**Missio Dei: Is There Any Common Ground?**

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**Abstract**

*Missio Dei* has become a common and valued expression in most wings of the church. To what extent do we mean the same thing when we use this term? This article explores the understanding of the concept *missio Dei* in contemporary conciliar and evangelical contexts, with special emphasis on *The Cape Town Commitment* and *Together towards Life*. Although *missio Dei* has had a turbulent life with diverse definitions and connected interests in the relatively short time span of the term, there seems to be a growing convergence in its usage. This common ground is primarily connected to the change from an ecclesiocentric to a Trinitarian paradigm of mission and to understanding the kingdom of God as the goal of mission. There are, however, differences in the documents, and these are evident in the relative emphases they give to the centrality of Christ and the role of the Spirit.

**Keywords**


1 **Introduction**

*Missio Dei*, a formula found already in St. Augustine’s discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity (Engelsviken 2003:482), has achieved a high status in missiology. In many ways, its meaning is self-evident, at least when it is understood as a subjective genitive. If there is a missionary calling to the church, it has to have its source in God. Like the church, mission is in his possession. The
church might have acted differently, in practice making the church the centre of the Christian missionary calling, but has any church body throughout history ever suggested that, from the theological point of view, God is not the primary sender in Christian mission?

*Missio Dei* is not a self-defining missiological term. After some decades of turbulent discussion, the term now seems to be accepted in all camps of the worldwide church. To what extent is this a sign of convergence between the different camps and traditions? Or is the term merely used to cover over remaining differences? These are some of the central questions of this study. There is, moreover, a linguistic question raised by Hans Rosin when he says in his concluding remarks, “Depending on the linguistic framework, the term has however had a different function from the start, quite apart from the strong modifications of content which it has undergone during the short time of its existence” (Rosin 1972:3–5).

Jacques Matthey, who served as programme executive for mission studies in the World Council of Churches (WCC) for a number of years, suggests that the dominant theology of *missio Dei* during the 1960s and 1970s, “contributed to sharpen the conflicts between ecumenical and evangelical circles” (Matthey 2001:429). This important observation echoes John Stott’s critique of *Church for Others* in Uppsala (WCC 1968:26). The core question of my article is how the two movements, which I prefer to refer to as “conciliar” and “evangelical,” have come to terms with this tension in their latest official documents on mission.

This article will analyse comprehensive mission documents from the Lausanne Movement (LM) and the World Council of Churches (WCC): *The Cape Town Commitment* (CTC) of 2011, one of three representative mission documents of LM, and *Together towards Life* (TTL) of 2012, the latter of only two comprehensive mission documents adopted officially by WCC. In both documents, there are numerous mentions of *missio Dei* in English versions of the term, “the mission of God” or “God’s mission.” In fact, the Latin term *missio Dei* does not appear in CTC. In TTL, we find the Latin formula twice, both times in brackets. It seems to stand as a technical term, pointing to where their English translation derives its content (TTL 2012: §§ 11; 43).

2 The Origins of Contemporary Understandings of *Missio Dei*

Karl Barth derived the term *missio* “from the doctrine of the Trinity” in 1932 (Richebächer 2003:590, note 13). A couple of decades later, at the meeting of the International Missionary Council (IMC) in Willingen in 1952, the Trinitarian emphasis in the understanding of mission came to prominence. The formula
missio Dei, though, only appeared in the report from Karl Hartenstein after this meeting. Hartenstein, who coined the formula missio Dei in 1934 as distinct from missio ecclesiae, represented a Barthian tradition with an emphasis on “the purpose of the establishment of Christ’s dominion over all the redeemed creation” (Hartenstein 1952:54). However, according to John Flett “missio Dei lacks theological development.” Especially it needs “a more robust grounding in the doctrine of the Trinity” (Flett 2014:70). Instead of using the term to permit “unqualified drawing of missionary ideas into ecclesiology” (Flett 2014:69), Flett suggests a return to Barth’s emphasis on “[t]he divine intervention […] as a mediation which is most proper to Him” (Flett 2014:71; italics used by Flett).

With George F. Vicedom comes the first comprehensive development of the concept, using the term missio Dei. He takes as his starting point the use that we know from Hartenstein, that missio Dei is the continuing sending of the church, following the sending of the Son and the Spirit. On the other hand, Vicedom also proposes the idea that this sending is a missio Dei specialis (Vicedom 1960:43; see also 15), which is marked by the sending of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit as God’s redeeming act. However, Vicedom’s use of this term lacks clarity. Is there consequently a sort of missio Dei generalis (a term construed by Berentsen 1983:2–4) which is different from the missio Dei specialis? While introducing for the first time the formula die spezielle Missio Dei, Vicedom in the same paragraph talks about missio Dei in a more generic meaning of the formula: “This missio Dei, which embraces all of God’s action, can therefore also be described as the reign of God” (Vicedom 1960:15–16).

Hans R. Rosin points out this ambiguity in Vicedom. He further shows that after Willingen there was tension over what the Trinitarian turn in the understanding of mission should mean, and he argues that missio Dei became a Trojan horse of ecumenical theology of mission (Rosin 1972:25–26). Hartenstein’s understanding of missio Dei was entirely in terms of the Heilsgeschichte, of the salvation history as he emphasised “the Trinitarian foundation and the universal redemptive purpose of mission” (Engelsviken 2003:482). However, Rosin’s reference to the Trojan horse points to what he calls “the (unassimilated) ‘American’ vision” of voices pleading for the wider political implications of the Trinitarian perspective on mission (Rosin 1972:17).

From the early 1960s, the concept of missio Dei “developed mainly in the Western European context of uncritical appraisal of secularization” (Matthey 2010:22). James A. Scherer quotes the meeting of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) in Mexico 1963 saying, “Mission has to take place from within this world” (Scherer 1987:109). The unresolved issue in Mexico, as Rosin points out, led to a move in the direction of understanding
mission as “everything God is doing in the world, apparently independently of the Christian community” (Rosin 1972:26).

During the 1960s, Dutch theologian Johannes C. Hoekendijk, the former Secretary for Evangelism in WCC, was a leading voice. He stated, “Church-centric missionary thinking is bound to go astray, because it revolves around an illegitimate center” (Hoekendijk 1967:38). Hoekendijk himself does not use the formula *missio Dei* extensively. However, his ideas linked up to and spurred on the secular turn in the understanding of mission. He goes on to say that “the church has no fixed place at all in this context,” that “the church may be of only little relevance” (Hoekendijk 1967:40). His horizon seems to be predominantly immanent and leads to a universalist understanding of salvation when he states, “That Christ is our hope means that we may declare to everyone that for Christ’s sake things are all right with the world.” Therefore, he continues, we can “free ourselves from all sorts of traditional fuss”, as “in the apostolate we are dealing with the Kingdom-for-the-world” (Hoekendijk 1967:59).

