

BEYOND *MISSIO DEI*: AN EXAMINATION OF CHRISTIAN WITNESS

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ABSTRACT

Beyond *Missio Dei*: An Examination of Christian Witness

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The concept of mission that gained prominence since the sixteenth century mostly defines the life of the church, and since the 1950s, the conception of *missio Dei* (mission of God) that derives its basis from the trinitarian interpretation of “sending,” has turned mission into an indisputable requirement. Yet, mission as a second-step or subsequent activity that is begotten by an already existing, complete, and accomplished Christian entity, does not either constitute or impede its ability of becoming and remaining Christian.

Drawing on the contemporary theoretical context, this dissertation attempts to consider the Christian entity as one that continues becoming only within its own faithful attempt at proclaiming the lordship of Christ, or bearing witness to Christ. These acts of faith are considered here as an entity’s confession of faith and hope in and through its praxis around the most pertinent issues that are being thrust upon it by its immediate and wider milieu, regardless of whether it directly confronts them or dexterously evades. The cumulative aftereffect of an entity’s praxis is its witness, and this dissertation argues that

the witness that Christ seeks is not any special act, but the simple act of living with a different performativity.

If a religious entity could only be conceived in the becoming mode and never as a finished or accomplished body or being, then it would consequentially become impossible to sustain the claim to identity or essence by merely maintaining religious affiliation and partaking in rituals. Once essence assumed through religious affiliation become untenable, the most readily available ground of othering would vanish, and along with it, the possibility of maintaining missions aimed at conversion as a separate enterprise that does not require any particular regard for the witness of the communions.

The different conception of entity is being sought with the contention that the difference the gospel of Christ announces is that humans are not called to lead *truncated lives* tethered to repetitive acts as ends in themselves, but to an *abundant life* of quintessential freedom. This dissertation strives to re-read the Christian testimony as a witness of God—*marturion Dei*—that simultaneously reveal who God will be, and the becoming of humans that pleases God—the *marturia* or the witness of the disciples.

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INTRODUCTION

The hearts of those who have not yet heard the voice of God, or precisely, of those who are not yet Christians, are purported to be creeping and crawling with animals: creatures characterizing the undesirable traits that demonstrate the sway of Satan. The menagerie includes the haughty peacock flaunting feathers of pride and self-righteousness, the obstinate goat gleefully defying conventions, the know-no-restrain gluttonous pig, the toad reveling in vile and immoral stories and gossip, the snake spewing the venom of envy and deceit, the quick to anger and forever vengeful tiger, and, the disobedient and lazy turtle that disregards both its abilities and responsibilities. This depiction of non-Christian hearts happens to be the core contention of a Christian mission tract in the Malayalam language. The leaflet entitled “Thampiyude Hridayam” (Heart of Thampi) was widely distributed across Kerala State, India, in the last two decades of the previous century, and it continues to enjoy some prominence even today. “Thampi” is both a proper name in many communities across South India, and also a common address customarily made to someone who is younger than oneself; and “Hridayam” means heart. Thus the term “Thampi” in the title of this tract could be perceived either as the name of a particular non-Christian individual, or as a comprehensive characterization of the perpetual spiritual immaturity of all those who have not yet embraced God, or in essence, Christianity. The title of a version of this tract that address the Islamic community is “Heart of Pak,” and it is again a similar play on the Urdu/Persian word “Pak,” which

means pure or holy.¹

The depiction of non-Christian hearts in this tract and the word play in the titles in its different language versions is not an expression of a new zeal, but very much rooted in the Indian Christian tradition. The regular translation of the word “Bible” in Indian languages could be “Pustak,” to convey it as a book, or its plural form as a collection of books. However, when translated into Indian languages, the usual adjective of “holy” is replaced with the words “Satya Veda,” which, in translation, designates the bible as the “true Veda.” The obvious pronouncement here, as Stanley J. Samartha notes, is that the “four Vedas of the Hindus are ‘false.’”²

¹ Different versions of the basic theme of this tract have been customized to address various religious communities across Kerala. A discussion on the impact of the tract “Heart of Pak” on K. K. Alavi, a well-known Christian convert from the Islamic community in Kerala, is profiled in, John Anthony Chesworth, *The Use of Scripture in Swahili Tracts by Muslims and Christians in East Africa* (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2007), 193.

² S. J. Samartha, *One Christ—Many Religions: Toward a Revised Christology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 67, 189, fn. 1. A standard response to the problematization of this depiction of the Hindu religious scriptures as false, would be that it has given self-esteem and respect to the Dalits who embraced Christianity, as Dalits were considered outcastes and thus beyond the purview of the four Vedas of the Hindu tradition. However, there is sufficient evidence that the mass-movement conversions of Dalits in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that eventually transformed the Indian church to become predominantly Dalit, happened primarily through the initiative of Dalits themselves. Until the time of these mass-movement conversions, both Catholic and Protestant missionaries were keen on converting the upper caste Hindus and they never wanted to diminish that possibility by baptizing the Dalits, who were considered untouchables within the Hindu caste hierarchy. The present day interest among many Muslim refugees in Europe to embrace Christianity is also indicative of mixed motives involved in all conversions. V. Devasahayam, a pioneer of Dalit theology emphasizes: “It was the Dalits (not missionaries) who took the initiative in mass movements and the missionaries were forced to respond to this Dalit initiative. There was a dramatic increase in the membership of the church. Due to mass movements, the nature of Christian church was transformed from a tiny, urban, educated community of mixed social origins to a predominantly poor, rural, illiterate Dalit community. A permanent Dalit stamp was marked on the church and it is this church that has come to stay.” V. Devasahayam, *Outside the Camp: Bible Studies in Dalit Perspective* (Madras: Gurukul, 1994), 38. Also, see, John C. B. Webster, *A History of the Dalit Christians in India* (San Francisco, CA: Mellen Research University, 1992); and, James Massey, *Dalits in India: Religion as a Source of Bondage or Liberation with Special Reference to Christians* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1995). With regard to the emerging interest in religious conversion in contemporary Europe, see, Harriet Sherwood and Philip Oltermann, “European churches say growing flock of Muslim refugees are converting,” *Guardian*, June 5, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/05/european-churches-growing-flock-muslim-refugees-converting-christianity>. Also see, Josie Ensor, “The Muslim refugees converting to Christianity ‘to find safety,’” *Telegraph*, January 20, 2017. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/01/30/muslim-refugees-converting-christianity-find-safety/>. And, Faisal Devji, “Conversions From Islam in Europe and

The Kerala State chapter of the Bible Society of India used to visit various congregations of its member Church denominations and organize tours around that particular geographical area to call people to a belief in God and thus convert to Christian faith. In the early 1980s, as a teenager, this author was part of one such trip and tried to market “Heart of Thampi” at a village square. Upon reading the booklet that was about to be sold to others, and on examining my own heart in its light, it was evident that my entire Christian upbringing, and the diligent participation in both the worship services and Sunday School classes, had not stamped out the frolicking of these undesirable creatures from a heart that is supposedly “Christian.” And when I thought about the observable conduct of my fellow parishioners, about their interpersonal relationships, and of their professed positions on questions from caste, class, patriarchy, and so on, the hearts of the majority of them could not be very much different either. Evermore so in the case of those on that Bible Society van, who were gathered under the reigning strategy of saving the souls of non-Christians by making them aware of the wretched state of their hearts and thus of the terrible consequence of being condemned for perdition unless they accept the Christian religion. This contemplative awareness that the contrast between Christian and non-Christian hearts did not seem so prominent and unambiguous as this tract so confidently portrays, weakened my resolve and made me an unconvincing salesperson to my potential buyers.

At the village square, an acquaintance by virtue of being a cousin of a very good friend and classmate graciously obliged me by buying a copy of the booklet. This generous buyer started reading the tract immediately. The choir that accompanied such

Beyond,” *New York Times*, August 15, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/15/opinion/islam-conversions.html?ref=opinion>.

evangelistic attempts continued singing while the preacher meditated on his message that would crown the day's efforts on the Lord's harvest field, and the team members pursued others to acquire copies of the tract, as they all were busy with their own daily shopping and socializing routines. Soon after finishing reading, this friend gave me the strangest of looks that evinced the power of a revelatory moment wherein the perceptions of all Christians about the whole of their neighbors of other faiths have become eminently transparent as the brightest of days under the tropical sun. It was a look that carried the full force of disgust, dismay, and disbelief in the actuality of a relationship that had been previously considered to be of friendly disposition, based upon a sense of trust, and shared humanity. One that could only be read as: "So this is what you think and have had always thought about me and my cousin all along on those many occasions when we have shared some gracious moments together, and at times even the fellowship of food and drink? Now only I realize the dreadful deception of all those seemingly pleasing instances, and that those were merely skillful charades camouflaging your true feelings and beliefs." It has never been possible to excise from memory that piercing look that displayed the unexpected and upsetting revelation, and its haunting question of whether a Christian could simultaneously be in a genuine friendship with persons of other faiths, and yet condemn them as depraved for merely following a different religious path.

This question of the possibility or impossibility of an individual Christian's or their communion's relationship with neighbors of other faiths ever since prompted me to continuously be in the communion of sojourners who seek ways of sustaining and nurturing those already within the tradition, and inviting those others beyond to Christian faith, but through different patterns of engagement. My involvement later on in the Mar

Thoma Church's youth group, and in the Student Christian Movement of India, opened up different possibilities of being Christian in the Indian context. They did so through exposures to the stark realities of the many prevailing exploitations and exclusions, and by insisting on immersion in the struggles that addressed these issues as the most appropriate faith response for a Christian living in those times. Introduction to social analysis and to possible pathways of involvements were made in the immediate context of real-life struggles led by the many people's movements and action groups that sprang up across Kerala since mid-1970s. Many of these social action groups and movements emerged out of a Christian persuasion and drew their inspiration and nourishment from the streams of liberation theologies, and from the Christ image that they carved out as the one that especially privilege and require praxis. During the student days and beyond, there had been many opportunities to be part of both faith-based and secular groups and movements, and the personal quest has always been for an appropriate and adequate Christian witness in a society defined by religious pluralism, and especially in a nation where the Christian faith commands numerically a miniscule minority.

I.1. Definitions and Thesis Statement

The current bipartite format of Christian life is of primarily being and remaining Christian, and subsequently embracing actions as mission that would correspond to the preferences and potentials of a communion or an individual. The effort in this dissertation is to problematize this notion of an individual Christian or the church as an accomplished or complete entity. This notion presumes that such an entity could thereupon assume actions of their choice, or elect never to engage in any acts, without any particular effect

on their status or claim to being and remaining Christian. My effort will be to imagine both a Christian and the church as a continuous process of becoming, and which could only remain so within acts of bearing witness. Thus, in the place of an accomplished or complete entity who could assume actions as a second step, both the entity of the Christian and the church emerges in and through actions, and never in spite of them.

Before we proceed any further, let us account for some of the terms around which this project is being fashioned. By way of a definition, Dana L. Robert observes, “as a historical process, Christian mission involves the crossing of cultural and linguistic boundaries by those who consider themselves followers of Jesus Christ, with the intention of sharing their faith.”³ Andrew Kirk, another mission theologian, holds that “mission is quite simply, though profoundly, what the Christian community is sent to do, beginning right where it is located (‘you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem... and to the ends of the earth,’ Acts 1:8).”⁴ The concept of *missio Dei* gained popular acceptance after the Willingen conference of the International Missionary Council, held in 1952. This new concept of mission, Paul S. Chung affirms, is grounded in the “triune God” as the “Sender, Sent, and Sending” reality. Theologically, it is a “missional hermeneutics [that] articulates the triune God (sending and *perichoresis*) as the creator and the redeemer for the sake of God’s reconciliation, at the center of which remains the kingdom of God.” With the help of this concept, it is being claimed that the “church exists now as a sign, foretaste, and instrument of the kingdom of God by debunking and challenging

³ Dana L. Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 9.

⁴ J. Andrew Kirk, *What is Mission?: Theological Explorations* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2000), 24.

principalities and powers.”⁵ The leading question of our exploration is whether such an ecclesiology, which equates the church with Christ or kingdom of God is essential, helpful, and indeed desirable for faith formation and its sustenance, or whether Christ and the kingdom of God needs to remain as a testimony, by which the church lives, and cannot do otherwise. Kirk, notes that, “legitimately or illegitimately, the *missio Dei* has been used to advance all kinds of missiological agendas,” and as a remedy, insists, “to assert that God has a *missio* presupposes... a personal God with particular characteristics... and a personal subject.”⁶

The ever-expanding components that are being packaged into the concept of mission make Kirk and others weary. This process of continued filling out of the concept of mission could be seen within the recently adopted World Council of Churches’ document entitled “Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes: New Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism.”⁷ This affirmation made at the WCC’s 10th assembly in Busan, South Korea, in 2013, is the second such effort by the Council to state the theological imperative, commitments, goals, and methods involved in mission and evangelism. From the secure affirmations like the “church is a gift of God to the world for its transformation towards the kingdom of God,”⁸ to accounting for every

⁵ Paul S. Chung, *Reclaiming Mission as Constructive Theology: Missional Church and World Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), 113, 119.

⁶ Kirk, *What is Mission?*, 25.

⁷ World Council of Churches, Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME), *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes, A New Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism*, (Geneva: WCC, 2013), <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/mission-and-evangelism/together-towards-life-mission-and-evangelism-in-changing-landscapes>.

⁸ WCC, *Together Towards Life*, 7.

possible avenue for being in mission—from evangelism, interfaith dialogue, justice and peace, care of creation—the list of activities that are being considered as mission continues to grow. And, when combined with every possible nuance to keep the missional enterprise beyond the appearance of self-righteousness and arrogance, it makes this document into an enormous balancing act. For example, “authentic mission makes the ‘other’ a partner in, not an ‘object’ of mission,” and that “mission is not a project of expanding churches but of the church embodying God’s salvation in this world.”⁹ This statement is a typical example of how the need to respond to new realities is being laboriously accommodated within an ongoing understanding of mission.

The exploration we are embarking is on whether we should continue on this path of mission that requires this impossible balancing act that makes none comfortable and has the church continuing with desperate attempts at finding appropriate avenues for mission, and thus producing disparately fractured engagements with the world. Since too much of the weight of the contemporary theological framing of the concept of mission is being borne by the concept of “sending” or “missio” that is part of the doctrine of Trinity, our attempt is to problematize this very notion of sending.

This dissertation is an attempt to substantiate the argument that the revelation of God testified to within the Hebrew Scriptures, the salvific event of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the continuing presence of God that Christians testify as the work of the Holy Spirit can be legitimately conceived as the “witness of God,” rather than the “sending.” The concept of “sending” suggests a movement from one sphere to another and it presumes God’s movement between different spatiality. The classical

⁹ WCC, *Together Towards Life*, 34, 22.

theological insistence on perceiving God as ontologically or essentially separate from the universe arguably serves as both the basis of sustaining this concept of “sending,” and also provides Christians with an option to consider vast sections of humanity and creation as beyond any real experience of transcendence. Ontological separateness becomes essential component to maintain the conception of a God who would willfully enter and exit the world, and thus the possibility of the act of “sending.”

In contrast to the notion of sending, a witness of God is a continuous act of God bearing witness to Godself on who God will be, and that toward which humans could continue becoming. In chapter four, we will gather resources to argue that the act of bearing witness is not an act of demonstration or revelation before the beholders as a performer plays a part, but it is the very performativity in and through which a subject or entity continue becoming. Regardless of the message it communicates to all those who have the eyes and ears (Mk.4:9; 8:18) to behold and hear an eventual performativity, the acts of performativity is the only means by which an entity or subject becomes such; that very process of becoming is her bearing witness to herself. Conversely, for both God and humans, bearing witness to oneself is the only available economy through which they could continuously become themselves in and through their respective performativity. Moreover, the one who is thus performatively becoming would have no control over the witness it imparts to those who partake in such an event as noncontributing observers by noticing, hearing or seeing such events of witnessing. Some observers could retrospectively testify an event as a revelation from God. Yet, for the vast majority of others, this very same event would either continue to remain in the domain of ordinariness, or as something that could have a scientific explanation. This normal

experience points to the fact that actions and events do not transparently communicate and beget the same discernment and determination from all of its participants. Long before the problematization of authorial intent became a newfound novelty, Paul has confessed the impossibility to seamlessly wed intentions with actions—“I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do” (Rom.7:19).¹⁰

Even if acts were being conjured as a performance in order to either impress or deceive, if those who observe these performances are perceptive enough, they would be able to see the actuality of the witness of the performer. As the Indian philosopher Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan observed, during the height of missionary “sending” from the West to the rest of the world during the first half of twentieth century, that Christians are “*ordinary* people making very *extraordinary* claims.”¹¹ Radhakrishnan’s comment points

¹⁰ Jacques Derrida points out that “the writer writes *in* a language and *in* a logic whose proper system, laws, and life, his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely.” With regard to the “logic of supplementarity,” Derrida goes on to complicate the authorial intention of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and of his text, that demonstrates the “difference between implication, nominal presence [of the concept of supplement], and [its] thematic exposition.” Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1997), 158, 213.

¹¹ E. C. Dewick, had been a theology teacher in the UK, during the first half of twentieth century, and he had an extensive connection with India during that period. Dewick, thus recalls a personal conversation he had with Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, a scholar and prominent Indian philosopher who had been a professor at Oxford University, and who later on became independent India’s first Vice-President, and its Second President: “You Christians seems to us Hindus to be rather *ordinary* people, making very *extraordinary* claims! I replied that we make these claims, not for ourselves, but for Jesus Christ. The retort came back quickly: ‘If your Christ has not succeeded in making *you* into better men and women, have we any reason to suppose that he would do more for *us*, if we became Christians?’” E. C. Dewick, *The Christian Attitude to Other Religions*, The Hulsean Lectures, 1949 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University, 1953), 178, fn. 2(b). Emphasis original. David Bosch, the eminent mission theologian, holds that “Evangelism is announcing that God, Creator and Lord of the universe, has personally intervened in human history and has done so supremely through the person and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth who is the Lord of history, Savior and Liberator. In this Jesus, incarnate, crucified and risen, the reign of God has been inaugurated.” In principle, we could agree with a part of this statement within the category of proclamation. However, we would problematize this understanding of “intervention” later on here within this project, and argue that there is only an “evangel” and that there cannot be any “ism” made out of it, as the evangel has to be continuously listened to and discerned anew according to the context in which it is being apprehended and announced. However, persons receiving this announcement would be least concerned with its semantics, and more interested in how and whether the proclaimers live as if none other than Christ is truly the Lord of history, or whether Christ is merely a synonym or metonym for the many other earthly claims

to the fact that regardless of the rubric under which actions are being authored, they are solely received, evaluated, and appraised by both the self and other on the basis of the overall witness of the individuals and communions. Even when particular pronouncements or actions are being organized as mission, they are never being encountered by both the self and the other, and especially by the other, as isolated objects, but as part of the missional entity's overall witness. Thus, all action organized as mission is always already part of the overall witness of an entity, and there is no way of securely maintaining the bipartite arrangement of considering a selfsame, autonomous, and enduring Christian entity that could beget subsequent actions that would never alter its constitution. Conversely, an entity could only be thought of as emerging through its acts and disposition in relation to its immediate and wider context, and these deeds and consequent character that constitute an entity are in themselves its testimony of faith and hope.

If the interpretation of "missio" or "sending" could be relinquished and a renewed understanding of "witness" be embraced, then God's own witness to Godself can be understood as an invitation before humans to become disciples in and through their own respective lives of witnessing. However, this project is not a direct discussion on the doctrine of Trinity, but an assembling of resources to demonstrate that it is possible to have a renewed understanding of God's revelation in history as a witness of God. The intention is to argue in the subsequent chapters that becoming Christian does not simply involve partaking in well-defined repetitive liturgical acts, along with a subsequent addition of a mandatory mission that could be adopted according to convenience.

of lordship. David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 412.

Missions that persons and communities could either choose according to their convenience, or assume as a heroic act, would ultimately end up serving only the self's need for a missional opportunity and engagement. Within such endeavors that are primarily begotten to satisfy a supposed missional mandate, and in the attempts that would seek a change in the situation of the other alone, any actual benefit for the other and the world would remain ancillary.

Even though we are exploring the theme of mission under the rubric of missions that seek to secure religious conversions, our attempt is to disrupt the general notion of mission itself. Within the general notion of mission, the whole of life, or the act of becoming and remaining Christians in particular, could be had through or organized around certain repetitive nonnegotiable acts that ought to be sustained until the end of times.¹² Also, given the zeal with which persons and communities would embrace and engage in missions that are supposed to usher in some form of eschatological consummation, there is a potential danger of inviting tyranny of varying scale and scope.¹³ Then there are religious missions that are embraced as a mark of accommodation

¹² David Bosch asserts that “[s]ince God is a missionary God (...), God’s people are a missionary people,” and that therefore “[t]he question ‘Why still mission?’ evokes a further question, ‘Why still church?’” Also notable is the assertion that “[t]he church has a history only because God has granted it the privilege of participating in the *missio Dei*.” Bosch, *Transforming*, 372, 495.

¹³ This is true of both religious and secular missions that are aimed at eschatological consummation. Ramsay MacMullen records the violence that accompanied the Christianizing efforts after Emperor Constantine’s conversion to Christianity in 312 CE. Catherine Keller accounts for the many missional attempts that drew inspiration from the Book of Revelation, and met with their inevitable aftermaths of seeking eschatological consummation by human endeavors. Jacques Derrida argues that the tyrannical effects ensue due to the simplistic and steadfast wedding of any teleology with a well defined eschatology, and he strives to hold them as separate, even when the danger of them falling back and becoming a seamless unity is ubiquitous. See, Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400)* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984); Catherine Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1996); Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994).

with the prevailing social systems, and surreptitiously accepting their lordship by imagining themselves to be beyond the sway of the system, and busying themselves in some convenient form of action. Thus, the conversion-focused missions are just our point of entry into the discussion on the construct of mission in general, and not the end of it. Our contention is that act of life in itself and becoming Christians in particular are thoroughly discursive acts that require the fear and trembling inducing discernment processes, and never a simple adoption of some repetitive scheme of conduct. Whatever we do as repetitive observance and in liturgical cycles are actually prompts to embark on this discernment and discursive processes, and not the processes in themselves. Our effort is to demonstrate that the gospel that Christ brings and the abundant life that it offers, is beyond the sway and grasp of any mission that is being insisted as mandatory, and that which could supposedly be fulfilled through repetitive enactment of a particular act, or an array of acts. It is an attempt to understand the concept of abundant life as an eternal interruption of every such attempt at simple and programmed enactments through which life in general, or Christian life in particular, gets accomplished. Succinctly put, what we seek in and through the act of bearing witness is: “A way never known in advance, no matter how many names we give it. A way that appears only as we walk there.”¹⁴

The accounting for the contemporary theoretical context in the first chapter of this project would make it impossible to sustain claims of any special access to the pre-critical text. By pre-critical text, we mean the state of affairs before humans began to communicate with each other and fashion their worlds in and through their own constructions and interpretations, or as within the biblical imagery, before humans began

¹⁴ Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 276.

naming other members of the creation (Gen.2:19-20). Since all texts thereafter could only be begotten through numerous determinations and privilegings, we are considering all of them as critical texts, and thus as deconstructible. The standpoint that humans could only apprehend reality within the critical text, and author the texts of their social and individual lives around the material situations they find themselves, makes it obligatory to situate of this project in particular, and the religious question in general within the critical text. Thus, it becomes necessary for this project to situate the religious question as arising from and squarely situated within human praxis in itself, and never in spite of it, or beyond the ordinariness of the regular or usual praxis in which humans are always already entangled. Hence, before we get to actually introduce the individual components of this dissertation, it becomes necessary to have a few sections by way of a prolegomenon to present the presuppositions that guide this work.

Since the concept of mission is firmly aligned with seeking new converts to Christianity from beyond its fold, any attempt at problematizing this concept could immediately raise the suspicion that this is a surreptitious attempt at foreclosing the faith tradition, and that those who raise these concerns are not committed to its sustenance and furtherance. Hence, it becomes necessary to have a remark on the interests and intentions on seeing the Christian faith tradition sustain and further itself as the very reason for raising these concerns here within this project.

I.2. Sustaining and Advancing the Christian Faith Tradition

No Christian, or for that matter no pursuer of any religious faith or of various secular ideologies, would ever be comfortable with the thought of them being the last

adherent to follow those paths they cherish and staunchly persevere negotiating. If there is no possibility for both individuals and their communities to bequeath in some form and fashion the wealth of their experience, their failures and achievements, and the faith and hope in a certain future, life in the present will not have much meaning. Individuals and communities derive their will to persist only when they are imbued with hopes for better times for themselves and for everyone who would come after them. For example, if it becomes absolutely certain that climate change or a comet will wipe out whole life on earth in a very near future, life as a whole would grind to a halt. Since there would not be anyone to come after them, there would not be any particular purpose in persevering in anything, as the future in itself is being foreclosed.¹⁵ A pertinent aspect related to believing in a future is that, becoming human needs to be understood as surpassing the aspects that humans shares with other creatures—seeking to preserve life through bodily nourishment, comforts, play, defense mechanisms, and above all through the quest to propagate their own genes.¹⁶ Hence, becoming human requires consistent work over and above creaturely existence that conforms to genetic instincts, and work with the

¹⁵ Samuel Scheffler, a professor of philosophy at New York University, in his lecture entitled “The Afterlife,” delivered as the Tanner Lectures on Human Values at the University of California, Berkeley, in March 2012, deals with the question of “afterlife.” It is not about the “personal ‘life after death,’” but the “collective afterlife” where there is a certainty of the “existence of other human beings after our death.” Among a series of thought experiments presented by Scheffler, a “‘doomsday scenario’ [wherein] everyone dies after thirty days after your death,” and in an “infertility scenario,” where everyone living today would get to complete their normal lifespans, but “no babies are born” to anyone. “Scheffler’s ‘afterlife conjecture’ speaks to how deeply and pervasively unsettling this might be. If we were to learn that, there was no afterlife, if we were to find ourselves in the doomsday or infertility scenario, the conjecture says, a wide range of things that now matter to us would no longer do so. We would no longer value them, where ‘valuing’ involves cognitive, motivational, and affective elements. We would lose confidence in the belief in their value, we would see ourselves as having weaker reasons to engage with them, and we would become emotionally deadened to them, as if by depression or ennui.” Niko Kolondy, “Introduction,” in Samuel Scheffler, *Death and the Afterlife*, ed. Niko Kolondy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3.

¹⁶ This does not mean there are no variations or degrees of difference among a whole range of creatures that are termed as animals, and even among plant life. See, Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

possibilities accorded by the physical and social structures by continually creating new worlds and ways of living.

Everything humans do by pursuing their respective pathways is equally fashioned not only to derive their own individual and communal sustenance and satisfactions, but also, are most importantly meant to proliferate and further their own patterns of life and the beliefs that simultaneously author and anchor such endeavors. Both the acts of passing on and reception are equally creative acts requiring work, imagination, and creativity to transform both participants—the imparters and receivers—into what is being bequeathed and received. In the context of teaching, it is not the information on a subject that is being transferred, but the teachers themselves who embody the knowledge, sensibilities, and wisdom of the field. Hearing or reading someone like astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson speak about multiverse, is not just a transference of information about multidimensionality, but a communication of himself as a teacher who in some unique way embodies the possibility of imagining and inhabiting multiple dimensions. The message that the influential teachers impart is not an extra-constitutional addendum that they tug around, but very much a part of their core constitution. It is into this embodiment or inhabitation of knowledge, wisdom, and scientific comportment that transforms the person into the message itself that the students are both attracted to as a magnet, and are invited to inherit and emulate in a non-punitive way. David Bosch holds that “in an authentic eschatology the vision of God’s ultimate reign of justice and peace serves as a powerful magnet—not because the present is empty, but precisely because God’s future has invaded it.”¹⁷ The argument advanced within this project is that the

¹⁷ David J. Bosch, *Transforming*, 517.

witness of the Christian communions ought to serve as the “powerful magnet” that draws new disciples—both those who are born and raised within and those coming from beyond.

Hence, it is impossible to continue striving to become followers of the Nazarene, and at the same time to be neglectful of the need for nurturing those who are currently within the tradition, as well as for inviting those others beyond to join this continuing journey of faith. It is a journey that keeps history open by both persistently resisting from conferring eschatological character to any particular social arrangement, and by withstanding the temptation of precipitating any avowed eschatological end. And, it is as well a journey that abides by the call to follow its lord to the Galilees of this world in the hope to partake in the movements of peoples that will continue to be summoned, strengthened, and set forth.¹⁸ Hence, it is not a question of whether or not to nurture new generations or invite others to follow Christ. Rather it is a matter of fashioning both nurturing and invitation as an integral part of the current adherents’ conscious and sustained efforts at becoming Christians. The current pattern of mission aimed at securing religious conversion is being organized without any necessary connection with the life of

¹⁸ Galilees need not be understood in geographical terms as outside or other of the cities/seats of power, or as social peripheries to the hegemonic and dominant orders. These are sites of subversion, transgression, and negotiation where alone the new could be envisioned and ushered in, as they “insistently gesture to the beyond,... [and] embody its restless and revisionary energy... [that] transform the present into an expanded and ex-centric site of experience and empowerment.” It is the borderlands where the “boundary becomes the place from which *something begins its presencing* in a movement not dissimilar to the ambulant, ambivalent articulation of the beyond.”[†] However, the readings of othering by way of absolving the “axiomatics of imperialism,” or to remain complacent in the face of various situations of exploitations and exclusions, as if some positive aspects could be read from them is akin to “continu[ing] in sin in order that grace may abound” (Rom 6:1). (“Axiomatics of imperialism,” is a recurring theme in the works of Gayatri Spivak.) [†]Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 6, 7. Also, pertinent is Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s contention that “[i]n the smooth space of Empire, there is no *place* of power—it is both everywhere and nowhere. Empire is an *ou-topia*, or really a *non-place*.” Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 190. Emphasis original.

the communions. The exploration within this dissertation is therefore on how the life of the communion in itself could at the same time become nurturance for all those within, and invitational to everyone beyond.

I.3. Problematizing the System of Dual Conversions

M. M. Thomas, an Indian Christian theologian and a leader of the global ecumenical movement, begins one of his homilies delivered in 1983, at the Princeton Theological Seminary, by recalling Hendrik Kraemer's conception of "two conversions" required of all Christians. To Kraemer, "every person needed two conversions—the first conversion from self to God and the second from God to the world."¹⁹ Thomas builds on this conception of dual conversions and gives a testimony on how "Jesus Christ became real to [him] as bearer of God's pardon and power in personal living," in his teens during his college days. And thereafter, on how three "non-Christians—Jawaharlal Nehru, Karl Marx, and Mahatma Gandhi," enabled him to identify the "idol-worships" underlying various social structures, evils of exclusion, and myriad forms of unmerited privileging, and "of the spiritual significance of the corporate life and the structures of culture, society, and state."²⁰ Thomas, along with many of his fellow sojourners, thus comes to the realization that the "principalities and powers" are "in fact the sins of idolatry of many generations accumulated and institutionalized in social structures, economic systems, and cultural traditions which have acquired an independent momentum in our

¹⁹ M. M. Thomas, "A Spirituality for Combat," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, Vol. 5 No. 2, 1984, 144.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

common life.”²¹ Thomas emphasizes that the “communion with God through Christ becomes for us the source of a spirituality of hope, of discernment, and of participation with Christ in His (*sic*) continuing combat against the forces of corporate idolatry, self-righteousness, and inhumanity built into the structures of modern culture, society, economics, and politics.”²² We can only thank God for the witness of the likes of Thomas and countless others who unflinchingly and diligently strive to be part of Christ’s continuing combat. However, we have to pause in the very moment of thanksgiving and examine why this dawning of the need for a second conversion escapes the vast majority of others who partake in the very same body and blood of Christ. Most Christians never get to hear or answer the second call to which Thomas and others have responded.²³

This notion of dual conversions have served Thomas, Kraemer, Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and countless others exceedingly well in their faith journeys, and they have amply testified their faith and hope in countless instances of action and reflection. However, this understanding of conversion in two separate and subsequent phases could very well render the second one as an optional addendum and provide a possibility of becoming and continuing as Christians without any inherent need of going through the trouble of a second conversion. This inessentiality of the second conversion provides yet another possibility that turns everything Thomas identifies as “sins of

²¹ Thomas, “Spirituality for Combat,” 145.

²² *Ibid.*, 146.

²³ Alan Paton, renowned for his novel “Cry, The Beloved Country,” has another hope-filled novel entitled, “Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful.” In this novel, a black person thus articulates his motivation for being in the fight for justice and racial equality: “Yes. And I’m going to get wounded also.... I don’t worry about the wounds. When I go up there, which is my intention, the Big Judge will say to me, Where are your wounds? and if I say I haven’t any, he will say, Was there nothing to fight for? I couldn’t face that question.” Alan Paton, *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1981), 66-67.

idolatry”—the principalities and power expressed as social structures, economic systems, and cultural traditions—into metonymies²⁴ for Christ.²⁵

History is replete with examples of this idolatry— accommodations on slavery in late antiquity; identification and according of God’s blessings to political dispensations that proved physically beneficial to the Church, or church becoming symbiotic part of them; accepting feudalism and serfdom in the middle ages, and thereafter the various arrangements of colonialism, slavery, capitalism and consumerism as ordained by God, and thus in no particular need for seeking other ways of organizing corporate life; the lack of willingness to discern that it is essential to “do battle with malignant power and ‘spiritual wickedness in high places’” when “prophetic outrage” was supremely called for in the wake of lynchings in the U.S.;²⁶ efforts by a section of Christians in Germany that came together toward establishing an image of Jesus as Aryan, thus as non or even anti-

²⁴ The concept of “metonymy” is being enlisted here according to OED’s definition that “a thing used or regarded as a substitute for or symbol of something else.” “Metaphor” on the other hand is a transference or substitution where the word or phrase is “analogous” to that which it replaces. In our recruiting of the term “metonymy,” for example, the constructs of “race” or “patriarchy” could never be analogous to “Christ.” However, holding on to these texts even after them being problematized and demonstrated as constructs merely meant to subjugate and exclude, becomes a willful act of according lordship to them, be it in a partial or total replacement of Christ. Gayatri Spivak notes that Jacques Derrida’s use of the terms “metaphor” and “metonymy” is in keeping with the “techniques” of “condensation” and “displacement” respectively, that which are being employed by Sigmund Freud to explain the phenomenon of “dream-work.” For Freud, within dream-work, the work of displacement is the transference between totally unrelated concepts, things or events. See, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Translator’s Preface,” in *Of Grammatology*, by Jacques Derrida, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1997), xlvi; 318, fn.18.

²⁵ Hebrew and Christian scriptures testify to a God who takes offence at human acts of organizing their lives around unjust practices of social and personal conduct. Except this scriptural testimony of the outright offence whereby humans demonstrate through their deeds that God is absent from history and that there is no seat of judgment, it is impossible to perceive that God could be offended by other acts of disparaging, defaming, or vilifying. The acts of desecration that the blasphemy laws prosecute are in reality offences against those who practice religious paths, and not against God per se. These offences against religious devotees could actually be addressed by extending other criminal laws including the ones tackling defamation. The actual blasphemy law for the present and future times could be trained against anyone who claims to transparently know the mind and will of God, and above all, against anyone who claims that God has commanded them to do any particular act, or is with them in any particular or all of their actions.

²⁶ James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 56.

Jewish;²⁷ the Christian League of Southern Africa, that vehemently justified apartheid on the basis of Christian faith and on the certainty of the chosen status of the white race;²⁸ the continuing efforts at sustaining patriarchy; the tireless determination of maintaining “class apartheid”²⁹ and caste privileges. This list could go on endlessly.

In each of these cases we have assembled above, those who consider themselves to have gathered in the name of Christ (Mt.18:20), the invocation of the name of Christ will always remain a unique combination of what the church have come to understand by Christ, and the name of Christ as a metonymy. What the invokers of the name of Christ would happen to champion, and purport to protect and preserve, or strive to pursue at any particular moment in history will always be admixed with the name of Christ, if not unequivocally purported as Christ. Metonymies occur not only within these negative examples or in the deliberate exploitation of Christ’s name with mendacious motives (Phil.3:18-19), but also in every human situation, and it is impossible to have a pure invocation of the name of Christ without any accompanying metonymies.

The spiritual strength of persons like Bonhoeffer, Thomas, and many others is admirable and awe-inspiring that on the very basis of their first conversion, they were able to discern the need for a second conversion to truly follow Christ. However, our effort is to problematize this system of dual conversions, and the conception of static

²⁷ Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2008).

²⁸ See the section entitled, “Religion and Apartheid,” in *South Africa: A Country Study*, ed. Rita M. Byrnes (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1996), 141-143.

²⁹ Class apartheid is a term enlisted by Spivak to encompass the reality of both the global political situation, and that is increasing its grip within all societies across the world and ripping them apart. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Righting Wrongs,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 103, no. 2/3, (Spring/Summer 2004): 523-581.

nature of remaining Christian regardless of the individual and communal witness in the world. The argument we are striving to advance is that it is impossible to have the first conversion in itself as a *stand-alone and static* claim without it ever being expressed in the second conversion, in the form of social determinations, confessions, and actions (James 2:17).³⁰ The second conversion could not be the domain of a few illustrious men and women who would inadvertently feel the weight of this obligation (1 Cor.9:16) upon them in their quest to follow Christ in relation to the concrete situations of their world. The components that Thomas identifies as part of the second conversion ought to be the only avenue for the Christian and her communion to express their faith and hope. This would obligate both the individual Christians and communions to courageously confess the lordship of Christ, in contradistinction to and in earnest combat against the powers and principalities that most acutely demand their pledge of allegiance at any particular place and time. In this regard, we also seek to problematize the two corollaries that accompany the concept of dual conversions. The first conversion is perceived to oblige the believer to persistently pursue both the religious and nonreligious others who are presumed to be leading subhuman lives, in order to make humans or Christians out of them so that they may come into the sway of divine transcendence. And that the second

³⁰ Jean-Luc Nancy observes: “works do not stand in the order of external manifestation, or in that of a demonstration through the phenomenon. And faith does not subsist in itself. This is why what is in question here is to show faith *ek ton ergon*, on the basis of works, and coming out of them. Instead of works proceeding from faith, and instead of works expressing it, faith here exists only in the works: in works that are its own and whose existence makes up the whole essence of faith, if we may put it that way. Verse 20 states that faith without works is *arge*, that is vain, inefficient, and ineffective... *Argos* is a contraction of *aergos*, which is to say without *ergon*... the *ergon* is here existence. That also means, then, that the *ergon* is understood in a general sense, as effectivity much more than as production; it is understood as being-in-act much more than as the *operari* of an *opus*.” Nancy goes on to argue that “What James... would have us understand is that faith is its own work,” and that “it *is* in works, it *makes* them, and the works *make* it,” and thus that the “just one or the justified one would be he (*sic*) who lets himself (*sic*) be attested, borne witness to, in the other.” Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*, trans. Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant, and Michael B. Smith (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 51, 52, 54. Emphasis original.

conversion could be testified by undertaking some form of actions as “mission,” and engagements that would in no way threaten the status quo of the church or the world. The charitable gestures and reform activities, while meeting immediate needs, in fact reinforce the existing state of affairs by bringing in temporary changes that both make an intolerable situation bearable and convey the contention that “there is no alternative” other than the mild modifications to the social structure.

In reality, humans cannot live without metonymies, as it is neither possible to unambiguously and absolutely discern the proclivities of the self, nor be certain of the present and future effects of their determinations, decisions, and actions that give expression to those predispositions. Evermore so, as Paul Tillich demonstrates, all actions are in some way a letting go of numerous other outcomes: “The word ‘decision,’ like the word ‘incision,’ involves the image of cutting. A decision cuts off possibilities, and these were real possibilities; otherwise no cutting would have been necessary.”³¹ There is no special means or mechanism by which humans could transparently discern either the ultimate consequences of their actions that fall in the domain of long-term planning, or be unambiguously certain about their own interests and or the interests that their actions would ultimately end up serving. Thus faith as the work in itself or as the “being-in-act” could only remain becoming so within a prayerful fear and trembling that their actions be close enough to the communion’s own understanding of what it means when invoking the name of Christ, and to its own perception of bearing witness to their faith and hope in Christ.³² Since the subject is not prior to the acts and could only emerge and sustain

³¹ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Volume 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1973), 184.

³² Dietrich Bonhoeffer observes: “Drawing conclusions is no help at all, because the Word of God demands not conclusions, but obedience. But to draw no conclusions at all can be willful disobedience

within them, the acts are not a performance that is being made before any other, but an attempt by the self at bearing witness to oneself as to who or what the subject is continually becoming in and through their acts.

Our exploration here is to gather resources to argue that both becoming human and becoming Christian need to be understood as *a singular or non-dual act* that is being played out in the myriad events and occasions that are both being consciously wrought, and those that are being spontaneously encountered. The contention is that both the acts of becoming Christian in confessing/proclaiming Christ, and that of becoming human could only be performed in response to concrete situations and within the efforts to reimagining them in accordance with the faith and hope one professes. The witness thus being continuously spun out in the acts of becoming human and becoming Christian is what would testify that one is genuinely striving, and this witness alone could enduringly draw or repel others. Formulaic pronouncements and propaganda could sway some for a limited span of time, but they never leave anything lasting beyond a limited posterity, and cannot be significantly sufficient to prompt further journeys of faith that surpasses nominal existence. With resources from the works of Ramsay MacMullen, Peter Brown Judith Lieu, Virginia Burrus, and many others, we will strive to argue this position in chapter two. Most pertinently, it requires enormous amount of violence to maintain the contours of any orthodoxy.³³ This violence could range from the reducing or withholding

toward the Word. Thus each single question must be examined and a decision must be sought step by step.” Geoffrey B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson, eds., *A Testament to Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, (New York: Harper One, 1995), 162.

³³ In his editor’s note to Augustine of Hippo’s writings on ecclesiology, Bryan P. Stone remarks: “church’s mission was to offer ministries of healing, restoration, and moral guidance, but Augustine could also insist on the use of coercive measures, imperially administered, to deal with wayward Christians.” Even though the apostles have never sought violence in their efforts at building up the church, Augustine justifies the use of force by arguing that “everything comes in its own season,” and that the “enforcement of

of fellowship and communion, to the detrimental threat of foreclosing the possibility of employment or the actual possibility of being removed from service if variance is ventured. Historically it has even reached the stages of actual bodily harm, and the prospect of being expelled from the communion is a pervasive threat for anyone who begins to scrutinize the status quo. However, as the protagonist of the Book of Job testifies, the only way to stay faithful is by admitting doubts and consistently interrogating the rationale and fruits of any particular faith and hope.³⁴ This act and ability to interrogate one's own cherished convictions, commitments, and actions, is an inalienable part of not only of becoming human and Christian, but also of life in itself, and without which there could only be the sterility of a servile existence.

The current scheme of becoming and remaining Christians is by doing certain things from professing one's belief in Christ, being baptized, participating in sacraments, making creedal affirmations, and engaging in worship.³⁵ The optional second step for

terrible but salutary laws" are capable of bringing back those who have gone astray. After recounting a series of inquisitorial stakes that burned countless women who drew inspiration for their faith and praxis from the Book of Revelation, Catherine Keller observes that, by the time of Mary Daly's condemnation in the last quarter of the twentieth century, "fortunately... Rome had had its matches confiscated." See, respectively, Bryan P. Stone, *A Reader in Ecclesiology* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 43-45; and, Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 112.

³⁴ Title of the commentary on the Book of Job, by M. M. Thomas in his native language Malayalam, could be translated as "Faith Reinforced through Doubt." M. M. Thomas, *Samshayathilude Urappakkunna Vishwasam* (Thiruvalla, India: Christava Sahitya Samithy, 1993).

