we will want to be like God. When we want to be like God, we need an apple: and this apple can be in the form of “the courage to be.” For this very reason that Jesus said: “Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it” (Matt. 10:39).

Conclusion

When Love manifests Itself in and through us, we will naturally do what Love does: we are to take the sufferings of the world and everything in it into ourselves. We will do what Love has done: we are going to take the existential and ontological fear and anxiety of the world into ourselves. And we will take these fear and anxiety so seriously that we are “deeply grieved, even to death” (Matt. 26:38), that our sweat becomes like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. We will take these fear and anxiety to the point that we will be crucified to and for the world. This is what it means to be witnesses: to be martyrs. That is our Christian mission: a mission of Love. Christian life of mission is not to break the world for the wholeness of itself, but instead to break itself for the wholeness of the world. Christian life is a life of crucifixion: we are not yet to come to a life of resurrection, for it is still a promise to us, although a life of resurrection has been given to us. It is still our hope, even though it is already realized in our Lord. But here on earth our Christian life of mission is to become Jesus’ body and blood: It is Christ who is formed in our Christian life. Christian mission is the loving being of the

body of Christ in the history of humankind. Each Christian is not a member of Christ's body; rather each Christian is the whole body of Christ, i.e., each one is a witness of the fullness of Christ's life. And all of these will be done not by and through our doing and speaking, but by and through our not-doing and not-speaking: i.e., by our being witnesses when the power of the Holy Spirit comes upon us. We have no power to do these things by ourselves. We can and will do these things only when Love manifests Itself in and through us, i.e., when Love is with us and we are in Love (Jn. 15:1-17). That is the Good News: the Good News first and foremost for the church and her Adam.⁴⁰ That is what *Emmanuel* means: "God [is] with us."

⁴⁰ Adam should be understood in collective sense.

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