Two relatively recent studies suggest a more nuanced understanding of Hoekendijk’s position. Although these are largely beyond the scope of our study, they do have implications for understanding the historical development of the concept of *missio Dei*. A key issue for Dale Irvin is to emphasize that Hoekendijk’s harsh critique of the church never intended to sideline the genuine church, the church “from below.” Hoekendijk, Irvin suggests, primarily stands up against the ecclesiocentrism represented by established Western church institutions (Irvin 2019:7). Following John Flett (2016), Irvin shows how Hoekendijk’s specific term “apostolate” relates to the church to the extent that she discovers her purpose. I am less convinced by Irvin’s attempt to lessen the differences between Hoekendijk and Lesslie Newbigin (Irvin 2019:4–5). Even though they seemed insignificant at the beginning, the differences over the years developed into a wide chasm. In the end, we cannot avoid viewing Hoekendijk as a main contributor to the radical and secular development that culminated in 1968.

*Missio Dei* was a key concept leading up to the WCC General Assembly in Uppsala 1968, when it was agreed that God’s mission should aim at establishing *shalom* (WCC 1967:14–16). Hoekendijk claimed that “[t]his concept in all its comprehensive richness should be our leitmotiv in Christian work” (Hoekendijk 1967:19–20). In Uppsala, the overwhelming understanding of this was social and political, aiming at what an American group of theologians at the assembly called “humanization”. Hartenstein’s Trinitarian and redemptive sending of Christ received no emphasis. We hardly find Vicedom’s ambiguity between (general) creation and (special) redemption in *missio Dei*. The dominant emphasis is on a “secular interpretation of the *missio Dei*” (Bevans and...
Schroeder 2004:291). While saying that this development was “contrary to the intentions of Barth and also of Hartenstein,” David Bosch comments, “By introducing the phrase, Hartenstein had hoped to protect mission against secularization and horizontalization and reserve it exclusively for God. That did not happen” (Bosch 1991:392).

It would appear that the formula *missio Dei* more or less faded out during the 1970s. Up to that point, it had become an expression owned by a politically radical wing of the conciliar movement. For many others it had become a *terminus non gratis*, an unwelcome term.

### 3 The Content of the Formula *Missio Dei*

We have observed how the formula *missio Dei* was understood in a variety of different ways in its early years. Before looking at further developments since then, let us take one step back. According to Bosch, Dutch theologian L. Hoedemaker said that the concept can be “used by people who subscribe to mutually exclusive theological positions” (Bosch 1991:392). Is it still possible to find some sort of common conviction behind the idea? In the midst of differing emphases, what stands out as distinctive with this formula? As in many ways it has set a new missiological agenda, is there any common ground between the different understandings of the term?

After the two world wars, Western European culture and politics faced a radical crisis of global dimensions. This also implied a changed situation for the Western churches, a situation which altered the relations within the global church. Old patterns of dominance had to be changed, with huge implications over time for the understanding of the mission of the church. It was above all the mainline churches which in 1948 formed WCC, a body which was fused with the IMC in 1961, with the intention of strengthening global unity. Did this lead to improved agendas for the non-Western churches? It certainly did later, but in the 1960s the WCC agenda seems to have been dominated by the response to Western secular ideas in discussions dominated by Western male clergy and academics.

However, the conciliar movement started to see and discuss the need to rethink Christian mission. The most frequently used word to characterise this rethinking is “Trinitarian”. We can find different words used to describe the former way of thinking. Some will call the old paradigm ecclesiocentric, others Christocentric, or even anthropocentric. One problem with labels like this is the tendency to use them with stigmatising intentions and thus create caricatures, or to reserve positive connotations for one group and not for
another. As we will see, Christocentrism still characterises some streams of Trinitarian thinking, so it is hard to say that *missio Dei* is a turning away *per se* from Christocentrism. Calling the older position anthropocentric tends to be a caricature, as who has ever taken God out of the equation? In this article, we will consider the shift primarily as turning from ecclesiocentric understanding and practise of mission, to a Trinitarian and regnocentric understanding.¹

If we are to pursue our study of the term, we need to find sustainable categories that enable us to make distinctions without stigmatising. There are no clear, established models to discern the different sorts of understanding of *missio Dei*. No clearly defined categories have come into common use or been embraced as common categories in order to distinguish between different interpretations. Michael Goheen, however, has presented two labels which are helpful. He distinguishes between what he calls a “Christocentric-Trinitarian” model and a “Cosmocentric-Trinitarian” model (Goheen 2000:117–118). He makes this distinction in his analysis of early developments. Both streams in the early years intended to be Trinitarian, while at the same time taking different directions. Goheen confirms his understanding that the statements from Willingen in 1952 “concealed profound differences about the nature of the Trinitarian basis” (Goheen 2000:117). The original Barthian emphasis clearly had Christ as the centre of gravity, while the Hoekendijk turn defined the world as the locus of mission. Jacques Matthey makes the same distinction between the two streams since Willingen, but he only labels the first one “classical” while not labelling the other (Matthey 2001:429).

Goheen uses the labels to point to a discrepancy from Willingen onwards. His focus is primarily to clarify what he sees as the developing Christocentric-Trinitarian position of Lesslie Newbigin. It is not his intention to give any comprehensive definition of the labels or categories. Therefore, we need to clarify our understanding of them, and we will do so by contrasting issues that are often not clear-cut. The following, then, is an attempt to clarify categories by which we later can compare the contents of CTC and TTL. The differences might be crystallised under the following four points.

Firstly, what does ‘Trinitarian’ mean? Is it a replacement of the Christocentric tradition or is it an enlargement of it? Hartenstein and those who pursued his line of thought will tend to say the latter. Christ himself is the one revealing the Father in the Holy Spirit. The radical wing after Willingen tends to go for a

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¹ ‘Regnocentric’ refers to the Latin word *regnum*, meaning kingdom, realm or reign, and describes here the consummation of God’s kingdom rather than the growth of the church as the goal of God’s mission.
broader replacement approach, widening it to an understanding of a preceding revelation by the Father and the Spirit in creation and culture.

Secondly, and as a consequence of the first point, a Christocentric-Trinitarian approach will, while retaining a broad understanding of the activity of the triune God, use the term *missio Dei* to refer to Christ’s redeeming work for the fallen world by a loving God. Mission is salvific by nature, “caught up in God’s redeeming action” (Goheen 2000:117), and, as such, is part of God’s *Heilsgeschichte*. On the other hand, although it will also entail a divine redemptive work, a cosmocentric-Trinitarian approach will understand mission as broader and more independent of the narrower perspective of fall and salvation. *Missio Dei* comes already to expression in creation itself. Therefore, it is an expression of God’s work in broader and general history and tends to downplay the role of salvation history. Berentsen calls it “a generic term for God’s total activity” (Berentsen 1983:6).

Thirdly, the different approaches to the distinction between creation and redemption might lead to different theologies of salvific universalism. Will all be saved in the end, or is salvation uniquely and solely found through faith in the person of Jesus Christ, his life, death and resurrection?