³⁵ Lesslie Newbigin sets up the question of "*What is the manner of our ingrafting into Christ?*," and in response, gives a compilation of three answers: "The first answer is, briefly, that we are incorporated in Christ by hearing and believing the gospel. The second is that we are incorporated by sacramental participation in the life of the historically continuous Church. The third is that we are incorporated by receiving and abiding in the Holy Spirit." Even though the preceding sentences are forceful in emphasizing the "missionary and eschatological" character of the church and the Christian, this tripartite affirmation does not factor in that affirmation as a significant component of the church's or Christian's "ingrafting into Christ." Thus, making it possible for communions and persons to becoming and remaining in Christ without any necessity of becoming "missionary and eschatological." Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (London: SCM Press, 1953), Quoted in Stone, *Reader in Ecclesiology*, 176. Emphasis original.

those who thus continue to be Christians, and for their communions, is to be involved in various missions of their own choosing. This could range from seeking conversion of non-Christians, to varied forms of social engagements from charitable actions that for the most part preserve the existing state of affairs, to the subversive ones that problematize it. Regardless of whether one is involved in any sort of action, directly or by surrogacy (paying hired hands to act on one's behalf), the condition of remaining Christian is permanent unless self-abrogated by various acts deemed apostasy by individual communions. What we are attempting here is to problematize this possibility of remaining Christian while being simultaneously able to unabashedly presume sacredness, inevitability, and eternity to the social systems, practices, and arrangements that define any of the historic times.³⁶ Even when this is not done overtly, it is always possible to consider social arrangements as situated beyond the purview of one's faith confession, and thus surreptitiously remaining in peace with them, and thus absolving one of any qualms of conscience for partaking in or profiting through them.³⁷

It is not that humans could live without making tents—the profession of Saint Paul—and thus without participating in the market dynamics or in the imperial/civilized

³⁶ Sebastian Kappen, an Indian Christian theologian and Jesuit priest, maintains: the Christian Ungod “is the god who Christians fashioned to legitimize their lust for wealth and power. It is this Ungod who inspired Kings, and Popes to embark on the Crusades and massacre of millions of Jews and Turks, who in the person of the Grand Inquisitor indulged in the brutalities of witch-hunting and the burning of heretics, who authorized authorized the Christian Kings of the West to colonize and enslave all ‘pagan’ nations, who gave the green signal to slave trade involving the transportation across the Atlantic of 30 million Africans... In short, he (*sic*) is a god who takes the side of the affluent against the poor, of the powerful against the weak, a god with hands dripping with the blood of the innocent.” Sebastian Kappen, *Spirituality in the Age of Recolonization* (Bangalore, India: Visthar, 1995), 3. Quoted in George Zachariah, *Alternatives Unincorporated: Earth Ethics from the Grassroots* (London: Equinox, 2011), 35.

³⁷ Once this surreptitious posture is being assumed, it would never occur to unambiguously and audaciously proclaim that, “we reject the false doctrine that the Church can abandon the form of its message and its order to whatever it wishes or to changes in prevailing ideological and political beliefs” of the day. “The Barmen Theological Declaration” (1934), in, Stone, *Reader in Ecclesiology*, 159.

peace that is required to pursue any profession or for any possibility of planning for a tomorrow. Also, it is not that the Christian call is for everyone to become social activists who drop out of the contemporary production processes in order to pursue ushering in different dispensations of peace and justice. The question is, whether it is at all possible to remain Christian by presuming sacredness to the social texts that humans evolve, or by considering them as ordained by God, and thus as something to be preserved for all eternity, or, to hold them as something that never impinges on one's faith life.³⁸ Or else, whether the Christian call is to perpetually relativize everything as being relative to God. It is a call to relativize every social organization that is being inherited and continued to be produced as the work of human hands, and resist ascribing them with any measure of divine blessing or authoring, and thus considering them as a mere phase in history, and never as the finality of human achievement or possibility. Most importantly, it is a call to relativize our own conceptions of the divine as tentative attempts at living faithfully and of constructing the best ways to conceive and communicate the received revelatory witness, and as ones that best capture the continuing experience of God that permeates the life on earth at a given time and place.³⁹

³⁸ Peter C. Phan observes that “in sum, Christendom is the politico-religious order—a sort of caesaropapism in reverse—promoted by medieval popes who championed a world in which Christian teachings and church law would imbue every aspect of human life, and in which they would exercise an absolute and supreme power over every human being, including political rulers. It was brought to an end by... more important than cultural factors, the chief contributor to the demise of Christendom is, I submit, theological, namely, the gradual realization that Christendom is not Christianity and has nothing to do with Jesus and his gospel.” Peter C. Phan, “A New Christianity, but What Kind?,” in *Landmark Essays in Mission and World Christianity*, eds. Robert L. Gallagher and Paul Hertig (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009), 204.

³⁹ M. M. Thomas urges: “What is real church history? It is not the history of its Popes and Archbishops—no, not at all. It is the history of people who filled with the vision of a redeemed church, created strife and division within the church. It is the history of its reformers, of its heretics excommunicated, of its infidels martyred for causing revolution in the church. If we are to be worthy of that heritage let us make quarrels and more quarrels for the sake of its redemption.” M. M. Thomas,

The argument we strive to advance is that the proclamation of Christ as Lord is possible only in the unique ways in which one participates in the social processes and practices. It is a mode of participation that demonstrates the awareness and humility that both what we have inherited and what we produce is thoroughly situated within the human realm and thus relative to the absolute or the ultimate that we strive to proclaim. Rosemary Radford Ruether reminds, “[w]hat have been called the objective sources of theology; Scripture and tradition, are themselves codified collective human experience,” and that the “hand of the divine does not write on a cultural tabula rasa.”⁴⁰ The texts we inherit, the ones we strive to both preserve, and the ones we try to produce are mere vehicles of testimony, and not the testimony in itself.⁴¹ Remaining at ease with inherited dispensations (texts) without the required deconstructive inhabitation within it is to impart sacred status to it, and thus life as whole becomes an attempt at trying to live the impossibility of having two distinct sacred grounds of one’s being (Mt.6:24). It is the impossible balancing act of holding on to the confession that God or the divine as the only enduring reality in which everything subsists, and yet conferring absolute status to the social texts of one’s own time and place.

Ideological Quest within Christian Commitment (Madras [Chennai], India: Christian Literature Society, published for the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, Bangalore, 1983), 29-30.

⁴⁰ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*, With a New Introduction (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 12, 14.

⁴¹ Vitor Westhelle, critically appraises the “theological program of ‘inculturation’” that bases itself on Thomas Aquinas’ theological notion that “grace presupposes nature,” and of a contemporary mission theologian Ramon Iribertegui’s contention on inculturation as similar to the “preparation of those twelve tribes for Christ lasted 1800 years.” Westhelle observes that, “[a]nd if in this last model [of inculturation] the active proclamation will have to wait thirty or eighteen hundred years, *what still remains unquestioned is the fact that in the end this gospel is deposited in the church in its very institutional form.*” Vitor Westhelle, *After Heresy: Colonial Practices and Post-Colonial Theologies* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade, 2010), 30, 31. Emphasis added.

It is equally impossible is to deconstruct one text and thereafter turn around and accord finality to the new text that one thus produces as that which best testifies to the contemporary understandings and possibilities. Trying to hold on to an instrument that has past its usefulness in serving the need for giving witness, is an act of imparting to *it* the status of *whom* the testimony ought to be. Participation in a testimony or the production of a new one is a way of inhabiting it with the awareness that it is a construction to testify to a faith, and not the sum total or analogous to what one is always imperfectly and incompletely attempting to bear witness to. Life is not a simple rote recitation or regurgitation of anything given, but is always a reinterpretation of the received texts and continued production of new ones. Hence, it is necessary to re-cite with confident understanding that arise from the work of wrestling until daybreak and securing a blessing (Gen. 32:25-29) of renewed elucidation of the previously received.⁴² Equally necessary is the accompanying imperative of evolving new ones that are adequate and appropriate to carry forward the essential task of proclamation.

Ruether contends that within the paradigm of feminist theology, the “relation to God no longer becomes a model for dominant relations between social groups, leaders, and the led,” rather the “relation to God means we are to call no man ‘Father, Teacher or Master’ (Mt. 23:1-2). And, that the “relation to God liberates us from hierarchical relations and makes us all brothers-sisters of each other.”⁴³ Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza introduces the “neologism [of] ‘kyriarchy’ meaning the rule of the

⁴² Westhelle calls for a “theological deconstruction of the models that took for granted a truth that had to be imparted, a truth that had been presupposed.” And primarily, that “[i]t is a discussion concerning the Christian understanding of revelation, before it becomes a missiological, ecclesiological, or Christological question. How do we know the God that is announced?” Westhelle, *After Heresy*, 32.

⁴³ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 136.

emperor/master/lord/father/husband over his subordinates.” Fiorenza offers the construct of “kyriocentric,” as that which “refers to [the] ideological articulations that validate and are sustained by kyriarchal relations of domination,” and “kyriocentrism” as an “intellectual framework and cultural ideology that legitimates... kyriarchal social structures and systems of domination.”⁴⁴ Every feminist and other liberation theologians have sought ways to envision life without these kyriarchal social structures and their malevolent and patently disastrous effects on certain sections of human beings.

According to Fiorenza, “feminism is such a sociopolitical movement and practice that works toward a world free from dehumanizing domination compelled by the dream of a renewed and different, domination-free world.”⁴⁵ The project within this dissertation is very much in accord with this resolve of Fiorenza and other liberation theologians and theoreticians. However, this dissertation considers Jacques Derrida’s construct of the disjointedness of time as a better possible check on “kyriarchal power.” Derrida holds that history would perpetually be defined by the out-of-joint character of time, and that this disjointedness of time is the very process that propels and keeps alive the quest for a “domination-free world.”⁴⁶ The out-of-joint nature of the world is neither a fall from originary bliss, nor that which is susceptible to any particular eschatological consummation in and through human efforts. In this scheme, being out-of-joint becomes the constitutive condition of history, and it would keep the world without a conclusive end. Since explicit and tacit quests for lordship will always be inherent in any human

⁴⁴ Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam’s Child, Sophia’s Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 14

⁴⁵ Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Congress of Wo/men: Religion, Gender, and Kyriarchal Power* (Cambridge, MA: Feminist Studies in Religion, 2016), 6.

⁴⁶ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*.

relationship or establishment, the church's proclamation of "Christ is Lord" is being considered here within this dissertation as that which would simultaneously unveil the disjointedness of any particular time and place, and as that would confront and unsettle every human construction's claim to lordship or kyriarchy.

The bipartite construct of becoming Christian is analogous to the concept of being human, wherein everyone who belongs to the species is considered human within the prerogatives of state law. This basic concept of who is human should be aggressively upheld, as it is never possible to legally and conclusively determine whether individuals and groups are consistently being engaged in acts of becoming human in every avenue of their lives.⁴⁷ Also, it is never possible to determine whether humans are steadfastly using all opportunities available to them to be in the act of becoming humans, and that they are enlisting the whole of their abilities, potentials, creativity, and are doing so with all of their heart, soul, and mind (Mt.22:37). Thus to resist peoples and groups from being excluded from their inherent ability and opportunity in participating in the process of determining the establishments of their collective political existence and related governance systems, it is important to unwaveringly retain and affirm the equality of all human beings. This upholding of the universal understanding on who is human is essential for ensuring the possibility for everyone to participate in the envisioning of the current and future trajectories that these shared expressions of common-life should chart.

⁴⁷ In the first chapter of this dissertation, with the help of Spivak's reading of Kant and Hegel, we track the detrimental effects of the foreclosing of humans. Responding to Hegel's contention that "[a]gainst the absolute right that such a people possesses by virtue of being the bearer of the development of the world Spirit, the spirit of other peoples has no rights (*rechtlos*)," Enrique Dussel observes that, "[i]n the face of this, no other people can be said to have any rights proper to it, and certainly none that it could pose *against* Europe." Enrique Dussel, "Eurocentrism and Modernity (Introduction to the Frankfurt Lectures)," *boundary 2*, vol. 20, no. 3, *The Postmodernism Debate in Latin America* (Autumn 1993): 74. Emphasis original.

Thus, it keeps open the potentiality for everyone to seize opportunities for evolving vocations that would enable them to be in the act of becoming human, and at the same time prevent the prospect of anyone claiming to have achieved the static and unending status of nonduality with the Divine, or of enduringly being part of the elect.

This construct of equality among homo sapiens accords an option to all members of the species to either continue in blissful and self-excusing conformity within the social conditions in which they find themselves, or to embrace life as an altar-call to reflexively encounter and deconstruct every aspect of the existing communal structures and situations. This deconstructive inhabitation is nearly impossible as a solitary quest, but could only be imagined as an integral part of the witness of the church, or of other similar communal coming together of persons. It is a life that confers humans with either undue and unrelenting injustices until they are problematized and dismantled, or with opportunity to cavort in the actual quagmire of unearned privileges, power, and ease. The advent of the act of becoming human ensues from the discernment that both the undeserved privileges of the self and the undue disprivilege of the other are defined by a single discourse. Consequently, it is a realization that there ought to be an equal and yet uniquely different responsibility for both the self and the other in deconstructing the texts of injustice.

Gayatri Spivak terms the “predication of being-human as being called by the other, before will,” which means that being responsible or assuming responsibility for the status quo does not ensue as a willing action, but as an openness and response to the call of the other. Spivak defines an “education in the Humanities” as an attempt at “an *uncoercive* rearrangement of desires,” and insists that it is possible for a teacher to

“rearrange desire noncoercively.” And that, it is by “develop[ing] in the student a habit of literary reading, even just ‘reading,’ suspending oneself into the text of the other—for which the first condition and effect is a suspension of the conviction that I am necessarily better, I am necessarily indispensable, I am necessarily the one to right wrongs, I am necessarily the end product for which history happened.”⁴⁸ A Christian call to discipleship could be seen as similar to Spivak’s notion of an education in humanities, a call to consider everything on earth as relative to the ultimate—the God in Christ (2 Cor. 5:19)—and to resist conferring ultimacy to their own interpretations of the revelatory experiences. This call could be perceived as analogous in its very abandoning of the traditional missional assessment that one has to do something for the other without an actual “suspending oneself into the text of the other.”

The privileged self will never discern its own dehumanization through unmerited conferment, until and unless the obviously dehumanized other who actually inhabits the suffering end of a discourse problematizes the situation and demonstrates the inherent injustice that permeates the social text.⁴⁹ Once this happens, the privileged who choose to continue in their gleeful ease, or even strives to preserve and further that, cannot be considered as the “real and fully human” who have heeded to the call of the other and assumed responsibility to steadily examine their lives and everything surrounding it. Moreover, it is to consciously begin laboring toward whatever is their legitimate due and willingly refusing and resisting whatever is not. However, the privileged that strive to preserve their undue advantages ought to still be considered “strictly human” before the

⁴⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Righting Wrongs,” 532.

⁴⁹ Among many possible resources, see, Susan Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women’s Lives* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1991).

law, and need to be continued to be enfranchised, and have the opportunity to equally participate in the process of defining the destinies of their political systems. This alone would keep open the possibility for everyone to begin his or her own individual and collective journeys of becoming fully human.

The conception of keeping the act of becoming Christian separate from the participation in social processes is in effect sacralizing the social order of the times. It thrusts one into the impossible position of serving two masters, or else, into the act of identifying the social dispensations as metonymies of Christ. We need to emphasize that we are not arguing for a revival of the Donatist error of insisting that both who minister at the table and all who participate are required to be without blemish, for the church to claim that it abides in Christ. We affirm the Augustinian wisdom that the separation of the wheat and chaff is forever deferred until the eschaton, as humans will never muster the exceptional standpoint and vision to make this discernment. It is also being understood that the Pelagian pursuit of perfection in and through human efforts is the quintessential pitfall, mirage, and an utter impossibility. The thoroughgoing ambiguity of the moment in which actions are being authored would defer the totality of its effects from the doers, and thus would either scuttle the quests from reaching their intended goals, or would saddle them with totally different results that at times could be of detrimental consequences. Thus, the actions could be carried out in faith alone—Tillich's notion of decisions as incisions indicate that all actions are in effect a letting go of numerous other actionable alternatives—even when all possibilities and every perceivable consequences are factored in. And, since no human could save another human from the sinfulness of their situation, as Augustine have recognized, salvation or

justification from the sinful consequences of human actions could only be through the grace of God.⁵⁰

However, we come to this “grace alone” position from the other side of the equation, wherein both the ambiguous nature of the social text within which all actions are carried out, and the impossibility of a thoroughgoing discernment of the doer’s own breadth of interests and intentions, renders praxis in itself the source of sin.⁵¹ With regard to Christian witness, an understanding of ambiguity that surround all human actions would remove the church’s engagement with the world from the realm of a simple act of choosing from an array of actionable items and prefabricated methods, and place it within the domain of deep discernment and accompanying prayerful fear and trembling. For a better appreciation of this challenge, we now turn to the discussion on the relationship between praxis and sin, and the inescapability of both.

I.4. Unavoidability of Violence, Violation, and Discrimination, as the Source of Sin and Corruption

We remain indebted to Augustinian conception of “original sin.” However, we would not have it as a flaw located in individual human beings, but as an inescapable reality destined through the essential violence required for organizing life on earth.

Furthermore, sin becomes unavoidable through the limitations and ambiguities imparted

⁵⁰ Gustavo Gutierrez reminds that “[h]uman works as such do not justify, they do not save.” Gusatavo Gutierrez, *On Job: God-talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Maryknoll, NY: 1987), 89.

⁵¹ Augustine holds that “[t]he cause of sin arises in the soul, not in the flesh; and the corruption resulting from sin is not a sin but a punishment,” and that the “fountain-head of all these evils is pride.” Thus, for Augustine, the corruption of the soul renders actions questionable, and it is a disease that could be addressed and alleviated by grace of God. Saint Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), Bk. XIV, Ch. 3, 550, 552.

by the construct of language within which alone humans could live, generate and sustain their texts of communal conduct, personal experience, and that of their individual and collective mediations and meditations. From taming of animals, to agriculture, to metallurgy, to every form of art and cultural artifacts, and most of all, the education of new generations could only be imagined as systematic, methodical, and measured embracing and administration of violence. Jacques Derrida, reminds that, “let us not forget that the violence that takes us toward the entrails of the earth, the moment of mine-blindness, that is, of metallurgy, is the origin of society.”⁵² Thus, violence on the self to undergo the blindness that invariably accompanies the underground mining operations and the flesh-melting heat that surrounds the smelting process, or to force these necessary practices on the other for the sake of an individual self or her community, and remaining willing, able, and ready to engage in the violence of excavating the entrails of planet earth, or in short, the thoroughgoing violence, originates and sustains the human society.

The teacher who pushes her students to struggle for more, the greatest works of art and industry, the surgical interventions aimed at rectifying bodily ailments, to the most intimate moments of physical pleasure, are acquired through the employment of innumerable degrees of pressure that is deemed adequate, and for appropriate amounts of time, in order to obtain the hoped-for results. This pressure could on any other occasion beyond the purview of these scenarios, and without the consent and willing participation of the subjects, could only be seen as outright violence and violations that would leave behind only ruins of both individual humans, their societies, and physical nature. The question of adequate pressure, appropriate duration, and the mode of its administration is

⁵² Derrida, *Grammatology*, 149.

always a subjective judgment, and the same measure that successfully leads one pupil to excel could serve to extinguish the flame in another. Yet, there is no other way than summoning this essential violence or the pressure that could both turn a stone into diamond or pulverize it. This inescapable necessity for conscripting violence to institute and sustain any form of human society (regardless of the measure of justice that defines them), and the thoroughgoing ambiguity and indeterminacy of its mode, potency, and frequency required for achieving any specific end, is the source of sinfulness, and is thus *original* and unavoidable.

Violence of any text that humans construct is a given and there is no escaping it. Meditating upon Hegelian understanding of Lordship and Bondage, Derrida avers that the encounter between the self and the other is where the human story begins, and that it could only be violent. Thus, “war, therefore, is congenital to phenomenality, is the very emergence of speech and appearing,” and this violence is preferable to the greater and untold violence of non-engagement between the self and the other:

Discourse, therefore, if it is originally violent, can only *do itself violence*, can only negate itself in order to affirm itself, make war upon the war which institutes it without *ever being able* to reappropriate this negativity, to the extent that it is discourse. *Necessarily* without reappropriating it, for if it did so, the horizon of peace would disappear in the night (worst violence as previolence). This secondary war, as the avowal of violence, is the least possible violence, the only way to repress the worst violence, the violence of primitive and prelogical silence, of an unimaginable night which would not even be the opposite of day, an absolute violence which would not even be the opposite of nonviolence: nothingness or pure non-sense. Thus, discourse chooses itself violently in opposition to nothingness or pure non-sense, and, in philosophy, against nihilism.⁵³

⁵³ Jacques Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978), 130.

Derrida maintains that “eschatology is not possible, except *through violence*” and that this “infinite passage through violence is what is called history.”⁵⁴ Thus, the violence in history and a telos begotten through violence (not the singular narrow understanding of bodily hurt and bloodletting alone) is the only way to live until eschaton. Hence, organizing the rules and norms of acceptable form and measure of violence, or the violence that could be legitimized as reasonable and necessary, is an inescapable reality. Thus, the necessity, and hence the reality of the all pervading nature of violence in every aspect of human life is the source of sinfulness in human life. This inescapability of violence makes the Augustinian intuition of “original sin” a reality, even if it is not exactly the way he had conceived it.⁵⁵

We have already noted Tillich’s notion of decision as incisions that cut away many alternative possibilities, and we will discuss in subsequent chapters the concept of “undecidability” around which Derrida explores the problematic of making decisions and the fear and trembling they induce. In all these rubrics, the basic fact that is being surfaced is of the need for discrimination. Without due discrimination, there could be any excellence or great achievements in any field of human activity. This necessity of discrimination, when stabilized and sustained as patriarchy, caste, class, and many other similar exclusionary practices, become the source of sinfulness. Considering the

⁵⁴ Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics,” 130. Emphasis original.

⁵⁵ Augustine observes that “man was willingly perverted and justly condemned, and so begot perverted and condemned offspring. For we all are in that one man, seeing that we all *were* that one man who fell into sin through the woman who was made from him before the first sin. We did not yet possess forms individually created and assigned to us to live in them as individuals; but there already existed the seminal nature from which we were to be begotten. . . .when this was vitiated through sin, and bound with death’s fetters in its just condemnation, man could not be born of man in any other condition. Hence from the misuse of free will there started a chain of disasters: mankind is led from that original perversion, a kind of corruption at the root, right up to the disaster of the second death, which has no end. Only those who are set free through God’s grace escape from this calamitous sequence.” Augustine, *City of God*, Bk. XIII, Ch. 14, 523.

possibility that someone's earned deference could be necessarily transferred or imparted onto their progeny or other beloveds, or making it possible to be purchased at a price on behalf of them, curtails or seriously impedes with lives of many others. The claim and possibility of automatic transference of earned deference to those unmerited, could extremely limit, severely hinder, and even patently foreclose the opportunity for several others to pursue different avenues to earn deference through their own efforts and accomplishments. Thus, discrimination and deference that are necessary becomes the source of sinfulness.

The case of violation is no different. From ore extraction that gives "mine-blindness" to every other human activity, especially the ones that truly makes life worth living is wrought through innumerable violations—from endurance limit of self's body, need for sleep, to a significant other and other family and friend's need for companionship. The same violations that are a creative necessity, when organized in a different manner, in a different context and within a different equation, would turn as desecrations and destruction. There is only a narrow margin between necessary and destructive, and calibrating the appropriate and adequate measure is never a simple and straightforward calculus. Thus, the possibility of sin is ever-present and inextinguishable, and there are no straightforward ways to discern the exact point when a necessary violence or violation turns patently sinful.

Having thrust into the text inscribed in and through violence instills the realization of sinfulness in humans, and then there are other voluntary acts of violence and violations that they partake. Thus, the quest of salvation is a universal characteristic and there cannot be any respite from it even if the religious responses to it could go bankrupt and

newer ones takes its place. As long as there is history, it will be organized in and through violence, and thus of sinfulness that prompts the quests for salvation, and the religious and secular responses to them.

This understanding of the social text that could only authored and sustained in and through violence, violations, and discrimination, could complicate the prevalent understanding of mission as a set and standardized response to a static human condition defined as “sin.” A different perception of sin and human predicament would necessitate a dynamic mechanism of reflective and reflexive response than the current paradigm of mission would permit.

I.5. Proclamation that in itself is the Call to Discipleship

The place we seek to separate from Augustine is in the ecclesiology where he has the church wrapped tightly around God through Christ.⁵⁶ This ironclad tethering of the church to God through Christ ensues from Augustine’s conception of the Trinity and especially his notion of *missio* or sending. To become Christian one has to continue affirming the original focus of the doctrine of trinity that: it is fully God who is being testified within the Hebrew scriptures, it is fully God who is being encountered in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, and it is fully God who is continued to be encountered in human history and in the church. However, if we modify our conception of space and time from what humans believed about these concepts during late antiquity,

⁵⁶ In *De Trinitate*, Book 6, Chapter 5, Section 7, Augustine notes the unity of trinity, and asserts that this unity and peace is that which the church has received as a gift in the Holy Spirit. And in this Spirit, the church participates in the life of the Trinity and are “commanded to imitate this mutuality by grace, both with reference to God and to each other, in the two precepts on which the whole law and the Prophets depend (Matthew 22:40).” Mary T. Clark, “De Trinitate,” in *Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, Eleonore Stump, Norman Kretzmann, eds. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University, 2001), 99.

then we get a different configuration of the doctrine wherein the concept of “sending” becomes unsustainable.

In a revised conceptualization, the whole space—be it uni/multi-verse—or the whole of reality could be conceived as being subsisting in God (Acts 17:28), and thus as no amount of time bereft of the presence of God from history, and God as in whom both time and space converge, or from whom they spring out. If such a conceptualization could be maintained, then the interpretations of sending, coming, and going would become unsustainable, as there could not be a space from which God could appear from or retreat to. And, there could not be a time from the unicellular spore to the current phase of evolutionary journey, and the beyond that is yet to unfold, that is bereft of God who waits to comprehend the texts that humans would create to order their life on earth (Gen 2: 19).⁵⁷

Our attempt is to examine if we could gather resources to account for evolution, and identify the source of sin and corruption within the inevitable discursive necessities of living, and if such a conception would disrupt the understanding of creation-fall-salvation-eschatology continuum. The current linear understanding of creation and the subsequent fall as a prompt for God to activate the numerous attempts at rescue and reconciliation culminating in the supreme salvific event of Jesus Christ, serves only to stupefaction of God, and as a basis for asserting the exclusiveness of Christian communions. It in no way serves as a call and mandate to organize lives in

⁵⁷ Derrida observes that in the act of human naming of animals, “God wanted to oversee but also to abandon himself (*sic*) to his curiosity, even allow himself (*sic*) to be surprised and outflanked by the radical novelty of what was going to occur.” Also that, to “mark *at the same time* the infinite right of inspection of an all-powerful God *and* the finitude of God who doesn’t know what is going to happen to him (*sic*) with language.” Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I am,” 17. Emphasis original.

contradistinction to other claims to lordship, and more often than not, contributes to identifying or interpreting those earthly claims to lordship as synonymous or as marks of being blessed by God.

The testimony of God, from the burning bush onwards could be reimagined as a witness of God, who directly addresses the texts of suffering that humans author in a manner that arrogantly present themselves as the supreme overlords of history, and as if there is no other authority besides them. The whole of prophetic tradition testifies to the responsive acts of God, who responds to human delusion of considering themselves as being lords of history and consequently of other humans and the earth. If the scriptural story could be comprehended differently, salvation would cease to be an afterthought after the event of the fall, and the doctrine of creation in itself would become the source of salvation. Since life on earth could not have appeared in the form of finished entities, and since every form of life would require violence, violations, and discriminations to both sustain themselves as such, and to evolve into newer forms of organisms, creation and redemption becomes a continuous process, and never a one time or once and for all event. Thus, a reimagined doctrine of Trinity would have replaced *missio* (sending) with *martyrion* (witness) wherein God testified to in the Hebrew Scriptures, and in Christ and the Holy Spirit could be understood as the witness of God, rather than as the mission of God. Our exploration is to track enough resources to argue for a revised understanding of Trinity that would simultaneously siphon-out the basis for arrogance, and demand lives worthy of the creedal affirmations.

If God could be understood as witnessing to Godself, then what this God would require of those who attempt becoming followers would in turn be to continue becoming

witnesses themselves. This requirement of witnessing will upset the dual conversion system and the possibility of remaining Christians without any conscious witness on the part of the followers. Participation in congregational life, sacraments, and service of the word will only count as preparation and nurturing toward the requisite witness. Jesus' call to "repent" would become the perpetual mechanism with which a current witness is being continually examined/deconstructed, and when necessary, a new one being envisioned. In this paradigm, no one can "become" Christian and "be" such thereafter; there could only be the journey of faith and hope of "becoming" Christian, and never a possibility of claiming to having arrived. The whole of Christian faith could be apprehended as an experience of perpetual "Gethsemane," not in the sense that it is constantly defined by life and death struggles, but by Jesus' ultimate witness of acting without any surety of outcome, and indeed despite the feeling of being forsaken by God, the Father, and one's own disciples.

The world has come to a stage where religious affiliations are not a given, either by virtue of being born and raised in a particular tradition, or by merely being within the fold of a cultural or national setting and sharing the benefits they accord.⁵⁸ National and cultural canopies either do not anymore require monolithic patterns of adherence or are becoming ever more open by turning into structures that provide a spectrum of options for everyone within its fold. This transformation of nation-states are not natural, and never a given without peoples and groups working toward relativizing the hegemonic

⁵⁸ In the context of the United States, Pew Research Center has an insightful discussion on the progressive vanishing of the category of religious affiliation at a person's birth and childhood as the guarantor of their continued adherence to that very same religion. Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Faith in Flux: Changes in Religious Affiliation in the U.S.* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2009), <http://www.pewforum.org/2009/04/27/faith-in-flux/>.

positions as just one among the many possibilities of being human. It could never be taken for granted that the changes will always be in the direction of greater freedom and acceptance of multiplicity in life choices. The nature of politics in any given society is such that everything from notions of ontological equality of humans to the rights secured from “Magna Carta Libertatum” onwards—most of them procured through arduous struggles—are always being incessantly renegotiated. It is possible that the progressive protections and rights will be curtailed or summarily revoked, if a majority within a particular generation does not actively get involved in the perpetual negotiating process called history.

However, the spreading awareness of the discursive production of everything in human life is problematizing positions that base human constructions on the authority of anything that is considered to be *a priori*, pre-critical, and thus as irreplaceable and permanent. Withdrawal or curtailment of citizenship rights by way of imprisonment or exile is increasingly being based upon the hurt caused to another member, rather than the failure to adhere to any straitjacket of desirable conduct. Identity markers based upon the notions of purity achieved through restrictions on certain dietary and/or sexual practices are being increasingly problematized and complicated as something inessential and extrinsic to a faith in God. The sustained production and maintenance of identity markers are no longer considered as preconditions for humans to be under the sway of God’s infinite love and grace. Moreover, the persons consciously disavowing the previously held certainties of sexual and dietary norms that were considered fundamental for religious adherence and observance, continue considering themselves as the children of God, not only despite of their deliberate choices, but also because of them. If history

continues to unfold along the current trajectory, it would become increasingly difficult to conceive and sustain faith in God through appeals to authority that is patently disharmonious with reason, evidence, and through the supposedly undisputable fiats curtailing individual adherent's freedom and choice without any substantiation on such requirements.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, the trajectories of history could reverse or change and a renewed course of ghettoization—which is already afoot due to intensifying inequality and heightening of racial prejudice—and a hardening and inflation of religious and or nationalistic identities could ensue. Any number of events from catastrophic climate changes, to massive wars, to exponential expansion in the research and implementation of artificial intelligence that would render a whole lot of humans as unnecessary to sustain their national economies, could accelerate the segregations and separations that is happening now and set history on different trajectories. Profoundly unequal distribution of resources, wealth, and opportunities, accelerated proliferation of gated communities, and an almost certain emergence of robotics that is poised to take over most avenues of work and opportunities to earn a living, in combination with climate change could produce a starkly bleak world.⁶⁰ This situation of utter hopelessness could drive persons

⁵⁹ Gordon Kaufman asserts that the “central task of theology in the present situation is to ascertain just what beliefs or concepts inherited from the tradition are still viable, and to determine in what ways they should be reconstructed so that they will continue to serve human intellectual and religious needs.” Also that it “involves a frank acknowledgement that religious believing and theological analysis and reflection are *human* activities, engaged in for human reasons to achieve certain human ends.” Gordon D. Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 179-180, 182 (emphasis original).

⁶⁰ On growing wealth disparity, see the Oxfam Inequality Report 2017, which shows that “just 8 men own same wealth as half the world.” Oxfam International, *An Economy for the 99%*, written by Deborah Hardoon (Oxford, UK: Oxfam International, 2017), https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/bp-economy-for-99-percent-160117-en.pdf.

and communities to hold on to or even revive bygone parochialisms and try using them as organizing principles and platforms to address their challenges. Uncritical or blind faith that god is with them, and them alone, could become plausible and even advantageous to solidify positions and assuage qualms on hurting others in order to preserve and advance the conditions and possibilities of their own community's existence.

By definition, there will always be a gap between the act of faith, and the rational and empirical basis of life. Yet, everything in human life, from the language in which we live, move, and realize our being, from economic theory to scientific explorations, and all dimensions of cultural production require and work on the very basis of the acts of trust and faith.⁶¹ But that faith and trust could only be based on the innumerable relationships that humans find themselves to be embedded in, and they could only be sustained through maintaining the above said gap at a reasonable and responsible minimum. Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason* has persuasively argued about the impossibility of proofs on the question of God. However, just as with the acrobats on the flying trapezes, there is a need for a secure basis and a reasonable minimizing of the expanse to make any leap possible and credible, even when all such leaps are always well within the verge of courage, confidence, trust, and above all, imbued with a tinge of insanity. It is not that the question of God is a discursive construction or a rational resolution that humans make, but that the question of God arises, and could only be encountered within the context and the concerns of human history and that too only within the resources available to a

⁶¹ In his writings, Derrida demonstrates this elementary fact of the all-pervading basis of faith and trust in every realm of human activity. Especially see, Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," and, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" in Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), 42-101, and 230-298, respectively.

specific people at a specific place and time. This is something that could be discerned within the Hebrew and Christian scriptures.

The scriptural story begins with the burning bush, continues through the prophets who insist on righteous historical actions as the only way of following God, and continues further in the different accounts of the Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, which reaffirms God's perennial concern for history. All accounts of encounter with God, both as particular events and as an unwavering cumulative concern, call human attention toward their responsibilities in history. Consequently, this singular focus on human responsibility to every actual other of theirs would render all supposedly religious quests toward holiness that forsakes tangible actions as quintessential flights from history. And, all such feigned flights from history could only be the finest device that have ever been invented at preserving the status quo that benefits the proponents of such quests of blessedness.

The contemplations on the origins and eschatological ends could only be faith affirmations directly based upon the revelatory events to which a community testifies. The conceptions of origins and ends are necessary and central for organizing lives on earth, but turning them into actuality and insisting them as the only way these could be conceived is untenable at the least, and potentially a source of strife in societies with multiple religious and secular expressions. The origins and ends are across the pair of ellipses that mark the boundaries of human history (professed origins <...interpretations of history...> perceived eschatological ends). The origin and end neither could be transparently discerned, nor could they have been the content of revelatory disclosures. For example, Christology is a genuine and necessary human concern and need to

determine the right way to understand how Jesus of Nazareth is the revelation of God. However, it could not have been the primary concern of the Nazarene himself, or never could be that of other humans with different faith commitments. Moreover, it is so when the history itself is a continued interpretation wherein the past is never completely discerned and decided for all posterity, and no present and future could ever be standalone moments without any reference or mooring to the past, or a future beyond it.⁶² The content of revelatory events are well within the context of historical existence, and since life on earth requires the orientation of origins, ends, and afterlife, the conceptions of them are faith testimonies based upon what the community affirms as revelatory events, covenants and commandments. The equation between God and humankind could not be one of simple equality, and thus humans could never transparently decipher the revelatory events and discern its significance conclusively and comprehensively without reminder. Hence, it is not possible for the recipients of revelation to pronounce that their interpretations of a particular revelatory event are statements of reality as to how God could only operate after such a gracious act of revelation. Thus, it would bode well to be humble enough to not foreclose the Divine by making human inferences of revelatory events as absolute and binding on God and comporting as if God has somehow become liable to work only within the parameters of the theological testimony that a community makes of its revelatory encounters.⁶³

⁶² Derrida observes that, “[t]his question [of the politics of the archive] will never be determined as one political question among others. It runs through the whole of the field and in truth determines politics from top to bottom as *res publica*. There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation.” Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998), 4, fn1.

⁶³ Wesley Ariarajah terms this charitable allowance as “prescribed freedom” wherein God is granted sufficient freedom of movement as if tied with a reasonably long rope with the stationary end of the

Without any particular power to demand faith or religious adherence, the quest for seeking, nurturing, and sustaining discipleship in the present times is left with appeals to the hearts and minds alone. There is no reliable or definite method in winning followers and keeping them treading those chosen paths forever. The only way for others to find saltiness in Christian theological statements is the actions they author in its proponents, and not the loftiness of its pronouncements. It is in this context that appropriate means of seeking new adherents becomes an issue and the sure methods that proved useful hitherto need to be problematized.

I.6. Textuality of Everything in the Human Realm

It is hoped that the discussions in the first chapter on the contemporary theoretical situation would bring forth the current emphasis on textuality of everything including individual identities. There are no secure and permanent structures informing and mooring the lives of individual humans or their communities. Beginning with language, everything in life is discursively wrought, and is sustained in and through performativity. Judith Butler across her theoretical work demonstrates that even the most elementary aspects of sex and gender divisions that were considered given are, in fact, produced through repeated performativity of juridical practices and law, and that the body itself is written in the process. Performativity is distinctive from performance that presupposes a subject that designs, coordinates, and performs the act, while performativity is the repetitive act or ritual through which any subject, identity, or agency could be thought of

rope fastened to the supposedly orthodox and thus immovable doctrinal tree or rock of a religious community. It is also similar to the low-volt electric fence that allows the cattle their freedom of movement and yet frustrating any attempt at being adventurous. S. Wesley Ariarajah, *Not Without My Neighbor: Issues in Interfaith Relations* (Geneva: WCC, 1999), 103, 105.

and encountered. Butler's endeavor in her prominent work *Gender Trouble* is an effort to establish that the sex differences that base its evidence on the presence of specific set of genitalia and thus perceived as prediscursive, is in actuality an effect of gendering that the social norms anticipates and prescribes. Butler points out that "the cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of 'identities' cannot 'exist'" and that "certain kinds 'identities' ... in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not 'follow' from either sex or gender." And, that the word "'follow' in this context is a political relation of entailment instituted by the cultural laws that establish and regulate the shape and meaning of sexuality."⁶⁴

Butler and the theoreticians we explore in the first chapter problematize the concepts of identity, subject, and agency, and they strive to demonstrate that these are never prior to the deed, but that it is in the very deeds that these characteristics emerge as an effect, and never as a cause—"the appearance or effect of being is always produced through structures of signification."⁶⁵ If, "follow" is a "political relation" as Butler insists, then Jesus' call of "follow me" could only be a call to another kind of political relation in light of the lordship of Christ and the kingdom of God. The Christian concepts of repentance, conversion, and discipleship, could not be any different from these

⁶⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 24.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 60. Butler argues that "*gender* is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, ... [but] the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence." And also that if sex is an effect of gender, then "'sex,' [as] that designation supposed to be most in the raw, proves to be always already 'cooked,' and the central distinctions of structuralist anthropology appear to collapse." Thus, "if constructed gender is all there is, then there appears to be no 'outside,' no epistemic anchor point of departure for a critical assessment of existing gender relations." Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 34, 51; (emphasis original).

poststructuralist understandings of identity and being. These acts could never be an interior change of heart that no one else would ever recognize, or that which at the most would merely involve a change of religious affiliation, but could only be acts that discloses different form of becoming. Apostle Paul's understanding that "if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17), and Saint James' contention that "faith by itself, if it has no works is dead" (Jas 2:17), points to the fact that identity, subjectivity, and agency, are all unending *acts*, and never a static possession that anyone could have and sustain for the rest of their lives.

If the supposedly basic difference of sex—one that is understood to be static through the extensive prevalence of specific reproductive physiology or physical structure among humans—is a culturally normed and regimented reality, and thus the notion of substance that determines identity is performatively fashioned, the evolution of prevailing social systems could not be any different. Spivak, enlisting Derrida's *Grammatology*, reminds that the "body's metapsychological script... is a figure of alterity that defines the human as being called by the other—to responsibility—rather than as a repository of an 'unique and essential quantity; that clamor for rights.'"⁶⁶ It is not that humans are prisoners of the prevailing hegemonic social texts and that they could only mutely follow them. Even when they are defined and compelled to repetitively and ritualistically attend to the hegemonic texts, in the process they gain the ability to deconstruct the texts by inhabiting them differently, mimic and parody them as acts of subversion, and also seek to evolve other texts that demonstrates their difference and determinations. The Christian call to be witnesses of Christ could thus be perceived as a

⁶⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward A History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 389, fn.101.

call to inhabit the texts of this world differently and deconstructively, and thus until eschatology perpetually relativize them in relation to God.

Judith Butler, considers the emergence of subject as the result of an inaugural and primary action—that which is akin to persecution, due to its unilateral disposition—of the other on a not-yet-subject who is thoroughly passive to the action of this other. Drawing upon the works of Immanuel Levinas, Butler writes that “that which persecutes me brings me into being, acts upon me, and so prompts me, animates me into ontology at the moment of persecution” and that “this ‘acting upon’ inaugurates a sense of me that is, from the outset, a sense of the Other.”⁶⁷ Butler emphasizes that “at the most primary level we are acted upon by others in ways over which we have no say, and that this passivity, susceptibility, and condition of *being impinged upon* inaugurate who we are,” and that this impingement is not merely a childhood phenomenon alone, but one that is “synchronic and infinitely recurring.”⁶⁸

Thus, Butler and all the philosophers she works with are unanimous on the mode of emergence of the subject, individual social responsibility, and sociality in general, in and through an act of “substitution” impelled by the other. If so, we might have an analogous understanding for the birth of the religious subject as an act that not only demand the whole of a person’s being, but also as an act of *being born again* (Jn.3:3) as Jesus has insisted. We could very well perceive the religious act as an intensely deliberate, intelligent, and conscious act of giving oneself over to the wholly other who simultaneously engenders responsibility to every other in the universe. Yet, the religious

⁶⁷ Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 89.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

could sustain themselves as such only to the extent that they are able to consider every such expression of responsibility as relative to the wholly other, and thus as thoroughly historical, finite and temporal. In relation to the wholly other, no particular expression or praxis of responsibility could be sacrosanct or eternal, as every single one of them are relative to and valuable for the specific times and places of their envisagement and institutionalization. The transgressions of Sabbath by Jesus recorded in the gospels point to the necessary alterability of collective imaginaries, institutions and conventions.