Fourthly, who is sent? The entire concept of *missio Dei* is that God is both the one who sends and the one who is sent, but following this sending nature of God, who follows God in his mission? The classical understanding, to use Matthey’s label, points to the church as being sent in God’s mission with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The leading theological trend about *missio Dei* before and in Uppsala focused, according to Matthey, on “people of good will” who work for justice “in the secular political and social events of the world” (Matthey 2001:429).

In our explorations, we will use Goheen’s labels as categories of distinction in accordance with the above clarifications, but we will also add at least two perspectives to the discussion. First of all, as we will see and discuss while exploring *missio Dei* in TTL, we might consider adding a “pneumatocentric-Trinitarian” perspective. From the Trinitarian starting point, the concept divides, then, into a Christocentric-Trinitarian, a cosmocentric-Trinitarian and maybe even a pneumatocentric-Trinitarian direction, depending on different emphases for what Trinitarian implies.

Secondly, building upon a Trinitarian foundation, the renewed kingdom-perspective, or regnocentrism in mission also stands out as distinctively connected with the concept of *missio Dei*. The kingdom-perspective is subordinate to the Trinitarian turn in shaping the *missio Dei* concept. However, the kingdom perspective occurred very early, and we might see it as a natural consequence of an enlarged missiology where *missio Dei* is greater than *missio*.
ecclesiae. The entire missio Dei concept implied a heavy criticism of mission as a movement from the mainline churches within colonial power structures, and with an Enlightenment heritage. This older and optimistic project might be considered anthropocentric, even though it is more appropriate to criticise it for acting as if the church was the goal of her own mission. Says Bosch, “It is inconceivable that we could again revert to a narrow, ecclesiocentric view of mission” (Bosch 1991:393).

Thus, we find it useful to add a regnocentric turn to the renewed Trinitarian basis of Christian mission. Understandings of what the term regnocentric means differ in the same way as understandings of missio Dei differ. The kingdom, or reign, as many prefer to refer to it, might be understood as God’s rule over creation in a way that primarily leads to social and political transformation. Alternatively, the kingdom or reign refers to and flows primarily from the redemptive work of Christ, even though this is not without social implications.

The South-African missiologist David Bosch was an important figure on the broader ecclesial scene for the further development of missiology. Writing extensively about missio Dei in 1980 he observes, “Roman Catholics and Protestants alike subscribe to this view’ of moving ‘from an ecclesiological to a Trinitarian missiology.” He continues to point to the danger of dwelling on abstractions of vocabulary and underscores the need “to elaborate in more detail what we mean by a Trinitarian foundation in mission” (Bosch 1980:240). In his book about paradigm shifts in missiology, he counts missio Dei among the decisive elements of a post-enlightenment missiology for our time. Following the views of Moltmann and Aagaard, he concludes that, “there is church because there is mission, not vice versa” (Bosch 1991:393). He confirms and strengthens this message in his last and posthumous book, “Because God is a missionary God, God’s people are missionary people” (Bosch 1995:32). Bosch’s views seem close to what we have labelled a Christological-Trinitarian approach.

Our understanding is that the missio Dei shift in missiology leads from a predominantly ecclesiocentric concept of mission to a Trinitarian and regnocentric concept. The question is what such central theological concepts as the Trinity and the Kingdom of God mean and imply in the respective traditions.

In the years following the two documents in our study, discourse about how to understand the term missio Dei has developed further in relation to the issue of the Trinity. Korean theologian Chung-Hyun Baik is critical of how the concept of missio Dei relates to an outdated discussion. “At Willingen and beyond it has not been fully Trinitarian” as “[w]e approach it primarily in relation to missio ecclesiae” (Baik 2021:339). His key to further perspectives on missio Dei is processio Dei, “the procession of the triune God”.

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In a recent book, Indian theologian Sarosh Koshy discusses the issue of going "beyond Missio Dei". He makes a post-colonial critique of mission, using the deconstructivist philosopher Jacques Derrida as his guide. He points to public speech as witnessing, rather than preaching or proclaiming, and is radically critical of what he calls “the system of dual conversions.” He argues “that both becoming human and becoming Christian need to be understood as a singular or non-dual act” (Koshy 2021:20).

These two contributions are rather critical of the lack of radical ecumenical rethinking. Baik brings to the fore again Hoekendijk and the shalom and “humanization” of 1968 (Baik 2021:338), while Koshy gives an open critique of TTL as an “impossible balancing act that makes no one comfortable” as long as they stay with an understanding of mission as “sending” (Koshy 2021:7).

Australian theologian Darren Cronshaw replaces missio Dei with missio Trinitas as his key term. He uses this in a discussion with key representatives of the missional church movement, out of a concern that they are remaining within the conceptual framework that they criticise. On the basis of Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas’ social Trinitarian theology, he “invites the people of God into an abiding relation that nourishes mission” (Cronshaw 2020:131). As Cronshaw’s perspective is in danger of becoming a bit lofty in its mysticism, New Zealander Lynne Taylor asks to what extent missio Dei might be an object of research, if the methodology of critical realism and grounded theory are used (Taylor 2020:53). None of these articles from Oceania shed light directly on our subject. However, they represent a further exploration of ideas that would be recognised on the evangelical side.

4 Missio Dei in the Broader Conciliar Context prior to Together towards Life

Looking at the formula missio Dei after Uppsala 1968, “it is striking how markedly it has moved in the background” in WCC, observes Berentsen (1983:7). The General Assembly of WCC in Nairobi 1975, after intense discussions, brought back a much sharper focus on evangelism as a “call to confess and proclaim.” This is the calling of the church, as it “is the proper and primary instrument of God’s mission” (Scherer 1987:130). This is in many ways a different message from that of Hoekendijk and Uppsala. From 1975 until the late 1990s, discussion of missio Dei directly in creation and in the cultural mandate seems rare in official WCC documents. This does not imply that these voices had totally disappeared. According to Berentsen, missiologist Johannes Verkuyl, in the documents leading up to the CWME conference in Melbourne 1980, distinguished
between *missio politica oecumenica* and *missiones ecclesiarum* in a way that repeated the understanding of *missio Dei* from the 1960s, “as an integrated designation of God’s work in general – in creation as well as in redemption” (Berentsen 1983:9). This was an important issue concerning what it means that the kingdom of God is the goal of mission.²

Matthey observes that since the mid-1980s, conciliar documents refer to *missio Dei* with “more ‘classical’ formulations” (Matthey 2001:430). In 1982, WCC through CWME worked out and released its first official and comprehensive mission document *Mission and Evangelism – An Ecumenical Affirmation* (EA). We observe that this very central document never mentions the term *missio Dei*. It is hard not to believe that this is a deliberate choice. The English ‘mission of God’ occurs once, addressing “the church itself as a function of the mission of God.” This does not mean that the characteristics of *missio Dei* are missing. On the contrary, Matthey seems correct in saying, “EA is built on a Trinitarian basis with a Christological concentration” (EA 2005:2). Already in its first paragraph, EA confirms mission as fulfilling the Trinitarian calling of the church. At the same time, the document is clearly Christocentric in its approach, calling it “this mission of mediation in Christ” (EA 2005: §6). Thus, “our proclamation is Christ and Christ crucified” (EA 2005: §7). It states already in the Preface that “the church is sent,” (EA 2005: Preface) and calls the church “the missionary people of God” (EA 2005: §39). EA thus carries clear signs of what we have defined as the Christocentric-Trinitarian category.

*Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today* (MEUT), published by CWME 2000 for the next world mission conference in Athens 2005, elaborates further the term *missio Dei* within the framework of WCC. Seeing the mission of God as limitless, it says that *missio Dei* “has been at work within the entire human race and the whole of creation throughout history.” Furthermore, it states that the Trinitarian approach to the term “promotes a more inclusive understanding of God’s presence at work in the whole world” (MEUT 2005: §§11–12). These expressions seem to point to “openness to others” with regard to the theology of religions. As MEUT honestly exposes the unresolved tension within WCC on

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² Lesslie Newbigin was a central figure in both IMC and CWME. For decades he was an influential leader and writer, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. He was profoundly concerned that the Trinitarian missiology in WCC should not lose its Christocentrism (Newbigin 1994:2). In a strong critique of the WCC General Secretary Konrad Raiser, accusing him of speaking ‘often of the incarnation but not about the atonement’, the elderly Newbigin underscored ‘the centrality of Jesus and his atoning work on the cross’ (Newbigin 1994:3–4). He attacked ‘the ideology of the 1960s’ and ended up pointing to what he considered Raiser’s ‘total amnesia in respect of the missionary and evangelistic work of the churches’ (Newbigin 1994:5). Newbigin was probably one of the most influential missiologists as the most radical waves from around 1970 settled and WCC started its process of reaching a common understanding of mission and evangelism.
these questions, the understanding of missio Dei leads to a clear “discernment of the signs of the Spirit’s presence among people of other faiths and no faith” (MEUT 2005: §§58–61). However, as Peniel Rajkumar has clarified, MEUT seeks to avoid any separation between “the presence of God or the Spirit, from the Son,” making MEUT more careful on the theology of religions than the Baar statement Theological Perspectives on Plurality ten years earlier (Rajkumar 2016:225–226). By anchoring missio Dei in “the whole of creation,” MEUT also puts heavy emphasis on the holistic nature of mission.

Mission and Ministry of Reconciliation (MMR), published by CWME in 2005, connects with MEUT in its understanding of missio Dei (MMR 2005: §22). MMR, though, is clearly Christocentric in its scope (MMR 2005: §§15–21). “The human predicament that creates the need for reconciliation with God’ is addressed as ‘sin’, which creates ‘alienation from God’ and ‘enmity between God and human beings” (MMR 2005: §17). The same paragraph points to the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross as his substitutionary death for us. This develops the tradition of EA and connects well with what we find in evangelical documents. At the same time, MMR emphasises the work of the Holy Spirit more than the previous WCC documents. The Spirit ‘transforms the church and empowers it to be missional’ (MMR 2005: §61). It is hard to tell how wide the implications of this are for discerning the signs of the Spirit in a variety of faiths and commitments (MMR 2005: §25). In MMR, elements of Orthodox pneumatology also shed light on the understanding of God’s mission (MMR 2005: §27). The word shalom returns as the final goal of God’s mission which is understood in holistic categories (MMR 2005: §62).3

5 Missio Dei in Together towards Life

TTL has four main parts, as well as an introduction and a conclusion. All of the main sections: mission, liberation, community and Pentecost, take the Spirit as

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3 Anne Marie Aagaard observes that missio Dei is a ‘terminus technicus for a certain understanding of mission with a Protestant origin’, also calling it ‘a Protestant reconoign of the theology of mission’ (Aagaard 1974:421). Her question is whether Catholic missiology can adopt the concept. This important question will not be elaborated in our study, but the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) brings sharp focus on the sending Trinity and on the missionary nature of the church. These are important elements of the missio Dei discussion. Since the 1980s, the Catholics have been members of CWME and have contributed extensively to the broader missiological discussions. The Orthodox churches have been part of the WCC discussions since the 1960s. Bevans and Schroeder claim ‘Much of the renewal in trinitarian theology in the West owes its inspiration to Orthodox theology’, e.g. on the understanding of trinitarian theology about the ‘radical communal nature of God’ (Bevans and Schroeder 2004:288, 294).
their starting point, while the entire text centres on an understanding of “life”. “Affirming life” and “life-affirming” are terms occurring repeatedly. This theme of life is constantly related to “the Holy Spirit, the Life-giver, who sustains and empowers life and renews the whole creation” (TTL 2012: §1). From the very first paragraphs, TTL places great emphasis on the need to recognise “God’s mission in a cosmic sense and to affirm all life, the whole oikoumene, as being interconnected in God’s web of life” (TTL 2012: §4). The words used to relate this theme to mission are frequently justice, peace, healing and reconciliation which are needed in order to move forward towards life in its fullness. TTL concludes that “the purpose of God’s mission is fullness of life” (TTL 2012: §102). The key biblical reference is John 10:10b, the promise by the good shepherd to give life abundantly to his flock. There is no reflection on the context of this verse, as it occurs in John’s Gospel where the words “life” and even “eternal life” are terms with particular connotations.

The first section is about how the breath of life is the Spirit of mission. The emphasis on pneumatology is placed within a strong Trinitarian context. God is a “missionary God.” As TTL states, “Mission begins in the heart of the Triune God, and the love which binds together the Holy Trinity overflows to all humanity and creation” (TTL 2012: §2). There is much emphasis on the creation-Spirit axis. After calling mission “the overflow of the infinite love of the Triune God,” it continues, “God’s mission begins with the act of creation” (TTL 2012: §19; 103). Mission even “has creation at its heart” (TTL 2012: §105). There is a “universality of the Spirit’s economy in creation” as well as “the particularity of the Spirit’s work in redemption” (TTL 2012: §15). Mission needs to be woven together with our being creatures dwelling in creation in such a way that “humans can participate in communion with all of creation in celebrating the work of the Creator. In many ways creation is in mission to humanity” (TTL 2012: §§21–22). While there is also a focus on the Spirit in the sense of revival through his gifts, his charismata, this traditional charismatic and pentecostal profile is not very significant compared with the connection between Spirit and creation. There is far more on the Spirit hovering over the waters in Genesis 1 than about the Spirit filling the disciples in Acts 2. Because the Spirit precedes the revelation of the gospel in Christ, we should consider him present not only in creation, but also in different cultures and faiths.

We have reason to believe that TTL aims at a balanced Trinitarian emphasis. While holding to “a pneumatological focus on Christian mission”, TTL still “recognises that mission is essentially Christologically-based and related to the work of the Spirit to salvation through Jesus Christ” (TTL 2012:§16). However, Stephen Bevans refers to what he calls “one of the consistent critiques of TTL,” namely “its rather weak – or perhaps better, implicit – Christology” (Bevans...
This comment corresponds with my reading of the document as its centre of gravity lies in the Spirit of creation in such a way that traditional Christology and ecclesial pneumatology become subordinate issues.