With regard to text and textuality, it is important to have a good understanding of what Derrida says, so that one does not risk identifying it with graphic inscriptions on any material, and especially with its most influential form—inscriptions within a book:

What I call ‘text’ implies all structures called ‘real,’ ‘economic,’ ‘historical,’ socio-institutional, in short: all possible referents. Another way of recalling once again that ‘there is nothing outside the text.’ That does not mean that all referents are suspended, denied, or enclosed in a book, as people have claimed, or have been naive enough to believe... But it does mean that every referent, all reality has the structure of a differential trace, and that one cannot refer to this ‘real’ except in an interpretive experience. The latter neither yields meaning nor assumes it except in a movement of differential referring. That’s all.⁶⁹

Derrida is often read by placing his work within a trajectory of theorists who term their work as poststructuralist or postmodern. Even the most perceptive of readers do engage in this characterization. It is instructive to note Derrida expressing his bafflement about the renowned Marxian scholars, who have made similar comments on his work on Marx and the future of Marxian thought:

I am also taken aback by a certain eagerness to speak of *Specters of Marx* or my work in general as if it were merely a species, instance, or example of the ‘genre’ *postmodernism* or *poststructuralism*. These are catch-all notions into which the most poorly informed public... stuffs nearly everything it does not like or

⁶⁹ Jacques Derrida, “Afterword: Toward An Ethic of Discussion,” in *Limited Inc.*, trans. Samuel Weber (Evanston, IL: Northwestern, 1988), 148.

understand, starting with ‘deconstruction.’ I do not consider myself either a poststructuralist or a postmodernist. I have often explained why I almost never use these words, except to say that they are inadequate to what I am trying to do. I have never spoken of ‘the announcements of the end of all metanarratives,’ let alone endorsed them... the ‘postmodernists’ (Lyotard, for example) who *do* use the word ‘metanarrative’ (something I have never done in my life, for good reason) would find this amalgam as unsettling as I do.⁷⁰

In this essay on Marx, Derrida thus restates his inference:

No critique of *religion*, or of *each determinate* religion, however necessary or radical that critique may be, should or can impugn *faith* in general... the experience of belief, of credit, of faith in the pledged word (beyond all knowledge and any ‘constative’ possibility) is part of the structure of the social bond or the relation to the other in general of the injunction, the promise, and the performativity that all knowledge and all political action, and in particular all revolutions imply. The critique of religion itself, as a scientific or political undertaking, make appeal to this ‘faith.’ It therefore seems to me impossible to eliminate all reference to faith.⁷¹

We have extensively cited Derrida to point out that our enlisting of his work is not to deny reality or materiality, but to point to the fact that humans could only apprehend reality within their texts and that there is no way for them to crawl out of them. Since humans could never have access to pre-critical material or condition, and are always bound by their texts, the revelatory experiences they encounter and the testimony they make are thoroughly within the text. Thus, humans could only encounter God in and through their texts and it is within textuality alone they could testify to such experiences. And, that the testimony they make on their revelatory experiences through their words and deeds, are very much within their textuality. The Christian language of faith and of the experience of God that is being enlisted in this dissertation is with the recognition that, both the revelation from God and the human testimony thereof could respectively be

⁷⁰ Jacques Derrida, “Marx & Sons,” in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida’s Specters of Marx*, ed. Michael Sprinker (New York: Verso, 1999), 228-229. Emphasis original.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 255-256.

received and made only within human textuality. However, it is not that God is within this textuality of humans, but that the whole of human textuality is within God, which again makes it ever more difficult to have a thoroughgoing knowledge of God, as it is never possible to fully encounter the “object of knowledge or the reality of knowledge.”⁷²

There could not be any Hebrew or Christian Scripture or theology without a conversation with outsiders and receiving significant insights from them. Job is the quintessential outsider who has been given a significant place within the Hebrew Scriptures as one who brings a theological word of utmost importance regarding human existence and their possibilities on earth (Melchizedek, Ruth, persons accounted for in Gospel or Matthew’s genealogy, and many others become part of this tradition of outsiders). Plato for early church leaders, Aristotle for Thomas Aquinas, Kant and Hegel for liberal theologians, Marx for liberation theologians, Whitehead for process theologians, thus become persons from the Joban tradition who offer tools to understand nature of reality during their times. By extension, in the context of our project here and around the theme of mission, Spivak, Butler, Derrida, and Deleuze, and other outsiders become part of the Joban tradition who offer insights on the impossibility of organizing singular missions that are considered either essential for being Christian or necessary for eschatological consummation. In the first chapter we track what three prominent

⁷² Karl Barth holds that, “[w]e might also be dealing with a possibility of knowledge which can be made intelligible as a possibility of man, but, in contrast to all others, only in terms of the object of knowledge or the reality of knowledge and not at all in terms of the subject of knowledge, i.e., man as such.” However, our argument is that, this precedence of the “object of knowledge” cannot be because we would have or could arrive at a thoroughgoing understanding of God, but that from the tragic awareness that no amount of divine revelation is capable of seamless communication that surpasses human textuality and its necessary components that always cavort on the verge of sinfulness. For example, no amount of dwelling upon the notion of kenosis is capable of doing away with the human quest for those coveted seats in any political state or organization, let alone the kingdom of God (Mt.20:21). Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. I.1, bk. 1, The Word of God as the Criterion of Dogmatics, 1-7, eds., G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 190.

outsiders have to offer, along with the key insight the biblical Job himself provides. Job himself has a crucial insight with regard to the theme of mission—not mission as in conversion efforts, but trying to organize life around the theme of mission so that some repetitive actions without much contemplation will take care of the act of obeying certain commandments like loving God and one’s neighbor.

I.7. Current Paradigm of Mission and its Discontents

The basic testimony of faith of nation-states, religious communions, or for that matter, any corporate body that humans beget, is enshrined in the documents that constitute and guide them for all posterity. This does not mean that the documents are static, but very much alive through fresh interpretations based upon historical experience and evidence, and necessary changes when considered as required. Also, it does not mean that arc of interpretations and alterations of constitutional documents always tend toward justice, as any arc of history that tend toward justice could appear as an arc only from a considerable distance and only within a conscious discourse intended to inspire.⁷³ Otherwise, all such arcs are at best zigzags, or paths with countless tortured detours, and painful retraces from many cul-de-sacs. The witness of any such group is judged by the degree of proximity or divergence in its conduct with respect to its own self-avowed contentions of itself and the ends for which it claims to stand for. Just as salvation is impossible to achieve other than by the grace of God, witness is not something one

⁷³ In fact, the quote from Theodore Parker, the nineteenth century abolitionist and a minister of the Unitarian Church, that was a century later made famous by Martin Luther King, Jr., communicates that the imagery of the arc is indeed an inspiring insight: “I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways; I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice.” Theodore Parker, *The Collected Works of Theodore Parker* Vol. II, Sermons, Prayers, ed. Frances Power Cobbe (London, UK: N. Trubner & Co., 1867), 48.

actively pursues and attains, but a testimony that the other gives as to what and how the self comes across in and through their encounter. It is similar to the very first naming of Christians at Antioch as a community with a unique testimony and conduct, which could never be a self-representation, but always a determination of the other. The possibility of bearing of false witness by the other is ever-present, and thus the necessity of encounter with the other and the indispensable struggle to achieve a fair testimony from the other. Such recognition cannot be demanded on mere contentions alone, but only on right intents, concomitant actions, and the appreciable fruits, that the other could discern and value as both closer to the other's own strivings, and above all, to self's faith claims. It could be easily seen that all the terms in this conceptualization could be rendered ambiguous, or even superfluous with questions on what is being meant by "right intents," associated actions, appreciable fruits, discernment, faith claims, etc. That in itself is the biggest challenge to have any conception of preprogrammed seamless mission that is supposed to unambiguously carry forward the demands for right actions and fruits.

The concept and conduct of mission need to be examined in two different phases. The colonial era mission had been a blessing to not only Christianity in particular, but the whole world in general. It freed Christians from both ecclesiastical and political authorities and set them on a course to explore their own responsibility as Christians. Ever since, the notion that Christians could merely be discerned as an entity only within the acts expressing their deep convictions has taken root and it could never return to Christian existence of pre-colonial times. Even the secular voluntary organizations we find around us are a direct inheritance of the missionary endeavor during the colonial times. Also, the responsibility that the nation-states assume in response to human

sufferings through political conflict or natural calamity in other nations is a continuation of what the missionary movement had inaugurated during the colonial times.

Ever since the early twentieth century, and even within the triumphant mood of the first international missionary conference in Edinburgh, in 1910, a rethinking on the missionary contentions on other religions has ensued and it only gathered strength thereafter. The second chapter here is an effort at tracking the developments in mission theology in the second half of the twentieth century and up to the present. Before we get to the contours of mission theology in the second chapter, it would be helpful to note how the current phase of mission appears to one of its own proponents. Scott A. Bessenecker, an associate director of missions at the Intervarsity Christian Fellowship, an organization sending U.S. students as missionaries across the world for various durations, has a book titled *Overturing Tables: Freeing Missions from the Christian-Industrial Complex*. The outright offensive disposition is not limited to the title alone. The content is an open quest for a different mode of organizing the current sending model, without its current confidence on capitalist or corporatist model. Bessenecker argues that the “church has uncritically adopted a corporate-style capitalist paradigm to inform and drive our mission,” and that it has contributed to the “creation of a Christian-Industrial Complex,” where “profit making overrules the world of prophet making.”⁷⁴ He argues that the task of “advancing the kingdom of God is not reserved for wealthy, well-connected or formally educated people; nor does it need to be propped up by a large and highly structured Christian-Industrial Complex.”⁷⁵ The key problem that Bessenecker identifies

⁷⁴ Scott A. Bessenecker, *Overturing Tables: Freeing Missions From The Christian-Industrial Complex* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2014), 19.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

with the corporate industrial structure is that “at a certain point the institution is no longer a vehicle to take us to a destination; it is the destination.”⁷⁶

The alternative models that Bessenecker lifts up are like one in Manila, Philippines, that is “dedicated less to preaching to the poor... and more as a place for the poor to ask questions of God and to search for answers.”⁷⁷ Many of these alternatives are in contradistinction to what he perceives as the current template of protestant church and mission wherein “Christianity impersonates the corporate model” and come to believe that “we can accomplish our mission with more money, a building, and a bit of ingenuity.” And, from his firm belief through working and observing the mission work both at the level of agencies and in the fields: “The church is not a franchise, and people are not targets to whom we sell Christ. The highly individualized salvation experience sold through skills of persuasion is a shadow of the all-encompassing power of the gospel.”⁷⁸ Bessenecker ends his book with a call to perceive “discipleship as mission”: “Jesus’ command was not to go and make converts or build churches or to gather attendees. It was to go and make disciples and to teach the nations to obey the way of life he imparted. That’s why Jesus’ disciples were initially called followers of the ‘the Way.’”⁷⁹

We travelled with Bessenecker for a long stretch to note the growing unease even among the proponents of the current model of mission that haggles, hustles, and harasses the members of other faiths without giving them enough evidence through real-life

⁷⁶ Bessenecker, *Overturing Tables*, 69.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 179.

models for the most important move that a person could make in their lifetimes. If it is becoming objectionable to the protagonists of the prevailing model themselves, then it is time to reevaluate the basic assumptions behind the contention that church ought to have organized attempts at securing conversion of religious others, rather than the life of church in itself becoming a call to repentance and conversion.

The first attempt in the second chapter is to track the pre-Constantine period of church growth and to gather existing evidence that demonstrate the paucity of open preaching as depicted in the Acts of Apostles. Historians of late antiquity, like Ramsay MacMullen, Peter Brown, and others do not support the possibility of incessant public persuasion, rather point to a slow but sure growth of the church through the difference it manifested from other communities, and with the different models of common life that they experimented with. When read along with the available historic evidence, and the fact that Luke writes the book almost three decades after the events, the awe-inspiring events of mass conversions could only be part real, and part with the intention to inspire readers, and also as an aspirational instrument to invoke similar actions.

The next part of the second chapter is to read three mission texts of recent time and to account for the rationale for continuing this enterprise, and for the methods involved in its pursuit. The works thus read are David Bosch's *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, a work that has become part of the canon of mission theology. The works on mission from the recent times include John G. Flett's, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community*,⁸⁰ and, Marion Grau's *Rethinking Mission in the Postcolony: Salvation,*

⁸⁰ John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).

Society, and Subversion.⁸¹ Flett identifies a deficient trinitarianism that informs the current understanding of *missio Dei* and sets out to propose remedies with the help of Karl Barth's theological compendium. Grau embraces the full consequence of postcolonial and poststructuralist theoretical context and seeks creative ways of theologizing mission in the postcolony.⁸² Grau's work is by far the most daring attempt to be simultaneously responsible to the postcolonial theoretical context and to be congruent to Christian tradition's missional history with all its ambiguities and possibilities.

I.8. Resources that lead us beyond *missio Dei*

The third chapter is a tracking of select resources from prominent theologians that would help argue that it is hard to sustain the notion of mission as a second-step or subsequent action that a religious or secular entity is capable of begetting, and yet could consider all such praxis as effectively remaining extraneous to its claim to a certain entityhood. The effort is to read Christ's call to follow as a demand to give up the convenience and repetitiveness of certain modes and methods that are being tenaciously insisted as inalienable to an entity's mission. Instead, the call to follow Christ is being comprehended as an invitation toward and the inaugural of the reflexive act of bearing witness. This act of bearing witness is not a special, separate, or subsequent act that an entity begets, but the very act through which alone any entity could be considered as such. The call of Jesus to repent, the texts generally termed as the Sermon on the Mount

⁸¹ Marion Grau, *Rethinking Mission in the Postcolony: Salvation, Society, and Subversion* (New York: TT & Clark, 2011).

⁸² Even though Bosch, Flett and Grau are the major interlocutors of this chapter, the relevant inputs of authors like Dana L. Robert, Lamin O. Sanneh, and others will be accounted for.

and that of the Last Judgment are read with the help of the theological works of Jurgen Moltmann and Reinhold Niebuhr respectively, to demonstrate the impossibility of missionizing and automatizing Christian life. The reflexive life that is called for could be further reinforced if the doctrine of trinity is read as a testimony of God's revelation of who God is and who human could be.

Catherine Keller's reading of the Book of Revelation is being valued within this chapter as a comprehensive text that points to the need to consistently keep the missional impetus in check, while being involved and intensifying the quest for justice. Yet, this quest is not based upon principles that could consider the materiality of both the earth and of all the numerous relations within it as dispensable, or as simple necessities with which humans are destined to work with as they await eschatology. Materiality becomes the very constitutive part of any eschatology that could be thought off; an eschatological living that is already being inaugurated and whose embrace is being felt every now and then.

We draw a significant insight from Ivone Gebara, in order to reimagine Eucharist—the most important and solemn of liturgical act around which Christian lives are established and sustained. Utilizing one's share of flesh and blood is the basic thing that all humans invariably do, and it is through this expending that everything in this world is being fashioned and maintained. The attempt is to read Eucharist as the utmost and obvious prompt to a life of witness that could only be wrought though *differently* breaking one's body and pouring one's blood and turning them into food and drink that are capable of ushering in a *difference* within the ordering of the world. We do not see this as a missional or sacrificial act of behalf of the self, but as the most elementary and

the only act that humans even otherwise do, regardless of Christ's call to discipleship or not. Christ as witness of God and the first fruit of all humanity have by way of example demonstrated how human flesh and blood ought to be expended, and the call to "do this in remembrance of me" (Lk. 22:19, 1 Cor. 11:25), becomes a call to continuously ascertain and amend the ways of this expending.

Karl Barth has devoted a significant amount of his theological acumen in delineating the significance of trinitarian "sending" and its motivating consequence for the Christian communions. We spend the most amount of time accounting for the work of Barth to demonstrate that when read against himself, the wealth of resources he bequeaths could be augmented to author lives of witness. A life of witness is the very discursive ability to know that the keeping of Sabbath is not an end in itself, but an invitation to be attentive to the larger meaning and social significance it entails. Witness is thus to be able to observe Sabbath while remaining open, vigilant, and confident enough to know when to break the Sabbath, and that the rote observation is indeed a skillful evasion of its imperatives (Mk. 2:27). We consider Barth as someone who dared to walk to the brink, stare at the abyss and make some conclusions and claims that usually would have been foreclosed by others. However, he immediately retreats from the brink and recapitulates and solidifies previously established understandings to its utmost potency. Barth reminds us of the dilemma of the leaders of the Protestant Reformation, with regard to the sacraments. Euan Cameron notes that, "on the one hand they [the reformers] strove against a 'magical' belief that sacraments invariably, predictably, mechanically conferred grace," but "on the other their logic threatened completely to

obliterate a biblical ministry.”⁸³ This is not just the challenge before the reformers or Barth alone, but before anyone who ventures to think through the wealth of the doctrinal corpus, and come up with relevant interpretations. We strive to show that it is possible to enlist the theological resources that Barth offers to organize lives that would be confident enough to give up missions and begin living with discursive courageousness.

Religions are straightforwardly construed to confer an essence onto its adherents—become part of a particular religious channel of grace and have a share in the salvation made available through it, or else be damned—and thus religious adherence as an easy marker of self and other becomes a perpetual source of strife.⁸⁴ The contention of essence essentially serves as the basis for the possibility, and as the prompt or even as the compellation to organize efforts aimed at religious conversion without any particular consideration to the witness of the community, and without witness playing any such role in attracting new followers (Mt.23:15). To circumvent these twin dangers of the contention of essence being effortlessly conferred onto individuals and communities through their respective religious affiliation, the disjunction between the religions as quintessentially human constructions and the God that they strive to testify needs to be relentlessly recalled and maintained as such.

⁸³ Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 158.

⁸⁴ During the course of composing this dissertation, a religious conflict had been brewing between the Muslim minority and the Buddhist majority populations in Myanmar. A United Nations report published in February 2017, records the atrocities of “mass gang-rape, killings, including of babies and young children, brutal beatings, disappearances and other serious human rights violations” against the Muslim population, and by September 2017, many are terming it as similar to the previous incidents of “ethnic cleansing” that the world has witnessed. See, “UN report details ‘devastating cruelty’ against Rohingya population in Myanmar’s Rakhine province,” *UN News Center*, Feb. 3, 2017, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=56103#.WcEinq2B2i4> ; and, Amanda Taub, “Myanmar Follows Global Pattern in How Ethnic Cleansing Begins,” *New York Times*, Sept. 18, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/18/world/asia/myanmar-rohingya-ethnic-cleansing.html>.

Toward sustaining the disjunction between humans and God, the most significant insight we draw from Barth is his insistence on the aseity of God that essentially insists on the disjunction that “God is God, and the human the human.” James H. Cone astutely notes that, for Barth, the “natural theology issue was not merely an intellectual debate but an event about life and death of men (*sic*),” that was made evident through the phenomenon of Hitler and Nazism—“the danger of identifying man’s word with God’s word.”⁸⁵ This dissertation argues that unreservedly radicalizing the Barthian notion of religions as essentially human manufacture, and robustly insisting on the fundamental difference between the human and God would simultaneously thwart the contention that a religion is able to confer a presumed essence upon their adherents. A perpetual commitment to disrupt every semblance of essence as soon as it begins crystallizing would siphon out the basis, motivation, and justification for religious violence meted out on whomever a particular religion would term as its other. It would simultaneously contest the ability of religions to go about conversion missions without any consideration of their actual witness.

I.9. *Sola Fructus*: The Unstated End of the Protestant *Solas*

The fourth chapter is an attempt to read the gospel of Matthew as a text that systematically and thoroughly blocks all avenues of mission and unambiguously calls for witness and fruits as the only acceptable affirmation and proclamation. The legal term *Fructus percipiendi*, means that fruits could have been produced by something that have had the potential, yet, did not do so because of the fault of the one who had held the fruit-

⁸⁵ James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 87.

bearing object in possession.⁸⁶ The reading is hoped to show that the concept of mission is diminishing the fruit-bearing ability of both Christian communions and individual Christians. This diminishment occurs not by inaction, but by being fully immersed in actions that either inadvertently or intentionally cause the doers to foreclose both their immediate and wider contexts. The risk-free options for satisfying a supposed missional mandate would safeguard the entity from perishing, even if its fruit bearing ability languishes. If at all there is judgment, it is for not producing fruits, and thus the need to give up mission and embrace acts of bearing witness as constitutive component, and never as an optional addendum.

The new light shed by a different reading of Galatians by placing it very much within the imperial context of the Roman Empire presents Paul's binary differentiation of justification by faith, as opposed to works, in a different key. Brigitte Kahl's magisterial work reads the epistle of Galatians through the eyes of the Gauls who were surviving the Roman colonization through many works of justification that were mandatory for them to gain admittance into the ruling dispensation, and to be considered as citizens of the Roman province of Galatia. The "works of law" through which the imperial monotheism of Caesar was being instituted and sustained, included the regular and diligent participation in the liturgical acts of emperor worship and in the people or nation or citizen-making process that were being continuously enacted in the arena. Those who could have a life under the new world order and those who deserved death for the sake of the imperial peace were literally determined during these gatherings in the arena, and it

⁸⁶ Frederick Tomkins, and William George Lemon, *The Commentaries of Gaius on the Roman Law* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1869), 221.
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=osu.32437122279892;view=1up;seq=7>.

gave a special meaning to the concept of being “saved” by God. Thus, the Pauline conception of “faith” becomes a different set of acts or works, one that is persistently beyond the self and other making process of imperial monotheism, and as works that would always remain beyond a person’s interiority that none other than the person claiming to have faith could be aware of, or could vouch for.

We look at the act of bearing witness as something that is unrepeatable, and non-replicable. Thus, the call to become witnesses is neither a call to attempt an imitation of Christ, nor to institute some standardized form of performance that could thereupon be insisted as of eternal verity. The effort in this dissertation is to argue that the possibility of becoming Christians could be authored only through a continuous discursive process of bearing witness, and that only within such process might Christians continuously emerge and sustain themselves as such.

CHAPTER 1

Theoretical Context and the Mission Imperative

The categorization of ‘political theology’ is a tautology as all theologies and in fact all texts that humans produce are political in more ways than one. The differences between theologies or that amongst the diverse texts are being marked by the kind of politics they seek to espouse, be it explicitly or surreptitiously, intentionally or inadvertently.¹ The type of politics the theologies or texts champion could be experienced through the affects and effects they engender, discerned through the components that go into their construction and above all by ascertaining the grammar that defines them. The “political” could broadly be conceived as the praxis of producing and sustaining specific social orders; and one that also entails a certain testimony to the dignity and nurturance it confers upon humans in particular and the whole of physical nature in general. It also includes the conscious visions and the concomitant actions of subversion when the hegemonic understanding and practice of the “political” is detrimental to human life, to other living beings, or indeed to the creation as a whole.

Since the supposedly just laws (based upon the prevailing hegemonic perspectives) in which humans try to institutionalize their vision for communities would

¹ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe defines “hegemony” as an “expression of power relations” that invariably pervade all societies, and “the political” as the “ontological dimension of antagonism” that is the basis of any hegemony, and “the politics” as the “ensemble of practices and institutions whose aim is to organize human coexistence.” Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking The World Politically* (London: Verso, 2013), xi-xii.

always be insufficient to capture the totality of their intentions, and since the laws are patently corruptible and could also become potentially fatal at a future historical time, there will always be a yearning for an impending fulfillment or a coming of the moment when the reality thus inaugurated will infinitely surpass the finest of human aspirations. This is most strikingly delineated in the Hebrew prophetic traditions, and also within other religious scriptures as in the *Bhagavad Gita*, in the imperatives that require seeking justice, and in the anticipation of a redeemer when injustice abound and the “time is out of joint.”² Derrida observes that, regardless of the content that defines various religious and secular expressions of messianism that posits or anticipates the fulfillment of a promise in an “other” or in an “event to come,” the “formal structure of promise exceeds them or precedes them.” The “structural messianism” that thus exceeds or precedes any systematized expression of the “to come,” could be perceived as the constitutive condition of human life, and this “undeconstructible” “experience of the emancipatory promise” undergirds and propels the interminable and impossible pursuit of the ideas of justice and democracy.³ These ideas “as event of a pledged injunction that orders one to summon the very thing that will never present itself in the form of full presence, is the opening of this gap between an infinite promise... and the determined, necessary, but also necessarily inadequate forms of what has to be measured against this promise.”⁴

² This quote from William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is being enlisted as a continuous refrain by Derrida to demonstrate that time being out of joint is the constitutive condition of life, and not a fall from an original bliss. See, Derrida, *Specters of Marx*.

³ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 81. Derrida holds that the “absolutely undetermined messianic hope” as the “eschatological relation to the to-come of an event *and* of a singularity, of an alterity that cannot be anticipated.” It is a mode of “[a]waiting without horizon of the wait, awaiting what one does not expect yet or any longer, hospitality without reserve, welcoming salutation accorded in advance to the absolute surprise of the *arrivant* from whom or from which one will not ask anything in return and who or which will not be asked

Even though the eschatological expectations do not necessarily converge or are being envisioned in the same categories, religions, and to some extent many political ideologies give varying expressions to these yearnings and enact them through a host of liturgical and social practices. Even if the respective religious/ideological liturgical and social practices could be informed through the many mysteries that particular communities testify to, these practices themselves are thoroughly historical and thus material, empirical, and textual in their construction and enactment.⁵ Thus, the theological or textual explications that inform the liturgical and social practices cannot but be built upon the material realities and consequently are also a continuing response to the predominant context in which they have evolved and are continued to being performed.

Given the thoroughgoing materiality or textual reality of religious praxis, it is necessary to account for the context when discussing any aspect of religious life. It is evermore so in the field of Christian mission, which has become an organized and specialized endeavor that not only encompasses the whole compendium of Christian faith, but also becomes a judgment on everyone beyond the formal fold of Christian communions. This is so because the organized efforts understood under the rubric of

to commit to the domestic contracts of any welcoming power (family, State, nation, territory, native soil or blood, language, culture in general, even humanity), *just* opening which renounces any right to property, any right in general, messianic opening to what is coming, that is, to the event that cannot be awaited *as such*, or recognized in advance therefore, to the event as the foreigner itself, to her or to him for whom one must leave an empty place, always, in memory of the hope—and this is the very place of spectrality.” Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 81-82.

⁵ Gayatri Spivak, a pioneering postcolonial theorist defines: “Textuality as a structural description indicates the work of difference (both plus and minus) that opens up identity as adequation.” Identity thus could never be inherent, but only discursively begotten. Thus to sustain an identity, consistent, and mostly repetitive work is required. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value,” in *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, eds., Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean (New York: Routledge. 1996), 120.

“mission” strives to be a program with its own theory and practice in order to address the people of other faith traditions and of no organized faith adherence. Moreover, the widening of the notion of mission with many social interventions intended to inaugurate and further peace and justice, and to preserve the integrity of creation, fails to both resonate with the same intensity over time, and or achieve its envisioned ends, just because they are conceived under the category of mission.

The major effort in this chapter is to account for the theoretical positions that complicates the construct of mission as a set of actions that an accomplished or completed entity could chose to embrace as second-step, and without any detrimental or beneficial contribution to the constitutional status of the entity whether such acts are being carried out or not. It is not the concept of mission that is being directly problematized, but the contention that there could be an accomplished or completed entity that could preserve its status or nature regardless of whether or not second-step actions as mission are being authored. To this end, the effort is to track resources that disrupt the contention of any entity or subjectivity as accomplished or complete, and instead understands it as being fashioned in and through constant acts of construction.

The theoretical works of Gayatri Spivak, Jacques Derrida, and Gilles Deleuze, are being drawn upon to surface the constructed nature of entity or subjectivity, and the violence of foreclosures that generates the illusion of separateness of social locations. Also, to problematize the question of essence that imparts the notion that apparent social locations are truly separate and independent, and this notion of separateness becoming the source of missions that could be adopted out of free choice. Most of all, the effort is to acutely problematize any mission that strives to devise self-assured actions in aid of a

secure teleology that would lead the world to a defined eschatological end. As we have already noted in the introductory section, these theoreticians are being termed as part of a Joban tradition, by basing this determination on their outsider status of not being participants in the Christian faith journey. In addition to Job's position as an outsider, the life story of Job provides crucial insights on many of the standard avenues of mission that individuals and communities embrace—from charity to interventions to seek justice and equality on behalf of and in solidarity with the weaker sections of the community. Above all, the most significant driver of the missional efforts that seek speedy eschatological consummation, one that engulfs Job despite his own personal trauma—the agony and moral indignation on the design of society wherein the unrighteous thrive with impunity and the righteous, the disadvantaged, and the poor are destined to falter.

1.1. Discernments from the Joban Tradition

The central character of the book of Job is neither Hebrew nor ever invokes the imagery of chosen status of a people and the special covenants that God, in the Hebrew tradition, has accorded it.⁶ Job is neither the only outsider in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, nor the only one to intensely center their discourse on the question of justice. Melchizedek, the king of Sodom, whose name means “the king of righteousness,”⁷ (Gen. 14. 17-20) is prominent among the non-Hebrew persons who are favorably accounted for in the scriptures, and the priesthood of Jesus is considered in the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 7.17). Thus, the presence of outsider personalities as core participants in the

⁶ Gutierrez, *On Job*, 3.

⁷ Ronald Hendel, “Genesis Introduction and Annotations,” *Harper Collins Study Bible*, eds. Harold W. Attridge, et.al. (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), 23.

spiritual journey of the Hebrew people, both reemphasizes the whole corpus of prophetic exhortations on the necessity of pursuing justice within human communities, and points to the fact that worshipping God or striving to follow God in history could only be carried forth in and through the quest for righteousness.

The book of Job begins with a discussion around the personal misfortune of an individual, and over the course transforms itself into a universal account of the wicked prospering while the multitudes suffer for no reason or cause for which they hold responsibility. Carol Newsom notes the contrast between chapters 23 and 24, the former as Job personally “seeking for justice before God,” while the subsequent chapter accounting for Job’s “understanding of God’s judgment (or absence thereof) in relation to the oppression of the poor and the depredations of criminals.”⁸ Gustavo Gutierrez emphasizes that the question that the book of Job pursues is on fashioning faith as one that is beyond the concept of retribution that frames whole of human life and its relationship with God around the limited and thus ultimately meaningless possibilities of rewards and punishments. Kenneth Numfor Ngwa considers that the “important aspect of the book” is the “human struggle to articulate a theology in the midst of one’s own suffering or about the suffering of others,” and observes that the “sovereignty of God implies that God’s freedom to act transcends the law of retribution as understood within such opposing moral categories,”⁹ of good and evil as simplistically and directly centered around the conscious and deliberate actions of humans. By strictly planting God “within

⁸ Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (New York: Oxford University, 2003), 165.

⁹ Kenneth Numfor Ngwa, *The Hermeneutics of the ‘Happy Ending’ in Job 42:7-17* (New York: W. de Gruyter, 2005), 104, 105.

the framework of opposing moral categories of good and evil,” what the friends of Job do not consider or include in their exhortations is the possibility that “God does bring trouble for no reason, or better still, for reasons that exceed the limits of retributive justice.”¹⁰

This uncomplicated conception of good and evil not only renders human life and its relationship with God as solely utilitarian, but also the divine to both a petty narcissist keen on earning praise and approval, and as one who is a captive of humans and is required to bestow bounties or penalties when humans follow certain paths or acts in a very particular and predetermined ways.

Tertullian, one of the early church theologians, discusses this issue of God’s captivity in the context of baptism, and how people turn God into a slave of theirs when they calculatingly play around by either hastening the sacramental act of baptism, or equally so by intentionally delaying it. Since baptism is thought to in any case purify past sins, some rush to have it without sufficient preparation of repentance and necessary change of heart, while others deliberately delay it in order to be able to continue sinning with an awareness and perhaps with an assurance that finally at baptism, all the conscious and unconscious sins will be washed away. Tertullian admonishes that both groups of persons “transforms His (*sic*) free benevolence into servitude,”¹¹ wherein God is required to act in a certain way alone when a ritual is carried out or observed regardless of the imperfect motives, inadequate preparations, and the inert follow-up actions that are being feigned.

¹⁰ Ngwa, *Hermeneutics of the ‘Happy Ending,’* 105.

¹¹ Tertullian, *De Paenitentia*, VI. 11, pp. 168-169, Quoted in Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living*, Lectures at the College de France 1979-1980 (New York: Picador, 2012), 121, fn. 22 on p.138.

With regard to our investigation around the concept and praxis of an overarching mission that has eschatology as its teleological horizon, six verses of the book of Job offer the most significant rebuttal and rerouting. In these six verses (Job 40.9-14), the God who sympathizes with Job's anguish over innocent suffering and shares his righteous indignation towards the wicked—for not being troubled with the destruction that they willfully rain upon other humans and the whole of creation—calls upon Job to adorn himself with the power and the glory as of God and to thereafter outstare and denigrate the wicked, and to finally try banishing them from this world. Gutierrez interprets this scene as God pointing to the simple and yet very significant fact that the “wicked cannot simply be destroyed with a glance,” and that even when God desires justice, it is impossible to impose God's desire on humans as it would be the end of human freedom and also that “without freedom, God's justice would not be present within history.”¹² Such an intervention by God to end wickedness would conclusively end life on earth too, as thereafter there will only be automatons incapable of discerning right and wrong, or any such need for discernment has forever ceased to exist, as humans could then on only do the right that God has preprogrammed for and in them. The beauty and mystery of life on earth, and very much that of the living God, the source of all life, resides well within the respective ability to be reflexive every moment and thus explore, express, and establish the innumerable possibilities around any given situation at any given point of time and place. Carol Newsom notes the book of Job's accounting of the perversely untamable—the sea and the Leviathan—in God's speech to Job, as “highlighting the nonmoral and nonrational dimensions of deity... on the one hand; and

¹² Gutierrez, *On Job*, 77.

the unmasterable violence of existence, with its indifference to human values, on the other, [that] constructs a tragically structured world.”¹³ Newsom emphasizes that the “understanding [of] the divine speeches through the lens of the tragic sublime allows Job’s perception to be transformed, without resolving the irresolvable fractures of reality.”¹⁴ With regard to freedom, Gutierrez writes, “precisely because human beings are free, they have the power to change their course and be converted,” and that the “destruction of the wicked would put an end to that possibility.” And also that the “all-powerful God is also a ‘weak’ God, and that the mystery of divine freedom leads to the mystery of human freedom and to respect for it.”¹⁵

For any conception of an overarching mission aimed at hastening or aiding eschatological consummation, whether it derive its motivation and methods from any of the religious systems or from secular ideologies, we could glean two essential admonitory messages from these verses. First, trying to attain the power and glory as that of God in order to seek justice by brute force will never achieve this stated goal, but end up having the opposite effect of the purported pursuer of justice turning into yet another tyrant, and thus ending up adding one more to the dynamic array of the wicked. Moreover, the ordinary wicked pursuing power, wealth, or sadistic pleasures for themselves could only be of limited and localized danger. While the righteous turned evil through their self-righteous certainty of their end goals, and of the purity of their hearts and intentions, could sow disaster in much greater scope and magnitude, as it motivates many others to

¹³ Carol A. Newsom, “Re-considering Job,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 5, no. 2, (February 2007): 170.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁵ Gutierrez, *On Job*, 77-78.

join cause with this seemingly righteous paths and professed ends. The well-defined eschatological ends and the secure paths supposed to reach them with minimum expenditure of energy and efforts, when operationalized, could very well end up in desolation, masqueraded as altruism. The examples of fascist regimes, and communist experiments of the previous century, and the quest in the first decade of this century by the United States and other Western nations purported to democratize and civilize the Middle East, and whose disastrous aftermath is still continuing at world-threatening levels, will never be the last human efforts at forcing self-avowed eschatological ends and consequent collective facing of the abyss of widespread and prolonged destruction. Thus the message of these verses is that no eschatological consummation is at hand in and through human efforts, and for every such quest, tyranny is its certain aftermath. The massive experiments of National Socialism, Communism, and the names of Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, and many others like them up to the present times, and the self-righteous certainty of their respective eschatological missions of their own brands point to this fact.¹⁶ What unites these evidently dissimilar quests are not the righteousness or blatant wickedness of their respective motivation and pursuit, but the concept of overarching mission that is readily available for persons and groups to embrace, and thereupon with

¹⁶ Isaiah Berlin (1909-97), a British philosopher and political thinker in a lecture entitled “Two Concepts of Liberty,” delivered in 1958, observes: “One belief, more than any other, is responsible for the slaughter of individuals on the altars of the great historical ideals—justice or progress or the happiness of future generations, or the sacred mission or emancipation of a nation or race or class, or even liberty itself, which demands the sacrifice of individuals for the freedom of society. This is the belief that somewhere, in the past or in the future, in the divine revelation or in the mind of an individual thinker, in the pronouncements of history or science, or in the simple heart of an uncorrupted good man, there is a final solution.” And, that, regardless of the political orientations of the left or the right, the “faith in a single criterion,” and regardless of whether the “standard of judgment” is being “derive[d] from the vision of some future perfection... or is rooted in the past,” when it is being unflinchingly adhered to, it “will then be used to justify the *a priori* barbarities of Procrustes—the vivisection of actual human societies into some fixed pattern dictated by our fallible understanding of a largely imaginary past or a wholly imaginary future.” Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in *Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy (Oxford, UK: Oxford University, 2002), 212, 216.

self-assured abandon devise devastating teleologies in order to arrive at an all too definite respective eschatological ends.

Second, the whole discourse of Job is wrought through the rubric of particular experience of an individual and the extrapolations of social implications based upon it. The particular experience of innocent suffering of Job leads him to recognize and thus anguish over others who suffer for no account of theirs, and he yearns for a bearable resolution for the same. Thus the innocent suffering of the other becomes a revelatory moment for Job, and it prompts him to action. The significant insight in light of this ever-present possibility of revelatory moments that the unique experiences of suffering could bring about is another equally ubiquitous possibility of the pitfall of fashioning eschatological endings that measure up to that particular experience alone. Derrida holds that the “principle of a radical and interminable, infinite (both theoretical and practical...) critique belongs to the movement of an experience open to the absolute future of what is coming... a necessarily indeterminate, abstract, desert-like experience that is confided, exposed, given up to its waiting for the other and for the event.”¹⁷ Thus, it becomes impossible to sustain a critique without an expectation and waiting, and thus without a certain vague understanding of an eschatology. Even though feminism, and the many other liberationist streams of praxis have urged that authoring actions around personal and collective experience is indispensable, it is still a question whether a particular experience of suffering, however grave it might be, or a vision of a new reality that emerges from a radical awakening, however revolutionary it could be, is sufficient enough to fill in the content of any of the eschatological visions, however wholesome

¹⁷ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 112.

they might appear.¹⁸ The immediate experience of suffering could propel persons and groups to be overzealous, self-righteous, and unrelenting about the envisioned endings, and cause to commit themselves to achieve such endings by any means, and above all, in their own lifetimes.

Sandra Harding, a feminist theoretician, notes the ubiquitous possibility of generating analysis and actions on a point of “view from nowhere,” that could lead to “transcendental or ahistorical foundationalism,” and its supposed corrective of an insistence upon “spontaneous consciousness of individual experience,” could lead to “experiential foundationalism.”¹⁹ Foundationalism in both of these modes tends to “parochialism,” and hence yet another way is to be sought, as they would consequently color their own eschatological horizons upon which their respective critiques would ultimately be based. The insistence on experience in its own turn and fashion could again cause nothing but tyranny of exclusiveness in exchange for exclusions, and thus the respective eschatological visions need to be perceived in a mode and manner that would

¹⁸ Mary Caputi, through a reading of the works of Theodor Adorno and Jacques Derrida, problematizes the question of “power” and the “various recent incarnations of power feminism.” Emphasizing the need to “revive this critique” of capitalism and of “expanding feminism’s purview to include many forms of oppression,” and through a recounting of her interlocutor’s contributions in this regard, Caputi observes: “one of critical theory’s deepest insights [is] that the sufferer unveils, perhaps unwittingly, a larger social truth by engaging a supplemental logic, a deviant reasoning that points to a broader conversation. And at this historical moment, that conversation is about the influence of global capital, the injustices of globalization and interpenetrations of world populations as this calls into question the sovereignty of European and American civilizations.” Caputi holds that contemporary “triumphalism fails to appreciate Adorno’s contention that ‘[t]he need to lend voice to suffering is a condition of all truth.’” And that the [Derridean] “concept of ‘hauntology’ vitiates a triumphalist position by insisting that the latter’s self-aggrandizing claims fail to discern the tragic realities that they themselves have so often produced... [and that] which underscores the close proximity of the developing world whose poverty are in part created by the resource-hungry, consumerist industrialist north.” Mary Caputi, *Feminism and Power: The Need for Critical Theory* (New York: Lexington Books, 2013), 6, 3, xviii.

¹⁹ Sandra Harding, “Reinventing Ourselves as Other: More New Agents of History and Knowledge,” in Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?*, 269.

profoundly surpass any of the particular experiences and the concomitant contingent imaginations.²⁰

Thus, these scriptural verses (Job 40:9-14) could be read as God's caution against the simplistic quest for well-defined eschatology, and thereupon designing sure praxis at arriving at any of these envisioned eschatology. Newsom observes that "what Job has just heard in the divine speeches... is a devastating undermining of his understanding of the unproblematic moral continuity between himself, the world, and God," which in fact "is a profound loss of unity, a recognition of the deeply fractured nature of reality."²¹ In other words, it is God's admonition to keep eschatology as a vision alone and never to try plotting roadmaps to any eschatology that satisfies human imaginations and longings. Since humans are always already enmeshed in numerous actions that either sustain or subvert the status quo in varying intensity and impact, the choice is never between having a praxis or not, but only a question of the nature of their ongoing praxis, and the correspondence between its stated ends and the actual consequences. The effort within this dissertation is to posit repentance (*metanoia*) that leads to conversion begins with the problematization of an ongoing praxis, and embracing yet another praxis in its place as one that appropriately and adequately help bear witness to the different mode of becoming that an individual or a community testifies to have initiated (Lk.19:8).

²⁰ With regard to basing discernments solely on essentialist horizons rather than on textual construction, Harding observes: "How people are named is a politically important matter, and I do not devalue the reasons to reserve the label of 'feminist' for females who work to improve women's lives. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that *feminists are made, not born*. Biology is not enough to make Marble Morgan or Margaret Thatcher feminists." Harding, "Reinventing Ourselves," 279. Emphasis added.

²¹ Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 255.

Hence, the purpose of eschatological visions is to help fashioning real responses in the contemporary struggles and to enable having a reasonable planning for a foreseeable posterity. In terms of that time that lies beyond the scope of a responsible futurology, the call is to trust God and the future generations to be as conscientious in expressing their faithfulness as any of the present and previous generations that have considered itself as the contemporary actors in history, and thus required of themselves to set history in a certain trajectory and pass it on to posterity in a certain fashion. Since there is no “moral continuity” between a particular generation and their “world” and “God,” as Newsom observes, the eschatological visions could only serve toward fashioning a limited teleology for addressing actual questions that are being encountered, or ones that could be reasonably perceived on the basis of collective human experience. Thus, it is imperative to resist an eschatological vision from being strictly delineated or turned into an ontological entity, and it thereupon serving as a source for social engineering that ends up as “vivisection of actual human societies.”²² To prevent this often-repeated pernicious pattern that wreaks havoc by seamlessly conjoining a particular teleology with a sharply delineated eschatology, Derrida recommends disjoining or to “distinguish the latter from the former,” that is, to separate teleology from eschatology.²³

Yet, in spite of these two important and indispensable caveats—against seeking justice with brute force alone (Job 38:12-15; 40:9-14), and envisioning the eschaton primarily on the basis of personal experience and evolving secure teleological programs

²² Berlin, *Liberty*, 216. From year 2014 to 2017, during the time of working on this dissertation, the television screens, and other news media were replete with haunting and horrifying images of cities and civilizations of the Middle East that existed for more than a millennia being decimated by the eschatological mission of a group that called itself the “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant,” or the “Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.”

²³ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 112.

to attain it through human actions—before any attempt at pursuing justice, the whole book of Job revolves around the theme of innocent suffering and the spiritual anguish it creates to everyone in the midst of it. Since everyone born is always inheriting a system and its inevitable inadequacies and inescapable violence, there is no question that persons and groups find themselves at particular edges of a discourse that defines the social order, and at particular locations in which each find themselves to be placed within. There will always be discourses that simultaneously privilege some, regardless of any unique merit or toil of theirs, and disprivilege most others for no fault of theirs and regardless of their best efforts. The economic and sociopolitical systems that similarly define the destiny of persons are nothing other than discourses sustained through reiteration and violence.

In the midst of the givenness of social systems, the Book of Job and the whole of Prophetic testimony within the Hebrew Scriptures on what God requires of humans (Mic.6:8), the only possibility to follow God is to pursue righteousness as modeled by Job’s testimony of himself, and his contemplation of the plight of those who suffer without reason.²⁴ Gutierrez insists that it is important to “situate justice within the framework of God’s gratuitous love,” and that there is an “opposition between gratuitousness [of God] and a conception of justice that can be translated into demands made of God by human beings and that renders God prisoner of our deeds or our cultic actions.”²⁵ Moreover, Gutierrez holds that God is “not simply the guardian of a rigid

²⁴ Gutierrez notes the Book of Job’s “requirement of doing justice as a way of knowing and speaking of God.” Gutierrez, *On Job*, 89, fn. 20, 127.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 88. This “gratuitous love” is not of privileging and disprivileging different sections of humanity, but the grace by which the “wicked are not simply annihilated,” as both the categories of the righteous and unrighteous are never static, and the unjust undergoing a conversion experience and the just ceasing to be so is a ubiquitous possibility. See, *Ibid.*, 78.

moral order,” and that in “moving through history, God walks a path in freedom.”²⁶ We could read Gutierrez’s understanding of the freedom of God in permitting humans to have a life of freedom to pursue their own predilections, and to always have an option of conversion, as a secure pointer to the nature of God who has not tethered godself to any particular mandatory of mission. The effort in this dissertation is to argue that the witness of God in Jesus of Nazareth is a call before humans to embrace this very freedom to live freely without any mandatory of overarching mission that has to be carried out unwaveringly until eschatology.