During the discussion in section two about the importance of confirming mission from the margins, God’s mission takes on a relatively secular agenda. *Missio Dei* means that God is “the One who acts in history and in creation, in concrete realities of time and contexts, who seeks the fullness of life for the whole earth through justice, peace and reconciliation.” This leads to “deconstructing patriarchal ideologies, upholding the right to self-determination for Indigenous peoples, and challenging the social embeddedness of racism and casteism” (TTL 2012: §43). TTL gives much space to “mission from the margins,” but there is no discussion of the phrase’s lack of clarity, nor questions such as: Who has the right to define others as being at the margins? If the centre of gravity of the church has moved south, who then is marginal? This ecclesial discussion on centre and margins, however, does not seem to be a major focus of TTL. The marginal seem to be the powerless, poor, vulnerable, exploited, and oppressed of the world (TTL 2012: §37–38).

This might help to explain the rather dominant secular agenda in TTL which nevertheless presents God’s mission as mission from the margins. Allen Yeh comments that while TTL anchors mission from the margins in the paschal mystery, “§32 delineates the cross as panacea for earthly rather than spiritual ailments” (Yeh 2016:459). In my opinion, this is a fair observation.

God’s mission in TTL clearly finds its foundation to a great extent in the creation mandate and in the preceding work of the Spirit in all cultures. Thus, TTL sees *missio Dei* largely in terms of general history. However, section three is about the church in mission and section four about the calling of the church to evangelise. The entire aim of the church is “to fulfil God’s missionary purpose” as she “came into being for the sake of mission” (TTL 2012: §57). Echoing the fathers of the term, “it is not the church that has a mission but rather the mission that has a church.” In this perspective, and for the sake of “embodying God’s salvation in the world,” we need an ecclesiology “from below” (TTL 2012: §58). In his comparison of TTL and *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, a document on the church also released by WCC in 2013, Bevans challenges the lack of structural consciousness in TTL, “making its treatment of mission less ecclesiological” (Bevans 2015:133).

To accomplish what she is here for, TTL challenges the church to promote unity. This implies unity between what we have held separate, such as church and mission, and between the churches themselves. However, this call to unity goes further, as it challenges us “to open up our reflections on church and unity to an even wider understanding of unity; the unity of humanity and even the
cosmic unity of the whole of God’s creation” (TTL 2012: §61). It is not immediately clear what this implies, but it seems to confirm what we have already seen in the first two sections of TTL, that God’s mission is much wider than the mission of the church, including all of humanity and creation.

In the title of section three “Spirit of Community: Church on the Move,” TTL summarises the dual character of the church. As the church is on the move, she is seemingly nothing in herself. Most of the emphasis of TTL is on what it means for the church to be on the move, rather than on the church as the community of salvation, called together by God to be the sign and anticipation of the coming kingdom or realm of God. However, TTL is also influenced by the Orthodox view of mission, that mission and diakonia flow from the community (TTL 2012: §§74; 78), and therefore the mission of the church is perceived as the “liturgy after the Liturgy” (TTL 2012: §17). The overall impression, however, is that TTL has a somewhat instrumental understanding of the church as a tool for God’s mission.

TTL refers to mission as “essentially Christologically-based” and “emphasizes the Holy Spirit as fully dependent on Christ” as one side of the biblical witness (TTL 2012: §16). God’s mission must also follow “the way of the Servant Lord” (TTL 2012: §78) and do “mission in Christ’s way” (TTL 2012: §88). This is central to the fourth section which is about evangelism. However, TTL does not have a very Christocentric understanding of God’s mission. While linking evangelism to “the centrality of the incarnation, suffering, and resurrection of Jesus Christ,” the text adds “without setting limits to the saving grace of God” (TTL 2012: §80). This seems like hesitation to admit an exclusive understanding of salvation in Jesus Christ, whereas “the Holy Spirit works in mysterious ways, and we do not fully understand the workings of the Spirit in other faith traditions.” It follows that dialogue, rather than preaching and proclamation, comes to the centre of the evangelistic task in God’s mission. TTL goes further, though, saying that the church should not only be dialogical as there is “inherent value and wisdom in diverse life-giving spiritualities ... authentic mission makes the ‘other’ a partner in, not an ‘object’ of mission” (TTL 2012: §§93–94).

TTL does not focus specifically on the kingdom or reign of God. However, all of mission aims at the kingdom of God. We do “discern signs of God’s reign on earth” while seeking justice, inclusivity and healing (TTL 2012: §§46; 51). The church itself “can be a sign of hope and an expression of the kingdom of God here on earth” (TTL 2012:§54), as this kingdom is the goal of evangelism (TTL 2012:§109).

As God’s mission is to a great extent related to the created order and the cultural mandate, it is less connected with a specific focus on salvation history and more understood in terms of general history and God’s activity in its totality. There are similarities between this and what, according to
Johannes Aagaard, characterised the goal of *missio Dei* in the 1960s. “This goal embraces God’s action in creation and redemption, *so that no division is possible*” (Aagaard 1973:14; *italics* mine). This missing distinction in TTL between creation and redemption means that the question of the scope of salvation remains ambiguous. We cannot point to any unambiguous expression of salvific universalism in any paragraph of TTL. On the other hand, the aims of God’s mission are dominantly immanent, and the very inclusive language towards people of other faiths and of no faith makes the issue of universalism at least an open question.

As we have seen, TTL includes “all of creation” in *missio Dei*, so that even “creation is in mission to humanity.” What does this mean for our understanding of the more specific mission of the church in evangelism? TTL holds on to an evangelistic task pointing to Jesus and the kingdom of God but, as we have seen, even here TTL broadens the perspective to make the ‘other’ a partner in mission.

Unlike the most radical understandings of *missio Dei* in the late 1960s, TTL gives the church a significant role in God’s mission. Thus, TTL is different from certain secular models in the times of Hoekendijk. It goes far, however, in including the “other” as partner in the gospel mandate of the church. Even though it also aims at including Christology, TTL’s Trinitarian model is still not Christocentric. TTL puts the Spirit at the centre of mission, but the emphasis on the Spirit in creation and in the cultures indicates an understanding of *missio Dei* primarily in the direction of cosmocentric-Trinitarian categories, even though there are also obvious pneumatocentric elements.

### 6 *Missio Dei* in the Broader Evangelical Context Prior to The Cape Town Commitment

Does the evangelical wing of the church have an understanding of or response to *missio Dei*? While presenting different constants of theology in a variety of historical contexts, Bevans and Schroeder also analyse the concept of *missio Dei*. They ascribe varying missiological characteristics to the different wings of the church, such as Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical, and Conciliar Protestant. In their analysis of the concept of *missio Dei*, however, they leave out the evangelicals from the comparison (Bevans and Schroeder 2004:296). Does this imply that Evangelicals are without an understanding of, or a response to *missio Dei*?

The evangelical use of the concept was established relatively late. The congresses on world mission in Berlin and at Wheaton in 1966 made no use of the term, nor did they discuss Trinitarian theology. The Wheaton Declaration
comments on the idea of universalism of salvation in the following words, “The universalist merely proclaims a universal Lordship of Christ and sum-mons men to acknowledge it in their lives” (Wheaton 1966:12).

The Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in 1974 reacted against the conciliar development and more specifically against the demand from the Bangkok Assembly of CWME in 1973 about a “moratorium” on Western mission. Even though the Lausanne Covenant (LC) never mentions the term “God’s mission” in either Latin or English, it points to the Trinitarian faith (LC 1974: §§ 5; 14), but without spelling out the implications. However, John Stott, the major author of LC, emphasised in his keynote address to the congress that “the mission of the church arises from the mission of God and is to be modelled on it” (Stott 1975:66). Two of the reports from the congress contain important elements showing how the LM related to the ongoing debates. Klaas Runia explores the Trinitarian nature of God, but without saying too much about mission, while J. Andrew Kirk unfolds the relation between God’s kingdom and the church, with implications for mission.

In the Manila Manifesto (MM) from the Lausanne Second World Congress in 1989, there is still no emphasis on God’s mission as a term. The kingdom-perspective is sharper, with implications for “the lordship of Jesus Christ over all of life” (MM 1989: section 4). As a sign of God’s kingdom, the church should be “an indication of what human community looks like when it comes under his rule of righteousness and peace” (MM 1975: section 8).

In the evangelical missiological community, the Trinitarian influence came clearly to expression in the Iguasso Dialogue, held by the Missions Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance in 1999. The keynote Bible studies reflected on biblical Trinitarianism and mission, but the term missio Dei is largely absent from the papers. The Iguasso Affirmation declares, “All three Persons of the Godhead are active in God’s redeeming mission” (Iguasso 2000:17), and further, “We commit ourselves to a renewed emphasis on God-centered missiology” (Iguasso 2000:19). The emphasis is on God’s redeeming action for his fallen creation and is careful and classical in its focus. Alan Roxburgh goes further, while addressing the contemporary implications. “A Trinitarian missiology is foundational to engaging the cultures of a pluralized, post-modern world” (Roxburgh 2000:183).

Roxburgh has been a key contributor to The Gospel and Our Culture Network, which largely had an evangelical background, even though not restricted to that. The literature from the network is clearly indebted to Lesslie Newbigin’s missional ecclesiology, but their critique of the old Christendom paradigm is more radical than Newbigin’s (Goheen 2000:436). Since the late 1990s, they have played an active role in coining the term “missional” to refer
to the church. “Thus our challenge today is to move from church with mission to missional church” (Guder 1998:6). Mission is primarily something that the church is by its very nature, not something it simply engages in. Its doing generates from its being. This ecclesiology has parallels with some central aspects of missio Dei, a concept that Darrell Guder considers is the key for unlocking our understanding of what mission is. All mission and evangelism are “rooted in the missio Dei” (Guder 2000:25). Guder constitutes a clear understanding of missio Dei as leading to God’s “salvific actions in human history,” stating that “such a theology is obviously Christocentric” (Guder 2000:47–48).

Evangelicals will usually be reluctant to accept the tendency of universalism which we can find in some aspects of the missio Dei tradition. Malaysian evangelical missiologist, Methodist Bishop Hwa Yung, points to the consequences of taking a universalistic stance towards salvation. Discussing Hoekendijk’s position, he states, “if all (...) are to be saved (...), then what is important is not evangelization but socio-political action and humanization. Since the latter is identified with missio Dei, and the church is where God is supposedly at work, then the locus of the church’s identity is where socio-political action for humanity’s welfare or humanization occurs!” (Yung 2014:34). A similar warning against the danger of not distinguishing between creation and redemption in missio Dei has also come from evangelical Lutheran missiologists (Berentsen 1983:11–14; Engelsviken 2003:489–490).

Leading evangelical theologian and Old Testament exegete Christopher Wright has written comprehensively on both God’s mission and the mission of God’s people. He pays little attention to the Latin phrase, but while acknowledging that the Latin verb mitto means primarily “to send,” he also adds that he will talk about “mission in its more general sense” (Wright 2006:23). This sheds light on the double meaning of the word “mission” in the English language, which is not common in many other languages and thus is potentially confusing when “missio Dei” and “God’s mission” are used interchangeably. While “mission” in English means not only sending, but also “task” or “purpose” as in ordinary action and business plans, the Latin word seems to be restricted to the sending perspective.

Wright criticises the conciliar tendency to use the term missio Dei to refer “simply to God’s involvement with the whole historical process, not to any specific work of the church” (Wright 2006:63). He admits that in a broader sense of the word “mission,” the whole of humanity has a mission related to the creation mandate (Wright 2006:65), but his entire emphasis is on the mandate of the church and on redemption. However, this redemption also involves the redemption of God’s creation (Wright 2006:23). This might be the most challenging message from Wright to his evangelical friends: How comprehensive is
salvation? Wright points to the cosmic reign of God in Christ and places great emphasis on the missional calling to care for creation (Wright 2010:31, 48–62).

7 Missio Dei in The Cape Town Commitment

CTC consists of two large parts, each with several paragraphs. Part I was a text written before the congress in 2010, primarily by Chris Wright, while a group of theologians under Wright’s leadership worked out Part II during and immediately after the congress on the basis of the topics and issues covered day by day in a variety of sessions at the congress. Part I has a confessional or even worshipping style. The basic idea is that the mission of the church is a response to the great gift of love from God, an expression of our love for Him.

CTC is confessionally and classically Trinitarian, and it expresses our love to the living God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. “In the unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God alone is the Creator, Ruler, Judge, and Saviour of the world” (CTC 2011: Part I, 2). However, there is no exploration of what the communal nature of God implies. The text goes directly to expressions like “God’s mission” and “the mission of God” as if the terms carry an established common understanding. CTC uses these expressions almost interchangeably with “the Church’s mission,” “Christian mission” and ‘Biblical mission’. Stating, “the Church’s mission goes on,” it continues by saying, “the mission of God continues,” as if the two phrases are identical (CTC 2011: Preamble). At the end of the paragraph, the text reads “the Church’s participation in God’s mission continues.” Even though God’s mission, as with God himself, is semper major and cannot be restricted by the church, the church is consequently the one sharing his mission.