Since the final three verses of the Matthean Gospel that is being termed as the Great Commission becomes the tip of a precariously balanced inverted pyramid, and since this Gospel often gets to be read in a reverse order, and in light of these three verses, we are trying to distinguish teleology from eschatology. In this reverse reading, the first verse becomes Jesus’ assurance of being with his disciples “to the end of the age” as the eschatological horizon, and the rest of these final three verses become the definitive teleology that need to be pursued until the eschaton. Despite the numerous nuances and caveats assembled to attain sufficient distance from the colonial confidence of the previous era of missionary engagement, and from the continuing snares and pitfalls of self-righteousness, the definition and practice of mission still continues to be: “Mission is, primarily, making disciples, that is, turning others into what the disciples *are*: those who practice justice-love and emulate ‘the works of Jesus (Mt. 11:2).’”²⁷ The emphasis on

²⁶ Gutierrez, *On Job*, 88, 90.

²⁷ David Bosch, “Reflections on Biblical Models of Mission,” in *Landmark Essays in Mission and World Christianity*, eds. Robert L. Gallagher and Paul Hertig (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009), 15. Emphasis added.

the word “are” is being added, and this contention of stasis that the words “are” and “is” communicate is the focus of our work within this dissertation.

David Bosch, to his credit, assembles an array of actions as inalienable part of his understanding of mission and he does not limit it to preaching and church planting alone, albeit them being continued to be held inalienable and primary. However, the effort here in this project is not to problematize the concept of mission per se, but that of the contention that is being crystalized in the word “are,” that there could disciples who could be considered as accomplished or completed, and who could subsequently be in mission. It is equally to trouble the claim that it is possible to conclusively discern beforehand, that one is about to embark on a righteous quest, that it is possible to remain certain that one is consistently in a “practice [of] justice-love,” while being within the act in itself, and that it is possible to “emulate the works of Jesus.” The question we pursue is whether any of these aspects are susceptible to an *a priori* judgment, or if these determinations should be deferred until such a time when the community is at a situation to make a retrospective discernment on the events past.

The argument we are trying to advance is that the disciples come to be only in and through these very acts that Bosch establish as mission, and through the many other acts that would be determined as such in the future. This act of becoming Christians as an individual or a communion by giving expression to their own faith affirmations in contemporaneously appropriate and adequate form and content in itself becomes the invitation before the other to begin this journey of discipleship. Thus, our effort here is to rearrange, or to flip the order of the current format wherein an accomplished or completed entity—an individual disciple or the church as a communion of disciples—is

supposedly being called to subsequently carry forth actions organized under the rubric of mission, without any particular effect on their status as a Christian entity. Instead, we would have the entity emerge in and through those very acts that are now considered as part of the second-step options of mission. Even though this act of bearing witness in and through actions do have proclamation as its motivation and impact, it need not always be verbalized, and need not have the necessary confrontational impetus required to be in direct opposition to the most detrimental of lordship claims that would render the Christian and every other religious claim to lordship irrelevant. Moreover, those who bear witness to themselves, be it humans or God, do not have any control on the impact or influence it might have on those who happen to be present, observe, or participate at the scene of witnessing. Thus, even if witnessing is essentially proclamation in itself, specific acts of powerful, direct, and at times passionate and confrontational proclamation as in the Barmen Declaration becomes imperative.

It could be perceived that everyone comes to be within an already raging fight, and that there is no time or place to discern the parties, options, and the stakes involved, in any other way than over the course of the battle. There are no pavilions, galleries, benches, or locker rooms, to retire from this fight or watch it contemplatively. All contemplation and consequent conversion happens amidst the battle and in the real-time. Conversion as changing course while still being in the middle of the fight and without loosing a beat is possible only by complicating the battle lines, deconstructing the discourses that simultaneously privilege some and disprivilege others, and then on fighting consciously from a location that one has deliberately chosen, and not that one was placed within. Even while undergoing suffering or being on the disprivileged end of

the equation, until the sufferer or the disprivileged begin to problematize the discourses that sustain the status quo, and begin to resist working toward rescuing themselves through private methods of seeking individual favors, they in effect reinforce the prevailing order. To preserve one's life and that of the future generations, appeasement and other forms of simulating submissiveness might still be necessary even after an individual or community begin problematizing the texts of suffering. Until such a time when open defiance becomes feasible, however, there is a difference between accepting the discourse of the status quo, and doing so as a strategy or by way of mimicry.²⁸ Thus, even if such conversion would still have a community or someone continue fighting on the same side, it is to be in the fight differently, with different weapons, strategies of reading, and thus draining off the supposed solidity of hegemonic texts and discourses.

Harding argues that the conception of standpoint theories could be extended to those persons who normally inhabit the locations of privilege and yet would deliberately choose to become the "other" to their own social locations, or to the hegemonic conceptions of knowledge, power and privilege.²⁹ Feminist standpoint theories that Harding and others have been advancing since the 1980s, identifies women in particular, and the people from dis/underprivileged locations in general as the "others" to the hegemonic order, are thus best situated and capable of evolving liberatory knowledge, science, and politics. Harding rightly observes that, "until the less powerful raise their voices to articulate their experiences (frequently a dangerous act), none of us can find

²⁸ Homi K. Bhabha develops this concept of "mimicry" (and that of "hybridity") as a subversive act and "an *ironic* compromise" that dissolves the solidity of a text (practice/institution) or its pretention of possessing an essence and hence possessing a unique selfsame identity. See, Homi K. Bhabha, "Of mimicry of man: The ambivalence of colonial discourse," in Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 121-131. Emphasis original.

²⁹ Harding, "Reinventing Ourselves," 268-295.

that perspective from their lives.”³⁰ Even though the standpoint theories argue that it is advantageous to ground thought in the everyday lives of people in oppressed and excluded groups, in this particular essay, Harding poses the question of whether it is possible for the people who through progressive politics know themselves to inhabit “wrong identities” like whites, European-/American, heterosexuals, economical elites, to produce knowledge and politics that is liberatory. “What can be the role in knowledge-seeking for the lives of those of us who are or would be antiracists, male feminists, heterosexual antiheterosexists, economically overadvantaged people against class exploitation, and the like?”³¹ This quest is in the interest of “encourag[ing] ourselves and our students and colleagues of European descent, men, heterosexuals, and economically overadvantaged to think and act past the tendency to a guilt that is fundamentally inauthentic and passivity-inducing.”³² And to pursue the question of whether it is “true that *only* the oppressed can generate knowledge, that one can contribute to criticism and the growth of knowledge only out of one’s own oppression.”³³ Noted is the possibility that some men “have arrogantly tried... to claim a kind of feminist authority... [and that they do] claim the name for themselves without struggling against their own sexism—or, at [the] least, without enough struggle to earn them the minimum right to the label.”³⁴

Harding affirmatively answers her question on the potential for persons from the privileged locations to produce liberatory knowledge from their own respective social

³⁰ Harding, “Reinventing Ourselves,” 270.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 271.

³² *Ibid.*, 272.

³³ *Ibid.*, 278. Emphasis original.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 280.

locations by problematizing the power and privilege that the society keeps bestowing on them without their seeking, and despite their insistence on refusing to accept the same.

For example, “whites *as whites* can provide ‘traitorous’ readings of the racial assumptions in texts... written by whites.”³⁵ However, this is still offered as an option, as “most of them [overly privileged white men] may not *want* to do this, but they *can*.”³⁶

Our effort is to trouble the generosity of choice that Harding’s emphasis on the modal verb of “can” would provide, and the consequent missional “notion of responsibility as ‘duty of the fitter self’ toward [the] less fortunate others” that this convenience of choice could create and sustain.³⁷ The understanding that the “predication of being-human [is] being called by the other, before will” is our basis for this effort at troubling the both the notion of choice and the convenience of the missional option that the “can” provides.³⁸

This understanding of being-human points to the perennial process of becoming human as a response to the call of the other, and that this response is prior to the act of willing, or that the possibility of willing emerges only within the act of response. This notion of the call of the other could be perceived as analogous to the religious call of being called by the wholly other.

We are grateful to Harding for soliciting responsibility to evolve knowledge and actions based upon one’s own social location that gives them the “race and class overprivilege,” and calling everyone to “grasp how gender, race, class, and sexuality are used to construct one another,” and to be aware of the “common sense of the age” that

³⁵ Harding, “Reinventing Ourselves,” 289. Emphasis original.

³⁶ Ibid., 290. Emphasis original.

³⁷ Spivak, “Righting Wrongs,” 535.

³⁸ Ibid.

“naturalize, or make appear intuitive, social arrangements that are in fact optional, [and that which] have been created and made to appear natural by the power of the dominant groups.”³⁹ Also, for noting that this overcoming of the “‘spontaneous consciousness’ created by thought that begins from one’s dominant social location,” is “an extremely painful process” of “second birth.”⁴⁰ However, by offering it as an option—“most of them may not *want*... but they *can*”—to become traitorous or not, it is a question whether Harding leaves untouched the already prevailing notion that the privileged positions like white, European-/American, heterosexuals, economically over-advantaged, are separate from, and existing independently of the groups such as people-of-color, persons-of-third-world-origin, gays and lesbians, the impoverished, and the like. Despite Harding’s attentiveness to the direct “causal connections between” different social locations, this optional of the “can” in order to become traitorous would leave space for the continued efforts of the “fitter-self” to persist in perceiving the “less fortunate others” as the objects of their missional duty. Moreover, the possibility of this optional could be enlisted to circumvent the call of the other, and instead cursorily address the disenfranchisement of the other without the painfulness of becoming traitorous to one’s own social location, or threatening it in any significant way. It would never occur to those who feel responsible for the “less fortunate other” that, that which makes them the “fitter self” is an effect of the constructed texts, that these texts are sustained through their own active participation, and that these very same texts are in itself responsible for rendering a vast majority as the “less fortunate other.” The duty-driven responsibility that the “fitter-self” feels towards

³⁹ Harding, “Reinventing Ourselves,” 284, 285, 287.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 287.

the “less fortunate other” and the missions that this feeling of responsibility initiates would not subvert the texts that simultaneously generate these two vastly divergent entities or locations of privilege and disprivilege, and the manner in which these texts instantaneously dissimulates the reality of its concomitant productions. For example, the commonplace notion that the “poor were lazy and inferior to the wealthy” who have earned their fortune through a combination of superior intellect and consistent hard work.⁴¹

If this view of separate and independent locations is permitted to be held on to, then the people of privilege would have a choice of whether to take a position and undergo the “second birth” to become the “traitorous other” to their own social locations, or else to just remain passive spectators and enjoy their privileges. However, enjoying the privilege that one did not earn could also be read as an equally dehumanized existence, albeit in an extremely different manner than that dehumanization being suffered by the disprivileged. Hence, it is very much in the interest of their own process of becoming human that the privileged problematize the discourse that bestows them with this dehumanizing ease of receiving unearned deference, opportunities, power, and possessions merely through the accident of birth. Even for those privileged who consider themselves to have earned it, there is an effacement of the social structures that makes it possible for only a few, while systematically placing insurmountable odds before the vast majority of others. This could be the only way the persons of privilege have for working toward their humanness, and hence evolving liberatory knowledge and politics.

⁴¹ Christina Branom, “Perspectives of Social Justice in Sociology,” in *Social Justice and Social Work: Rediscovering a Core Value of the Profession*, ed. Michael J. Austin (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2014), 130.

We do want exactly what Harding is calling for: persons from privileged social locations to be involved in a politics that dismantles their own privilege, and consequently, all that which disadvantages the disprivileged. What we do not want is that this necessary act of becoming human could be taken up as a mission either out of charity or solidarity, or out of self-love that seeks heroism.⁴² The act of becoming human by heeding the call to responsibility could only be wrought by actions that bear witness to the reality that such an act or event is in fact happening. And, this event of bearing witness as the act of becoming human by following the call of the other is that which alone could stay beyond the scope of charity and solidarity of an accomplished or completed “fitter self’s” magnanimity toward a “less fortunate self,” is in effect the deconstruction of the texts that produces these disparate locations. The acts that are currently being carried out as missional charity and solidarity could very much be part of this eventual happening, however not as components that sustain the status quo, but as that which subverts it. The first act of methodically organized charity and solidarity that is being recorded in the Christian Scriptures—the collection for the saints—is devised as a communal act that is happening within the overarching theme of the subversion of the most acute claim to lordship—that of the Caesar, and Paul even presents it as a matter of fair balance of wealth (1 Cor.16:1-4, 2 Cor.8:1-15, Acts 24:17-18).

The act of becoming human in response to the call of the other that could only be begotten through actions that testify to this event’s actuality could alone dispel this

⁴² These acts of charity and solidarity that we critique here is not that which are assembled as part of the efforts that destabilize the supposed solidity or identity of the texts, but that which skillfully circumvent such destabilization and in its place seek to sustain them. It is not that there should not be any alleviation of suffering until the hegemony and dominance of the world is completely turned upside down, but that such efforts be organized as essential components of a process that work toward turning the world upside down, or at the very least, appreciates such a need.

construct of mission that an accomplished or completed entity requiring no necessary change or conversion could carry out as a matter of choice. Hence, the difference we seek from Harding's proposal is that the optional of "can" need to be rearticulated as "ought" or "should" to denote that by this "second birth" alone one embarks on the journey of becoming humans—responding to the other before willing and assuming responsibility, or the act of willing emerging within this response. The notion of distinct discourses or independent/unrelated texts autonomously producing privileged and disprivileged locations lends support to the notion of solidarity that the privileged could offer as a choice of their own, and also as a demonstration of their goodwill, generosity, and charity. The understanding of solidarity as a charity on the part of the privileged, renders it as a cheap act, similar to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's contention of cheap grace, and it sustains the current nongovernmental industry of solidarity not only as an act of choice, but more often than not, as one accompanied with an air of magnanimity that stealthily seeks praise and gratitude from the supposed recipients of the gestures of solidarity.

An analogous understanding in acting solely out of one's choice and of sheer benevolence is also that of certain Christian conceptions, where God did not have to leave the privileged position of heavenly peace, but chose to assume the perils of flesh, and yet did so out of sheer generosity toward humans and for offering them salvation. This understanding of choice of God imparts God like ability on those who are in the position to bestow charity and solidarity on the less fortunate of this world. However, the loving creator God who is being testified in the scriptures as one who hears the cry of the people, could not have had any other way than being in the salvific demonstrations of who God is, and, consequently, who humans could be. Thus, the very revelations of God

are also simultaneous disclosures of and calls to what the Divine requires of humans. The witness of the prophets and that of Jesus Christ is that of the continuous unfolding of the revelation of God as one of love and justice, and humans as capable of deliberately turning their own flesh and blood into palatable and life-affirming food and drink for others.

The concept of *missio* or mission could be sustained only by keeping different locations produced by the same discourse as utterly separate and having nothing to do with each other. This concept of separateness fuels both the industries of charity and solidarity, as poverty could be viewed as a lack of resources of some, rather than a painstakingly designed feature of the political economy, and hence could be addressed by the disposable income or wealth of the privileged without having to problematize how such accumulation of wealth would be possible in the first place. Men could offer solidarity with women's struggles for equality without having to problematize their positions of privilege, and so do the privileged in all such discursive scenarios like race, caste, class, ethnic, sexual orientation, and the like. What mission, charity, and solidarity, informed in and through the understanding of the separateness of locations is that it preserves the world intact without any structural changes, and with very minimal adjustments necessary to both preserve the status quo and yet cosmetically accommodate the voices that deconstruct the hegemonic positions, and thus ensuring that there is no "turning the world upside down" (Acts 17.6).

The shallowness, and the self-serving and status quo sustaining nature of the acts of charity and solidarity are ably demonstrated by the book of Job. Job recounts his own realization of poverty and many forms of injustices, and testifies to his own acts of

benevolence when he had the power and every good fortune to do so, and on his many righteous gestures that upheld justice in relationships between the mighty and the powerless (Job 24-29). Now when he has nothing and has become an object of public derision, Job recognizes that those weak with whom he previously sided with do not sympathize with him, and that they are rather among the ranks of who despise him (Job 30:1-13). Newsom notes that the erstwhile benevolence Job is depicting is paternalistic and very much part of the hierarchical arrangement of societies, and that “social resentment lurks in even benevolent hierarchies, [and thus waiting] to be unleashed, as Job discovers, when a previously high-ranking member of the social order falls on hard times.”⁴³ Also that the “Job’s former solidarity with the poor seems to have evaporated,” when his social standing is diminished. This is the precise point that duty or responsibility that the “fitter self” feels toward the “less fortunate other” is really thin and that it is inherently incumbent on the fitter self’s ability to retain their status intact. Newsom notes that “when one considers what a strong term of contempt the word ‘dog’ itself is,” the “insult becomes breathtaking” (30:1). And, that Job’s concluding determination of his mockers as “persons of no name,” and as those who were “whipped out of the land,” (30:8) reveals the “social-spatial map of Job’s moral world” where the “margins... are filled by the needy who depend on the benevolence and protection of the nobles and whose very dependence is necessary for defining what it means to be a noble in this society.”⁴⁴ The concern we struggle to surface about the acts of charity and solidarity is that until and unless the benefactors problematize their respective “social-

⁴³ Carol A. Newsom, “Job,” in *Women’s Bible Commentary*, Expanded Edition, eds., Carol A. Newsom and Sharon A. Ringe (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 142.

⁴⁴ Newsom, *Book of Job*, 190.

spatial map of the moral worlds,” these actions would serve mostly to reinforce the prevailing cartographies.

Up until now, we have strived to trouble the category of mission that presents itself as an array of actions that an entity performs either for the sake of the other, or to satisfy a presumed mandate, and that which is without any particular stake, or of constitutive benefit or detriment for the performer, and that which would not have any direct impact to the doer’s identity regardless or in spite of whether engaged in a mission or not. The previous and current missional efforts, both in the secular and religious strain, organized around the acts of charity and solidarity could not be any different, as they too invariably points to the hierarchical situation of those who bestow and receives. And this awareness makes it possible to predict when, how, and why the current expressions of solidarity could evaporate when climate change or any other world altering event would strike, or if the recipients would themselves lose faith in this paradigm and forcefully demand justice, and fair and equitable access to resources and opportunities to pursue theirs and their progenies' lives.

What needs to be emphasized, as Harding herself does, is that these social locations of privilege and disprivilege are not separate and independent locations, but produced and sustained by the very same discourse. There are no separate discourses that produce the supposedly upper, lower, and outcaste locations, and there are no two discourses that privilege the communities caught in a situation of racial privilege and disprivilege, or the most prevalent one of all, the patriarchy that patently privileges men and disprivileges women. If oppressive or exclusionary situations are discursively generated, then both the privileged and the disprivileged inhabit the same discourse,

albeit at different social locations of that very same discourse. Hence, *tame* or *traitorous* identities become the only options before both the people of privilege as well as those who are disprivileged.⁴⁵

Even among the disprivileged, persons and groups could remain *tame* by accepting the given positions and not problematizing them, and thus not revolting against the social texts of exclusion, disprivilege, and downright physical suffering. Thus, the optional “can” that Harding’s call offers the privileged for them to become traitorous to their own locations of privilege could end up sustaining the locations of privilege and disprivilege as separate and independent of each other. Moreover, such discretionary acts of becoming deliberately traitorous on the part of the privileged, in my view, is charity, and charity never induces change, and only ensures continuation of the establishment. There could be any number of manifestations and any number of variations in terms of manner and degree in expressing the tame or traitorous identities, but it will be impossible to stay away from embracing either of these possibilities in some fashion. What we seek is to accentuate is Harding’s own understanding of “causal connections” between the locations of privilege and disprivilege, and thus remove the act of becoming traitorous from the voluntary category and position it as a constitutive component of the act of becoming human. It is similar to Spivak’s answer to the question of “[w]hy must we follow the Golden Rule ([as] the basis of human rights):” “because the other calls us.”⁴⁶ Since it is always possible to foreclose this call of the other, as we will see within Spivak’s discussion on “foreclosure” in the next section of this chapter, it is imperative

⁴⁵ The usage of “tame” is not from Harding, and it is used here as an antonym of her terming of “traitorous,” also as a synonym for the notion of “conformist.”

⁴⁶ Spivak, “Righting Wrongs,” 531.

that we remove the act of becoming traitorous from the domain of voluntary choice, and instead elevate it to the status of the “claim to natural or inalienable human rights—rights that all human beings possess because they are human by nature.”⁴⁷

What needs to be further emphasized is that, conforming to a hegemonic discourse or challenging it, are not options before individuals and peoples that they could choose to make or not, as everyone always already find themselves at a particular location of the discourse, as they are thrust into this battle called life.⁴⁸ As we have already noted in the introductory chapter, this argument is similar to Judith Butler’s position that the emergence of the subject invariably happens in and through an act of “‘substitution’ impelled by the other.” Consequently, there are ample possibilities for struggling for liberatory knowledge and politics from both un/underprivileged and privileged locations. The liberatory knowledge and politics so produced from un/underprivileged and privileged locations are not analogous, but they are both in correlation with each other and coalitional in nature, and thus are mutually enabling in helping their comrades in other locations to see beyond the blind spots that every location could invariably have.

Perhaps, the most significant message of the encounter between God and Job could be on the fundamental and natural human desire to have complete resolution and accomplishment of their crucial aspirations in their own lifetimes—of being able to just “take hold of the skirts of the earth, and [have] the wicked be shaken out of it” (Job

⁴⁷ Spivak, “Righting Wrongs,” 527.

⁴⁸ Spivak’s thus outlines the concept of *aporia*: “I use *aporia* to name a situation where there are two right ways that cancel each other and that we, by being agents, have *already marked in one way, with a decision that makes us rather than we it.*” Ibid., 531/572, fn. 35.

38:13). Among the “*disastrous historical failures*” and “depoliticization, or a withering away of political effectivity”⁴⁹ of Marxism, that Derrida observes is that it ended up being an “onto-theological or teleo-eschatological program or design.”⁵⁰ The “*repoliticization* of a certain inheritance from Marx” that Derrida proposes is to “open up access to an affirmative thinking of the messianic and emancipatory promise as promise.”⁵¹ This promise would be “divested of everything which has welded the political to the ontological—in the first place, to a certain conception of the effectivity or present-being of the universal cast in terms of the state, and of cosmopolitical citizenship or the International cast in terms of the Party.”⁵² We would not concur with this proposal of “repoliticization” as a divestment of everything ontological, as without an ontological habitus, no promise could ever be sustained, or handed over to the future generations as their inheritance or bequeathal. It would be similar to the “spiritual not religious” quest of having access to a certain spirit of Christ while simultaneously discarding the institution of the church, as a testimony of Jesus as Christ could be testified and sustained as continuing stream of inheritance only in and through the church. However, we welcome the necessary vigilance that the ontological entity of the church as a clay jar that contain the treasure (2 Cor.4:7) to never end up erecting teleo-eschatological programs, rather than incessantly, faithfully, confidently, and yet humbly testifying to the promise that it providentially receives, or to presuming it in itself to be an ordained vehicle toward a certain eschatological consummation.

⁴⁹ Derrida, “Marx & Sons,” 221. Emphasis original.

⁵⁰ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 94.

⁵¹ Ibid. Emphasis original.

⁵² Derrida, “Marx & Sons,” 221.

We encounter this pursuit or temptation of ontologizing a promise or a critique into teleo-eschatological programs in all overarching missional situations, both religious and secular, and it is epitomized in the missionary/ecumenical slogan “the evangelization of the world in this generation.”⁵³ The issue with the first part of this title, the question of “evangelization of the world,” as in any human missional practices, would meet its eventual problematization and empirical evidential analysis, and they will survive or cease to be according to their inherent merits and continuing worthiness. However, the second part is that which corrupts all human endeavors as they strive to diminish the distance to their exceptionally particular conception of eschatological horizons to the very frame of the lifespan of their proponents. The anguish and moral indignation that Job has through his recognition of the suffering of the innocent is appropriate, sufficiently forceful, thoroughgoing, and necessary to have to be considered as a living human. However, it turns poisonous and potentially disastrous when anyone yearns for complete resolution in his or her own lifetimes and begins evolving programs to attain this end.

As we have already noted above, it is not the teleology or the eschatology that is being challenged, and, it is not even an argument against any teleology that draws its motivation from a particular eschatological vision. What is being problematized is the effort at evolving teleological programs that are supposed to securely lead to a precise eschatological end. Thus the message is to combine the righteous anger with eschatological vision and start working toward resolution within the context of the

⁵³ It was at first the title of a book by John R. Mott, the pioneering ecumenical leader and the key promoter of many ecumenical movements including the World Council of Churches, and later the motto of the first World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, in 1910, of which Mott was the primary proponent. John R. Mott, *The Evangelization of the World in This Generation* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1901).

immediate and most pertinent issue into which one is placed in, and never to define the form and content of an eschatology and thereupon force any particular path to achieve it. Catherine Keller, by problematizing Ernst Bloch's "eschatological fervor"—that draws upon Friedrich Engels' "passage [that] rhapsodically invokes the medieval imagery of the crusade, the apocalyptic final battle, and the pure brotherhood of the warrior-heroes, in a guarantee of the millennial triumph,"—calls "progressives" to "grapple more honestly with the way the metanarratives of an egalitarian, just, and *peaceful* community, from the biblical warrior myth onward, have marched earnestly, sword in hand, into historical horror."⁵⁴ To save us from similar future historical horrors brought about by self-confident missions that are certain of both their teleological apparatus and eschatological destiny, we seek nothing short of keeping teleology separate from eschatology, and to always resist conjoining them into a teleo-eschatology.

Even when a supposedly detached or humble posture of participating in the mission of the Lord or *missio Dei* is being adopted, the end result cannot be different when the content of eschatology and the teleological pathway remains the same as before, or in any case well defined. Not all missionary engagements necessarily combine their teleology with their respective eschatological expectations, however some stream certainly do so, and since the actions are effected under the rubric of mission, the distance between them being insisted as an essential component of an eschatology is not very much removed. The very same actions summoned in order to bear witness to a communion's faith affirmation would not have a similar attachment to the actions themselves, wherein they are insisted upon as indispensable to future attempts at bearing

⁵⁴ Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 184.

witness, as they are only a means to what is being sought to be expressed through those actions. Moreover, no qualitative change is being effected when the content of eschatology remains one particular understanding of the longing that “there will be one flock, one shepherd” (Jn.10:16), when it is being understood singularly through the rubric of overt religious adherence to Christianity by every single person on earth, rather than as a “theonomous” spiritual presence testified through the actions and political positions of humans that announce what they hold as their ultimate concern.⁵⁵ All new concepts like the mission of God or *missio Dei*, could be appropriated to be at the service of what it seeks to redefine. The new found humility of ascribing a model invented by humans on the divine serves only as a blinder/blinker to stay on the very same track, and also as a novel construct that there is no other way than being in this since God thyself is persistently doing just this work alone and the consequent obligation placed upon all Christians (1 Cor.9:16). The meaning of the concepts like “gospel” and “proclamation” are considered to be too self-evident to need any interpretation and or translation, and they are supposed to carry a univocal intent throughout human history and across all geographical terrains. Since the content of eschatology and the way of its arrival is considered to be very well defined from the beginning of the world, a change in conception from the mission of humans to that of God, ushers no necessary change in conduct or character, other than how it is being presented to the self. At best, such a change comes across as an adjustment of strategy, rather than of substance.

Christian theology as an exposition of resources and themes around which the church could author its acts and affirmations to remain faithful to its testimony of Jesus

⁵⁵ For a discussion on spiritual presence as theonomy, see, Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Volume 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1963), 245-282.

Christ, is always brought forth through the conversations with both the context within which act of bearing witness is being carried out, and with the most pertinent theoretical articulations of the times. The non-Christian theoreticians who are pertinent for Christian theology in our discussion around the theme of witness and proclamation are metonymically termed as the Joban tradition, owing to the outsider status of Job within the Hebrew Scriptures. Thus, the Joban tradition is comprised of those who are not Christians by religious affiliation or practice, and yet have significant and indispensable word for Christians as they have rooted their life and work upon these three indispensable messages of restraining violence to the bare minimum required to sustain the discourse between the self and the other, refusing to make any eschatology immanent by way of conceptualization, or by conjuring teleology that is supposed to securely grasp the horizon, and never sidesteps the most pertinent issue before them and rather immerses themselves within it.⁵⁶ Moreover, they are the ones who refuse to consider any present as accomplished or as an end of history, as they accord the present only the status of just another phase in continuing unfolding of the magic of life and history. Everyone who thus strives to keep history open is a conversation partner, and it is only within that conversation could the becoming Christian could emerge in and through their praxis.

This chapter is an effort to account for the theoretical context that complicates the trajectory of the current phase of Christian mission as it has come to be perceived and practiced over the last five centuries—an understanding that holds an *a priori* and eternal

⁵⁶ Catherine Keller offers a significantly different theological reading of the Christian apocalyptic vision presented in the biblical book, “The Revelation to John.” We will explore the resources and directions that Keller is offering in our discussions in chapter 3. See, Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, and also the companion volume by Keller, *God and Power: Counter-Apocalyptic Journeys* (Minnapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005).

transparency about the form and content of Christian proclamation, certainty about the direction or focus of the oppositional orientation of the gospel, thus the addressees of this message, the modes of communication, and above all, the desirable end results.

The contemporary theoretical context could be perceived as one primarily informed by the likes of Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, and Martin Heidegger. All of these philosophers have painstakingly strived to demonstrate that in human history there are only constructions and consequently that there is nothing given or of supernatural inflection. Within Nietzsche's perception of genealogy, everything comes about through a never-ending play of significations where chance and conscious will-to-power perform a crucial role in rendering the process and the meanings thus produced as thoroughly fluid, contingent, and temporal.⁵⁷ In opposition to the "dangerous old conceptual fiction" of a "pure, will-less, painless, [and thus the] timeless knowing subject," Nietzsche holds that there is "*only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective 'knowing'; and [that] the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our 'concept' of this thing, our 'objectivity,' be."⁵⁸ We will begin our mapping of the theoretical context with a postcolonial theorist and then proceed to a couple of other theoreticians whose influence becomes prominent from the second half of twentieth century onwards.

These theoreticians work in different registers and it is not our intent to synthesize them, but to lift up their relevant work where it most directly complicates the conscious

⁵⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, "On The Genealogy of Morals," trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, in *On the Genealogy of Morals & Ecce Homo*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989), 77-78.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 119. (Emphasis original)

efforts at encounter by Christian communities with those beyond its fold. In chapter four, the contributions of these very same theoreticians along with others will be drawn in a constructive conversation with Christian theologians to see whether the Christian testimony could be understood as a witness of God, rather than as one that would have God to be in a perpetual state of mission—the *missio Dei*.

1.2. Foreclosure, Denegation and the Imperative of Civilizing Mission

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a prominent postcolonial theorist, bases her investigations that are relevant to our discussion on the idea of mission, around the concept of “foreclosure,” an idea developed by Jacques Lacan, who in turn is building it upon an analogous understanding found in Sigmund Freud’s works. The basic indication from Freud is that the “ego rejects the incompatible idea together with its affect and behaves as if the idea had never occurred to the ego at all.”⁵⁹ Lacan terms this defense mechanism of the ego, as “foreclosure” as this excluded idea never becomes part of the inscribed chain of signifiers within the ego, as what is being foreclosed is the very act of the inscription of affect. Spivak notes that this “rejection of an affect” brings forth the question of “ethical responsibility (a burden of being human)” to the other, and also that of the act of “encrypting of the name” that shields away the experiences that one cannot willingly encounter. For Spivak, what or who is being rejected or foreclosed in the Western philosophical and ethico-political tradition is the “native informant,” and for her it is “the name of Man—a name that carries the inaugurating affect of being human.”⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Spivak, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 4.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 4-5. Native informant is a term that Spivak borrows from ethnographical practice in anthropology. It is a representative term and also a reminder of the one who lend themselves toward the

She insists that this rejection of affect has previously served and continues to serve as the energetic and successful defense of the “civilizing mission.”⁶¹ The withdrawal of affect happens in two steps: first there is an “internal withdrawal of cathexis” that goes on to manifest itself as a “disavowal of the real external world,” whereby the “the withdrawal of cathexis is also a withdrawal of significance,” from the real world, and thus invention of an imaginary world.⁶² In Lacan’s conception of foreclosure, “what has been foreclosed from the Symbolic reappears in the Real,” or else, “the Real is or carries the mark of the expulsion.”⁶³ Spivak notes that the “native informant” is the “name for that mark of expulsion from the name of Man—a mark crossing out the impossibility of ethical relation.”⁶⁴ Impossibility is that which underscores the simultaneity of necessity and unachievable character of what needs to be sought, and yet that which forever eludes the complete grasp of the seekers.⁶⁵

Spivak tracks the native informant in Kant’s *The Critique of Judgment*, beginning with the section “Analytic of the Sublime,” and notes that in Kant’s view, each step beginning with the “experience of the beautiful,” to the “moment of the Sublime” occurs

production of the text, yet never capable of any self-inscription and usually being inscribed upon by the ethnographers. *Ibid.*, 6. On the “inaugurating affect of being human,” it would be helpful to recall the discussion on the encounter with the other and of response in Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).

⁶¹ Spivak, *Critique*, 5.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶⁵ Spivak holds that the, “Necessary but impossible tasks—like taking care of health although it is impossible to be immortal; or continuing to listen, read, write, talk, and teach, although it is impossible that everything be communicated—lead to renewed and persistent effort.” And that, “This is distinct from the ‘utopian mode,’ which allows us to figure the impossible.” Spivak, “Righting Wrongs,” fn. 53, 537/575.

as a part of the programming—*Analge*—of the very nature of humans to feel inadequacy in every step and then going on supplementing the lack through reason. The subjects attaining rational will encounters their own inability in sensing the Sublime as there could never be a full experience of the Sublime. There is a pleasure derived in this very awareness of inadequacy, and thus consequent arousal of “our supersensible determination,” leads to the moment of the Sublime by way of supplementation of what is always beyond its reach. Spivak notes that, for Kant, the “freedom as the pleasure of reason exercising dominion over sensibility” and that of the “human access to rational will” appears to be “structured like [a] programmed supplementation of a structurally necessary lack.”⁶⁶ This supplementation is achieved through “troping”—beauty, rational will, freedom, and finally the feeling of sublime as something that is actually being experienced, are all achieved through the trope of these very same concepts that do not have any tangible existence other than as tropes. The feeling of the sublime requires “receptivity” and even though it is part of the natural “programming,” it could only be actualized by or in culture. Even among those humans who live within the cultural terrain, some like the poor and the children are not yet trained or educated enough to have this receptivity, while women are “uneducable.” But for the raw human—the savage and the primitive—who is beyond the reach of culture, the nature could only be encountered as frightful and thus as a terror. This lack of the raw human “must be corrected through culture.” But this “civilizing mission” of imparting culture sets itself to failure because of Kant’s own contention that even though the “judgment upon the sublime in nature *needs* culture...it is not ...primarily *produced* by culture...It has its foundation in human

⁶⁶ Spivak, *Critique*, 11.

nature...in the tendency to the feeling for (practical) ideas, i.e., to the moral.”⁶⁷ Spivak notes that “it is not possible to *become* cultured in this culture, if you are *naturally* alien to it,”⁶⁸ and also that the “raw man (*sic*) has not yet achieved or does not possess a subject whose *Analge* or programming includes the structure of feeling for the moral.”⁶⁹

In the next step of the “Critique of Teleological Judgment,” in order to answer the question of “why it is necessary that men should exist,” Kant terms the alien as “New Hollanders or the inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego” and points to the sheer inessentiality of the whole race—“such a thing is then not even a natural purpose; for its entire species is not to be regarded as a natural product.”⁷⁰ Spivak notes that if the New Hollanders (the Australian Aborigine) and the man from Tierra del Fuego were “endowed with speech (turned into subject of speech),” then they would have certainly supplemented reason as a statement of their own situation and could have effected a change in Kant’s position—just as it is in every step of Kant’s *Critique* that is being built on a series of supplementations by way of troping or metalepsis.⁷¹ The New Hollanders did actually name themselves as “*Kaweskar*, the people,”⁷² and Kant never investigated in order to be aware of it, but only sought to foreclose beforehand. For Spivak, it is the “axiomatics of imperialism as a natural argument to indicate the limits of the cognition of (cultural)

⁶⁷ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, 105. Quoted in Spivak, *Critique*, 12. Emphasis original.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*, n. 32, p. 29.

man.”⁷³ Kant is actually calling forth the native informant, not to grant speech, but to foreclose so that a West or a Europe could be defined as the norm for being human, or as archetype of being human. This is the encryption of the name that Spivak was alluding to as the name of the native informant, as the “name of man” is encrypted within the sole subject (Europe) that is thought out to be. The effect of this encryption is that the supposed sole subject can neither have a proper name because of its bearing this encrypted name within itself, and nor there can be an ethical relationship between this singular subject (Europe) and the one who carries the “name of man” and who is forever foreclosed—the native informant.

Sufficient attention is required to account for this “aporia between the discontinuous texts of the raw man and the subject as such” and the ever-present “axiomatics of imperialism,” that sustains these texts as separate and incapable of relating to each other.⁷⁴ Neither a mere reversal between the master and the native informant is possible, as the “complicity between native hegemony and the axiomatics of imperialism” is also an interminable presence. In every native situation, there are hegemonic and dominant forces that achieve their ruling status exactly by enlisting analogous attempts at foreclosure, and over there, the status of the native informant transfers to the subalterns within the native communities. Spivak in an interview in 2007, notes the danger of the concept of “native informant” being “illegitimately usurped by the upwardly mobile metropolitan migrant as the postcolonial,” and thus for us, this possibility of usurpation points to the need of maintaining the notion of native informant

⁷³ Spivak, *Critique*, 26.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

as an abstract concept that unsettles the foreclosures, and never as identifiable entities.⁷⁵

Thus, the only way to strive for ethical relationships is by having persistent deconstruction to dis-close every attempt at the foreclosure of the native-informant or the subaltern, and to be vigilant about the imperialistic impulses that invariably arise, and that which lurks behind as an omnipresent possibility in every human situation. This deconstruction is not a benign reading of the texts, but an acute attention to the history of axiomatics that define any text, and thus a disruption of the axiomatics in itself, as Spivak, drawing upon Derrida, calls for this necessary deconstructive vigilance:

“The armchair deconstructor, decentering his or her subject at will, ‘denies the [prior] axiomatics *en bloc* and keeps it going as a survivor, with minor adjustments *de rigueur* and daily compromises lacking in rigor. So coping, so operating at top speed, one accounts for the reasons to continue assuming responsibilities without a concept.’”⁷⁶

Spivak trains her deconstructive lens next onto Hegel’s writing on “Bhagavad Gita” as it is popularly known, or the “Srimadhbhagavadgita,”—the full name by which Hegel records it. Spivak’s thesis in this section revolves around the concept of the

⁷⁵ Yan Hairong, “Position without Identity: An Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak,” *positions: east Asia culture critique* 15, no. 2, (Fall 2007): 444.

⁷⁶ Spivak, *Critique*, 324. It would be helpful to read Derrida’s quote in full on maintaining sufficient attention and vigilance in deconstructive inhabitation:

“For us, however, most often and in a manner still dominant, the discourse of responsibility makes an appeal, in a mode we find tautological, to a pure ethico-juridical agency, to pure practical reason, to a pure idea of the law, and correlatively to the *decision* of pure egological subject, of a consciousness, of an intention that has to respond, in decidable terms, from and before the law. On this I do insist: it is thus for us most often and most prevailingly, though the bond is not indissoluble for all eternity. It is not natural, it has a history. One can doubtless imagine dissolving responsibility’s value by relativizing, secundarizing or deriving the effect of subjectivity, consciousness or intentionality; one can doubtless decenter the subject, as is easily said, without retesting the bond between, on the one hand, responsibility, and, on the other, freedom of subjective consciousness or purity of intentionality. This happens all the time and is not altogether interesting, since nothing in the prior axiomatics is changed: one denies the axiomatics *en bloc* and keeps it going as a survivor, with minor adjustments *de rigueur* and daily compromises lacking rigor. So coping, so operating at top speed, one accounts and becomes accountable for nothing: not for what happens, not for the reasons to continue assuming responsibilities without a concept.” Jacques Derrida, “Mochlos, of The Conflict of the Faculties,” trans. Richard Rand, Amy Wygant, in *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2*, trans. Jan Plug, et.al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2004), 90-91.

sequential time that is being fleshed out with discontinuous events and happenings as “timing” onto a Graph of “Time” that tracks the movement of Law within a given society. For Hegel, an ideally evolved art should reveal the “adequate relationship between sign (spirit) and meaning (knowledge),” and the form (*Gestalt*) of Indian art as expressed in the Gita is “perceived (by the *Geist* as subject, not Indian individuals) to be [as being] separate from meaning.”⁷⁷ Thus Hegel holds that the “Indian art cannot supersede or sublimate the contradiction between shape and meaning.” Spivak reading of the Gita demonstrates her thesis that “Time graphed as [the movement of] Law manipulates history seen as timing (events/happenings) in the interest of cultural political explanations, both in Hegelian and the high Hindu contexts.”⁷⁸

Spivak’s reading of Gita reveals a negation of the lineage based society where the “killing of blood kin is forbidden,” to an affirmation of a “political intervention where killing [anyone] becomes a metonym for action.”⁷⁹ For Hegel, the argument emphasizing the indestructibility of the soul is a “monotonous argument,” but for Spivak this argument of the becomes one crucial device through which the lineage system is sublated into Statehood where the allegiance is sought to more abstract sense of solidarity, laws and principles, rather than to bloodlines. Also crucial to Spivak’s reading is that, it is only after these movements within the text of Gita the notion of castes could be introduced and called by their proper names. What Spivak strives to demonstrate is that that both “Hegel” and “Gita” could be “read as rather two different versions of the manipulation of

⁷⁷ Derrida, “Mochlos,” 41.

⁷⁸ Spivak, *Critique*, 43.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

the question of history in a political interest, for the apparent disclosure of the Law.”⁸⁰ Spivak reads Hegel’s rejection of Gita as a “denegation,”—a “negative judgment” that is the “intellectual substitute for repression that [which] reveals a certificate of origin,”—that produces the “repressed certificate of origin: ‘Made in (or for—effect or condition) Capitalism.’”⁸¹ Spivak sees this rejection or denegation as a “parody of the foreclosure in Kant.”

Spivak also does a reading of the Indian nationalist writings on Gita and shows how the nationalist project becomes a “displaced or reversed legitimation of colonialism,” and as a “displacement” of what she has “metonymically named as ‘Hegel.’” Spivak points out that “neither the colonial, nor the postcolonial subject inhabits the (im)possible⁸² perspective of the native informant or the implied contemporary receiver... ‘Hegel’ is refracted into the colonial subject.”⁸³ Moreover, Spivak cautions that an uncritical “celebration of the “hybrid,” that inadvertently legitimizes the “pure by reversal,” and insists that “there is no *historically* available authentic Indian point of view that can now step forth and reclaim its rightful place in the narrative of world history.”⁸⁴ And also that an “unquestioning privileging of the migrant

⁸⁰ Spivak, *Critique*, 58. Spivak does not take note of the fact that the Law as in caste system that is being disclosed in the Gita does not bind caste to one’s birth, but only to human qualities. It is true that these human qualities understood as an essence of a person, and when coupled with the notion of rebirths, could lead to a notion of caste by biological lineage. Yet, Gita leaves space for an interpretation of caste where it is not linked to birth, and wherein a person born within Shudra lineage could very well become a Brahmin by virtue of his/her demonstrated qualities and achievements in life and vice versa.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁸² (im)possible is putting the word “impossible” under erasure to reveal the aporia and the reality of the intimate simultaneity of both the necessity and the difficulty realizing a possibility.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁸⁴ This observation of Spivak is not necessarily a critique of Homi Bhabha per se, as Bhabha enlists the concept of hybridity to reveal the constructed character of all entities. However, this concept

may also turn out to be a figure of the effacement of the native informant.”⁸⁵ By these readings and ample cautions she is offering, Spivak is alluding to the reality that all writing is in some way “Hegel,”—the effort to manipulate lived time as in timing into the Graph of Time as Law. And thus the possibility that most texts could have within it many foreclosures and denegations in order to establish a binary of self and other that could save or shield the subject of the text from the burden of ethical engagement with the other and organize the life of subject as if there never was an encounter with an other worth reckoning. These insights from Spivak throw significant light on some of the assumptions that marked the beginning of the modern missionary movement, and even to some extent as a latent presence in the current efforts at keeping that movement thriving. Next, we examine some of the Christian attempts at foreclosure.