Part I begins with a fundamental statement, “The mission of God flows from the love of God. The mission of God’s people flows from our love for God, for all that God loves” (CTC 2011: Part I, 1). God’s love is constitutive of his mission, the source from which all things spring up. God is at the centre of mission, and not only his love. “The greatest motivation for our mission is the same that drives the mission of God himself – that the one true living God should be known and glorified throughout his whole creation” (CTC 2011: Part I, 2b). This emphasis on love probably shares kinship with the fervour of the Moravians who were at the origins of evangelical missions in the 18th century. This can be illustrated by the story of the crucified Jesus calling Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf to mission, “This I have suffered for you. What have you truly done for me?” (von Mehring 2013:154). The order of divine and human action is important, as “we love because God first loved us,” but in CTC there is still a rather strong
emphasis on “our love for the whole gospel, ... for the whole church, ... for the whole world” and on “our overflowing love for him” (CTC 2011: Preamble and Part 1, 10). This emphasis on the believer’s loving heart is to some degree in tension with a traditional theocentric understanding of missio Dei.

When CTC discusses the first article of the Creed, God the Father does not stand out primarily as creator but as relational. This is very similar to early expressions by David Bosch who wrote of missio Dei that, “Mission has its origin in the fatherly heart of God” (Bosch 1980:240). As with Bosch, in CTC this leads to an emphasis on the Son and on the story of what Jesus has done for us. His loving, salvific work implies that he calls us to discipleship and obedience, leading to proclamation of Christ alone (CTC 2011: Part I, 4).

The Holy Spirit is central to the understanding of mission in the text, as he is called “the missionary Spirit sent by the missionary Father and the missionary Son, breathing life and power into God’s missionary Church” (CTC 2011: Part I, 5). This might be the single most saturated formulation in CTC concerning God as a missionary God, and it occurs in the paragraph about the Spirit. The empowering Spirit is central as without the Spirit “mission is mere human effort.” As the text points to the Spirit in creation, and to his purpose of witnessing to Christ, it is interesting that it has nothing to say about the presence of the Spirit in what TTL calls “life-giving spiritualities” in all cultures and faith traditions. In CTC, the Spirit is primarily connected with “the true and whole gospel” and the “authentic biblical mission” (CTC 2011: Part I, 5). While referring to “this story of God’s mission,” it does so within the framework of “the story that the Bible tells (CTC 2011: Part I, 6b). The ministry of the Spirit in mission consequently connects with the gospel of Jesus Christ told in the Bible.

CTC goes further than any previous document from LM concerning the integral approach of mission. The redeeming work of God aims at eschatological consummation. This consummation is the transformation of “the creation broken by sin and evil into the new creation” (CTC 2011: Part I, 10). Under the umbrella of “integral mission,” CTC draws a very comprehensive map for mission, addressing individual persons, society and creation. “All three are broken and suffering because of sin; all three are included in the redeeming love and mission of God; all three must be part of the comprehensive mission of God’s people” (CTC 2011: Part I, 7a).

God’s mission agent for his great purposes is the church, primarily addressed as “the people of God.” CTC envisages no other divine mission partner. An illustration of this occurs in the final paragraph under Part I, which has the subtitle “We love the mission of God.” In this paragraph, the sayings “mission of God” and “God’s (or his) mission” occur six times while “our mission” occurs five times. The overlap is nearly complete. God has a mission in which “we share”
and “to which God calls his Church” (CTC 2011: Part I, 10). The centrality of the church in God’s mission corresponds well with Goheen’s emphasis on the missional church, stating that “the church is the locus of God’s renewing work” (Goheen 2011:92; italics mine).

The second part of CTC is a demonstration of the comprehensiveness of the mission mandate as presented in Part I, and issues a call to action. The six paragraphs reflect each day of the Cape Town Congress in 2010. As such, they have a restricted frame of understanding. This is how the leaders and speakers saw the strategic needs in 2010. Most of the challenges remain, but the text is devoted more to practice than to principles. For our purpose, it is important to recognise how CTC views the extent of involvement.

The first of six areas of action concerns truth in Christ in the pluralistic encounter. Declaring “spoken proclamation of the truth of the gospel ... is paramount in our mission” (CTC 2011: Part II, A1a), the action plan confirms the love of the gospel which demands obedience and stands in contrast to human and religious reality (CTC 2011: Part I, 8).

The word ‘missional’, which occurs a number of times, probably gives a direction to how we should understand some of this. The commitments do not go directly back to concrete church strategies which we can call “missions,” in the plural. Many of the areas are and will be the subject of mission strategies in the churches. Others are about leading the lives of disciples. Thus, it has a specific address to the workplace, focusing on “the mobilization of all God’s people in the mission of God” (CTC 2011: Part II, A3).

How can the church provide the motivation to “serve God in different callings?” From this point of view, there are no areas of life which a Christian can remove from the Lordship of Christ. The mission of God is not primarily something to be lived out in ecclesial strategies but in the greatly empowered lives of those who follow Jesus “with missional effectiveness” (CTC 2011: Part II, A3). “Make disciples” is the subtitle of one of two concluding remarks at the end of the Commitment. This is at the heart of where CTC wants to lead (CTC 2011: Part II, Conclusion). Thus, the document very strongly connects theological education and mission. Intending “to equip all God’s people for the missional task,” we must “acknowledge that theological education is intrinsically missional. We need ‘to ensure that it is intentionally missional” (CTC 2011: Part II, 4).

CTC does not elaborate much on the understanding of the kingdom of God. Early on, it refers to the coming day ‘when the kingdoms of the world will become the kingdom of our God’ (CTC 2011: Preamble). This saying returns almost identical in the final paragraph of Part I, but with “kingdom of the world” in the singular (CTC 2011: Part I, 10). This peculiar difference gets no
explanation. It is unclear exactly what the formula ‘will become’ implies, but it probably indicates an understanding of strong continuity between God’s creation and his final recreation.

As for the characteristics of the different understandings of missio Dei, the Trinitarian emphasis in CTC is not a replacement of ordinary evangelical Christocentrism. The centrality and uniqueness of salvation in Christ is paramount in CTC, but Trinitarian consciousness enlarges and broadens the understanding of God’s salvific work. Even though God’s mission, especially in English vocabulary, also might be ascribed to God’s work in creation, CTC’s use of the term is entirely focused on God’s redemption with reference to salvation history. However, this salvation history and redemptive work concerns individual persons, society, and creation. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that CTC follows Chris Wright in opening up a broader understanding of salvation.

However, CTC is by no means universalistic in its understanding of salvation. The lostness of humanity is an unchanged and lasting reality for those without faith in Jesus Christ. Thus, mission is necessary to people of other faiths, and to unreached and unengaged peoples. Consequently, CTC knows only one partner for God’s mission, the church. This becomes clear while observing the almost completely interchangeable use of terms such as “the mission of God” and “the mission of God’s people.” This does not mean that the work of men and women of good will is excluded from being service of the will of God. However, this issue is not raised in CTC’s discussion of God’s mission, and within the document’s overall concept. To summarize briefly, it would appear we are justified in asserting that CTC represents a clearly Christocentric-Trinitarian view of missio Dei.

8 Concluding Reflections

The central question in this study concerns the concept of missio Dei. As it is now in common use, at least in equivalents like ‘God’s mission’ or ‘the mission of God’, are we on common ground in our use and understanding of these words? Do conciliar and evangelical missiologies fill them with the same content? A short answer to these questions would be that there is an ambiguous picture.