1.2.1. Christian Efforts at Foreclosure and Denegation

The deliberate efforts at evaluating and assigning value to other religious traditions at the ecumenical level officially began at the first World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910. The work of the Edinburgh conference’s Commission IV entitled the “Missionary message in relation to non-Christian religions,” testifies to the status of objective evaluation of other religions by a cross-section of Christian leaders of that generation. Along with more than two hundred respondents who were mostly Western missionaries working across Asia, the eminent missionary leaders

often understood as analogous to an alloy wherein more than one essential element come together to form a compound. Even Spivak’s concept of “Native Informant,” is often simplistically perceived as a representative of the migrant community. Spivak, *Critique*, 62. Emphasize in original.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 18.

from India, like C. F Andrews, J. N. Farquhar, A.G. Hogg, Pandita Ramabai, and others provided their input to the Fourth Commission. This commission sought to figure out what was “really alive in the non-Christian religions, what had the power of keeping men back from Christ, or of preparing the way for faith in Him.” The report of the fourth commission is remarkable in its depth in considering other religions and the challenges it poses to the spread of Christianity. Before the inculturation efforts were conceived late in the nineteen-sixties, this report from 1910, quotes A. G. Hogg’s contention that what we need is not “simply Christianity in India, but an Indian Christianity.” The concluding remarks of the report goes on to affirm that Hinduism could help enhance the Christian conception of the Kingdom of God to be extended to encompass not just the “inward deliverance from the power of sin, but [also the] ultimate deliverance from everything that cripples and depresses the entire life of man.” This conception of all dimensions of sin could now be seen as a precursor to the liberation theologies, and the quest to learn from other religions could be seen as a forerunner of field of various theologies of religions that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century.

Johan Herman Bavinck, a Dutch missionary and theologian who had an active involvement in the first half of the twentieth century, notes that when reading the report of the Commission IV, “one is struck by the positive reports on other religions from some of the missionaries.” Bavinck lifts up sympathetic testimonies from the Commission IV report as in “a missionary working among a particular tribe stated he had found real ‘God-seekers’ among them; a missionary from China commented on the many points where Buddhism touches Christianity; another missionary pronounced one form of Japanese Buddhism ‘wonderfully like Christianity;’ and a missionary from India thought

that “a sympathetic mind will find very much in Hindu religious ideas which anticipates fuller expression in Christianity.”⁸⁶ Also noted is that there were “some missionaries... [who] did not want to identify ‘elements of truth’ in other religious systems,” and that, “as a whole, the delegates at the Edinburgh Conference were inclined to recognize a true search for God in non-Christian religions, but their final conclusions were formulated carefully with the concerns of each particular missionary’s perspective in mind.”⁸⁷

Similar positive recognition by missionaries who had open encounters with Hindus and Buddhists, were made at the International Missionary Council meeting in 1928, in Jerusalem. A missionary who have lived in China observed that the “Buddhist monks may give to the Christian Church something of the wonderful treasures which Christ as the Eternal Logos has bestowed upon them through Buddhism.”⁸⁸ After tracking the positions taken by many missionaries at the Edinburgh and Jerusalem meetings, Bavinck calls Christians to recognize that since almost all religions have mythical accounts for a paradise lost, it need to be considered as “memory of God’s revelation within humanity,” and thus “must not exclude the possibility that they (the religions) may have been affected by a certain influx of special revelation.” Also, that the “non-Christian religions are not void of special revelation but that special revelation may have influenced these other religions as they developed.”⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Johan Herman Bavinck, *The J.H. Bavinck Reader*, eds. John Bolt, James D. Bratt, and Paul J. Visser (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 101.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 105-106.

In a comprehensive study on Christian encounter with Hindu religion, Wesley Ariarajah tracks the history of interreligious engagement between them, and through it the related Christian theological understandings informing its trajectory spanning the twentieth century.⁹⁰ In his survey of the report of the Commission IV, Ariarajah provides evidence, that most missionaries who served among the Hindus offered appreciative remarks on many of the Hindu practices and the theology that informs them. The missionary respondents to the Commission IV's questionnaire emphasized the many core conceptions and characteristics of Hindu life, as in the "spiritual view of life," the "conception of oneness of God," of "incarnation," of the devotion to God as in "*Bhakti* and *Bhaktimarga*," the grace of God, and salvation as the intimate and ultimate "union with God."⁹¹ Evaluating the testimonies given by the respondents, the Commission IV noted that there are "'profound and vital truths' hidden in Hinduism," and that "no other non-Christian religion approaches this in the gravity or in the depth of its endeavors after God."⁹² Ariarajah notes that in placing the encounter with Hindu religion at par with the early church encounter with the Greco-Roman world and its religions and philosophy, the Commission had already moved from the prevailing notion that of "Christian faith replacing other faiths or of fulfilling them."⁹³ In addressing the understanding of "inner nature of the religious aspiration of man (sic)," the Commission posed the question for itself whether Christians have fully understood the implications of Holy Spirit in the lives

⁹⁰ Wesley Ariarajah, *Hindus and Christians: A Century of Protestant Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 22.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 24; fn.24, pp. 23-24.

of humans, and beyond the regular trinitarian understanding of having Spirit's place and activity confined to the "life of God."⁹⁴ Ariarajah notes the openness that the Commission demonstrated in "listening and learning about other faiths," without any judgment of them for mere prevalence of undesirable social aspects, and its positive view of the doctrines and beliefs of other faiths. The implication he draws from the report is that there was a "realization of some inadequacies of the way Christian understandings of the nature of reality, human life, ultimate goals, etc., were formulated," and that this view would necessitate "a positive attitude to, and life with, people of other faiths."⁹⁵

By the time of the Jerusalem meeting in 1928, the new awareness of the teachings and practices of other religions and the onslaught of rationalism and secularism in the West presented Christianity with strange allies in other religions. The statement of the Jerusalem conference affirmed the "values" in other religions and held that the challenge to Christianity was primarily from secularism and not from other religious traditions. The Jerusalem statement called upon Christians to show loving-kindness to Jews, and observed that the noble quality in other religions as the proof that God has left no place without a witness, and to recognize other religions as part of the one Truth that sense the Majesty of God and the consequent reverence in worship, and above all for the desire of ethical living. In place of the motif of unilateral conversion, the conference called the adherents of non-Christian religions to join Christians in the study of Jesus Christ and asked Christians to join hands with other religions to stem the tide of secularism.⁹⁶ These

⁹⁴ Ariarajah, *Hindus and Christians*, 26.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁹⁶ Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope, ed., *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 394-395.

calls of the Jerusalem conference was not without controversy and many participants raised the issue of “syncretistic thinking” and saw the meeting’s thrust as a way to form a “universal religion”. Moreover, many found the interest in studying Asian religions as undermining the task of Christian mission solely focused on conversion.

With regard to Hindu religion, the meeting held it deficient of “ethical passion,” and observed that if it let Christ into it, the Hindu religion could gain what it lacks in moral zeal. Surprisingly enough, the statement makes a claim similar to that of Karl Rahner’s conception of “anonymous Christ,” long before it was being formally theologized, even if not in the exact way, as Rahner do not claim that other religions or their adherents will recognize or acknowledge it: “If Hinduism will let Christ enter within its ancient walls, then it will be found that he is no stranger, but one who has sojourned there before and who will find within it those who will recognize His Lordship and set him upon its throne.”⁹⁷ Lamin Sanneh considers Jerusalem 1928 as the starting point of the views like that of the “Last Judgment not as the end of the world but as the summons to social justice, and everlasting life not as blissful, deathless existence beyond time and space, but a free, prosperous, and happy life here and now.”⁹⁸ Thus, the two sets of issues, first of interfaith engagement, and the second of the necessity of Christian involvement in social and political issues were addressed at length and affirmed at Jerusalem 1928.

⁹⁷ Jerusalem Meeting Report, (London: Oxford, 1928), 41. Quoted in Ariarajah, *Hindus and Christians*, 40.

⁹⁸ Lamin Sanneh, “Should Christianity be Missionary? An Appraisal and an Agenda,” *dialog: A Journal of Theology* 40, no. 2 (2001): 92.

The next International Missionary Council meeting in 1938, at Tambaram, India, became a stage to conclusively address all the growing awareness of many other religions and the positive evaluation they were receiving within the missionary circles in particular and within the wider church communions across the world. Hendrik Kraemer, a Dutch missiologist, working as a missionary in Indonesia since 1922, was tasked by the meeting organizers to especially produce a “book on evangelism in the modern world, with special reference to the non-Christian religions.”⁹⁹ Kraemer’s book entitled *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, was in effect a missiological explication of the theology of Karl Barth. It served as the basis of conversations at Tambaram, called to embrace a “divine realism” that anchored upon the twin themes of God as the wholly other, whose revelation is available to humans only by way of self-revelation, and of “Biblical realism” where the “essential message and content of the Bible is always the Living, eternally-active God, the indubitable Reality, from whom, by whom all things are.”¹⁰⁰ This Biblical realism of Kraemer thus denies any claim for “continuity” between what is commonly understood as natural revelation available to all contemplative minds regardless of time and space, and the special revelation made available only in Christ. Thus, the “values” of non-Christian religions that were affirmed by Jerusalem 1928, and the revelation of God in Jesus Christ are in radical “discontinuity.”¹⁰¹ Kraemer concluded

⁹⁹ Richard J. Plantinga, “Missionary Thinking about Religious Plurality at Tambaram 1938: Hendrik Kraemer and His Critics” in *The Changing Face of Christianity, Africa, the West, and the World*, eds. Lamin Sanneh and Joel A. Carpenter, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 163.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 164-165.

¹⁰¹ The notion of “discontinuity” is based upon the contention that revelation is available only in the special events of God’s self-disclosure, and, since the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is the only such source of self-disclosure, there is no other source by which humans could know or follow God. Thus, “discontinuity” is not a simple contradiction arising out of an error of judgment in respective appreciations of the equally available experiences of revelation (as in general revelation), but the total

that Hinduism was “devoid of a truly transcendental understanding of God, [and is thus] basically naturalistic, monistic, and eudaemonistic,” and by insisting upon Christian discontinuity with other religions, he succeeded in his assigned task of “putting mission theology back on its rails”¹⁰² Ariarajah holds that the “deepest disappointment at Tambaram was its failure to pick up the lines of thought presented by the Edinburgh meeting’s Commission IV.”¹⁰³

Ever since Tambaram 1938, the position of Kraemer put Christianity and other religions in an unbridgeable “discontinuity.” In effect, Tambaram initiated a systematic and conscious effort of “foreclosure” and “denegation” of the affect that the prevalence of other religious traditions had begun to impart on to Christian consciousness. It thus transformed the communions to continue organizing its missional efforts without ever being affected by the presence of other religious traditions. Since then, the question of addressing the issue of the theological significance of the presence of other religious traditions got thoroughly separated from the overall discussion of Christian engagement with the world. The acknowledgement and evaluation of other religious traditions, the mission enterprise primed at securing religious conversion of non-Christian others to Christianity, and the other forms of social involvements, the ones organized around seeking justice, development, and relief work, all travel in parallel tracks. It remains so, even when each separate path would be magnanimous enough to customarily acknowledge the necessity of integrating the other facets of engagement. It could be

inaccessibility of revelation outside God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ, as any other claim to special revelation is unsustainable.

¹⁰² Ariarajah, *Hindus and Christians*, 71, 85.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 88.

argued that even when the mission enterprise embraces other aspects of social involvements, they are often perceived as an aid, or at worst as a mask, for the actual intention of gaining persons for the faith.

There have been many developments in engagement with other religious traditions, and interreligious dialogue has become an important and very much permanent feature at both the ecumenical level from WCC onwards, and for the individual communions and their congregations. Yet, the effort is also to hold on to the model of conversion and church planting that emerged out of the missionary movement and give it current expressions as in short-term missions.¹⁰⁴ The Commission on World Mission and Evangelism meeting in 1989, at San Antonio, Texas, invited adherents of other faith traditions as consultants and the major question before the meeting was Christian engagement with people of other faiths. The consensus that made San Antonio conference famous is that “We cannot point to any other way of salvation than Jesus Christ; at the same time we cannot put any limit to God’s saving power. There is a tension between these affirmations which we acknowledge and cannot resolve.” Thus, the San Antonio statement did demonstrate a certain amount of magnanimity through its willingness to let God have the freedom to choose other salvific vehicles besides that which the church testifies to in Jesus Christ. However, since there is no necessary acknowledgement of the possibility of persons and communities leading salvific lives by following different religious paths, there is not much difference between the “discontinuity” that Kraemer insisted in 1938, and the “tension” that Christians continues to experience in 1989. Thus, even after fifty years of living and working together with

¹⁰⁴ Among many available resources, see, Brian M. Howell, *Short-Term Mission: An Ethnography of Christian Travel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012).

other religious communions, and that too in a radically changed world, Christians still find it difficult to conclusively end their act of foreclosure, and confidently announce that it is not the affirmations that count, but the affects that the affirmations would engender (Lk.10:25-37; Rom.2:5-11).¹⁰⁵

As we have already delineated above, the persons and communities could only continue to strive becoming whoever they claim to be becoming, and this act of continuous becoming is an act of bearing witness to oneself. Every single person and community are always in the middle of such acts of bearing witness to themselves, and these acts could in itself be in a certain degree of agreement or variance from their professed beliefs and commitments. These acts of bearing witness to themselves are constantly being seen, observed, or witnessed by other persons and communities who are being present at these sites of self's acts of witnessing. The persons or communities trying to bear witness to themselves, or striving to sustain a faith in and through their actual acts of endeavoring to continue becoming whomever they claim to be becoming, would have no control on how their acts would be seen, perceived, or received by those who observe or are present at those sites of bearing witness or becoming. The event of Jesus of Nazareth never received sufficient understanding that it is indeed a witness of God, even from those close companions and fellow travellers until the Pentecost, and even then, such a determination eluded the majority of those who were directly present at the sites of Jesus' testimony. Thus, it is always a struggle to elicit a faithful testimony or

¹⁰⁵ Affects are sought, not because we unambiguously know that we would always or only have life sustaining and nurturing influences, but that faith in itself is an act, and that no faith could be sustained without acts. And we are in total agreement with Karl Barth's caution: However "[n]otable our *works* may be; but we must not over-estimate them, we must not raise them to the order of infinity. God alone is the merchant who can pay in the currency of eternity. He alone can make valuation which is eternally valid." Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (New York: Oxford, 1968), 61-62.

witness from every other who is present at the sites of self's acts of bearing witness to themselves. A faithful witness or testimony by the other on self's attempts at bearing witness to themselves is sewn together within the matrix of self's struggle to seek and obtain a just hearing of their efforts, and the other's rigorous evaluation of the same and finally their charitable gesture of conferring such a testimony. The best efforts of the self in bearing witness to themselves, that are being consistently evaluated by the other as of no particular life-affirming value of loving God and neighbor, would become acts of foreclosure and denegation, and that which would amount to bearing false witness against one's neighbor (Ex.20:16).

The most recent mission document entitled *Together Towards Life* by the Commission on Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches include a number of issues and avenues of involvement that the present times demand, and also a strict code of conduct for the conversion efforts of the Church. Yet, the long menu of mission possibilities and directives given in this Statement are still poured into the old wineskin of mission theology that lends itself to bearing false witness of the faith experience of our neighbors. The old wineskin is made out of the continuing assertions that "witness (martyria) takes concrete form in evangelism—the communication of the whole gospel to the whole of humanity in the whole world," and also that "evangelism is the outflow of hearts that are filled with love of God for those who do not yet know him."¹⁰⁶ A century after the Edinburgh conference, Christians are ever more aware of the spiritual lives of our religious neighbors and also sense that there is hardly anyone without knowledge of the divine or transcendence. Yet, the doctrinal conceptions prevent

¹⁰⁶ WCC, *Together Towards Life*, 29.

them from confidently acknowledging it. Ariarajah observes that the act of bearing false witness of our neighbors of other religious faith continues through the “inability [of the church] to make a genuine theological affirmation of God’s presence and activity in the ‘world,’ which would mean, in the Sri Lankan context, that one would affirm God’s presence in the lives and activities of Buddhists, Hindus, and others.”¹⁰⁷

The foremost of all the successes of the modern mission enterprise that emerged and gathered steam from the sixteenth century onwards is that it was able to retroactively frame every aspect of Christian life, especially the scripture and theology as quintessentially mission initiatives. From bible translations to theological documents, every aspect of giving a testimony of faith is cast as mission and missionary in the mold of the modern mission movement. It is impossible to read both the New Testament in itself and its commentaries without encountering the word “mission” attached to many sections of the text, and every single one of them is a retroactive gesture of naming everything as “mission” that remotely resembles the modern mission enterprise.¹⁰⁸ It could be seen as a natural response of the scholars and theologians who are continued to be trained under the canopy of the missionary movement, even when deliberately disagreeing with the conversion aspect of it, would consider any outreach and everything resembling the modern mission movement as mission or missionary. A particular

¹⁰⁷ S. Wesley Ariarajah, “Do Not Remember the Former Things: Rethinking Christian Witness in Our Day,” in *Witnessing in Context: Essays in Honor of Eardley Mendis*, eds., Monica J. Melanchthon, George Zachariah (Tiruvalla, India: Christava Sahitya Samithi, 2007), 39.

¹⁰⁸ For example, beginning with the section in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 10, verses 5 to 15, that receives the title, “The Mission of the Twelve,” in “The Harper Collins Study Bible,” there are at least four sections within the Gospels that get termed under the rubric of mission. Moreover, there are many references to mission and missionaries in the study resources that accompany the books in the New Testament. See, *The Harper Collins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books with Concordance. A New Annotated Edition by the Society of Biblical Literature*. Edited by Harold W. Attridge et al. New York: Harper One, 2006.

retroactive reading¹⁰⁹ of the Acts of the Apostles in light of the modern missionary movement, one that termed its attempt as triumphal conquest and occupation,¹¹⁰ could only cast the entire Christian history as one of progressive conquest.¹¹¹ It is hard to fathom whether the pre-Constantine church had that kind of power as that of the colonial enterprise within which the modern missionary movement emerged and flourished. The model that emerged within colonial framework is actually being superimposed onto the pre-Constantine church onwards, and especially to the experience expressed within the New Testament.

It is debatable whether the word “mission” is appropriate for the first act of the twelve disciples (Mt.10:5-15), and also that of the seventy (Lk.10:1-12) being sent to the Israelite towns, and whether they could be counted as mission in the modern sense.¹¹² The command to stay away from the Gentile and Samaritan towns, or the Jewish mission is in itself being read by many Matthean scholars as the key to understanding the

¹⁰⁹ For an example of a different reading of the Acts of Apostles, see, Wesley Ariarajah, “Witness and Dialogue,” and “Witnessing in Dialogue,” in *The Bible and People of Other Faiths* (Geneva: WCC, 1985), 39-47, and 48-58.

¹¹⁰ For example, from John R. Mott’s concluding address to the Edinburgh conference: “The end of the conference is the beginning of the conquest.” Kinnamon and Cope, *Ecumenical Movement*, 10. Among many possible similar titles, see, James Mills Thoburn, *The Christian Conquest of India*. (New York: Young People’s Missionary Movement. 1906).

¹¹¹ In the next chapter, we will have an extensive examination of this act of retrojection, wherein everything that resembles the modern mission movement receives the determination of being the early attempts at mission, and thus the basis for the argument that along with apostolicity, mission in this particular template is an inalienable component that defines the Christian church.

¹¹² Gred Theissen, a German New Testament scholar observes: “Jesus movement was a renewal movement internal to Judaism. It was addressed to all Jewish congregations and originally had no interest in forming groups separate from Judaism. It is thus a misunderstanding to speak of primitive Christian communities in the earliest period.” Also, on the question of why Paul left the house of Aquila and Priscilla, and moved to Titus Justus’ house that is “next door to the synagogue” (Acts 18:7), could be perceived as that the “synagogue probably occupied a central location by virtue of which it would have been propitious for Pauline mission.” Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth*, ed. and trans. John H. Schutz (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 28, 90.

concluding verses of the Gospel that have come to know as the Great Commission. Some of these efforts read the general focus of the Gospel with Isaiah 56:1-8 as key, and thus present the Great Commission as an expansion of the mission to Israel and not a replacement of the same. We will look at some of these texts in the next chapter.¹¹³ The conversion called for in these cases is from one particular witness within the Jewish tradition, to another one within the very same faith, a witness that Jesus and disciples were demonstrating and thus inviting others as something that is worthy enough for their embrace. Even the travels by Apostle Paul, termed as his “missionary journeys,” in bible translations and theological works, are also primarily to the Jewish diaspora spread across the Greco-Roman world, and that again is a presentation of a witness of being Jewish differently, and not a call to conversion from one religion to another.¹¹⁴ Regarding early Christian emergence soon after the apostolic period, W.H.C. Frend, an Anglican priest and church historian, whose expertise includes the Donatist movement, and martyrdom and persecution in the early church, writes:

The story of the church’s mission in this period, however, is obscure. In the Pauline period, we can see missionaries at work, such as Paul preaching in the school of Tyrannus at Ephesus and the mission of Epaphras to Colossae. *Now there is silence about such persons and even the details of the message or kerygma they proclaimed. All we know is that missions went on.* First, the synoptic Gospels and Acts are themselves missionary documents. They contain detailed accounts of Jesus’s instructions to his disciples, and all end on a

¹¹³ For example, see, Benjamin L. White, “The Eschatological Conversion of ‘All the Nations’ in Matthew 28.19-20: (Mis)reading Matthew through Paul,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 36, issue 4 (2014): 353-382; Anders Runesson, “Was there a Christian Mission before the Fourth Century?: Problematizing Common Ideas about Early Christianity and the Beginnings of Modern Mission,” in *The Making of Christianity: Conflicts, Contacts, and Constructions: Essays in honor of Bengt Holmberg*, eds. Magnus Zetterholm and Samuel Byrskog (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 205-248.

¹¹⁴ Andrew F. Walls maintains: “For one brief, but vital, period, Christianity was entirely Jewish. The Christians of the first generation were all Jews—diverse, perhaps in background and outlook, Hebraist and Hellenist, conservative and liberal—but *without the slightest idea that they had ‘changed their religion’ by recognizing Jesus as Messiah.*” Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 16. Emphasis added.

missionary note. The disciples were commanded to preach Christ crucified everywhere “beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47; cf. Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15) and are recorded as doing so (Mark 16:20). Acts continues the theme by stating that the disciples would be the Lord’s witnesses “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (1:8).¹¹⁵

Thus, there is an acknowledged “silence” regarding any mission activity of the kind of the modern mission model after the apostolic era, and many of the mission history texts including the one by David Bosch¹¹⁶ do recognize it. The “silence” is thereafter being retroactively filled in from the point of view of the modern missionary movement that emerged and flourished since the sixteenth century, and from a belief that there cannot be any other way of inviting persons and communities to embrace a religious tradition. Frend’s assertion that “all we know is that missions went on,” points only to the belief promoted by some of the church historians and mission theologians alike, that there is only one way, and one way alone to gather adherents for religions and it is the one that had come to be established within the modern mission movement. Hence, the simple equation of if there are Christians, then there must have been mission.¹¹⁷ The presence of Christians in itself is debatable, as there could have been only Jewish and non-Jewish followers of Christ. The readily available resources to fill in the “silence” are the instructions for the itinerant preachers in the early Christian text of “Didache,” and thereupon reading the emergence and prevalence of the monastic movements across

¹¹⁵ W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 126-127. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁶ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*.

¹¹⁷ Bart D. Ehrman observes that, there are good reasons for thinking that most of the Christian mission was conducted not through public preaching, say on a crowded street corner, but privately, as individuals who had come to believe that Jesus was the Son of God told others about their newfound faith and tried to convince them to adopt it as well. Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, Fourth Edition (New York: Oxford, 2008), 58.

Christian history as essentially carrying out a missionary function. Both the presence of itinerant preachers and that of the monastics are interpreted, by both the church historians like Frend, and mission theologians like Bosch, as the previous iterations of the modern mission enterprise, and thus serves to prove that every new member of Christian communions, other than those who are born and raised within, were laboriously won, and thus the focused labor with the singular goal of gaining new adherents is the only way to announce the gospel. There we have the rationale and the justification for keeping the modern missionary model intact, and also for enhancing it. In the next chapter, we will look at a little more detail at this retroactive assignment of the term “mission” to everything within the entire Christian history and theology to everything that even remotely resembles the modern mission enterprise.

All over the world, there have been, and still are many religions with greater and fewer numbers of adherents, and only a few of them have ever had something that could be termed as mission or missionary, and yet they all did draw a following. It is not that there was no one with zeal to go out and propagate one’s faith, or that such an act is unnecessary. However, there could not have been a militaristic or industrial style mobilization previously, similar to that which emerged ever since the formation of the Society of Jesus in 1540 CE, within both the catholic and the protestant sections of the church.¹¹⁸ Bosch notes that the words “mission” and “missionaries” first used by Ignatius

¹¹⁸ With regard to the purposes of the founding of the Society of Jesus through the papal bull entitled “Regimini militantis ecclesiae,” issued by Pope Paul III, on September 27, 1540, John W. O’Malley observes that the second purpose of which was “propagation of faith.” And that, “[t]oday we can hardly speak of Christianity without using the word mission, yet in the sixteenth century mission was just coming into usage in its contemporary sense of evangelization of people not yet Christian. The emergence of this usage coincided with the founding of the Society... [and] in 1540, surely, ‘propagation of the faith’ (or ‘journeying to the infidel’) was still the technical term for the enterprise.” John W. O’Malley, “Introduction: The Pastoral, Social, Ecclesiastical, Civic, and Cultural Mission of the Society of Jesus,” in

of Loyola, “is historically linked indissolubly with the colonial era and with the idea of magisterial commissioning... [which] meant the activities by which the Western ecclesiastical system was extended to the rest of the world... [and] the ‘missionary’ was irrevocably tied to an institution in Europe, from which he or she derived the *mandate and power to confer salvation on those who accept certain tenets of the faith*.”¹¹⁹ Frend is in agreement with Adolf von Harnack’s realization of the “overriding importance of the Jewish Dispersion (Diaspora), not only in molding the early Christian mission but in providing the basis for its steady expansion throughout the Greco-Roman world,” and on the fact that “by the end of the third century Christianity had penetrated to every corner of the empire and to almost every section of the population.”¹²⁰ The history of widespread presence of Christians in the Greco-Roman world by the end of third century is a fact, but assigning it to the sheer labor of persuading new adherents cannot be entirely true. Just as the mass movements of the Dalits in India to join the church in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the initiative would have been mainly from the people, and the reason for it could have been both the different lifestyle and the fellowship of Christians, and also the equality it accorded to all humans.¹²¹

The Jesuits II: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts 1540-1773, eds., John W. O’Malley, S.J., Gauvin Alexander Bailey, et. al. (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto, 2006), xxiv.

¹¹⁹ Bosch, *Transforming*, 228. Emphasis added.

¹²⁰ Frend, *Rise of Christianity*, 1.

¹²¹ Bishop James Mills Thoburn (1836-1922), an American Methodist missionary pioneer to India who began his errand in 1859, became the superintendent of the missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church in India and Malaysia in 1888, and served in India until his retirement in 1908. He did author many books about his missionary experience in India, and in a volume with almost 600 pages, he notes the tensions and complications involved in the conversion of the Dalits. Thoburn observes: “the fact that God manifestly seems to be leading missionaries in the direction of these people; *that it is they who are coming to the missionary, rather than the latter who goes to them*; ...by becoming Christians, improve their condition, and that there is no harm in their perceiving it; that they will not permanently stand in the way of access to the higher caste, while, even if they did, we dare not hold aloof from them on that account.”

Many in the present world are adopting aspects of the Indian system of Yoga, or another of the many different systems of meditations, including that of the Zen. Some evangelists for all these systems are prevalent, and there are some who profit from them. However, most people are embracing them not out of incessant persuasion of the evangelists, but by observing the benefits they are supposedly imparting on their friends, neighbors, and other acquaintances. This does not mean that there are no confident and passionate proponents who are adept and keen on promoting their respective systems, but that they are akin to the “powerful magnet” that Bosch hopes the Christian mission to be modeled upon.¹²² All religious systems could have for the most part have emerged by persons and communities willingly embracing it by observing the different, or unique, or exemplary lives led by its adherents and the benefits they bestow upon those within its fold. The contention of Harnack and Frensdorff’s of widespread prevalence of Christians by the beginning of the fourth century could only happen in this fashion where people seeing the merits and joining en masse, and not by being pursued, lured, haggled, or even harassed with. The model of conscious and consistent labor with unipolar agenda of conversion as the singular cause of Christian expansion in the pre-Constantine Greco-Roman world cannot be convincing, and this construction of a continual mission in the template of the modern missionary movement is only meant to serve as a rationale for the argument that there is no other mode by which Christ’s influence to traverse both the

James Mills Thoburn, *India and Malaysia* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1892), 403. Emphasis added. John C. B. Webster, a historian of the Dalit movement notes: “It was the Dalits, not the missionaries, who took the initiative in launching the mass movements and in doing so, challenged some of the assumptions upon which missionaries have labored for decades.” And also that the “mass movements were Dalit movements, initiated and led by Dalits; missionaries did not lead the Dalits, but responded to them.” John C. B. Webster, *The Dalit Christians: A History* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1992), 38, 71.

¹²² Bosch, *Transforming*, 517.

physical geography and the minds of persons and communities. The post-Constantine spread of Christianity across Europe, and in the modern period to the European colonies in South America especially, and across Asia and Africa in general could not be seen as a continuation of the willing embrace that marked the first three centuries of Christian history. In the next chapter, with the help from Ramsay MacMullen, Peter Brown, and other scholars with expertise on the early and post-Constantine church, we will try to trouble this continuist argument of relentless mission beginning with Jesus and thereafter continuing through Apostles to disciples everywhere and forever. For now, we just take note of Bosch's reading of the politics of conversion:

Emperor Theodosius' decrees of 380 (which demanded that all citizens of the Roman Empire be Christians) and 391 (which proscribed all non-Christian cults), inexorably paved the way for Pope Boniface's bull, *Unam Sanctam* (1302), which proclaimed that the Catholic Church was the only institution guaranteeing salvation; for the Council of Florence (1442), which assigned to the everlasting fire of hell everyone not attached to the Catholic Church; and for the *Catechismus Romanus* (1566), which taught the infallibility of the Catholic Church. In the context of this model it was unthinkable that people should be allowed to believe as they chose; as late as 1832 Gregory XVI rejected the demand for freedom of religion not only as error, but as *deliramentum*, 'insanity.' Protestants... mentality often hardly differed from that of Rome; where the Catholic model insisted on 'outside the *church* no salvation,' the Protestant model adhered to 'outside the *word*, no salvation' (Knitter 1985: 135).¹²³

Even when it is being accounted for as Bosch does in this quote, this well-documented history of the politics of conversion is always being glossed over. Thereafter, it is always a reversal to the standard mode of perceiving the growth of the community as a result of voluntary mission prompted by faith alone on the part of Christians, and the willing acceptance of Christianity on the part of the others by sensing its merits over their own religion, and in fact, above all other religions. This "foreclosure" and "denegation"

¹²³ Bosch, *Transforming*, 474-475.

that the Christians have embraced and practice diligently helps keeps intact the model of modern mission that emerged during the colonial times. The short window of theologically grappling with the issue of the prevalence of other religious traditions was shut close at Tambaram 1938, and no efforts ever since have been forceful enough to force open it and make it a general theological concern for the whole church. Ever since, the theological accounting of other religious traditions runs on an entirely separate track, and it never actually impinges upon the rationale for continuing the same format of mission, and its methods and strategies. All contemporary mission texts would acknowledge the other track that strives for theological accounting of the presence of other religious traditions, and after the customary recognition and emphasizing upon making genuine interfaith engagement as part of the efforts in gaining adherence, they all fall back on delving at the rationale and justifications for the continuation of the very thing that is being tried out for almost the last four hundred years. If there is an affect imparted by other religions on Christian communions—similar to the “values” of the other religions that were affirmed by the Jerusalem meeting of the International Missionary Council, in 1928—then it should demonstrate itself within the actions justifying those affects. Since this affect is being successfully foreclosed, it has become possible to simultaneously hold on to these disparate tracks of theologizing and comporting, and embrace an appearance as if nothing in the efforts of gaining new followers has changed ever since the apostolic age. Foreclosure is possible only with the contention of both the self and the other possessing enduring essence. Hence, next we are trying to read Christian faith as one of quintessential demolition of the construct of selfsame essence.

1.2.2. From Ur to Golgotha: The Unending Destruction of Essence

Spivak reads the colonial project of civilizing mission as that of “soul making,” where the “native ‘subject’ is not almost an animal but rather the object of what might be termed violation, in the name of the categorical imperative.”¹²⁴ Kant’s notion of the “categorical imperative, conceived as the universal moral law given in pure reason” holds that “[e]verything in creation which he (man) (*sic*) wishes and over which he has power can be used merely as a means; only man, and it with him, every rational creature, is an end in itself.” Kant observes that “the possibility of such a command as, ‘Love God above all and thy neighbor as thyself’ resonates well with this” categorical imperative, wherein love becomes a requirement as in a law, and not left as a matter of choice. Spivak holds that this categorical imperative could be stripped of its “subtleties” and the possibility of different readings as that of Jean-Luc Nancy’s observation that the “categorical imperative is the mark of alterity in the ethical,” and thereafter it could be “travestied by and in the service of the state.” And that, “such a travesty in the case of the categorical imperative can justify the imperialist project by producing the following formula: make the heathen into a human so that he can be treated as an end in himself; in the interest of admitting the raw man into the noumenon; yesterday’s imperialism, today’s ‘Development.’”¹²⁵ This formula, Spivak avers, is not an aberration of Kantian categorical imperative, but one that arises out of its own underpinnings that determine the self and other of the philosophical project.

¹²⁴ Spivak, *Critique* 123.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 123-124.

In his effort to read Apostle Paul as the foundation of universalism, Alain Badiou lifts up “Paul’s unprecedented gesture in subtracting truth from the communitarian grasp [of] a people, a city, an empire, a territory, or a social class.” Badiou identifies that Paul’s gesture turns “what is true (or just; they are the same in this case)” into that which “cannot be reduced to any objective aggregate, either by its cause or by its destination.”¹²⁶ For Badiou, the truth that Paul enlists in establishing and sustaining a “law [that] is capable of structuring a subject devoid of all identity and suspended to an event whose only ‘proof’ lies precisely in its having been declared by a subject.” In this book published in 2003, Badiou’s chief concern for the universal and the law that funds a subject devoid of identity is thrust against the emerging particularisms across Europe, of which his own France’s extreme right-wing political party, the “Front National” of Jean-Marie Le Pen that came close to claiming the French presidency in its national elections of 2017. Badiou observes that the “maxim in question is ‘France for the French,’” and the frightening lack of a “tenable answer to this question [‘What is a French person?’], other than through the persecution of those arbitrarily designated as the non-French.”¹²⁷ The “identitarian logic” that insists “French” as the “founding category in the State,” requires “insistent installation of relentlessly discriminatory measures targeting people” that leads to the “communitarization of the public sphere, and the renunciation of the law’s transcendent neutrality.”¹²⁸ This previously occurred during the fascist wave that swept Europe during the first of the twentieth century when it was acceptable to “surreptitiously

¹²⁶ Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2003), 5.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 8, 9.

defining the Jew as [the] prototype of the non-French. Badiou lifts up the verses of Galatians 3.28, and that of Romans 2.10, as that counters the identitarian logic of these times.

These insights from Spivak and Badiou come to us with a specific significance on the direction in which the acts organized around the rubric of mission seeks and finds its target audience and supposedly prospective followers. Badiou points to the foreclosures that the identitarian advocates maintain by unseeing the continuing “capitalist devastation (persecution is inevitable because unemployment precludes all hospitality),” and the actual status of the “French republic” that gets presented “as ghostly as it is exceptional (foreigners are only tolerable so long as they ‘integrate’ themselves into the magnificent model presented to them by our pure institutions, our astonishing systems of education and representation).”¹²⁹ A similar act of willing unseeing occurs when considering the Christian as an accomplished entity, and thus beyond the sway of the requirement that “they should repent and turn to God and do deeds consistent with repentance” (Acts 26.20). This is being achieved by considering these inseparable twin requirements that could never be reckoned as being accomplished, as comprising of a simple act of becoming Christians for those who are beyond its circle, and for those who are already within, just by continuing to remaining so. The second component of this obligation—deeds commensurate with repentance—is reduced to some manageable actions that could accompany this quest for other’s conversion directly, or as a way to prompt a conversion by demonstrating the goodness that adherents gather by following this particular path of salvation. The direct or indirect focus on conversion is sustained through a notion of

¹²⁹ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 8-9.

essence as in the question of “who is French,” the question of who is a Christian, and who is the remaining other that now needs to repent and turn to God by becoming Christian. Persons and communities that fall under a broad cultural canopy are considered part of the Christian self, and thus most attempts at calling to repentance and that of the deeds supposed to be effects of repentance are most often than not are trained at those who are considered as the other of this cultural canopy. This situation is similar to Derrida’s observation of prevailing or pervading ethnocentrism that one disavows overtly or considers oneself to be beyond its clutches and yet performs exactly within its parameters. With regard to Claude Levi-Strauss insistence that the Nambikwara people of Brazil were without writing and are thus “fully self-present in its living speech,” Derrida observes:

It is, however, an ethnocentrism *thinking itself* as anti-ethnocentrism, an ethnocentrism in the consciousness of a liberating progressivism. By radically separating language from writing, by placing the latter below and outside, believing at least that it is possible to do so, by giving oneself the illusion of liberating linguistics from all involvement with written evidence, one thinks in fact to restore the status of authentic language, human and fully signifying language, to all languages practiced by *peoples whom one nevertheless continues to describe as ‘without writing.’*¹³⁰

When the affect of the ever-sprouting theological statements that undergird the status quo, and their detrimental character that diminishes or even demolishes the lordship claim of Christ is willfully unseen or is never being acknowledged, and when the organized mission efforts of the church are always trained at an other—rather than repenting the surreptitious support for many of the theological statements that are being unreservedly accepted as the commonsense of the times, and thereupon evolving “deeds

¹³⁰ Derrida, *Grammatology*, 120. Emphasis original.

consistent with [this] repentance”—that are considered to be beyond the scope of the essence of the self, it becomes a form of ethnocentrism, however it would be masqueraded as anti-ethnocentrism. This other who are the customary targets of mission could be separated by physical geography as those who live in different lands separate from that of the self, even when it is within the very same political State—the other-side of the supposedly civilized locales in any community, or by cultural geography, the one that distinguishes the many minorities in any physical location.

Two of the quintessential traits that lend themselves to undergird and define essence are the notions of the sacredness or specialness of any particular place, and that of the bloodline lineage as the essential and singular mode of inheritance. Without organizing these two aspects in some form, there could not be human lives both as individuals and in communities. There cannot be universal love as an abstract principle without it being expressed in many of the particular pathways of love to those immediately around oneself, and there cannot be a love for the global or of the earth, without it being actualized in the particularity of a place. However, saturating immediate relations and the geography within which one finds themselves to be embedded in, with an excess of meaning, and thus having an excessive or obsessive attachment to them, or having them as superseding every other kind of possible relationships and solidarities, in effect thwarts any quest for justice and righteousness. From the basic aspect of inheritance of private property, ever since it became the prominent organizing principle, to patriarchy and many other forms of exclusions, to the legacy seats at educational institutions, to the favoring of those in dominance in the disbursement of justice across both criminal and civil aspects of legal jurisprudence, the examples abound of how an

understanding of essence works in cross purposes with every conceivable quest for righteousness in its various aspects of equal rights and opportunities, law, and justice.

The early twentieth century constructions of ethnic superiority and purity, and its current manifestations of protectionism and the quest for separate development, the unequal rights and opportunities ensured through outright legal mechanisms to the subtle forms of discriminations that plague all societies in various degrees of intensity, have their basis on an understanding of who shares the essence of the ruling classes, and who all constitute its other.

It is possible to read the Biblical account of the spiritual journey of a people in the vein of Spivak's analysis of Hegel's study of "Bhagavad Gita" and her demonstration of Gita as yet another example of the bloodline lineage system being sublated into statehood and into its abstract laws and principles, and yet as in every understanding of sublation, the bloodline lineage very much being enlisted as in the system of caste as the basis of statehood. The account of the spiritual journey from Ur to Golgotha could be read as a perpetual unsettling of the quintessential solidities of essence in its twin modes of bloodlines and the anchoring upon place. Abraham is called first to sever every sense of rootedness to a place, and along with this, his sense of belonging to a lineage, and thus to go on transforming the face of earth wherever his journey takes him. He receives from God the assurances of all nations of earth being blessed in and through him and his countless descendants. However, when first of the blood progeny arrives, Abraham is forced to discard the child along with its mother. The second child, the one that could be considered as legitimate and as a proper inheritor is being asked as a sacrifice to God. If the contention of Jesus that being desirous is to be considered as having already

committed adultery could be extended to contemplations on discarding or actually getting close enough to killing one's own child, then both of the acts of Abraham could be considered as filicides.

There have been many able readings of this horrendous act of Abraham and about the ethical correctness of the same. The most prominent of all, Soren Kierkegaard's meditations on the Mount Moriah expression of faith, is made possible by having both faith and ethical as separate entities, albeit related and necessary, and in the end serving the cause of both faith and ethics in the very act of willing filicide.¹³¹ Kierkegaard's contention of "teleological suspension of the ethical" for the sake of an individual's higher responsibility and particular need to express her fidelity to God radically bifurcates the individual from the ethical or the universal realm. Such a profound separation cannot be sustained without holding the particular individual need as separate from the prevailing mandates on not killing without justifiable reason, and also on not disregarding the norm of filial love, and thus that of ethics as a universal requirement.¹³² Thus, it becomes an insistence that there is another channel available for humans for their expression of faith and trust in the Divine, and that this special channel is above and beyond the regular channel that calls humans to responsibility—the face of the other. Apart from the scriptural account of Mount Moriah, such a radical separation of the universal and the particular requirements before an actual individual could be tenable,

¹³¹ Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling: Dialectical Lyric by Johannes de silentio*, trans. Alastair Hannay (New York: Penguin, 2003).

¹³² Chris Boesel's volume is a significant contribution around the act of faith of Abraham and the inevitable questions of ethics, particularity, and universalism that surrounds it. Since the thrust of this work is on the essential and unavoidable risk involved in the proclamation of the gospel, we will be in conversation with it in our concluding chapter. Chris Boesel, *Risking Proclamation, Respecting Difference: Christian Faith, Imperialistic Discourse, and Abraham* (Cambridge, UK: James Clarke, 2010).

first, only if it is possible to transparently decipher the will of God within a language in which humans “live, and move, and have our being.” Languages could only be eminently partial, particular, and incapable of even rendering the self and the other transparent to themselves and to each other, let alone able to capture what is being required of them by God, the wholly other. Second, there needs to be an essentialized individual or a community with an irreducible particularity that is not constructed, which means not susceptible to deconstruction, but existing as a given that stays selfsame through time and space. Third, it needs to be possible for humans to author acts that are unambiguous and that which perfectly matches the will of God that has become exceptionally transparent to themselves and to others around them. If scriptural witness could be trusted, such a transparency of the wholly other and thy will is an impossibility, and all that humans are capable of perceiving is as if “in a mirror, dimly” (1 Cor. 13:12). Even when all particularities are irreducible for both self and the other, and are never susceptible to being subsumed by any other, there cannot be any particularity that is not constructed, and thus not syncretic, or prosthetic. Thus, all particularities are susceptible to deconstruction and it is possible to put them under erasure.