Commenting on the centenary of the World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910, Kirsteen Kim reminds us that missio Dei “is not only a practical task but also a theological matter” (Kim 2011:352). This is very true, even though it is almost an understatement. In many ways, missio Dei might be considered primarily a theological matter, as Kim’s further assessment also proves.
*Missio Dei* derives from the Trinity. It carries the marks and signs of the communal nature of God and thus aims at unity with God and his creation. There are strategic implications in this, but these are secondary. As Kim points out, “*Missio Dei* stresses unity not only for pragmatic reasons but as an integral part of witness to God” (Kim 2011:353). Starting from this assertion, Kim unfolds the ecclesial consequences of *missio Dei*.

Knud Jørgensen, who worked closely with Kim and others on realising the impressive Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series, writes, “The *missio Dei* paradigm makes impossible the separation of mission and church. If the church is defined by mission, then the unity of the church and mission are deeply interrelated” (Jørgensen 2014:45; italics his). This seemed to be the driving force behind the centenary celebration at Edinburgh in 2010 when all wings of the world Christian church were present, thus making it more representative than WCC or LM. This also seems to be the driving force behind the renewal of the concept which has taken place since the 1990s. Following the politically radical occupation of *missio Dei* in the 1960s, there has been a redefinition going on, a pursuit of common ground. As a result, all ecclesial camps now seem to acknowledge the concept as central to understanding Christian mission. Jørgensen was convinced that “highlighting the *missio Dei* perspective and the pneumatological dimension will ... strengthen our mission focus.” Unity is “for the sake of mission.” He joined Lesslie Newbigin in a longing “to hear more about the concern to share the Good News about what God has done for the world” (Jørgensen 2014:293).

There is common ground between TTL and CTC in the establishment of a Trinitarian basis, thus leaving behind a (Western) ecclesiocentric paradigm of mission. There is a common interest in establishing the kingdom of God as the goal of mission. The church has a role in the mission of God. Therefore, it must understand its nature and further find its calling as missional. God’s mission has a church, not vice versa. There is, moreover, a common conviction that the indivisible Trinity necessarily leads us to see the different sides of mission together as a whole. As the Divine One is Three in Unity, God’s mission needs to aim at an integrated holism. Both TTL and CTC have a rather comprehensive understanding of integral mission in terms of social involvement. God’s mission aims at a reordering of creation. The mission of the church must reflect this, whether it is as a realised reign of God in the created and political order or as a sign of the kingdom that is breaking in and will be consummated at the return of Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, there are some obvious differences between the documents. CTC stands in clear continuity with previous evangelical documents in
its Christocentrism, while TTL emphasises this only to a limited extent. The Christocentrism of CTC is exclusive in salvific terms, whereas TTL has no clarity on the question of salvation and universalism. TTL, on the other hand, puts almost all its emphasis on the Spirit, but in creational categories, rather than glorifying Christ or reviving God's people.

Kirsteen Kim, who contributed to both TTL and CTC, confirms that “the Spirit's ministry of reconciliation is most often connected with creation” in TTL (Kim 2016:385). This goes not only for reconciliation, but for the entire understanding of missio Dei. The nature of God's mission reflects the communal nature of the Trinity and flourishes from creation. Even though CTC establishes a wider and more integral understanding of salvation than in previous Lausanne documents and confirms the role of the Spirit in creation, there is no doubt that biblical mission is understood as God's redemptive work for his fallen creation. It flows directly from reconciliation as God's vertical action in Jesus Christ and his atoning work on the cross.

Norwegian missiologist Tormod Engelsviken, who worked on the team that processed CTC, also has a recent contribution about reconciliation and missio Dei. With impulses from Catholic missiologist Robert Schreiter, he claims that “there is a profound theological connection” between the ministry of reconciliation and missio Dei, thus anchoring missio Dei in the centrality of Christ (Engelsviken 2020:165). The principal differences between TTL and CTC are obvious in this basic understanding of missio Dei. Jan Jongeneel finds a significant difference here, not only between TTL and evangelical missiology, but also within the conciliar tradition between TTL and EA (Jongeneel 2014:282–283).

Consequently, the two documents have a very different approach to identifying those who are God's co-workers in mission. CTC includes the church as the people of God in a way that makes it God's own co-worker for his great mission of salvation. While TTL includes the religious “other” in unfolding the mission mandate, it reveals a different theology of religions compared with that of CTC (Kjøde 2017:110–12). This goes back to the understanding of truth and revelation. While TTL emphasises the work of the Spirit in all cultures and faiths starting from the creation, CTC emphasises the necessity of truth that demands obedience and excludes all other faiths. CTC is aware of good values in all cultures, but never in terms of salvation. Therefore, the calling of the church, and the church only, is to follow Jesus to those who have never heard the gospel. The largest gap between the two documents might be visualised at this point, not primarily in terms of who is sent, but in their understanding of the exclusivity of the truth of the gospel to a lost humanity.
List of Abbreviations

CTC  The Cape Town Commitment  
CWME The Commission on World Mission and Evangelism  
EA Mission and Evangelism – An Ecumenical Affirmation  
IMC The International Mission Council  
LC The Lausanne Covenant  
LM The Lausanne Movement  
MEUT Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today  
MM The Manila Manifesto  
MMR Mission and Ministry of Reconciliation  
TTL Together towards Life  
WCC The World Council of Churches

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**Resumen**

La *missio Dei* se ha convertido en una expresión común y valorada en la mayoríá de las ramas de la iglesia. ¿Hasta qué punto se le adjudica el mismo significado al utilizar este término? Este artículo examina la comprensión del concepto *missio Dei* en los contextos conciliares y evangélicos contemporáneos, poniendo una atención especial a El compromiso de Ciudad del Cabo y a Juntos por la vida. Aunque la *missio Dei* ha tenido una vida bastante agitada con diversas definiciones e intereses vinculados, en el tiempo relativamente corto de la terminología, parece haber una creciente convergencia en su uso.

Estos puntos de coincidencia están relacionados principalmente con el cambio de un paradigma eclesiocéntrico de la misión a uno trinitario y con la comprensión del reino de Dios como objetivo de la misión.

**摘要**

*Missio Dei* 已成为教会大多数分支中常见且受重视的表达方式。当我们使用这个词时，我们在多大程度上是指同一件事吗？本文探讨在当代公会和福音派背景下对 *missio Dei* 概念的理解，特别强调《开普敦的承诺》和《共同迈向生活》这些文件。尽管在相对较短的时间跨度内，*missio Dei* 经历了动荡的生活，定义多样，兴趣多种，但其用法似乎越来越趋同。这个共同点主要与从以教会为中心到三位一体的使命范式的转变，以及将上帝的国度理解为使命的目标有关。然而，这些文件存在差异，这些差异在它们对基督的中心地位和圣灵的角色的相对强调中显而易见的。