It is hard to perceive humans to be capable of unambiguously discerning the will of God around any particular situation in history. What God requires from humans and their communities at any given point of history could only be a determination based upon the accumulated tradition of a faith community wherein certain of their previous acts could be termed as pleasing to God and others as abhorrent. What pleases or angers God could not be realistically discerned in the actual present, and all human actions remain human actions. Certain actions that were previously considered to be pleasing to God

could be problematized at a future time as the wisdom of God grants new awareness and insights on righteous conduct (Jn.16:13). Practices around patriarchy, feudalism, serfdom, caste, and many other forms of exclusions that were previously considered as being ordained by God, could be seen as falling under such a discernment process. These discernments and dissolutions are being carried out in the present as thoroughly ambiguous, stumbling, and imperfect strivings undertaken in the darkness, and in and through human resources and discernment. The only accompaniments for persons and communities of faith could only be their trust in God that the unintended and those intentional necessary acts of sinfulness would be forgiven, and the earnest hope that God will enable them in such a way that the results of their actions would fall on the side of seeking righteousness and justice that pleases God.

Thus, another possibility of reading the accounts and epiphanies from Ur, to Mount Moriah, to the prophetic testimonies, and to that of Golgotha is as one of a consistent demolition of essence, and as the simultaneous inaugural of both faith and ethics as inseparable, and as an insistence that faith could only be pursued in an through ethical practices. Without the symbolic killing of one's own progeny and the wider kin, and without the annihilation of the notion that a place or geographic territory could possess a certain specialness or sacredness and that which in turn imparts an inviolable essence to the persons within that domain, there cannot either be any faith in God, or any conception of ethics. Without such a demolition of the essence accrued through these twin modes, there could only be an unproblematized privileging of the kin by bloodline, and that of the place or nationhood through geography, and the reigning notion could only be that my people/tribe and nation are right in every given circumstance, regardless

of every evidence to the contrary, and however much overwhelming the evidence might be. Around the notion of essence, the object of faith is materialistic and permanent. Thus Abraham becomes the father of faith in and through symbolic demolition of conception of essence, first of the nationhood through commonality of place, and secondly, of that of bloodline lineage. After the symbolic filicide, Isaac could no longer be the inheritor in the traditional sense as it is being practiced among every other people and nations on earth, but a progeny from whom a sufficient distance has been established in order for a novel righteousness to emerge, one that surpasses the confines of lineage and geography. It could be perceived as the inaugural of a new nationhood that is not bound by geography or lineage, but with a witness before all nations on earth that reveals the fault lines of the notion of essence and the many tyrannies it invariably begets. Ethics, law, or righteousness could not be practiced without some understanding and organization of geographic jurisdiction, but considering such a necessity as ultimate is the issue that plagues the world till today. Thus the call before Abraham to go to the land God is about to show could be read as a perpetual command to keep going and never to settle on conferring sacredness on any particular land or lineage, and thus found a nation that becomes a blessing by liberating all nations on earth from the clutches of essence and ushering in a post-nation world.¹³³

As opposed to the introduction of caste system as a principle to establish a newly founded duty to ethics and law which Spivak reads in Baghavat Gita, an incessant stream

¹³³ “Postnational” is a concept that Jurgen Habermas advances as a way to democratize globalization through regional constellations. However, his argument is still very much within the construct of political identity forged through territorial bonds, rather than surpassing them, and not thoroughgoing enough on accounting for the “axiomatrics of imperialism” that defines and drives the current phase of globalization. See, Jurgen Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays*, trans. Max Pensky (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2001).

of prophets remind the nation of Israel, that their devolution into a system of caste and class privilege is reprehensible, and that their sense of permanent state of blessedness without any regard for righteous conduct on their part, is a thoroughly misplaced trust in themselves and not in the Divine. Even the sense of blessedness is being relativized with regard to both the innumerable possibilities still open before God, and with regard to its neighbors, and thus directly insisting upon the necessity of their continued witness of being worthy of the blessings (for example, Am.9:7). Jesus begins and ends his witness with the insistence of the symbolic killing of the kin—the obligatory requirement of forsaking both possessions and families—and by inaugurating a new family from the cross, a family that is based on solidarity around seeking the will of God, rather than lineage (Jn.19:26-27).

Thus, faith could only be expressed in acts that unsettle one's own life and of those around, and other than the act there is no tangible reminder or possession that acts of faith leave behind. What remains of the acts of faith is the witness that inaugurates new realities, and those realities again could only be sustained through continued acts of faith. On the contrary, *belief* is a conception of essence that accrues through repeated discursive professions or constructions of what is being construed as essence, and it is a particular possession of those who claim to have it. Acts of faith as in Mount Moriah, or that of a Confessing Church in Nazi Germany, or in the anti-apartheid struggles by the churches in South Africa, or the active participation and leadership role played by M.M. Thomas and other Christians in the resistance against political emergency in India, are not susceptible to institutionalization, and the repetitive recounting of these and similar acts of faith, are not to immortalize them, but only to serve as motivation and models for

contemporary and future acts of faith that is required of every generation, as their own unique response in opposition to the most prominent claims to lordship, the claims that are in direct competition with and in opposition to the lordship of Christ. What the notion of essence and belief begets are the permanent and repetitive doings that masquerades as acts of faith, while successfully shielding the doers from the perils inherent in the acts of faith. The most significant problem of essence and belief is that it actually preserves the truly competing and patently damaging lordship by pursuing ascribed opponents who are actually rivals and those who could never be termed as enemies or anathema. The actual rivals are turned into supposed opponents through a practice of twin foreclosures, of which, one is unseeing what the rivals are actually doing, another is to not acknowledge the real opponents who renders not just the claim of Christ's lordship, but that of every other claim to lordship, either as unsustainable, or as merely subservient to that of the claim to lordship of the prevailing social order. Thus, the confession of belief as in the creeds of Christian communions could be considered as salvific by those who profess them, only when they are capable enough to prompt the invokers to embark on contemporaneously relevant and significant journeys of faith that would emulate Abraham. Otherwise, both the creeds and the communions would fall under the scheme of essence and belief wherein the easiest option is of conferring enemy status on other religions, and thus trying to have them routed in order for Christianity to be considered as succeeding in being faithful to the gospel of Christ.

1.3. The Materialist Predication of the Subject

In an effort to account for the diversity and global reach of Christianity, Dana L. Robert observes that the “movement of Christianity from one culture to another can be explained by the concept of ‘mission.’” And, that this act of “sending” or mission arises out of the “philosophical structure [of] the idea of *universality* that the *message* it proclaims about Jesus Christ should be shared with all peoples” and that the Bible “contains the missionary documents that command Jesus’ followers to ‘go into all the world.’”¹³⁴ Roberts affirms that for the last two millennia, Christians carried out this command by “crossing geographic or cultural barriers, and founding new groups of believers wherever they go,” and these “[n]ew groups in turn launch missions of their own,” and thus turning “Christianity as a multicultural, global, presence in the world today.”¹³⁵ We will, later on in this chapter, with the help of Gilles Deleuze, look at the question of universality, and the source of any conception of universality. Here in this section, we will try to trouble the notion of sharing or transmission of the kernel of the “message” across geographical and cultural borders, a message that is supposed to both appeal to and seek to become lodged in the core of a subject and thereby totally transform the subject from within.

The subject often is thought of as consciousness that discerns and evaluates all affects that it receives from the outside, and thereupon capable of coming up with coherent responses to them. The subject in this conception is independent of everything that serves as a mooring in terms of sociopolitical and economical frameworks within

¹³⁴ Robert, *Christian Mission*, 1. Emphasis added.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

which any subject finds itself to be confined with and thus constrained. The mission message is ultimately trained to reach this core of the subject as pure consciousness, a subject who is in essence separate from its own actions, and hence behind and beyond every external influence. Even when the external realities are accounted for as in some way tangentially constitutional to the subject, such an accounting is only to straighten out the path to the subject. The contention of the prevalence of such a subject in fact leads to the notion that once the subject is persuaded enough to change its religious or political adherence, the work is being accomplished. However, the materialist predication of the subject that accounts for innumerable signs and signals, and above all the prevalence and possibility of many desires that complicates any straightforward depiction of a subject or a scenario wherein the subject is situated, points to the necessity of the persistence of work required and of the fact that no work could ever be considered as accomplished. This understanding of required persistence of labor of a different kind, and the tenacity required to continue working regardless of perennially deferred fulfillment, the model of gaining of new followers for a religious traditions will change dramatically. Moreover, since the realization of the work not being accomplished even for those already within the fold of a tradition, a newfound humility in communication will replace the simplistic certainties of overconfident imperialist pronouncements that encrypt within itself, the many denegations and foreclosures. The addressing of others will become an act of giving an account of oneself, which is in fact the act in which any subject is made. In the Christian context, this act of giving a testimony could simultaneously be the very act of striving to become Christians for those already within the tradition, and this endeavoring alone could be both the address to the other, and also the invitation before them to join

the self in its journey of striving to become Christians. Witness is the byproduct of this continuous and consistent attempt at becoming Christians, and that witness is a call to join the struggling, and with no guarantees in its success. In this conception, the subject is never an accomplished reality, but always a becoming and a work in progress for which the completion could be gleaned only as an inspiring vision and never with any sense of transparency.

Spivak holds that a “subject-predication is methodologically necessary,”¹³⁶ and to arrive at a subject-predication that is ethico-politically serviceable, she does a deconstructive reading of the question of value in the works of Karl Marx. Spivak’s attempt is to go beyond the binary opposition between exclusivist predications in the “idealist” mode that reads the subject as “consciousness” alone, and of the “materialist” stream, that perceives the subject merely as “labor-power” alone. Spivak points out that, “consciousness is not thought, but rather the subject’s irreducible intendedness towards the object.”¹³⁷ Yet, she is quick to point out that there cannot be a full resolution of any of the binary oppositions, and that the “impossibility of a full undoing is the curious definitive predication of deconstruction.”¹³⁸ These differing predications are neither simply reductive—either consciousness as thought, or the labor-power as the sheer ability to work—as they are often purported to be, nor are they mutually exclusive as they often gets framed, and this pervasive dualism thus failing to capture whole breath of human

¹³⁶ Spivak, “Scattered Speculations,” 109.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 110.

experience. The “deconstructive lever”¹³⁹ she enlists toward this reading is “use-value,” and she does demonstrate that the question of value is not an economic one alone, but a prominent concern across all human endeavors and fields of action. Spivak’s effort is to demonstrate that the question of value in the materialist predication is thoroughly textualized,¹⁴⁰ by which she signifies the many tacitly acknowledged, patently unacknowledged, and purposefully effaced components and factors over and above the total labor power and natural resources that are customarily construed as contributing toward the production of value. From the open-ended beginnings of the economic text, Spivak reads “indeterminacy” rather than “contradiction” in the economic chain, wherein labor is being represented as value, which in turn is represented as money, and finally is transformed into capital.

Spivak’s painstaking deconstruction of the materialist subject-predication is to demonstrate that “it is possible to put the economic text ‘under erasure,’ to see, that it is (the materialist subject-predication), the unavoidable and pervasive *importance* of its operation and yet to question it as a concept of the *last resort*.”¹⁴¹ Even if a complete resolution of the binary opposition is an impossibility, it is all the more the reason for a “persistent undoing of the opposition” between the idealist and materialist subject

¹³⁹ Deconstructive lever is that element or aspect which is at once very intimately inside the text and yet appearing to be on the outside as it could be dispensed off as inconsequential/insignificant. Spivak’s identification of “use-value” as a lever for a deconstructive reading of the question of value is due to its double nature—while being the source of “exchange value” that ultimately contributes to value, use-value could simultaneously be perceived as outside the circuit of value as value is defined by subtracting the use-value from exchange value. Spivak, “Scattered Speculations,” 118.

¹⁴⁰ In opposition to Plato’s ideal forms, an understanding of textuality brings forth the force-field of difference that constitutes all texts and thus the thoroughgoing constructed-ness of everything humans encounter around them, and in all that they construct.

¹⁴¹ Spivak, “Scattered Speculations,” 125. Emphasis original. In page xiv of her “Translator’s Preface” to Jacques Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*, Spivak notes that to put a text under erasure is to simultaneously reveal its inaccuracy while demonstrating its irreducible necessity.

predications as it is important to primarily reveal that the “complicity between cultural and economic value systems is acted out in almost every decision we make, and, secondly, [to comprehend] that economic reductionism is, indeed, a very real danger.”¹⁴² Spivak demonstrates that the “disavowal of the economic is its tacit and legitimizing collaborator” of economic reductionism, and that it is being achieved by “exclud[ing] the fields of force that make the [economic text] heterogeneous, [and] indeed discontinuous.”¹⁴³ In our discussion on mission as an engagement with peoples beyond the Christian communions, these words of Spivak are of utmost value:

It is a paradox that capitalist humanism does indeed tacitly make its plans by the ‘materialist’ predication of Value, even as its official ideology offers the discourse of humanism as such; while Marxist cultural studies in the First World cannot ask the question of Value within the ‘materialist’ predication of the subject, since the question would compel one to acknowledge that the text of exploitation might implicate Western cultural studies in the international division of labor.¹⁴⁴

The respective foreclosures practiced by both the “capitalist humanism” and the “Marxist cultural studies in the First World” could be seen as that which underwrites the missional efforts that skillfully circumvent the economic text and thereby maintains them in an unbroken perpetuity. Significance of Spivak’s meditations on value in the context of Christian theology in general, and Christian outreach in the context of mission aimed at religious conversion in particular is that there can neither be an explication of the core Christian doctrines as thoroughly transcendental to the economic text within which revelation is being continuously dis-closed, nor could they be simplistically reduced to an economic determinism without adequate and appropriate attention to the question of

¹⁴² Spivak, “Scattered Speculations,” 122.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 126, 112.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 122-123.

desire and the numerous indeterminacies that define the economic text. This is so because the circuit of value and especially that of use-value upon which value in general is parasitic, is totally open-ended and textual. Which means that a subject or a text cannot be completely extricated from the economic text or its materialist subject-predication as the chain of use-value and indeterminacy of desire weds all texts with the economic.

The mission message or gospel is essentially fashioned to appeal to a subject's "idealist" subject-predication or consciousness, and once that realm is thought to be securely seized, the materialist predication is then tacked on to the idealist one as an add-on and is operationalized through efforts ranging from education to economic uplift to every imaginable liberative endeavors. Or else, even in the currently popular mode of materialist interventions of mission by way of poverty alleviation and fight against exclusions, the ultimate goal is to reach the consciousness, the idealist subject-predication, by way of starting with the materialist predication. In either direct appeal to consciousness or within the mode that first addresses the material conditions in order to gain access to the consciousness, the Christian gospel and soteriology in the mainstream conception is primed to ultimately reach the consciousness of the intended recipients as it alone is perceived as the legitimate seat of subjectivity, and the materialist-predication of the subject could only be recognized as extra-constitutional and thus a necessary, yet, a dispensable addendum. Spivak's meditations on value provide a significant corrective, as the subjective and materialist predications cannot be seamlessly separated as it is thought to be. The presumed possibility of reaching the consciousness that is believed to be directing a "subject's irreducible intendedness," enables those who are in this quest of influencing the subject's consciousness, to foreclose themselves from the many

material conditions that implicitly implicate both of them. For example, in India, an upper caste Christian without the necessary deconstructive inhabitation of the text of caste, and striving to capture the consciousness of his or her prospective converts while foreclosing themselves to the reality of both of their materialist predication that is being woven in and through the fabric of many exclusions.¹⁴⁵ Just as the contention of the possibility of a pure idealist predication, the contention of presence as existing, available, and producible, lends itself to authority claims that are not essential for faith formation, but could contribute to the religious texts of othering. Thus, we next problematize the contention of a transparently available presence or one that is producible.

1.4. The Question of Full Presence of the Self and God in Human Speech

The dawning within the reformation movement of the sixteenth century, of the notion of “the free gift of divine grace,”¹⁴⁶ that cannot be contained or controlled by any human agency or institution, transformed the church forever. In effect, this new understanding divested its sacraments of the accretion of innumerable layers of ecclesiastical assertions on the mystery around their salvific efficacy, and thus situated them well within the confines of history, rather than of mystery. From Huldrych

Zwingli’s public defying of the Lent in 1522, to the contention of the reformers that there

¹⁴⁵ Samuel Rayan, an Indian Christian theologian, reflecting on the Dalit question, observes: “It is in choosing to be identified with them that the coming kingdom is discerned, met, and served. It is in their life, suffering, and struggles sincerely shared, that we meet Jesus. Without participation in their pain, we scarcely keep the memory of the Lord’s death in the scriptures and in the Eucharist. For the untouchables are the passion of Jesus. They are the Good Friday we grieve over with reverence and hope. They are the crucifixion of the Son of Man, the Son of God, today... [that the mighty and the] great ones were bypassed by the Jesus movement in its earliest formation and in its life for some two to three centuries is a fact to be pondered; it is of theological significance and of practical consequence.” Samuel Rayan, “Outside the Gate, Sharing the Insult,” in *Leave the Temple: Indian Paths to Human Liberation*, ed. Felix Wilfred (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 143.

¹⁴⁶ Cameron, *European Reformation*, 175.

cannot be anything humans could do or offer to God in order to obtain their salvation, there has been a progressive draining out of the conception that there can be any sort of ecclesiastical administering of the divine presence, grace, or salvation. It is not that there cannot be any spiritual presence of Christ either in the church or in the world, but that other than within the purview of an expressed faith as in a testimony of such a presence, the presence in itself cannot be positively manifested through any of the acts of the church that are supposed to effect such a presence. The words of institution previously breathed in by the celebrant of the mass with the intention of mediating the presence to transform the elements of the Eucharist into the body and blood of Christ in the pre-reformation church, have come to be pronounced prominently within the reformation traditions for everyone to hear and thus be a witness of it. After the traditional sacraments received a different interpretation through the work of the reformers, the previous conception of uncomplicated and automatic presence of the divine within sacraments get transferred to verbal preaching, and it begins to fill in the vacuum left behind by the former sacraments.

Karl Barth poses the question of how could the “belief that the word proclaimed even by preachers alive today is not just their own word (their own talk about God, though it is this too) but that it is the Word of God that is inseparably bound up with their own word, the same Word of God that speaks in the scripture, the same Word of God that the prophets and apostles themselves heard.”¹⁴⁷ Barth answers the question in the affirmative that the “Christian preaching is God’s Word in and for the present just as holy scripture is God’s Word in time, and revelation is God’s eternal Word,” and also that

¹⁴⁷ Karl Barth, *The Gottingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, Volume 1, ed. Hannelotte Reiffen, and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 268.

“only the one Word that speaks three times is the true Word of God, just as only the triune God is the living God.”¹⁴⁸ This reasoning of Barth inaugurates the essentiality of preaching, and it being equated with proclamation, and as the mark of the church and, as the “vital link between this very specific hearing and making heard, the Word which it receives and passes on,”¹⁴⁹ establishes the ministry of verbal preaching as the singular sacrament for the church. Here, Barth’s threefold understanding of the Word of God as in revelation, scripture, and preaching, is being offered as an alternative to “eucharist-centric ecclesiologies and postliberal practice-based ecclesiologies proliferating in contemporary theology,”¹⁵⁰ does so with an equivalence between preaching and proclamation.¹⁵¹ Indeed, Barth emphasizes the distinctions and conditions involved:

The claim with which Church proclamation steps forward and the expectation with which it is surrounded should not mislead us: it is always and always will be man’s word. It is also something more than this and quite different. *When and where it pleases God, it is God’s own Word.* Upon the promise of divine good-pleasure it is ventured in obedience. On this promise depend the claim and expectation. But proclamation both as preaching and sacrament does not cease to be representation, human service.¹⁵²

Soon after making this determination of human action becoming God’s own if God so chooses, Barth enlists the article 7 of Augsburg Confession of 1530, that which defines the church as the “congregation of saints where the Gospel is rightly taught and

¹⁴⁸ Barth, *Gottingen Dogmatics*, 270.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁵⁰ Thomas Christian Currie, *The Only Sacrament Left to Us: The Threefold Word of God in the Theology and Ecclesiology of Karl Barth* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015), xiv.

¹⁵¹ David Bosch, while comparing the clerical prominence in both the Catholic and Protestant sections of the Church, observes: “The church remained a strictly sacral society run by an in-house personnel. Only, the focus for the ‘cure of souls’ was not, as in Catholicism, the sacraments, but the proclamation of the word of God.” David Bosch, *Transforming*, 470.

¹⁵² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. I.1, bk. 1, 1-7, 69. Emphasis added.

the sacraments are rightly administered.”¹⁵³ And, Barth goes on to insist that the acts of “teaching the Gospel and the administering the sacraments take place on the assumption of a purity and rightness of the action,” as a “norm that decides as to the rightness of the action.” Moreover, that “this rightness of teaching and sacrament also decides whether the Church really is here and now the Church, the *ecclesia* (gathered community), the *congregatio sanctorum* (assembly of saints).”¹⁵⁴

We could only agree with the Augsburg Confession’s definition of the church, and could only be indebted to Barth for the emphasis that he adds on the words of “purity” and “rightness,” and considering them being the deciding factors on the actuality of the church. And, for the boldness of his insistence that the “Church should fear God and not fear the world.”¹⁵⁵ However, Barth immediately translates these acts of “teaching” and “administering” into the definition he have previously established: that the “proclamation is preaching,” the “proclamation is sacrament,” and that the “Church has a commission to make such [a] proclamation.”¹⁵⁶ Barth promptly qualifies this act of preaching as proclamation from it becoming static formulaic pronouncements, as he insists on its contemporary relevance by requiring the preacher to make the proclamation “intelligible to men of his own generation the promise of the revelation, reconciliation and vocation of God as they are to be expected here and now.”¹⁵⁷ Even though

¹⁵³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. I.1, bk.1, 70. In this quote, instead of the Latin words and phrases, their respective English translation as it is being rendered within this edition is being enlisted here.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 71.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 53.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

continuous criticism and correction of the act of preaching is an inalienable responsibility, Barth holds that “[w]hat is said about God in the Church seeks, as proclamation, to be God’s Word.”¹⁵⁸ And, “[r]eal proclamation means the Word of God preached and the Word of God preached means... man’s talk about God on the basis of God’s own direction, which fundamentally transcends all human causation, which cannot, then be put on a human basis, but which simply takes place, and has to be acknowledged, as a fact.”¹⁵⁹ Yet, this act of preaching as proclamation that becomes the “Word of God” cannot be “our possession, to which we can never point back as to a datum,” but it is an “event in itself” which still would remain in the domain of “accidental characterization” and as an “event of the willing and doing of proclaiming man.” At times when it pleases God, such “proclamation becomes real as God commands, God comes on the scene, God judges.”¹⁶⁰

Barth holds that the “statement that the Bible is God’s Word is a confession of faith, a statement of the faith which hears God Himself speak through the biblical word of man,” and that the “Bible is God’s Word as it really bears witness to revelation, and proclamation is God’s Word as it really promises revelation.”¹⁶¹ And, it is never a straightforward literal embrace of the Bible, but with an emphasis that it “to be understood afresh and hence expounded and interpreted,” where “[e]xegesis is always a combination taking and giving, of reading out and reading in,” that the Bible will continue to be a “norm that magisterially confronting the Church” rather than it being

¹⁵⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. I.1, bk. 1, 75.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 88, 90.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 107, 108.

“taken [as a] prisoner by the Church.”¹⁶² The Bible “bears witness to God’s past revelation” and by this “act of witness it establishes the relation of the Church to revelation, and therewith establishes the Church itself as the true Church, and therewith its proclamation as true proclamation.”¹⁶³

Yet, Barth’s identification of the acts of “teaching” and “administering” (Augsburg Confession) with proclamation, and they becoming God’s word—even when held with necessary qualification of “when and where it pleases God”—turns these acts, more often than not, into primary or singular mediums through which God’s word would encounter humans. Thus, these necessary and fundamental acts of congregational constitution become the domain of calculable anticipation and avenues to pursue production of such a presence. The admonition for deriving simplistic and secure sureties (Mt.3:9) around any aspect of human determination or production is not merely aimed at any single aspect or a singular people, but aimed at the ubiquitous human quest of localizing and containing the Divine into any discernable objects or manageable processes. Barth offers constant qualifications that the “biblical witnesses point beyond themselves,” and that “beyond all immanent teleology they [the authors of the books in the bible] are forced to speak and write about the other.”¹⁶⁴ However, by identifying the acts of preaching and the administering of sacraments as channels that could become “God’s own Word,” Barth leaves open the possibility for persons and communities to both consider them as singular and certain channels for such a becoming, and also to

¹⁶² Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. I.1, bk. 1, 103.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 108-109.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

continue striving to turn them such. Moreover, the preaching is more often than not, are hardly carried out by those who are perceptive enough as Barth, or by those who are as keen as him to always be on the vanguard in the matter of sociopolitical issues of their times, and consider them as the necessary avenues of proclamation and resultant witness.

It is not just preaching and administering of sacraments, but anything could become God's word if God chooses so, and these quintessential congregational acts could be considered as attuning those who are trying to follow Christ to keep themselves open enough to identify a presence of God when it encounters them. And, even if proclamation as in "Jesus Christ is Lord" (2 Cor.4:5; Rom.10:9), should always be ventured in verbal and nonverbal performativity, if an act have truly turned into actual proclamation could only be a retrospective judgment, and never a matter of prospective production or contemporaneous discernment. It is similar to arriving at Barth famous statement of "as a tangent touches a circle, that is, without touching it," from the other side, from the side of humans, rather than from the side of "new world of the Holy Spirit."¹⁶⁵ Humans and their texts, and the textuality within which alone they could live, constitutes only a infinitesimal part of the reality we term as God, and there is no way humans who are in God (Acts 17:28), could precisely intercept the circle of the Divine. It is only after an event that the church could affirm that the act of honoring your maker and proclaiming Christ as Lord involves the act of not giving up your seat and moving to the one that simultaneously asserts and accepts the belief of unequal origin, and thus the status of subpar humanity. In the ambiguity of any present, a proclamation thus ventured could never be ascertained or assumed with a certain degree of confidence, and a proclamation

¹⁶⁵ Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 30.

could be termed as such only after the dust of the present settles and the effects of a proclamation becomes evident.

In the third chapter, we do an extensive reading of Barth's work of Christian witness, and our basic argument is that an individual or communion could continue becoming Christian only within their witness. And, we would argue that this witness is begotten through their proclamation of "Christ as Lord" in and through the concrete situations and issues of a time and place. It is not a benign act of pronouncement, but predicated on refusing the claim of dominions and dominance that stake claim to lordship. Thus, the regular "preaching" and "administering the sacraments" that occurs within the ecclesial life cannot be considered proclamation per se, but only as necessary anchors and impelling influences that guides, enables, and ensures witness of the individuals and their communions. Every generation at every time and place are always already faced with situations that calls for their own respective versions of Barmen Declarations, and the ecclesiastical cycle of "teaching" and "administering the sacraments" are the source of such boldness of proclaiming Jesus as Lord, and thus Caesar is not, or Aryanism is not. However, it does not mean that acts of "Gospel [being] rightly taught and the sacraments are rightly administered" could not become instances of proclamation, and they do become such when communions embrace such postures that demonstrate that they truly mean, "Christ is Lord." In any case, the celebration of Eucharist is always an act that disrupts the hierarchical organization of society by proclaiming the essential equality of all humans before God by their partaking in the one body and blood. Yet, this enactment of subversion cannot be an end in itself, and could

only be compelling force that propels the partakers to go forth and proclaim with their lives that Christ is truly their Lord and that there is none other.

Within his discussion on staking the claim that “theology as a science, in distinction from the ‘theology’ of the simple testimony of faith and life” of the church, Barth hopes that “[a]ll sciences might ultimately be theology.”¹⁶⁶ As noted in the introduction, we too share Barth’s aspiration for theology to be considered at par with the sciences. However, for the sake of democracy and for “the right, in principle to say anything,”¹⁶⁷ the question of parity should be broached from the other side of the equation—the textuality in which both the sciences and the theologies are enmeshed and the essential character of faith and promise within which human endeavors fundamentally partake.¹⁶⁸ In the case of rain and sunshine being equally bestowed upon the righteous and the unrighteous (Mt.5:45), even when there could be vast divergence on ascribing their source/origin or of its nature as a purely material reality or a gracious blessing, there could not be much variance on the scientific or material character of it. However, a revelatory event never comes across as of same origin and character to everyone who participates or witnesses it. Even those who were close companions and participants in Jesus’ earthly ministry could not comprehend what they were witnessing all along, and

¹⁶⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. I.1, bk. 1, 5.

¹⁶⁷ Derrida avers: “what defines literature as such... is profoundly connected with a revolution in law and politics: the principled authorization that anything can be said publicly. In other words, I am not able to separate the invention of literature, the history of literature, from the history of democracy. ...if democracy remains to come (*a venir*), this right to say anything, even in literature, is not concretely realized or actualized.” Jacques Derrida, “Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism,” in *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, ed. Chantal Mouffe (New York: Routledge, 1996), 82.

¹⁶⁸ Again, to borrow from Derrida: “There is no language without the performative dimension of the promise, the minute I open my mouth, I am in the promise. Even if I say that ‘I don’t believe in truth’ or whatever, the minute I open my mouth there is a ‘believe me’ at work. ...And this ‘I promise you that I am speaking the truth’ is a messianic apriori, a promise which, even if it is not kept, even if one knows that it cannot be kept, takes place and *qua* promise is messianic.” *Ibid.*, 84.

even after it was testified to them that Jesus have indeed being raised from the dead (Lk.24:19-24). And, among the vast majority of those who have witnessed many of the work of Jesus, only a few affirmed that it has been indeed a dwelling of the Most High in our midst. As Paul's epistles demonstrate, it is an arduous challenge requiring many attempts from different angles to define and communicate the significance of "Jesus Christ, and him crucified," and the reconciliation it thus makes available. Even after all the efforts are expended, there could only remain an humble acknowledgement that it could only be with an oblique understanding that humans could continue striving in faith, hope, and love, until the transparent and direct encounter (1 Cor.13:12-13).

We could very well agree with Barth's contention that, as "a result of the uniqueness of this object of knowledge [of God] might well be that the concept of its knowledge cannot be definitively measured by the concept of the knowledge of other objects or by a general concept of knowledge but that it can be defined at all only in terms of its own object."¹⁶⁹ And, the "assertion that this content... will always be an authentic and definitive encounter with the Lord of man, a revelation which man cannot achieve himself, the revelation of something new which can only be told him."¹⁷⁰ Also, that there is not an innate ability or instrument, "a disposition native to him as man, in an organ, in a positive or even a negative property that can be reached and discovered by self-reflection, by anthropological analysis of his existence," through which humans could arrive at the knowledge of God.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. I.1, bk. 1, 187.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 190.

However, even when revelation could be affirmed as God's own initiative and graciousness, and as that which could "only be told" by God alone, such revelation could only be received within the textuality of human existence, and this feature of human reality instantaneously diminishes the possibility of transparent translation of the revelatory message into human understanding. Even when the constant guidance of the Holy Spirit is being acknowledged, the Christian communions have arrived at most of its doctrinal understandings and creeds through considerable amount of strife and even bloodshed. Thus, it is not only that the humans "cannot achieve" revelation by their own efforts, but that they cannot completely and conclusively receive it as it is being communicated. The "assertions" and "presuppositions" that Barth calls for is being drawn from the side of God, and such an endeavor of doctrinal certainty from above on the one hand forecloses itself on the processes through which these certainties were arrived in the first place. On the other, rather than arriving at the intended end of instilling faith, the certainty of the correctness of the assertions would fuel arrogance in those who profess them. Moreover, what these assertions and presuppositions achieve is to foreclose the Christian communions from the possibility that there are other sojourners who are equally striving to serve God in and through their own perceived paths, and that there are secular ideologies trying to become salvific vehicles in themselves. What is thus being circumvented is the theological necessity that M. M. Thomas considers as crucial:

Theology is not just the explication of our faith in Jesus Christ. It involves also putting that faith alongside other faiths, and alongside rationality and other human values which we share with others, allowing the examination of each, including our faith, in the categories of the others. In this process we, as Christians, risk Christ for Christ's sake. But we also hope to show that rationality, morality, community and other values require grounding in the faith-dimension, and to reaffirm our confession of the ultimacy of Christ as the judge and redeemer of

human rationality, community and other penultimate values—as well as of the religiosity of humankind.¹⁷²

The statement that the “Church is the presupposition of knowledge of the Word of God,” could only be maintained from the human side of the equation, makes this affirmation of their faith, and attempt an imperfect, incomplete, and an always stumbling testimony of the oblique knowledge of God it has through its partaking in the event of Jesus Christ. What makes it oblique, imperfect, incomplete, and stumbling, is that fact that both the acts of partaking and affirming could be had only in and through the textuality in which humans could live. Human textuality is a thin textile that simultaneously separates and renders the awareness of their living, moving, and having their being in God (Acts 17:28) as an affirmation of faith alone, and never as a consummated continuity that could ever be produced and sustained. By the time it dawns upon anyone that dwellings could be made (Mt.17:4), to remain in the presence, the presence has already overflowed the very possibility of such calculable containment. Thus, the only way a faith affirmation of being privy to the knowledge of God could be witnessed by those beyond the fold of the affirming faith community is by bearing fruits worthy of repentance (Mt.3:8) that accompanies any such faith affirmation.

Thus, the identification of preaching as proclamation could serve to disregard the oppositional character of proclamation, and turn it into an act of foreclosing the communion from the most acute claim of Lordship that would make Christ’s claim to lordship as unsustainable, or as that could only be maintained as being subsumed under the reigning lordship of a time and place. The first of written accounts of the life and

¹⁷² M. M. Thomas, *Risking Christ for Christ’s Sake: Towards an Ecumenical Theology of Pluralism* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1987), 7.

work of Jesus, the Gospel According to Mark, begins with the direct confrontation and repudiation of the gospel of Caesar. The opening phrase in Mark's gospel, "beginning of the good tidings" is a direct quote and thus also an unwavering disavowal of the calendar inscription from Priene of 9 BCE, in which Caesar Augustus is being depicted as the divine incarnation who brings order out of chaos and thus inaugurates time and becomes a "benefaction to all humanity." The proclamation of the Confessing Church and its Barman Declaration, of which Barth is the primary author, is again a contestation of the gospel of Adolf Hitler and National Socialism that confers the lordship of the whole world on to the human constructs of racial superiority and its purity. If at all there is a presence of God in these proclamations, it is not in the literal words or in its syntax, but that which happens in its enunciation and in the testimony given by the witnesses of it. The Barmen declaration and Dietrich Bonhoeffer's willingness to walk to the gallows would awfully fall short of their very intent. These are acts of faith by communities and individuals, and thus their own particular way of proclaiming the lordship of Christ in and through their own particular situations, and with their own particular resources and determinations. Any presence that becomes evident around these acts of faith are discerned by those who witness these events, and through the potency of the challenge it places before them to embark upon their own unique acts of faith. Just as in Spivak's reading of Marx's conception of value as a differential, the presence of God could only be a differential between the acts of faith as proclamation of the lordship of Jesus Christ, and the further acts of faiths it initiates among the beholders. The presence of God is thus thoroughly "out of control" and open-ended, just as it is testified about the Holy Spirit.

1.4.1. Jacques Derrida and the Disruption of Presence

The logic of identity, where an entity is identical to itself, or selfsame, cannot be thought of without the conception of presence. An original presence generates the identity and sustains it across time without corruption. The contention of presence in an entity, and that, which imparts it with solidity, could thus be perceived as the root of the many exclusions and related violence that defines the social text of any time and place. As we will try to surface here in this section, the perception of presence is constitutive of the process of writing, or textuality in itself, and not of an eternal verity that an entity possess and thereafter embarks on the task of writing. However, as we have already noted in the introduction chapter, violence and exclusion are not a fall from an originary peace, and the continuous process of discernment of the tolerable level and terms of violence and exclusion, is not an attempt to reach a final peace where there would no longer be any need for violence and exclusions.

The contention of presence that defines the identity of an entity is the source of mission that an entity could evolve without altering its supposed constitution, in order to either exclude the other, or to convert it and render it same as the self so that it could be accepted and be considered as equal. The perception of presence that funds identity also fuels the notion of essential separateness from the other, or helps foreclose the reality that the privileged/disprivileged status of the other is directly implicated in the status of the self. The fundamental separateness thus achieved thereupon underwrites, or subsumes every attempt at engagement with the other under the rubric of charity and solidarity.

In our attempt to rethink the construct of Christian mission, we conscript Derrida's understanding of presence in order to dismantle the possibility of a Christian

entity that remains secure and selfsame from moment of baptism and could subsequently author acts to fulfill a supposed mandate of mission. This effort is not aimed at any particular acts that are currently being carried out under the rubric of Christian mission. But, it is to flip over the current framework of a preexisting Christian entity capable of originating and carrying out actions that does not necessarily have any particular impact on the self, but only to satisfy a supposed obligation, and for the benefit of the other. If the perception of a selfsame identity or entity becomes impossible to sustain, and if any identity, entity, or being could only be thought of as emerging within a particular performativity, then the Christian entity could only be begotten in and through a certain performativity. Thus, praxis could not be a second step activity that an entity begets according to its choice and proclivities, but the constitutive character of any entity. As we have noted with Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's impression of Christians, it is not what one says or does that make a difference, but the effect of these acts would have on both the self and the other.¹⁷³ Thus, what reveals or communicates of a particular performativity is the witness of an entity that thus emerges, and the entity would have little control on what it actually end up imparting. Hence, the need for constant contrition about the current witness that an entity is conveying through the actions that constitute it, and the necessity for consequent conversion that would express a different performativity to continue becoming the self that one professes to become. To disrupt the concept of a stable entity that is capable of subsequently choose to act or not, we now turn to Derrida's work on the concept of presence.

¹⁷³ See, footnote 11, in the Introduction chapter.

The whole corpus of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida's theoretical work could be perceived as a persistent draining out of all ascribed *presence* in texts—from philosophical, literary, artistic, to social practices and institutions. Derrida's contention is that the whole of Western metaphysics in its determination of being, proceed by defining a coherent and unique center of *presence* or self-presence that serves as the defining and differentiating characteristic of all entities including humans. The center of a being, an entity, or a structure is thought of serving simultaneously as the organizing principle in all its (apparent) external interactions, while simultaneously preserving itself from every possible external influence or stain. When rigorously investigated, it becomes untenable to hold on to the assignment of a secure center for any entity, structure, or being that is supposed to retain integrity throughout its interactions or “play” with other entities.¹⁷⁴ Upon this discovery, the center has to be perceived as situated beyond its borders.¹⁷⁵ Consciousness or the feeling wherein humans consider speaking to themselves, or the conscience wherein God's speech is purportedly being heard, is comprehended as the center where “God's infinite understanding,” the “logos as self-presence,” or the “being as self-relationship” make its presence felt as “voice,” or as “hearing (understanding)-oneself-speak.” The experience of consciousness, feelings, and conscience, precisely that of self-presence, is “*produced as auto-affection*” by the voice, as it is perceived as “an order of the signifier by which the subject takes from itself into itself, does not borrow

¹⁷⁴ Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978), 278-279.

¹⁷⁵ In Derrida's understanding, there are no entities or beings per se, but these terms are used with the necessary understanding of their constituted character and fluid nature. Thus, these terms are always under erasure.

outside of itself the signifier that it emits and that affects it at the same time.”¹⁷⁶ This affirmation of purity, divinity, and the antecedence of speech over writing are termed by Derrida as logocentrism or phonocentrism, and he considers it along with episteme as constituent of the “*greatest totality*.”¹⁷⁷ Episteme is an incessant quest organized to arrive at a unique center or origin, and logocentrism is the insistence of such an anchor.

The notion of presence is established and sustained through the two-part concept of the sign that holds within it the purported difference between the signifier that sensibly corresponds to an intelligible signified. Since voice has been understood (within the pre-Socratic to post-Hegelian thought) as intimately wedded to mind, meaning, and soul, the spoken signifier or speech becomes the self-presentation of the being, and writing as something exterior to the self and as such a mere technical transcription of speech. This notion of full-presence is being reinforced through the understanding of the speaker’s immediate presence to the hearer of a speech, as opposed to the absence of the author and thus the inability to transparently decipher the authorial intent within a written text. The comprehensive continuum of logos, mind, soul, thought, and meaning that gets expressed in speech (*phone*), not only constitutes logocentrism or phonocentrism, but also originates the “notion of the ‘signifier’” by rendering writing as derivative and thus as an exterior and supplementary necessity.¹⁷⁸ What Derrida wants his readers to notice is that writing whether understood as “natural,” “original,” or as “literal,” they all are metaphorical in constitution and thus very much “literal” in character. However, this

¹⁷⁶ Derrida, *Grammatology*, 98. Emphasis original.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

“literal” property is actively forgotten and the writing in its technical and cultural practice is thought of as lacking the self-presence that bears within itself the divine law as conscience and as an integral part of the body as breath and voice.¹⁷⁹

The primary effacement of signifier, Derrida argues, is not possible without a construct of an irreducible “transcendental signified” that authorizes and sustains the difference between the signifier and the signified. Meditating upon Martin Heidegger’s demonstration that there is no original “voice of being” and thus no secure and stable “meaning of being,” Derrida contends that the dissimulation of this fundamental lack is necessary to perceive “being as ‘transcending’ the categories of entity,” and that there cannot be a conception of being without the authorizing presence of logos as a transcendental signified.¹⁸⁰ What is important to note in Derrida’s conception is that neither being nor logos are original, but emerges only within a language that privileges the “‘third person singular of the present indicative’ and the ‘infinitive’”—the professed objectivity and certainty of the -s/-es, “to,” “to be,” and the “is”—and only through a movement of significations and corresponding dissimulations that erases the tracks of these passages in order to summon and solidify the conceptions of being and presence.¹⁸¹ Thus there is no real difference between the signifier and the signified, and every thing and every sense that we come up with or encounter are always already in the order of signifiers. Derrida argues that “if every sign refers to a sign, and if ‘sign of a sign’

¹⁷⁹ Derrida, *Grammatology*, 17-18.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

signifies writing,” then every sense even before it gets expressed within a speech is writing and that “writing itself [is] the origin of language.”¹⁸²

The most important change between the logocentric or phonocentric insistence of the difference between ‘natural’ and ‘literal’ writing, and Derrida’s understanding of writing as the originary manner in which all signs and every sense and meaning is brought forth, is that there is nothing natural about signs and that they are basically constituted instances. The process of this primary institution imparts sense to signs in an arbitrary pattern, as there cannot be any possible “relationship of ‘natural’ representation, within writing as speech or as graphic inscription. Within this notion of institution of everything as events of writing, there cannot be any “stability that is absolute, eternal, tangible, natural,” and “a stability is not an immutability; it is by definition always destabilizable.”¹⁸³ This is so because all signifiers are mutually linked through a web of relationships and what makes a signifier function as such is its difference and interactions with every other signifier. The characteristics of arbitrariness and difference within the world of signifiers do not indicate that those who use them could choose the meaning they could impart, but that the signifiers themselves do not have any symbiotic relationship with the signified.¹⁸⁴ Thus the relationship between every signifier and its corresponding signified—which in turn is yet another signifier—is an assignment and thus very much within the realm of grammar. Therefore, the order of all signifiers and consequently of all texts are defined by grammatology. Since there cannot be any sense

¹⁸² Derrida, *Grammatology*, 43-44.

¹⁸³ Derrida, “Afterword: Toward An Ethic of Discussion,” 151.

¹⁸⁴ Derrida, *Grammatology*, 46.

and meaning beyond and without the movement of signification, everything is very much within textuality and the act of writing.¹⁸⁵ Derrida's basic argument against metaphysics of presence is that "from the moment that there is meaning there are nothing but signs," and that we "*think only in signs.*"¹⁸⁶ This does not mean that there cannot be any determination of being, entity, meaning, or any sense of presence, but that these determinations could only be conscious constructions and that there is nothing pre-critical or transcendental within or beyond them. Yet, Derrida's endeavor is not to explain life in the purely materialistic mode or enclose it within merely ontic delineations. The non-or-anti-concepts, or the evental-processes of "trace," "difference," and "supplement," enable Derrida's thought to escape the sways of both the idealist and the thoroughgoing materialistic and or empiricist conceptions of life and history.

What is emptied out is not the possibility of predication, verbs, phrase, or the determination of being, but the notion of essence that makes all these necessities of life as self-same and irreducible realities.¹⁸⁷ The concept of identity thus ceases to be a sealed container and becomes a cracked pot that continuously lets multiple influences seep in and out and always in the making and never identical to itself. Along with Nietzsche's contention that "there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything,"¹⁸⁸ Derrida's enlisting of trace disrupts every attempt to freeze identity and define essence. Trace is an announcement of the other and an otherness that could be perceived as a movement that

¹⁸⁵ Derrida, *Grammatology*, 158.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 50. Emphasis original.

¹⁸⁷ Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," 147.

¹⁸⁸ Nietzsche, "Genealogy of Morals," 45.

encompasses the whole history of the earth and beyond and of each and every stage of life within the entirety of the evolutionary spectrum. Yet, trace does not refer either to any past origin, nature, or a future consummation, but always as a becoming, that stays beyond and yet encompasses the opposition of diachronic and synchronic, as an act rather than a structure.¹⁸⁹ Derrida holds that,

The trace must be thought before the entity. But the movement of trace is necessarily occulted, it produces itself as self-occultation. When the other announces itself as such, it presents itself in the dissimulation of itself. This formulation is not theological, as one might believe hastily. The “theological” is a determined moment in the total movement of the trace. The field of the entity, before being determined as the field of presence, is structured according to the diverse possibilities—genetic and structural—of the trace. The presentation of the other as such, that is to say the dissimulation of its “as such,” has always already begun and no structure of the entity escapes it.¹⁹⁰

What differentiates trace from a theological concept is that there is neither an intelligent doer behind that generates or becomes trace, nor the trace is of an eternally static and self-same verity that tints everything in the very similar mode and pattern. Trace itself is not an entity that could be made present, but always a movement that sustains the otherness of the other within the self or same, thus engendering all differences, and thereby rendering every determination of identity as partial and forever an unrealizable task. Derrida identifies trace as the movement of its own “becoming unmotivated,” within the process of the “temporalization of a *lived experience*,” that defies the simple understanding of being “in” space and time, and as authoring the differences between the elements at play, thus as the “*absolute origin*” that is not an origin at all, and

¹⁸⁹ Derrida, *Grammatology*, 51.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

as “*the differance* which opens appearance and signification.”¹⁹¹ Building on Ferdinand de Saussure’s thesis that “*difference*” is the “source of linguistic value,”¹⁹² Derrida demonstrates that both phonic and graphic signifiers derive their value solely from this principle of difference and that every text and every instance of meaning is gotten through certain organization of difference. It is trace and difference that co-facilitates signification, and, this difference as writing is that which prevents speech to assume its supposed intimate proximity to being and or logos. Derrida terms this process as arche-writing and illustrates that it functions as the basic structure of sign making by linking any particular expression with a specific content. Thus not only phonetic writing, but also every form of writing including hieroglyphic to every mode of signifying is writing and the supposed hierarchical supremacy conferred on phonetic writing could only be perceived as ethnocentrism. Arche-writing in Derridean parlance gets the neologism of “*differance*,” a conjoining of difference and deferral, and it opens the field of language and along with it the whole of human adventure to a trans-immanentist description or discernment. The concepts of arche-trace, arche-writing, and *differance* are always enlisted as under erasure, and thus have a quasi-transcendental character to them and they work for Derrida as constructs that prevent reducing language and everything else along with it to objectivism, empiricism, experience, etc., whose totality he terms as “*ontic enclosure*.”

The *differance*, which holds together within it difference and deferral, is not an institution similar to that of the signifiers (that are always constituted and solely

¹⁹¹ Derrida, *Grammatology*, 65. Emphasis original.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 52. Emphasis original.

determined as such by their respective difference within the web of signifiers), but a “minimal unit of temporal experience,” that as a trace, retains the “other as other in the same” so that “meaning would appear.”¹⁹³ Even though trace, and hence difference, cannot have any tangible existence, it makes all tangibility and thus every sense of presence and plentitude possible. Derrida places it anterior to the sign, but perceives it as a “certain nonorigin,” whose “*work*” and “*fact*” are always evident from the “determined differences and the determined presences that they make possible.”¹⁹⁴ Trace and difference refer to an active movement of inscribing mental imprints that relates to appearances (not merely visual or audible, but impressions in their whole range of possibilities) in their differential between sensory and lived instances that cannot be simply reduced to or taken as corresponding to internal or external realities, and or to experiences. The difference between sensory occurrences and their corresponding impressions sets the movement of difference in motion and thus of trace and difference. Alienation from the sensory and the refusal of any easy recapturing of full-presence is the work of difference, and it makes “the opposition of presence and absence possible,” by “produc[ing] what it forbids,” and “mak[ing] possible the very thing that it makes impossible.”¹⁹⁵

Derrida’s reading of the oppositions between nature and culture, and that between speech and writing, in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s and Claude Levi-Strauss’s works, demonstrates that both nature and speech lack the full-presence they are being

¹⁹³ Derrida, *Grammatology*, 62.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 63. Emphasis original.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 143.

accorded with. Nature does not impart a meaning and or full-presence by itself, and, speech even when it is perceived as proximate to the breath and thought of the being, and hence to be within an intimate relationship with the logos, the sense and signification it conveys is always an addition of supplementation. The process of substitution involved in the making of signs is forgotten as the signs themselves covers their tracks and the “vicariousness of [their] own function and make [themselves] pass for the plentitude of speech whose deficiency and infirmity it nevertheless only *supplements*.”¹⁹⁶ Rousseau believes supplement to be an evil addition to the good and innocent nature. Derrida demonstrates that supplement is “both humanity’s good fortune and the origin of its perversion,” that which, in the “form of the sign... becomes forces and make ‘the world move.’”¹⁹⁷ Thus both creativity and destructivity ensues from the very same act of supplementation. It is similar to the biblical Cain and his descendants from whom all creative arts and enterprises ensue, whereby creativity and destructivity could be seen to having the same parentage. Languages are the “regulated substitution of signs for things” and the fundamental “order of supplements,” which could never be thought without the violence inherent in both the constitution and regulated sustenance of signs.¹⁹⁸ This understanding of both good and evil emerging from the same source matches the Biblical account of according a single lineage of Cain to everything from the first spilling the blood, to the beginnings of civilization/society through the initiation of the violence of metallurgy,¹⁹⁹ and to the bringing forth of the creative arts (Gen 4.1-22). For Derrida,

¹⁹⁶ Derrida, *Grammatology*, 144.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 149; and also see Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics,” 133.

¹⁹⁹ Derrida, *Grammatology*, 149.

every step of writing and signification is imbued with violence, and it is not a matter of eradicating violence altogether, but understanding this essential fact and subsequently enlisting violence in order to resist the thoroughgoing violence. The appearance of the other as an other, the origin of signification and language, the discourse itself, are all patently violent by nature, but a violence that which could be perceived as an ethical violence organized against the transcendental or “peerethical violence.”²⁰⁰ In the next section we delineate the significance of this disruption of presence within our discussion.

1.4.2. Possibility of Presence Only Within the Matrix of Critical Pondering and Yearning

There is nothing egregious about Derrida’s demonstration that there cannot be anything pre-critical about sense in general, and, that meaning is possible only through writing governed by grammatology. The “Tower Experience” of Martin Luther²⁰¹ and other similar conversion or enlightenment experiences demonstrate that revelation happens only to those who have unceasingly pondered and passionately sought after it without knowing what they are yearning for. Without sufficient meditation and ardent anticipation, no revelation would be understood, and even then, every instance of understanding will always be confined within the limitations of the language and the material contexts of the participants in any of the revelatory happenings. Derrida reminds, “God no more really depends upon me than does the *alter-ego*. But he (sic) has *meaning* only for an ego in general. Which means that before all language about God or with God,

²⁰⁰ Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics,” 125.

²⁰¹ Cameron, *European Reformation*, 172.

God's divinity (the infinite alterity of the infinite other, for example) must have a meaning for an ego in general."²⁰² As the scriptural witness from the burning bush to the empty tomb could testify, not only the language and context of the participants would have already diminished the richness of the presentations of the other, but, the wholly other thoroughly dissimulates every "as suchness" (essence) and refuses to leave a remainder or relic that could be grasped, clung on to, and turned into an idol. It would be safe to add that, every determination of the nature of the wholly other, on the procedures that has been enlisted in the very economy of presentation, and of the historical and eschatological significances, could only be extrapolations carried out on the basis of the encounter and within the available cultural resources, and sociopolitical aspirations.

Derrida argues that the "spatial pair of inside-outside... gives rise to the opposition of subject and object."²⁰³ Our recounting of his deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence makes it evident that writing, language, and all texts imagined in and through them defy this spatial difference of inside and outside. The significance for us who contemplate on Christian theology is that it is no longer possible to simply perceive God as within the whole reality there is or as completely separate from it. Which means that there could not be a place for God to reside and from which to subsequently enter human history. Since God cannot be perceived within the categories of *is* and *is not*, as any such construal would have God to be within comparable terms with everything there *is*, and since all such constructions are susceptible to comparison and the categories

²⁰² Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," 132.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 88.

of proofs of existence,²⁰⁴ it could only be an idol made in the image of and to the predilection of its fabricators. And since all religions including the Judeo-Christian traditions consider the whole of humanity, if not whole of creation, to be God's offspring and as the ones who are inseparable from God (Acts 17.28), the religious adherents cannot consider anyone to be inside or exterior of God on the basis of whatever they profess or practice. Thus anyone who strives to complicate or even obliterate the Christian (or other religious) faith and hope in God, cannot be perceived as beyond the purview of God and let alone anti-God. The only ones who merit the categorization of being against God could be the ones who absolutize the hegemonic historical dispensations of their own times and considers them as the end of history and thus as eschatological fulfillment.

Insistence on presence or self-presence could be then discerned at the root of all oppressions, exclusions, foreclosures, and denegations. When the identity-markers are held to be patently present and irreducibly persistent in both the categories and the peoples who fall under the sway of the discursive constructs of patriarchy, class, caste, gender, sexual orientation, etc., then the only available liberative option would be to plead before the beneficiaries of these discourses to demonstrate the goodwill of sharing some of the benefits with those whom the discourses deny equality. It is not that there is no presence at all, but that every presence could only be thought and perceived of as emerging out of the play of difference and deferral. Thus, any presence could only be thought of as occurring within the realities that are constituted, instituted, and grammatically wrought, and never over and above them. The question of pure and

²⁰⁴ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I, 205.

automatic presence of God in any religious practice, liturgy, or dogma, not only in Christianity, but also in any other religions could only be outright blasphemous as the wholly other could never be captured and contained in any human system. We are not arguing that there is no presence at all, but that it is impossible to produce presence through calculated performances. Presence is an event that happens and beyond any control of humans.

Yet, it is not a matter of putting into suspicion the promise of Jesus Christ's presence amidst those who gathers in his name. But it is an effort to problematize the question of "name," of which, as Derrida demonstrates, there is nothing "proper" about it, and the violence involved in the process of naming and the levels of violence that the conception of "proper names," brings along with it.²⁰⁵ Reinhold Niebuhr reminds us about the metonymy of the "name" that happens when the name of Christ becomes a stand-in or a synonym for the nation as the in pre-war Germany.²⁰⁶ We can think about a multitude of such metonymic substitutions—patriarchy, race, caste, class, *capitalism*, *heterosexism*, *patriotism*,²⁰⁷ etc.—that which could be actually be working under the name of Christ or as a metonym. As for the recipients of the promise of presence, the only option would be to put the name under a constant interrogation or deconstruction to examine whether the name of Christ or Jesus is a covert substitution or trope for many of these and other possible nefarious substitutions. The faith statement of "God is with us"

²⁰⁵ Derrida, *Grammatology*, 112-113.

²⁰⁶ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 97.

²⁰⁷ It is not an issue with capital, or having a heterosexual orientation, or having a healthy and relational sense of belonging to a nation, but of everything turning violent and oppressive when they become *-isms*.

could only be true as far as and as long as it is accompanied by the corollary of constant questioning of “are we with God.”

The contemporary practice of mission displays a certainty of having a full-presence of God in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit within the Christian communities, which could subsequently be translated and transported to other cultures/languages and be seamlessly transcribed and securely implanted in new milieus. Fully self-present individuals and institutions through which God is made present in verbal communication in turn carry out the act of translation, transport, and subsequent implantation of Christian communions in different locations. The straightforward equation of proclamation to preaching, along with the contention of Word being made *present* in preaching,²⁰⁸ and thus preaching as an unavoidable necessity, binds Christian communities to the quintessential option of preaching that is poised toward a singular goal of conversion of religious others. Since there is no other sacramental presence and mode of proclamation, preaching thus becomes the unavoidable obligation for becoming a witness or disciple of Jesus Christ. When preaching is claimed as the only true mode of proclamation, the contemporary pattern of mission through spoken address becomes indispensable, or rather irreplaceable, and everything else that the Christian communities do could only be perceived as an expediting pretext for this singular obligatory of verbal communication of the gospel.

²⁰⁸ It would be imprecise to perceive that this view of presence or the preaching as the Word being made present, or as an alternative to the “sacrament of the altar,” as within the Roman Catholic church, emerged exclusively with Karl Barth, rather it should be seen as one that has been a part of the Christian tradition, which has been systematized by him. In fact, Barth revised his position of God’s presence in Church’s preaching in his *Church Dogmatics, Volume IV*. Even though it is not a rejection of his previous position on God’s presence in preaching, the fact that Barth found it necessary to revise points to the pitfalls of this position. Barth, *Gottingen Dogmatics*, 31.

The contention of any religion to have received anything more than a witness and a promise, the claim or assertion of being the singular administrators of God's mystery by any means is a sure source of violence and exclusion of multitude of others. Legitimately, humans could only metaphorically testify to what they have witnessed and have received as a gift from God, and could only give an account of the gracious giver in and through the characteristics of the gift, and never of the giver in its totality. This is so because the recipients are very much inside the giver and cannot have a vantage point to view and examine the divine. Our exploration in the subsequent chapters would be for the scriptural and theological resources in the Christian faith experience to argue that the God testified to is the very act of dissimulating presence rather than a transparent expression of full presence. If God could be perceived as a perennial performance of withdrawing every graspable presence, consequently the ecclesia would have to emulate this model in its obligatory engagement with the world. Then a new paradigm of witness would emerge wherein the proclamation of the gospel would be bold and unceasing, and yet remain consciously unconcerned about the mere augmentation of the ranks. The appeal and invitation before everyone to the discipleship of Christ, irrespective of their status of being born and raised within the tradition or beyond it, is by way of a proclamation that demonstrates the bearing of faith in the lordship and salvation in Christ by way of direct confrontation and refutation of the earthly hegemonies and dominances that are considered to be sacrosanct and thus requiring reverence. Next we look at the most prized of religious characteristics—universality and uniqueness.

1.5. The Source of Universality and Uniqueness

Along with the notion of producible or graspable presence, the concept of uniqueness is a prized possession of religious traditions.²⁰⁹ The contention of uniqueness and universality could either fuel indifference to the other, or the missional effort to make the other in the image of the self so that it could be loved and respected. While affirming the conception of uniqueness, it is necessary to examine the source of it in order to open up pathways of conversation between different faith traditions. Gilles Deleuze, a French philosopher, and a philosopher of multiplicities and immanence, in his discussion on the “Image of Thought,” problematizes the conception of thought being perceived as a natural endowment of humans who are supposed to possess a pure self that is imbued by an inherent goodwill, and capable of conjuring thoughts independent of any concepts.²¹⁰ Deleuze begins his exploration by examining the Descartes’ *Meditations*, and demonstrates that even though Descartes sets aside the Aristotelian definition of humans as a ‘rational animal,’ since this definition demands explicit presuppositions of both what ‘rational’ and ‘animal’ are meant to be, he ends up assuming another set of presuppositions that are being perceived to be commonsensical and hence of universal knowledge and validity. While escaping the explicit presuppositions, Deleuze demonstrates that the Cartesian definition of ‘I think,’ or humans as thinking beings is based upon another set of “subjective or implicit presuppositions.” Thus for Deleuze, the conception of “I think, therefore I am,” is based upon the three “implicit presuppositions

²⁰⁹ Recall the volumes that appeared in the late 1980s around the theme of Christian uniqueness. For example, John Hick, Paul F. Knitter, eds., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987), and, Gavin D’Costa, ed., *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990).

²¹⁰ Gilles Deleuze, “The Image of Thought,” in *Difference and Repetition*, trans., Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University, 1994), 129-167.

or subjective opinions” that “everyone knows independently of concepts, what is meant by self, thinking, and being.”²¹¹ Thought in the Cartesian mode, Deleuze avers, is saturated with recognition and representation wherein “difference becomes an object of representation always in relation to a conceived identity, a judged analogy, an imagined opposition or a perceived similitude,” and thus without any room for repetition in itself as it is accounted for only “by means of recognition, distribution, reproduction and resemblance.”²¹² The problem Deleuze flags is that all such acts of recognition and representation as both the evidence and instance of thought are based upon hypotheticals or concepts that beforehand determine the parameters and possibilities of thought, and thus becomes an act of everlasting ease. Thought, Deleuze holds, arises only in and through violence and,

the claws of absolute necessity—in other words, of an original violence inflicted upon thought; the claws of a strangeness or an enmity which alone would awaken thought from its natural stupor or eternal possibility: there is only involuntary thought, aroused but constrained within thought, and all the more absolutely necessary for being born, illegitimately, of fortuitousness in the world. Thought is primarily trespass and violence, the enemy, and nothing presupposes philosophy: everything begins with misosophy.²¹³

What forces us to think, or to overcome the distaste for knowledge or wisdom, is not of the object of recognition by way of resemblance, judging, or imagining, but it is of the order of “fundamental *encounter*” which cannot be perceived by the senses, as it is a “sign” that is “not a sensible being but the [very] being *of* the sensible... not the given but

²¹¹ Deleuze, “Image of Thought,” 129.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 138.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 139.

that by which the given is given.”²¹⁴ This object or sign that is being encountered comes across as a problem, and this problem unsettles the coherence of faculties of mind that were up till then held together by commonsense. Deleuze holds that the “[p]roblems are the differential elements in thought, the genetic elements in the true,”²¹⁵ and as such the problems are the only ones capable of engendering thought by way or rupturing commonsense assumptions and easy efforts at recognition and representation. For Deleuze, there is “neither affinity nor predestination” in the encounter, but it is the sheer “fortuitousness or the contingency” that which “guarantees the necessity” of thought.²¹⁶ Deleuze’s effort in interrogating the question of thought is to show that investigation by way propositions is a “play of mirrors,” wherein sense is generated by “a proposition that is [being considered to be] true if its expressible is true, while the expressible is true only when the proposition itself is true.”²¹⁷ Our interest in this discussion by Deleuze is what emerges within it as the source of universality.

Deleuze reverses the order and identifies the very location of sense in the problem itself, and that of the propositions to a secondary variety that could serve in as “responses and cases of solution,” and never as thoroughgoing resolutions to the problem. This is so because, the interrogation happens “within the framework of a community, [that] dismembers problems and questions, and reconstitutes them in accordance with the propositions of the common empirical consciousness—in other words, according to the probable truths of a simple *doxa*,” and thus he insists that the “sense or the problem is

²¹⁴ Deleuze, “Image of Thought,” 139-140.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 162.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 145.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 156.

extra-propositional, [and] that it differs in kind from every proposition.”²¹⁸ Deleuze further demonstrates that the “problems are Ideas themselves,’ while propositions are a “particular” and “determinate *response*.”²¹⁹ Thus, Deleuze insists that “[o]nly the Idea or [the] problem is universal,” and that [i]t is not the solution which lends its generality to the problem, but the problem which lends its universality to the solution.”²²⁰ Deleuze writes:

Even for a problem which has only a single case of solution, the proposition which designates this case would acquire its sense only within a complex capable of comprehending imaginary situations and integrating an ideal of continuity. To solve a problem is always to give rise to discontinuities on the basis of a continuity which functions as Idea. Once we ‘forget’ the problem, we have before us no more than an abstract general solution, and since there is no longer anything to support that generality, there is nothing to prevent the solution from fragmenting into the particular propositions which constitute its cases. Once separated from the problem, the propositions fall back into the status of particular propositions whose sole value is designatory.²²¹

This understanding of the source of universality as the problem that humans encounter, and not within the respective answers they come up with, calls for a dialogical existence with other religious traditions and with secular ideologies. Universality is neither in the self, nor the other, or a canopy of good intentions governing the discourse. It is between the self and other, with the problem or Idea as the source, and no one could have a discourse in any other way than universals, as all discourse is in a unique and particular relation to the problem that which is the source of universality. It is not that there is no uniqueness or universality in particular answers to the problem, but that all

²¹⁸ Deleuze, “Image of Thought,” 157.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 162.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid., 162.

particulars are very much unique and universal due to their inseparable bond to the question that they all are striving to address. If then theologically rendering this point: human predicament as in the all-pervading reality of sin and thus the inability of humans to author any actions beyond the taint of sin, did propel the pursuit for salvation and consequently inaugurated the religious quest in all its diversity, then conversation between religions around the unique and universal answers that the respective religions offer to the problem is a natural requirement both for fully understanding the strengths and weaknesses of one's own religious answers, and also to seek new followers.

The active and willful forgetting of the problem that sets off the quest for salvation or liberation, that the testimonies of revelation were never self-evident or transparent even for the immediate witnesses, that the testimonies always had to be accompanied by a painful process of continuous discernment and enactment, and about the futility of all testimonies that are not accompanied with acts that relativize the present with regard to the ultimate, would instantaneously become weapons that could cause bodily and material harm.

1.6. Sojourning between a Pair of Ellipsis and On a Bridge with Unsecured Towers

Christians have received a witness of God between a pair of ellipsis. There ought to have been many events and happening before our receiving of it, and based upon the gift that we have received as commandments, precepts, and broad perspectives on what pleases the divine are, there are, and ought to be, eschatological expectations that inform our lives in the present. The envisioning we permit ourselves on the things on the other sides of both of these ellipses—of former times and that of the eschatological horizon—

are extrapolations based upon the interpretations on what we have received and thus cannot claim the same reality status as that of the received witness. Neither do we have any privileged access to those that which are not disclosed, nor our best discernments based upon what has been graciously given cannot have any binding effect on the wholly other (Mat 24.36). Even the witness we have received, could have only been received, translated, transferred, and passed on in and through the linguistic resources we possess, and hence could only be an imperfect and incomplete mode of apprehension.

We travel on a bridge-called-life that we along with our companions generate out of the communal interpretations of the received witness and the eschatological anticipations they engender. This bridge is fashioned out of the interplay between the received witness along with the labors in which we persevere to institutionalize this inheritance and the accompanying eschatological yearnings. This bridge that cannot have any secure moorings other than the ones that are discursively wrought and performatively sustained through reiteration, and its towers appear only as touching the waters and going no further. It looks credible and inviting when the labors of the producers are in sync with their own profession of the received witness, and when the neighbors from other faith communions could recognize their own homologous eschatological expectations reflected in their neighbor's affirmations of greater "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14.17).

Our discussions in these pages point to one significant and unavoidable requirement of neighborly existence here on earth—one that of *encounter*. Allowing this encounter to happen requires theological and theoretical openness that do not foreclose such a possibility before any such could ever happen. While the mission practice and

theology during the colonial times, despite all of its shortcomings, liberated the church from its sedentary existence and set it on a course where persons and communities could put their faith to work in an unprecedented scope and reach, since the end of overt colonialism, the praxis of mission has reduced itself into an enterprise that chiefly composes the rationale for the continuation of a model that emerged and flourished within the colonial practice. Ever since, the reasoning of mission theology often sounds like what Derrida attempts demonstrate on how the narrower or the minor field of linguistics usurps every importance and life from the broader or general discipline of semiology and has turned it into “one of the areas of linguistics.”²²² A similar move within Christian theology is that the field of mission and missiology ceases to be a theme within ecclesiology and tries to become the sole reason for any ecclesiology.

The crucial resource that we have accounted from within the Hebrew tradition to prevent all manner of foreclosures and denegation is that of the voice from the whirlwind that addresses Job and reveals the impossibility of having a full and final resolution to the question of innocent suffering, and above all the limitedness all located positionalities. Next we map the field of Christian mission before we subsequently explore the theological resources that would take us beyond the contemporary mission paradigm.

²²² Derrida, *Grammatology*, 51.

CHAPTER 2

Contemporary Theological Articulations in Mission Theology and *missio Dei*

Jesus's call to the very first disciples to follow him have since prompted many to leave everything and strive to become doers as opposed to passive hearers who would take comfort in conforming to the prevailing order of their times. Church history is basically an account of those who tried to follow Jesus by unsettling the doctrinal and social status quos they found themselves in, and thereby risking everything including their very lives, to act upon their own personal and collective convictions on what is required of them to be followers of Christ in their own times. The missionary movement that gathered steam since the seventeenth century has been the most extensive and sustained of efforts at leaving everything and following Jesus. Martin Luther's reformation notion of the "priesthood of all believers" got its full effectiveness within the missionary movement, and both men and women got to contribute in their own right in this influential expression of Christian faith.¹ This is a very significant moment in the post-reformation period, when the believers began to take lead, evolve ambitious goals, and initiate bold and adventurous programs to fulfill them irrespective of their status of ordination, and regardless of gender, or social/class status. Ever since the origins of monastic movement, and before them becoming an intimate and official part of the

¹ Even today, it is astonishing to learn that "two-thirds of all British and American missionaries were women." Jeffrey Cox, "Master Narratives of Imperial Missions", in *Mixed Messages: Materiality, Textuality, Missions*, eds. Jamie S. Scott and Gareth Griffiths (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 6.

ecclesiastical structure, there could only have been very rare initiatives of the scale of modern missionary movement. This unique initiative presented an avenue for the believers to express and experiment their faith beyond the controls of the ruling classes of both the church and the state.

The studies on the contributions of the missionary movement are plentiful within both the Christian and secular scholarship. Equally abundant are the accounts of missionary movement's emergence and its ambiguous existence alongside the political, cultural, and militaristic aggression of colonialism. Even today, the efforts at conversion and church planting excessively ground its confidence upon monetary resource mobilization and on the power of currency exchange rates.² Our exploration is on the theology of mission, the question of why Christians have to be in any mission—not just the missions seeking conversion—and whether Christians are required to perform any overarching mission as an inalienable primary responsibility. Therefore, we will not focus on the history of mission or its status and the actual execution in our day.

Ever since its emergence, the modern missionary movement has undoubtedly shaped the whole being of the church and has especially recast the theological endeavor as an exploration of what should be the right avenue of action or mission at any given time and place. In light of their respective understandings of the significance of Jesus

² Todd M. Johnson, Gina A. Zurlo, et al., “Christianity 2015: Religious Diversity and Personal Contact,” and “Status of Global Christianity, 2015, in the Context of 1900–2050,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 39, no. 1 (Jan 2015): 28, 29. Regarding the influence of money in the mission enterprise, see, Jonathan A. Bonk, *Missions and Money: Affluence as a Missionary Problem... Revisited*, Revised and Expanded Edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006); and on the mission enterprise that has morphed into the lines of a for-profit business, see, Bessenecker, *Overturing Tables*. Both Bonk and Bessenecker seek to continue having mission focused on conversion, but without the seductions and corrupting influence of money and power that currently dictate both the motivations and the methods.

Christ, there could be several substantial differences between the various theological schools. However, it could be safely affirmed that, ever since the advent of the missionary movement, what unites the diverse schools of theology is the theme of mission, the question of what Christians ought to do in the “time that remains”³ as they await the eschatological consummation of the reign of God. Thus, from the whole corpus of liberation theologies to most other theological schools, in effect have become mission theologies or theologies at the service of mission. The difference between them is defined by how each understands the significance of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and on that basis determines their primary and unavoidable task as they seek to follow Christ and to be his witnesses.

We have noted in our discussion in the previous chapter that whether consciously active or inactive, or even when passively or impetuously so, human beings always have an impact on all that is around them by the very fact of being alive at a given time and place. Hence, it is never a question between action and inaction, but always one of getting the conscious actions right. It is also about ending the passive actions that are diametrically or obliquely opposed to the self-assumed cherished confessions of a person or communion, and of ending those having detrimental effects on humans and other members of the creation (both the living, and the supposedly nonliving—ones that could be considered as differently animate). One way to achieve right action is to prescribe forever a set of laws, and have them defined as mandatory duty, irrespective of historical situations that would require revised understandings on the presuppositions, nature, and

³ Giorgio Agamben has a book by this title. Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2005).

goals of the previously enlisted presumed right actions. Examples for religious and secular attempts at authoring right actions through law are plentiful in human history, with Marxism being the most recent total system that offers communes as the vehicle for concurrently producing right actions, and as that which offers salvation for the sins involved in all actions. The obvious issue with laws as the source of right actions is that they are “contingent to time and place,” and moreover, the prescribed deeds could be fulfilled through skillful ways that help circumvent the intent and thus end up sustaining malevolent status quos that the laws originally intended to prevent arising.⁴ Another is that they could become the source of an overarching mission that has to be accomplished regardless of the historical contingencies or the willingness of its supposed objects, and thus causing such a mission to become either a unilateral deterministic imposition on the other, and also as an unquenchable obsessive attachment to a particular iteration of the presumed mission. Above all, the issue of every action being invariably tainted, regardless of their intent and or the results, does necessitate a spirituality of begetting right actions without being burdened by the law of any overarching mission.⁵

⁴ Reinhold Niebuhr reminds about the “Talmudic reinterpretations, applications and extensions of the Torah [that] seek to do justice to the endless variety of problems and occasions for which the original law seems to be inadequate.” Also that: “No law can do justice to the freedom of man (*sic*) in history. It cannot state the final good for him (*sic*), since in his (*sic*) transcendence and self-transcendence no order of nature and no rule of history can finally determine the norm of his (*sic*) life.” Reinhold Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*, Volume II: *Human Destiny* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 39, & 40. Equally notable is the scriptural call for righteousness that surpasses the stifling bareness of literal observance rather than striving to approximate the spirit of the law (Mt. 5:20).

⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s recognition—in 1929, and before his public actions against Adolf Hitler and Nazism—that “we are not in a position to choose between good and evil, but only between one evil and another.” Geoffrey B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson, eds., *A Testament to Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York, Harper Collins, 1995), 504. Also, M. M. Thomas, in his Christian appreciation of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, reminds that “when human beings are actively involved in any field of action, what defeats the noble purposes is the attachment to actions, and what defiles the programs of action are self-righteousness and selfishness. How do we liberate the actor (*Karmi*), and the action (*Karma*) from the corruption of egoism, selfishness, and self-righteousness is the central question before all who struggle for a just society around the world.” M. M. Thomas, *Bhagavad-Gita: Oru Kristeeya Asvadanam*

The exploration here is on whether the call to Christian discipleship is one toward an overarching mission as a law that needs sustained implementation until eschatology, even if there could be changes in the understandings on the nature of this mission and improvisations on the methods to achieve them could be continuously refined in relation to historical conditions.⁶ Or else, whether the call is for the deconstruction of every overarching mission so that Christian witness would always be inseparably bound to both the witness of the faith and hope that it professes to have received as a gift from God in Jesus Christ, and to what it is observing in the world at any given moment in history. It is a perpetual effort to identify Christian life as a performative testimony to the continuous movement of the Holy Spirit between the inalienable components of a triadic witness, without conferring any precedence to the sequence on which comes first and what follows. Humans do always already have a witness, that is, through their very being in this world they are continuously testifying to the possibilities and impediments that their situations accord them, and also about their sympathies, solidarities, antagonisms, and aspirations, regardless of whether they do so intentionally, passively, or surreptitiously. Similarly, they are simultaneously witnessing (seeing/observing) and striving to perceive,

[Bhagavad-Gita: A Christian Appreciation] (Kerala, India: The Theological Literature Committee, 1987), 12. My translation.

⁶ Leslie Newbigin, with regard to mission focused on securing conversion of religious others and church planting being presented as a legal obligation before all Christians, observes that:

“There has been a long tradition which sees the mission of the Church primarily as obedience to a command... [This] tends to make mission a burden rather than a joy, to make it part of the law rather than part of the gospel. If one looks at the New Testament evidence one gets another impression. Mission begins with a kind of explosion of joy. The news that the rejected and crucified Jesus is alive is something that cannot possibly be suppressed... One searches in vain through the letters of St. Paul to find any suggestion that he anywhere lays it on the conscience of his readers that they ought to be active in mission. For himself it is inconceivable that he should keep silent. ... But nowhere do we find him telling his readers that they have a duty to do so.” Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 116.

discern, or recognize what is at work in the world. In addition to these two modes of witnessing (testifying to or disclosing one's own witness to the world, and the conscious watching/discernment), Christian claim is to have received the witness of God that testifies to the love, mercy, forgiveness, grace, justice, and above all of the already commenced reign of God. All gifts, inheritance, and promise, require the inheritors to produce actions worthy of the bequeathal.⁷ Thus, the challenge of an appropriate, adequate, and intentional Christian witness for any historical time is to have it inseparably aligned with both the discernment of what is happening in the world, and with the witness of God we have received in Jesus Christ, and that which is being continually renewed by the Holy Spirit (Jn.14:26). Our exploration in the subsequent chapters is to discover enough resources to argue that Christian story is one of resisting the ever-present seduction of the very idea of any overarching mission, and the quintessential inaugural of witness as the power to live in eternal freedom without ever having to "submit again to [the] yoke of slavery" (Gal.5:1) of any single or multiple repetitive and unreflexive acts through which a Christian life could be conducted with an easy conscience.⁸ It is an all too natural and understandable quest to preserve the grain of

⁷ In his discussion on Karl Marx, communism, and their continuing legacy, Derrida insists about the productive character of any promise. It is especially significant for the Christian promise: "It is even more a certain emancipatory and *messianic* affirmation, a certain experience of the promise that one can try to liberate from any dogmatics, and even from any metaphysico-religious determination, from any *messianism*. And a promise must promise to be kept, that is, not to remain "spiritual" or "abstract," but to produce events, new effective forms of action, practice, organization, and so forth." Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 111-112. Emphasis added in the last sentence.

⁸ Nikolai Berdyaev insists that, "God is Mystery, a Mystery toward which man (*sic*) transcends and with which he (*sic*) enters into communion. A false servile understanding of God, a slavish kataphatistic knowledge of God are the last refuge of human idolatry. God has not made a slave man (*sic*). God is the liberator. Theology has made a slave of him (*sic*). Theology and the seductions of theology have made a slave of him (*sic*), and idolatry has been possible in relation to God; and the slavish social relations of man (*sic*) have been transferred to the relation of man (*sic*) to God. God understood as an object with all the properties of an objectivized world has become the source of slavery. God as object is only the highest natural force of determination made absolute or the highest power of domination made absolute. What is

wheat from falling and dying, and yet be able to simulate striving and thus make themselves and others believe that they are doing exactly what they are called to emulate.

One word of caution at this point of our exploration would be that the words “overarching” and “mission” should always be read together and even when the word “mission” is found without this adjective. The argument that we advance here and in subsequent chapters is that the lives of individual humans and their all-encompassing collective expressions such as religions, and nation-states, should not have an overarching mission to live by. Nevertheless, they have to continuously evaluate their witness at every point of time and come up with different performativity that is in accord with both their own confession of faith and hope, and in responsive correspondence with whatever they are observing/witnessing in the world. An authentic response to reality or genuine witness needs to be appropriate and adequate intervention that strives to alter the prevailing situations in line with the confession of those who are getting involved. It is detrimental for individuals to live by any preordained singular overarching mission as it denies them the opportunity to lead their lives reflexively. To lead reflective and responsible lives is an organic dance of remaining open to the whole of reality. This dance is akin to Jon Sobrino’s conception of spirituality as an unrestrained and unending openness of “the spirit of a subject—an individual or a group—in its relationship with the whole of reality.”⁹ For Jon Sobrino, what distinguishes a genuine spirituality are, the “honesty about the real,” the “fidelity to the real,” and “a certain ‘correspondence’ by

determinism in nature is domination of society.” Nikolai Berdyaev, *Slavery and Freedom*, trans. R. M. French (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1944), 83.

⁹ Jon Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1988), 13.

which we permit ourselves to be carried along by the ‘more’ of the real.”¹⁰ The contention of having an overarching *a priori* of mission could in effect serve as an efficient shield from the reality surrounding individuals and communities, and thus help them evade the required reflexivity in life. Reflexivity is the ability of permitting themselves to be lured by the “more of the real,” which is the dimension of transcendence that always draws everyone and everything to be “more,” than the summation of their individual parts, and yet resists it being a possession. Adherence to overarching missions would prevent humans as individuals and their fellowships from transgressing and transforming laws and precedence when historical situations demand it. For the collective life-worlds like religions and nation-states that strive to define the destinies (not as fate, but as ethos that inform both the collective coexistence and the individual actions that sustains such living) of humans within its fold, to embrace an eternal and all-encompassing mission is an active invitation to tyranny. The fascist and communist states, and that of nationalist mission and manifest destiny, have made this abundantly obvious through the untold misery they have wrought, and the countless missions that still unravels our world in many tragic and horrendous ways.

We will return to this theme of witness in more detail in the next two chapters. The effort in this chapter is to study the theological imperatives that emerged within the missionary movement and continues to inform the life of both individual Christians and that of the church in its denominational and ecumenical expressions. Our focus in this chapter is to problematize the model of mission that holds that the conversion to Christian faith of those others beyond its fold is integral and imperative to the Christian call to

¹⁰ Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation*, 14.

discipleship, and that without its execution both the church and its members self-abrogates their claim to being Christian.

The danger of becoming an overarching mission is not an exclusive characteristic of the organized attempts aimed at religious conversion alone, rather that could consume every other mode of engagement that its respective proponents would insist as being inalienable and thus constitutive of being Christian. Thus, the overarching missions would end up stifling reflexivity, and reflexivity is life in itself. The reason we enter this reflection on mission through the conversion focused coalition of it is because it has been the source of an ongoing struggle within the ecumenical movement, a struggle that is now almost a century old, on what needs to be identified as the prime avenue, mode, and method of church's mission. The question continues to be whether church's mission is to primarily seek religious conversion, or is to have concrete and contextual engagements that would emerge out of church's conscious and sincere efforts at "reading the signs of the times."¹¹

As we have noted from the introduction chapter onwards, we come to this discussion from a different approach that would disrupt the contention of a secure, static, and accomplished entity, who could subsequently author acts as mission, and yet remain

¹¹ David Bosch holds that the signs of times argument "begs the question *how* we are to interpret God's action in history and so learn to commit ourselves to participation in this." On the other hand, S. Wesley Ariarajah notes his conviction that "in the course of the world missionary enterprise from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries, the church and the missionary movement have spun a missiological web in which they are now caught, with no way out." The quarrel between both sides is on what ought to be defined and pursued as mission, and thus both sides are vying for the very same mantle of mission. For those focused on conversion, the battle is about defending their supposed turf with minimal accommodation for ever emerging and evolving newer themes and thrusts, while for the other side comprising of a diversity of theological orientations and perspectives, it is to establish that the contemporary avenue of mission ought to ensure church's participation in the manifold actions that could be termed as pursuing justice, loving kindness (Mic.6:8), and "healing of the nations" (Rev.22:2). Bosch, *Transforming*, 428, Emphasis original. S. Wesley Ariarajah, *Your God, My God, Our God: Rethinking Christian Theology for Religious Plurality* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 2012), 158.

beyond the sway of any effect on its state and status as an entity, and regardless of whether or not it initiates such acts. We have noted that the prevalence of a set of genitalia and the supposedly obvious biological presence of erotic zones does not guarantee gender identity and sexual orientation. And, that the emergence of a subject is incumbent upon the “condition of being *impinged upon*” by others and that this impingement is “synchronic and infinitely recurring.”¹² If it is within a certain performativity that a subject continue becoming, then it becomes incomprehensible to consider a religious subject as straightforwardly founding itself through a particular combination of verbal confessions and accompanying ritual acts, and thereupon consider that this subject could originate subsequent or second-step actions as its mission in life. It is moreover so, when all three of these—verbal confessions, ritual acts, and subsequent actions—could never be completely and comprehensively smelted or sublimated from its metonymies that could be perceived as generating and sustaining the texts of hegemony and dominance of any time and place. Our effort is to underscore that a confession of being recipients of a vision or revelation of a ladder (Gen.28:12) could be made only by way of worship and by organizing one’s life in such a way that it becomes a blessing to those around. What is impossible and improper is the contention that the recipients of such a gracious vision could thereafter begin ascending and descending this ungraspable ladder at will, and that they could thereupon begin addressing themselves and other humans from the standpoint of the Divine.

Equally impossible is to sustain a confession by itself, as any such verbal pronouncement would always already be an act on behalf of, and thereby in opposition to

¹² Butler, *Giving an Account*, 90.

a certain ordering of the society. If a conversion and thus the consequently different confession could only be effected in and through acts (Lk.19:8), then the only thing that would matter is the acts that testify to the reality of such a conversion and confession. The methods and manner in which they are being performatively wrought could only be dependent on the issues at play, and not on any particular and eternal scheme that stays selfsame through every act of conversion and confession. Whether the acts of conversion and confession could be begotten through verbal testimony, a Barmen Declaration, a Kairos Document, Base Communities, acts of charity and solidarity, or anything else that the church would have previously enlisted as an expression of its testimony, or the need to evolve a totally new one, depends entirely upon the acute and urgent questions of the context, and there could not be anything sacrosanct with the modes and methods in themselves. Thus, our attempt to problematize the notion of mission is to free the church from considering any of the modes and methods that were previously invoked as inviolable and thus requiring them being performed until the eschaton.

The theology of mission from seventeenth century onward for the most part has been based on the Great Commission, the scriptural text of Matthew 28:18-20, and by the early twentieth century, it became the key to read not only the gospel of Matthew, but also the entire Biblical corpus. Even as the effort of turning the command of this Matthean pericope as the primary responsibility of the Christian church continues to this day, the effort since the early 1950s is to understand mission as part of God's very being. This new understanding of mission as one that originates from God, widens the scope of mission to include every aspect of the world that calls for church's involvement, rather than being limited to an enterprise aimed to secure religious conversion and initiate

church planting as clones of the originating communion. Yet, the idea of mission as law or responsibility and as an essential component to one's being, without which one ceases to exist, could only work either as an obsession with results and thus as an overzealousness to accomplish it in one's own lifetimes, or else as an inconvenient burden that necessitates evolving painless ways to simulate endeavoring. Especially so when one particular understanding and enactment is being idolized and held as inviolable, undisputable, and requiring no further discernments other than refinement of strategies.

In this chapter, we begin by trying to trouble the continuist construct that one particular model of engagement with the peoples of other religious faiths had been inaugurated by Jesus of Nazareth, and that which have been meticulously carried out by the apostles, and thereafter by the disciples in every generation. Since the continuist story is one of the major devices that serves as both justification and sustenance of the mission model that emerged in the sixteenth century, we enlist the works of Ramsay MacMullen, Peter Brown, Judith Lieu, Richard A. Horsley, and others to interrupt this supposedly settled and thus unquestionable certainty. With this background work on the continuist argument on behalf of mission, we would read significant contributions that David Bosch, John G. Flett, and Marion Grau have made in the field of mission theology. We hope to surface important aspects of their work that would lend us resources to be courageous enough to resist idolizing any particular mode and method of engagement with the religious other in particular and the world in general.

2.1. A Retrojective Paradigm that Refuses Shifting¹³

The conversions of Saint Augustine and other major figures of early Christianity are well known and we need not focus our attention on them in our discussion on mission aimed at securing religious conversion in particular, and especially so in our attempt at problematizing the very concept of “mission” itself. However, the question of the ways in which church transformed itself from being a peripheral, sporadically persecuted, and marginalized minority, and went on to dramatically grow and ultimately claim the whole of Roman Empire is of utmost interest. It is especially important in our effort to disrupt the bipartite scheme of an existent, static, and accomplished Christian who could produce second-step actions as its mission, and remain confident that none of its missional acts would ever alter its constitution. And, evermore so in our attempt to discern reliable means for the continued becoming of the Christian and her church, and a becoming that in itself would appeal equally to the minds of both who are currently being nurtured within the tradition, and of those beyond its fold.

Just as in the scriptural warnings on what not to take confidence and comfort in—horses and chariots (Ps.20:7; Isa.31:1)—the sum total of religious adherents in itself cannot be a pointer toward anything secure and set in stone, and continental Europe is its living proof. If in the present times, some have indeed become Christians (or for that matter have become Muslims, or any other religionists) by whatever motivation and efforts, they themselves or their next generations could very well become something else

¹³ Retroject/-ive/-ion: “...a feature of this approach is that it hypothesizes about courses of development in the past on the basis of the empirical evidence presently available, which is not unlike making predictions about courses of development in the future on the basis of the empirical evidence presently available, we may refer to it as the retrojective approach...” Carlos P. Otero, “Introduction,” in *Noam Chomsky: Critical Assessments*, Volume IV, *From Artificial Intelligence to Theology: Chomsky’s Impact on Contemporary Thought*, Tome I, ed., Carlos P. Otero (New York: Routledge, 1994), 16.

tomorrow. Similarly, to be leery of is the confident sightings of Christ here and there (Mt. 24:23) as in the persuasive arguments that the “center of gravity in the Christian world has shifted inexorably away from Europe... to Africa... Latin America, and... Asia,” and that the “conversions will swell the Christian share of world population” resulting in a “worldwide boon in the coming decades.”¹⁴ We have already noted Peter C. Phan’s contention that the “demise of Christendom” came through the “gradual realization that Christendom is not Christianity, and [that it] has nothing to do with Jesus and his gospel.”¹⁵ The current trends in religious conversions could not be perceived as portending a definitive future in terms of demographic trends. Neither could they be portrayed as heralds of the emergence of truly humane societies that would seek justice for human flowering while sustaining the integrity of creation. Nor as communities that would be vigilant enough to steadfastly resist imposing restrictive, punitive, and discriminatory will of the hegemonic and dominant majorities on the groups and individuals that they deem as other. The number of adherents in itself in any era could not be considered as a measure for Christian piety. Only the witness of those who seek to follow Christ could count for anything substantive in drawing others to the fold (Mt.5:16), regardless of whether the size of the flock is little (Lk.12:32) or large.

In his investigation on how the Roman Empire was Christianized from second through fourth century CE, Ramsay MacMullen sets out with the definition of “Christian conversion” as that “change of belief by which a person accepted the reality and supreme

¹⁴ Phillip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, 3rd Edition (New York: Oxford, 2011), 1, 2.

¹⁵ See, footnote 38, in the Introduction chapter.

power of God and determined to obey Him.”¹⁶ MacMullen begins with the account of instantaneous mass conversions of men at the foot of Saint Symeon Stylite’s pillar in the first half of the fifth century—the Syrian saint who stood everyday on a pillar as part of his rigorous ascetic practices. MacMullen ponders whether many of these instant converts could be considered to have “had really joined the church,” as most would have continued their previous ways of life that includes “pillaging of their enemies and avenging of their own dead.” He notes that the accepted pace of conversion as sanctioned by the fourth-century ecumenical council canons held “that the laying on of hands alone suffices for the salvation of nonbelievers,” and those who witness miracles were exhorted to swiftly become Christians without any further contemplation.¹⁷ MacMullen’s contention is that, apart from the minor part of the conversions that are personally “intense and consuming,” and involving the total “adherence of body and soul,” the vast majority of mass conversions during the pre-Constantine era happened in response to miracles and healings and that they could not have changed the conduct of the people very much. And, that up till 312 CE, and before Constantine’s “opening up of toleration” towards Christians, the available evidence supports only “how *groups* (not individuals) turned to the church.”¹⁸

Juxtaposed with this account of group conversions is that of an episcopal visitation to “Saxony and neighboring parts of Germany,” in the year 1600, during the height of Reformation. This ecclesiastical embassy finds a vast majority of people

¹⁶ Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400)* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

beyond the immediate circles of the elite, to continue being “ignorant of the simplest matters of doctrine, rarely attending church,” and practicing the “forbidden arts.” It considers them as “beyond the theologian’s grasp, the preacher’s appeal, or the visitor’s power to compel.”¹⁹ Yet, MacMullen maintains that the large group conversions worked in favor of Christians as it provided it with the accumulation of a critical mass that ultimately tilt the balance in favor of Christianity in terms of religious affiliation.²⁰ And especially so after the well-known conversion of Constantine in the year 312, after which the power of the earthly throne served as yet another authority in legitimizing and providing the strategic pressure of persuading momentum to the conversion efforts. After examining a breadth of literary material from both Christian and non-Christian sources, and having compared them with the archeological evidence available up till the early 1980s, MacMullen concludes that “after the New Testament times and before Constantine, very little open advertising of Christianity is attested,” and that no form of “official mission,” or “missionaries are just not mentioned.”²¹ What prompted “en masse conversions” required to account for the growth of Christianity through the end of fourth century, MacMullen holds, “first, the operation of a desire for blessing, least attested; second, and much more often attested, a fear of physical pain—*timor* as Augustine puts it later, *timor* belonging invariably to conversion; third, and most frequent, credence in miracles.”²² Since our interest in the pre-Constantine period is on whether the majority of conversions were wrought through the efforts of missionaries that could be perceived as

¹⁹ MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire*, 5.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 111.

²² *Ibid.*, 108.

precursors of the modern missionary movement, and thus as an enduring rationale for their continued maintenance and value in begetting new adherents, let us account for the judgment of other historians in this regard.

Even if MacMullen and other scholars could remain uncertain of the status and significance of exorcism, healings, and ecstatic pronouncements that are held to have happened in the past, we ought to read them in a different light and also point to the possibility of these phenomena to be still remaining as productive in galvanizing communities. This hesitancy to account for these unconventional practices is not just the characteristic of secular scholars alone, as Richard Horsley notes that it is prevalent among the contemporary New Testament scholars too. Horsley argues that these acts could have been “precisely what catalyzed community solidarity and the motivation for the formation of alternative communities and resistance to the dominant order.”²³ We would later, in the fourth chapter, look into the possibility of still having a place for the miraculous events and happenings within the witness of the church. Miracles as not something the church or individuals within it are capable of consciously and programmatically producing—which no human could ever do—but the constant recounting of them as a habitus that repetitively attune adherents to identify the miraculous whenever they appear, and having them being well-prepared to push open the doors of opportunity that crack open inexplicably. Not to discern or accord God’s hand behind any of the happenings in the present, as these miracles are very much in the realm of scientific and historical explanations, and many with not so pleasant outcomes, and

²³ Richard A. Horsley, “Introduction: Unearthing a People’s History,” in *Christian Origins: A People’s History of Christianity*, Volume 1: *Christian Origins*, ed., Richard A. Horsley (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2010), 4.

often times of unspeakable suffering and chaos. Yet, they are miracles nonetheless, as these opportunities were never being sought through contemplation, or strived for by ardent labor of activism, or yearned for in individual and communal prayers. Miracles of this order provide unique opportunities to witness God by being perpetually prepared to seize them whenever they appear and use them to change the course of history. We will try to account for a couple of events from the recent memory to argue that Christian witness invariably involve in seizing upon these miracles and turning them into moments of resurrection, or at the least to a certain degree to prevent the world from seeking restorations that are equivalent to raising the dead.

Christian proclamation in the pre and post Constantine eras could be perceived as diametrical opposite. The former had its preaching trained against the imperial imprimatur as it problematized the imperial contention of emperor as the lord and the son of God, and hence of the obligatory of emperor worship.²⁴ In the latter mode, the Christian proclamation travelled along with the imprimatur of the respective political authorities through the imperial, national kingdoms, and the colonial times. Even in the postcolonial times, it still travels on the shoulders of the abilities to raise enormous amount of financial resources that would rival the profits of the largest corporations of the world, and on the power of currency exchange rates.²⁵ Above all, the conversion

²⁴ Many recent works explore the subversive character of the gospel of Christ in its relation to the Roman Empire of pre-Constantine period. Especially see, Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1997); Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003); and, Brigitte Kahl, *Galatians Re-imagined: Reading with the Eyes of the Vanquished* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2010).

²⁵ As per the tabulation of the statistics of the global Christianity in the January 2015 issue of the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, by mid-2015, the approximate “Income of Global Foreign Missions” would have been approximately \$45 billion. Apple Corporation, by far one of the biggest companies in the world, reported that “Fiscal 2015” was its “most successful year ever,” by posting an

themed missions continue on the construct that sharply splits the salvation of the soul from every other aspect of life, and thereby skillfully unseeing or foreclosing itself from both the corporate and state-sponsored devastation that happens around the world.

The model for modern missionary efforts of the last five centuries is readily available off the shelves in the Acts of the Apostles, and it is only a matter of building the history of the church ever since the New Testament times as one that consistently continued with this singular paradigm of begetting adherents by persuading them through preaching. Thus the continuing rationale for the sustenance of this model of persuasion by preaching, despite the necessary adjustments enlisted to accommodate the ever evolving spectrum of social sensitivities, and the refinement of strategies by gathering from an array of advantageous works of charity and social involvements that is supposed to be beneficial in accelerating the flow of adherents. In contrast to the standard missionary image of street corner preaching, that renders the rival religions as errors and their deities as demons, the model that emerges within Paul's own letters is of a very slow and painstaking evolution of Christian communities. "A collaborative team worked in a town for months, even years, engaged in sustained teaching located in households of

yearly revenue of \$234 billion and a "record fourth quarter results" with "net profit of \$11.1 billion." If we assume that Apple raked in similar net profits throughout the four quarters of 2015, then it will amount \$44.4 billion, and it matches the "Income of Global Foreign Missions" enterprise. Apple achieves this level of profit through continuous product innovation, investments in research and development, successfully managing vast operations of production, advertising, marketing, and after-sales servicing, and above all in the face of fierce competition from mighty and lesser competitors. Moreover, Apple or other for-profit corporations would rise, fall, or survive only because of its success in their respective fields of expertise. See, Todd M. Johnson, Gina A. Zurlo, et al., "Christianity 2015: Religious Diversity and Personal Contact," and "Status of Global Christianity, 2015, in the Context of 1900–2050," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 39, no. 1 (Jan 2015): 28, 29. For the 2015 fourth quarter fiscal results of Apple Corporation, see, "Apple Reports Record Fourth Quarter Results," October 27, 2015, Apple Corporation, accessed February 25, 2016, <http://www.apple.com/pr/library/2015/10/27Apple-Reports-Record-Fourth-Quarter-Results.html>.

those who joined the fledgling communities.”²⁶ Even years of work do not result in a desirable witness that Paul aspires to see in his assemblies, the *ekklesia*, a term that provides a contrasting parallel to the political governing body of the cities, the *polis*.

In his discussion on the authorship, technique, and themes of the Acts of the Apostles, Bart D. Ehrman, drawing upon the Greek historian Thucydides, notes that no one took extensive notes of the speeches in the ancient times and that “historians quite consciously made up the speeches... to fit both the character of the speaker and the occasion.”²⁷ Thus, the speeches that are being held to as having been delivered by Paul and others “reflect what ‘Luke,’ the author of the account, himself wrote and placed on their lips.”²⁸ From the act of electing a replacement for Judas Iscariot, to the twelve’s collective presence when Peter converts thousands of Jews, to the introduction of Paul and his subsequent work becoming a point of entry for the Gentiles into the Church, to the Jerusalem council, and beyond, Ehrman, perceives that Luke is presenting an account of continuity. Beginning with Luke’s gospel demonstration of the continuity between Judaism and Jesus, in the Acts, the themes are of continuity between both Judaism and Christianity, and between Jesus and the church. Since the end of the world did not come as early Christians predicted, and as many were using this as a pointer that “Christians had been wrong all along,” Luke is presenting a program of caring for the vulnerable and spreading the message of Jesus as they continue to await the now deferred denouement.²⁹

²⁶ Ray Picket, “Conflicts at Corinth,” in *A People’s History of Christianity*, Volume 1, *Christian Origins*, ed., Richard A. Horsley (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2010), 121.

²⁷ Ehrman, *New Testament*, 143.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 148.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 161.

Thus, the significance for us is that missionary preaching and massive conversions rest only in part on actual events, and the rest is assembled in a way to motivate the community. The depictions in the Acts cannot be taken as a mandate as they themselves are an aspirational and motivational retrojection on what would have indeed happened, and with an acute focus on the effect that the text should have on its readers. The motivation we seek from scriptures and traditions is not verbatim, but in correspondence with our discernments of our world, and how best to follow Christ within its contingencies and within the scope of our own abilities. The only mandate that remains constant is the act of repentance and following, which in turn is the perpetual unsettling of the status quos of the society and its hegemonic and dominant orders.

The idealized notions of early Christianity as communes committed in practicing subversive politics and egalitarian living is equally misleading. It is yet again both a universal generalization based on the Acts depiction of perfect communal life that shares a common life, purpose, and a purse (Acts 4), and it is a projection of what we aspire to see in the past in order to seek authoring our present upon that basis. Above all, it is a construct to generate a pristine origin and a subsequent fall after which everything worthwhile was corrupted, and thus begetting a rationale to be in a constant effort to recapture this supposed immaculate origin. Virginia Burrus and Rebecca Lyman cautions that the “notion of a strictly egalitarian Christian community is as questionable as is the notion of Christianity as a distinctly low-class or proletarian movement.” Thus, the task before us is to account for both the “ways in which ancient Christian practices challenged social hierarchies by privileging the unprivileged... and the ways in which it

simultaneously reaffirmed existing class distinctions and gave rise to new ones.”³⁰ Peter Brown notes that a “myth of decline of the Church” became a prominent theme for Origen and Chrysostom, and that it got systematized by Augustine in the context of his effort to equate Christians partaking in civic celebrations as a corruption and equating it as an offering of “incense to the demons, taken from their very own hearts.”³¹ The New Testament itself is a testimony that there is no pristine origin as the first disciples, Paul, and the writers of the gospels were all striving to construct a plausible rendering of what has just happened in their midst and to delineate its significance to their own and for the times to come.

Every attempt at reform, renewal, and revival, turns on this pivot of decline from a perfect past, and to which humans have to return in order to have a live of serenity and fulfillment. The reason why every attempt at *reparatio* becomes painfully wrought and yet proves to be transitory wonders at best, or tyrannical tragedies at worst, could be because of this very nostalgic notion of decline and refusing to accept that humanity has no place or past to return. Emperor Diocletian who reigned from 284 to 305 CE, stabilized the Roman Empire from the decades of turmoil that he inherited. Following Diocletian, Constantine and other emperors continued on this trajectory, and “*reparatio* and *renovatio* were the slogans” of those times.³² However, by the end of the western empire in 476, none of these times of exuberance and ease of restoration and renewal was

³⁰ Virginia Burrus and Rebecca Lyman, “Shifting the Focus of History: Introduction,” in *A People’s History of Christianity*, Volume 2: *Late Ancient Christianity*, ed., Virginia Burrus (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005), 9.

³¹ Peter Brown, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianization of the Roman World* (New York: Cambridge University, 1997), 23.

³² Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000*, Tenth Anniversary Edition (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 57.

even remembered. Humanity only has a singular opportunity at envisioning a present and limited farsightedness into the future, and striving to realize it despite all its imperfections and ambiguities. The past as history and tradition could serve as signposts, a treasury of experience, and as buoys that mark out danger zones while navigating chartered waters, and also in unchartered waters as homologous pointers on what to watch out. Yet, the future is a very new creation that which God continually inaugurates (Rev.21:5) and there is no resemblance or any necessary bearing of it on the past. Faith alone is the sole companion on this last stretch when the act of taking flight as a trapeze performer by trusting that the future as the catcher will be there to capture the stretched out hands of the faithful actor who has already leaped from their secure and comfortable moorings. This unyielding faith will not come out of nothing and nowhere unless there is a conscious and consistent habitus of it before this release from the swing that the self is holding securely, and flying off to the unknown as an act or leap of faith. Doxology as the continuous recounting of the past acts of faith is that very habitus that prepares the participant to muster both the motivation and the might to their collective and individual leaps of faith. It is also that testimony of the grace of God experienced during those of previous acts of taking risks of faith as testified both in the scriptures and within the tradition. Thus, it is a continuous act of drawing reassurance toward the current acts of faith, and also a preparation and prompting the participants for their own acts of faith with the sure understanding that to live and follow Christ is possible only in and through their continued leaps of faith. Otherwise, God will be one who is made in the image of the insecure petty human overlords who revel in the adoration of their minions, and respond acerbically to every real or imagined slights to their authority and esteem.

In the context her exploration for “a series of nodal points around which Christian identity is configured,” Judith Lieu highlights the conspicuous absence of the prominent and pervasive signs of religious competition in early Christian texts beginning with the New Testament, especially in the Acts, and within the apologetic texts from the second century.³³ Apart from the scene of confrontation in Acts 14, Lieu notes that, “[d]espite Luke’s supposed affinity with the Gentiles, the cities he portrays as the scenes of Paul’s missionary activities in Acts boast rather more synagogues than temples.”³⁴ Even in Paul’s own letters to the churches in many cities in the Roman world, it is hard to realize that they are situated in “a Greek city,” as the “competing deities are notable by their absence.”³⁵ The evidence that Lieu is gathering is in order to account for the various acts of construction, imagining, invention, and remembering involved in the forging of early Christian identity as markedly different from the “other possible identities.”³⁶ The polemics against Jews are based on “Jews of the Old Testament,” and the attacks on “pagan” worship is based on ancient authorities from Homer onwards, and none of them account for, or are trained against actual groups of people and their religious practices. The act of systematic unseeing of the prevailing religious competition surrounding the early Christian communities, and the religious others being presented in “formulaic,” “caricatured” and stereotypical categories, is perceived by Lieu as a device to live simultaneously in the real world, and also in another created “world that they constructed

³³ Judith Lieu, *Neither Jew Nor Greek?: Constructing Early Christianity*, Second edition (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 240.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 240, 241.

through their texts.”³⁷ The primary concern of the early Christian texts, Lieu holds, has been “group identity... rather than the self-awareness of the individual.”³⁸ Thus the texts including “martyrology as a literary genre... produce a complete world of meaning (or a symbolic universe) which readers are invited to inhabit, a world of meaning that would have been strikingly contradictory of the dominant values of the time.”³⁹ The significance we could draw from Lieu’s work is that the persuasion in early Christianity was organized by means of demonstrating its oppositional witness rather than preaching to sell yet another version of God in the religious marketplace of late antiquity. Even with Paul, it is the witness that he presents before the Jewish diaspora—neither the brilliant and incessant preaching that pursues persons (1 Cor.2:4), nor the super apostles (2 Cor.11:5)—as that has gathered both Jews and Greeks into the churches and those he nurtured. And, Paul being instructed “more accurately” by Prisca and Aquila (Acts 18:26), and them being previously expelled from Italy (18:2) points to the presence of Christians in Rome before Paul began nurturing assemblies over there.⁴⁰ Moreover, it points to the communitarian nature of the witness that draws others to Christian communities and the team effort that goes into mutually enhancing and sustaining everyone within it.

In the age of Constantine onwards, the conversion to Christianity for the aristocracy was a “conversion to the almost numinous majesty of the Roman empire, now

³⁷ Lieu, *Neither Jew Nor Greek?*, 90, 95, 96.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁰ Ray Picket, “Conflicts at Corinth,” 121.

restored and protected by the one God of the Christians.”⁴¹ During this period, “the victorious rout of demons,” which means desecration of non-Christian places of worship, “formed the basic Christian narrative for the spread of the faith.”⁴² The leaders of Christian faith did not send out preachers across the borders of the Roman Empire until 400 CE,⁴³ and it is only after 600 CE that there really ensued an “age of the missionaries.”⁴⁴ For most of the third century, “the church remained a small group,” however, they “succeeded in becoming a big problem,” requiring persecutions as a way to contain them.⁴⁵ Even with power of the sword leading the way of the Word, it is only close to the year 1000 CE, a “‘European’ Christianity” would be “established with the conversion of Germany, of parts of Eastern Europe, and of Scandinavia.”⁴⁶

The continuist history of perennial presence of missionaries right from the New Testament times to the post-Constantine period is constructed in an authoritative form in the church history by Eusebius of Caesarea. It is Eusebius’s decision for himself and a stern instruction for his contemporary and future Christian writers that it is necessary to “set forth in our whole narrative what may be of profit, first, to our own times, and then to later times.”⁴⁷ Since there could seldom be anything other than “interested writing,” MacMullen is calling to attention the need to assemble resources from non-Christian

⁴¹ Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, 84.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 83.

⁴³ Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity: AD 150-750* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), 112.

⁴⁴ Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, 4.

⁴⁵ Brown, *World of Late Antiquity*, 65.

⁴⁶ Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, xvi.

⁴⁷ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Quoted in MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire*, 6.

writings and from archeological evidence to arrive at some plausible positions on what could have prompted conversions in the pre-Constantine times for the Christian movement to gather its adherents.

Twenty-five years after the publication of “Christianizing the Roman Empire,” in a new book entitled “The Second Church,” MacMullen looks at the actual state of the church as it practiced its piety in the form of various liturgical, fellowship, and cultural acts. In it, based upon a vast amount of new written material and archeological evidence that became available in the last two decades (from 1990 to 2010), underscoring the eastern or Greek origins of Christianity, and of its spread along with diaspora movement across the Roman Empire, MacMullen argues that:

Centuries of immigration, including forced displacement as slaves, had had a profound effect on [Rome,] the great capital of the ancient world. Among other signs of its operations was religion, including *post-Pauline Christianity, which had spread slowly, not so much by evangelism as by people themselves moving about, bringing the comfort of their traditions with them and seeking out their like*, to make stronger cultural communities wherever they settled.⁴⁸

If MacMullen’s previous work on Christianization of the Roman Empire was predominantly based upon the written texts, in this new book he compares literary compositions with the archeological evidence that became available recently, especially those from the Eastern Mediterranean region. MacMullen observes that written material comprises “often [the] normative view,” over and against the actuality that the authors “chose to ignore purposefully... as [the] actual practice [were often] differing from exalted norms, differing in social strata, differing according to time and region as

⁴⁸ Ramsay MacMullen, *The Second Church: Popular Christianity A.D. 200-400* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), x. Emphasis added.

Christian habits changed.”⁴⁹ These marginalized aspects are that he strives to surface through archeological evidence of the early Christian sites from across Eastern Mediterranean.

This discussion on early Christian communities that we are having is with the intension to express that there is no simple and self-evident linear progression from Jesus to disciples to the church, and that it had been a painstaking process of experimentation over the centuries that gave form and content to Christian communities across the Roman Empire.⁵⁰ The communities could have grown in numbers by the persuasive power of their communal witness that was unparalleled in the Roman world. Every other religious and secular communion admitted persons of their own social standing, while Christians would be the first one to have contested this norm of social class and embraced the model of a table open for all to share.⁵¹ Christianity never came into being without this process of a social movement, and thankfully, we are back again at the very same pre-Constantine era as there is no longer a Christendom to defend or look up to for patronage. If there is not an assumption of a symbiotic association between Christianity and capitalism, then there is nothing that binds it with the current hegemonic and dominant dispensations.

⁴⁹ MacMullen, *Second Church*, xii.

⁵⁰ Hal Taussig identifies the role of the “master narrative” of secure and singular origin of Christianity and its linear progression by way of a “straight trajectory of thought, practice, and authority from Jesus to the Nicene Creed” and beyond is in itself “manipulative and illusory.” This originary myth and linear progression serves to “marginalize the voices of the subaltern” and to help resist and foil “democratic processes of change within Christianity,” and above all as a “justification for Christian religion (over against other religions), and [its] global dominance.” Hal Taussig, *In the Beginning was the Meal: Social Experimentation and Early Christian Identity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2009), 13-16.

⁵¹ Brigitte Kahl observes that “from the perspective of Pax Romana and its imperial *nomos*, Paul’s peacemaking and community building (*koinonia*) between Jews and Gauls/Galatians ‘in Christ’ must have appeared as an upsetting irregularity that implied lawless conduct and disturbed the common (*koinon*) provincial reverence of the divine emperor.” And also that the “messianic *koinonia* did not comply with any of the principles of integration, rehabilitation, or association that the imperial order had established, explicitly and implicitly, for vanquished barbarians.” Kahl, *Galatians Re-Imagined*, 242.

Hence, we are in a very new era that bestows freedom and opportunity to experiment with Christianity for these times and the templates from the past could only be pointers and signposts, and not mandates. The only command being taking up one's own cross and following (Mt. 16:24) the Lord of history. Of this mandate and its contemporary implications, we will try to gather resources in the next two chapters. Now we turn to theological underpinnings of mission.

2.2. Seeking to Shift the Mission Paradigm, yet Reinforcing it

Among the studies in the field of theology of mission that strives to argue for continued focus on conversion and church planting along with an array of ever-evolving social themes that are increasingly being considered as part of Christian mission, David Bosch's book, *Transforming Mission*, is monumental, bold, attentive to every possible nuance, and thus very influential.⁵² Bosch's work is an attempt at retaining the central focus on the conversion of religious others, along with making room for the critical and creative insights that came into prominence in the post Second World War or the postcolonial period—the theological streams ranging from orthodox, liberationist, to interreligious dialogue. Drawing upon the noted philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn's notion of paradigm shifts within the disciplines of physical sciences,⁵³ Bosch sets out to demonstrate that there have always been paradigm shifts to the perception of what mission entails and how it ought to be advanced.⁵⁴ What requires a paradigm shift is that

⁵² Bosch, *Transforming Mission*.

⁵³ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970).

⁵⁴ Bosch identifies distinctive understanding of mission during the “historico-theological subdivisions” in the life of the Christian church as Hans Küng is delineating it. The six historical epochs or paradigms identified by Hans Küng are the apocalyptic primitive Christianity, the Hellenistic patristic

it has become increasingly difficult to defend the colonial era understanding of mission, and the ever evolving alternatives that range from calls on cessation of mission requiring conversion of every non-Christian other, to the ones that propose a range of alternatives that would render the focus on conversion redundant. The new ecumenical paradigm which Bosch proposes is an effort to retain the focus on conversion by recasting it onto a template that is less triumphant, aggressive, yet not abhorrent, determined, yet without conspicuous conceitedness, and with an abiding ability to combine the contemporary and future proposals that requires church's attention and active involvement.

Bosch's book is divided into three parts of equal lengths under broad thematic areas of "New Testament Models of Mission," "Historical Paradigms of Mission," and "Toward a Relevant Missiology." In the first two parts, Bosch works out a biblical and historical rationale that strives to demonstrate that mission was always an integral part of Christian life, and in the third section, this foundational character of mission is being purported as the primary characteristic that ought to perpetually define the ecclesial life. It is not that someone has to do the research to show that such a construal of a seamless history of Christian communities being in a continuous state of mission to be untenable. Bosch himself has done that painstaking work and has noted the wide inconsistencies and difficulties involved in such continuist construal of mission history and the many differing aspects and voices in biblical and theological interpretations regarding mission.

Bosch's project proceeds by way of extensive readings of both the New Testament texts and the history of the whole church in its Western and Eastern embodiments as essentially missionary documents. The effort is to establish the notion

period, the medieval Roman Catholicism, the Protestant/Reformation, the modern Enlightenment and the emerging Ecumenical, respectively. Bosch, *Transforming*, 181-2.

that mission aimed at conversion is very much a scriptural imperative for all Christians, and the very rationale for the constitution of the church. And that the church all through its historical existence have in some form have carried out this statutory responsibility, albeit with varying degrees of zeal, differing theological emphasis, diverse strategies, and toward varying sociopolitical ends. It is not that any of these mission efforts post-Pentecost and throughout the history of the church were optimal or without blemish, but that they were invariably carried forth, even if inadequately and often clumsily, as humans could not possibly do otherwise with any of the tasks supposedly entrusted to them by God. After establishing the basis for mission as the most essential of tasks before Christians and the church, Bosch addresses the challenges against the modern mission paradigm that emerged and flourished during the colonial era. Even when pointing the weaknesses of many of the alternatives and the programs that are being proposed as total replacement for the conversion focused mission, Bosch adeptly engages them and mostly appreciates the critique and incorporates them onto the ecumenical paradigm that he proposes. Bosch evades neither historical evidences, nor shy away from engaging the increasing theological challenges against the mission focused on conversion. In the introductory pages, Bosch recounts the numerous issues and challenges against the conversion-premised notions of mission and the missionary. Even in the concluding pages, it still remains difficult for Bosch to not address the calls to “eulogize” and “bury” the conversion-focused mission as it has become the “greatest enemy of the gospel,” and on Bonhoeffer’s construal of “church’s foreign missionary enterprise as a fight for self-preservation.”⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Bosch, *Transforming*, 518-19.

2.2.1. *Modern Missionary Movements and its Discontents*

At the very outset, Bosch states that the word “mission,” and the “connotations” that it currently have is of “fairly recent origin,” and that until 1950s its use had been limited and linked to the conversion and church planting enterprise. The usage of “mission” as conversion of others emerged with the founding of the Jesuit order in the first half of the sixteenth century and the category of “other” included all non-Catholics including the Protestants. The missionary groups that emerged within the Protestant church circles from the seventeenth century onwards embraced this notion of mission and the zeal for conversion. Bosch makes it clear that “until the sixteenth century the term was used exclusively with reference to the doctrine of Trinity,” with regard to the “sending of the Son by the Father and of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son.”⁵⁶ Also acknowledged is that the “term ‘mission’ presupposes a sender, a person or persons sent by the sender, those to whom one is sent, and an assignment.”⁵⁷ This brings forth the question of authority of the sender, and Bosch notes that even when it is fervently argued that the “real sender is God,” for all practical purposes, the authority rests with the church, or mission society, or in the previous imperial and colonial times, with heads of the former religious states of Christendom.

⁵⁶ Bosch, *Transforming*, 1. Also, with regard the understanding of the concept of “missions” in Saint Augustine, see, Mary T. Clark’s introductory remarks to Saint Augustine’s *De Trinitate*. Clark notes that in the “first few books Augustine explains that Scriptural statements regarding the Son as less than the Father refer to the Son in the “form of a servant” when made flesh. He then discusses the “Missions” of the Son and the Spirit in the world. The Son’s great Mission was the Incarnation. He became flesh to manifest God’s love in order to cure us from pride, heal us from the wounds of sin, and unify us as His Mystical Body. The Holy Spirit’s main Mission was made evident at Pentecost, and the Spirit continues in the Church to vivify it with truth and charity.” In *Augustine of Hippo: Selected Writings*, trans. and intro. Mary T. Clark, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1984), 311-312.

⁵⁷ Bosch, *Transforming*, 1.

Bosch takes note of the settled nature of Christian communities by the second century and without much of an interest or impetus on incessant mission aimed at gaining new followers. Despite this awareness, Bosch forecloses it in order to insist upon mission as an inalienable responsibility and as one that is being continuing uninterruptedly from the time of Jesus, and hence as a mandatory task for Christians to carry forth in the present. Also noted are the immensely significant years of 313 and 380, when the edicts of Constantine and Theodosius transformed Christianity in a multitude of significant ways.⁵⁸ The complicated nature of Christianization of Europe beginning from the fourth century onwards is also accounted for as the “vanquished peoples soon embraced Christianity and were assimilated in the dominant culture.”⁵⁹ Even then, the term *missio* was never invoked to denote the activity of seeking new adherents and was set aside for the trinitarian sendings of the Son and the Spirit.⁶⁰ In the sixteenth century, Lutheran theologians held that the “Great Commission” was exclusively intended for the apostles who engaged in *missio*⁶¹ and Bosch observes that the general Lutheran view was that the church does not have a “mission to the heathen, since the apostles have [already] completed the task.”⁶² Also, that the Christians “should not arbitrarily traverse the world looking for a mission field” as loving one’s nearest neighbor is the “prime motive for mission.”⁶³ Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits, was the

⁵⁸ Bosch, *Transforming*, 215.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 250.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 250.

first one to use the term *missio* in relation to the mission to convert religious others, and thereafter, those who are being sent have come to be known as missionaries.⁶⁴ Bosch commends pietism, Calvinism, and puritanism of the second reformation as major factors contributing toward the emergence of missionary endeavors as a thoroughly organized activity of the protestant churches.⁶⁵ The independent and ecclesial missionary societies thus emerge and they are still around in various forms and with a diverse range of understandings on the theology and practice of mission.

How does Bosch bridge the time between the fourth and the sixteenth centuries when organized forms of missionary activities emerge within both catholic and protestant churches? It is here that the monastic communities of both the orthodox and catholic churches come to play a very useful role.⁶⁶ Since this way of interpreting monasticism as the natural forebears of missionary societies of the colonial era would not be received well by the scholars of early church history, Bosh adds the qualification that “although the monastic communities were not *intentionally* missionary, ...they were permeated by a missionary *dimension*.”⁶⁷ Once this qualification is made, it becomes part of the program

⁶⁴ Bosch, *Transforming*, 228. 227-228. The papal bull of Pope Alexander VI, entitled *Inter Caetera Divinae* that divided the world beyond Europe between the kings of Portugal and Spain, was issued in 1493. The first Portuguese colonialist, Vasco da Gama landed on the West coast of Southern India, in 1498. The formal approval of the Society of Jesus by the Catholic Church was in 1540. Thus, we are well into colonialism when this very particular understanding of mission or sending emerges and solidifies itself.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 252-261.

⁶⁶ Bosch has separate sections for monasticism as mission within both the orthodox and the catholic traditions. See Bosch, *Transforming*, 210-213, & 230-236. With regard to the monastic movement within patristic tradition, Bosch terms it as a “saving element,” as there is not much mission happening in the template of what has come to be defined as mission in the colonial period.

⁶⁷ Bosch, *Transforming*, 233. Emphasis original. While commenting on Jean-Joseph Goux’s endeavor to equate Marx’s explication of the question of Value and his critique of money, to that of Jacques Lacan’s “Signification of the Phallus,” and Freud’s conception of genital sexuality, Spivak remarks that even when there could be “general morphological similarities,” the “fields of force” that make them “heterogeneous [and] indeed discontinuous” are effaced to achieve an “isomorphic analogy” that drains the

of mission that begins with Jesus Christ and continues uninterruptedly to the present times. Another similar component that contributes to the continuist vision is the historical accounts of the spread of Nestorian communities in parts of Asia, from Mesopotamia to China. Even when the schisms and the resultant mortal threat to their very lives that dispersed them across Asia are noted, the Nestorians are appropriated as the “major missionary force in non-Roman Asia,” and the vanishing of most of those communities are in turn attributed to the militant missionizing on the part of Islam and Buddhism.⁶⁸

Bosch observes that mission during the colonial period was often driven by many “impure motives” ranging from imperialist one of taming the indigenous populations, the cultural objective of imparting a superior culture, romantic desire to see distant “exotic countries and peoples,” to the “ecclesiastical colonialism” of carving out a space for denominational dominance across the world.⁶⁹ The theologically problematic issues of mission that are identified by Bosch are all related to the reign of God. They include, the conversion efforts that equates the reign with number of the supposedly saved souls; confining it exclusively to eschatology and thereby renouncing the responsibility toward the world; merely focusing on church planting and thus identifying the church with the

irreducible differences between them and thereby their unique significances. Similar to what Spivak finds in Goux, mission historians often coalesce various distinct phases of Christian history into a seamless continuist chronology of ‘mission’ as that which is consistently informed by a unitary understanding and impetus—the zeal of begetting conversion of religious others. Often forgotten or willfully effaced are the difference between each cycles of conscious and concerted missionizing, and also the axiology of imperialism that informed many of the missionary endeavors. Spivak, “Scattered Speculations,” 112.

⁶⁸ Bosch, *Transforming*, 202-205. Sharing of the experience of transcendence with the other is necessary and natural, but to link them to something as of specialized, focused, and organized program of the last three centuries is an overreach. Indian Church Historians of repute discuss this aspect of mission in early and medieval Indian church and does not conclusively construe a community with a constant zeal of mission. Among many other significant works, see, A. Mathias Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India, Volume 1: From the Beginning up to the Middle of the Sixteenth Century* (Bangalore, India: Published for Church History Association of India, by Theological Publications in India, Bangalore, 1984).

⁶⁹ Bosch, *Transforming*, 4-5.

reign of God; pursuing justice and thus reducing the reign with the continued perfectibility of the society.⁷⁰

The question that requires exploration is whether this notion of any overarching mission, however mindfully executed, could ever be without any of these perils. Is it just an issue with implementation under imperfect conditions and by flawed persons, or is it a much more important issue of the very notion of an overarching mission that is expected to inform the Christian self-understanding, that which defeats the very intent of such undertakings? Perhaps, the conception of having an overarching mission undermines the very imperative of witness, and thus becoming patently detrimental to the individual and collective living, both within the Christian communities, and also in the wider pluralistic communities within which they invariably live. The notion of mission could only be conceived and configured in a limited, secondary or penultimate sense, and it could only be as a way to carry out the specific goals that express the significant witness that is relevant at a specific historical time and space. The all-encompassing alliances like religions and nation-states strive to impart the necessary ethos and rituals to individuals and communities to conduct their lives around certain meaning making constructs and practices. The comprehensive fellowships of religions and nation-states, and the individuals within their fold, are required to have a witness that reflects their confession and one that matches most pertinent of issues before them in a particular historical context. In order to achieve the various aspects of this individual and collective witness, a number of specific organs with particular missions are required. Yet, these interventions and agencies instituted to carrying them out could only be perceived in a limited and

⁷⁰ Bosch, *Transforming*, 5.

secondary sense, with a contingent existence that is bound to its worthiness in the overall expression of a desirable witness. In the context of a nation-state, the many departments with specific missions ranging from law and order, defense, finance, health, education, labor, etc., that are instituted and continuously reformed in order to best witness to its own core constitutional beliefs, hopes, and principles. Once the state begins to consider itself as having a mission or manifest destiny rather than a word or witness, then the othering and objectification ensues and brings along unwarranted suffering to many. This othering is not limited to those beyond its geographical borders alone, but even those who are made others within its own direct legal domain.

The conception of mission as a recent invention and thus unessential to the understanding of Christian life and community is not a sufficient reason to renounce this concept or the endeavors that gets organized under its rubric. This kind of reasoning would foreclose the very possibility of theological construction, as every single time and space would demand new understandings and modes of being—the perpetual requirement to sing a new song that makes the heaven and earth, and everything in it rejoice about the righteousness of the Lord (Ps. 96). Thus, disavowing mission as a recent invention would not help us get over the ill effects of mission and to come up with evermore meaningful concepts of organizing Christian life.

2.2.2. Scriptural and Theological Basis for Mission

Bosch's search is necessitated by the fact that the “missionary enterprise had to make do with a minimal basis” of the Great Commission in Matthew 28.18-20, and mostly with the supposedly self-evident certainties of the worldly successes of

Christianity and thus its superiority over every culture and religion in the world. Bosch's effort is to make space for the new proposals for mission while not "jettisoning everything generations of Christians have done before us."⁷¹ This obligation of holding on to the tradition of going to the doorsteps of others and preaching the good news of Jesus Christ is justified through the assertion that the Christian faith is "intrinsically missionary," and that there are other missionary expressions like Islam, Buddhism, and Marxism.⁷² Since the reign of God inaugurated in Jesus Christ is the "great unveiling of [the] ultimate truth believed to be of universal import," and thus encompasses "all humanity," Bosch asserts that this universal "dimension of the Christian faith is not an optional extra" and thus "Christianity is missionary by its very nature, or it denies its very *raison d'être*."⁷³ He also holds that the "church begins to be missionary not through its universal proclamation of the gospel, but through the universality of the gospel it proclaims."⁷⁴ Thus, missiology becomes an interested enterprise for the "sake of Christian mission," but only to arrive at "*approximations* of what mission is all about," which is to give "expression to the dynamic relationship between God and the world."⁷⁵ Essential dimension of mission is to proclaim the "salvation in Christ," and to invite those who do not yet believe to repent and convert "to begin a life of service to others in the power of the Holy Spirit."⁷⁶

⁷¹ Bosch, *Transforming*, 7.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 8-9.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

Even when incorporating the different liberationist and dialogical aspects is broadening the understanding of mission, Bosch ends his book at almost the same place where he began. Albeit, the difference being now that God becomes responsible for whatever the church discerns its mission to be in a specific historical space-time: “...mission is *missio Dei*, which seeks to subsume into itself to the *missiones ecclesiae*, the missionary programs of the church. It is not the church which “undertakes” mission, it is the *missio Dei* which constitutes the church.”⁷⁷ This contention only serves to implicate God in everything humans conceive and conduct as mission. Between the scriptural witness and the historic witness of the Christian communions, there could be a wealth of signs and signals on what could be an appropriate stance and action on any specific issue at a particular time and place. However, in the here and now, those who make the discernments and author actions based upon scripture, tradition, reason, and experience cannot attribute them to God. When discernments and actions are made, they are just as every other human action that is defined by imperfections, fallibility, and sinfulness. Whether an action is pleasing to God or not is a retrospective discernment of the faith communion well after most of what was involved in the actual emergence and conduct of an action, and most of its ramifications have become amply evident. Historical actions thus discerned would become part of the tradition, and would serve as prompts for future engagements. The universality of Christ thus expressed in a communion’s response to a particular issue or question is incumbent on both the ability of Christ to provoke actions beyond all territorial and temporal boundaries, and on the questions that demonstrate the universal character of time as being “out of joint” in every era and space.

⁷⁷ Bosch, *Transforming*, 519.

We have already addressed the question of universality in the first chapter through Deleuze's contention that universality is not the property of an answer or statement, but that of the question to which a solution is being offered. Thus, the questions of salvation or human predicament—for which, any number of responses are possible—are the source of universality and not any particular witness or word to the same. The question that requires perusal is whether it is possible for humans to “give expression to the dynamic relation between God and the world” in any positive sense or programmatic manner. A communion's response to the “out of joint” character of their time and place could only be an attempt to bear testimony to its own confession, and an act that which is being begotten through its faith and trust in God through Christ. The actions thus embraced could only be carried out with a due amount of fear and trembling for both the uncertainty of the actual impact of any action, and the forever-unascertainable results of the alternative options that the communion is thus forsaking by choosing one action among the many possible options. However, this act of bearing witness to oneself is universal and has a character of always already, as without having to do anything in particular, humans could only be found in an act of working for or against something. In the dust-cloud of any present, it is never possible to ascertain whether such an action is in sync with a communion's or individual's confession or not, and all such discernment is possible only in the retrospect. Even then, every such attempts at retrospective discernments could only be made within the emphases and outlook of that particular time and place, and thereby making every determination partial and thus open to future interpretations—simply put, always human, and never *of* the divine.

Our liturgical and communal life and our engagement with the world could only

be a weak, imperfect, and thoroughly ambiguous testimony to the gift we have received, and continues to receive from God. It would be arrogant, and at worst blasphemous, to consider us capable of conjuring a present expression of God's actions in history. All humans should and could claim to be capable of is turning their lives into a prayer that our witness to be pleasing to God, and at the very least, not to be inimical to what God is presently doing. God's actions in history can never be positively ascertained at any given present, and if at all possible, it could only be in retrospect wherein we could approximately term a past moment that could be seen as God's hand setting the people free. Thus, in the present, whatever we do, including our liturgy and congregational life, do not in any way positively channelize God. However, what it does or needs to do is prompting us on organizing our contemporary witness in congruence with both the witness of God in Jesus Christ, and with our candid discernment of what is happening in the world. It is not that there should not be any trust in the promise of indwelling, but that we cannot positively produce it or claim that one is in such a life at any present. The only possible positive affirmation of God's presence in our lives would be in the assurance of the promise of salvation as a present reality whereby our sins that invariable accompany every supposedly righteous actions and the obviously unrighteous ones are being borne by the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Bosch distinguishes between the "mission" as singular to denote the *missio Dei*, the mission of God reveling as the "God-for-people," and the nature of God's involvement in the world. "Missions" in the plural, for him, is the church's way of "participation in the *missio Dei*" as the "whole church bringing the whole gospel to the

whole world.”⁷⁸ Missions include many components, but the one of “evangelism” is the “proclamation of the salvation in Christ.” The church as “a *sign* in the sense of pointer, symbol, [as an] example or model, [and as] . . . a *sacrament* in the sense of mediation, representation, or anticipation” ought/strives to “faithfully articulate the *missio Dei*.”⁷⁹ Whether unwaveringly implementing a unipolar understanding of “evangelism” is an essential part of the call to discipleship, or whether the call is forever being faithful witnesses to the “evangel” is a question for our exploration. Also, whether the very act of confessing or testifying to the evangel in public life is in itself not the very proclamation that is primed at gathering new disciples of Christ Jesus, or whether there is another separate act especially trained at achieving this goal. Just as a magnet draws to itself everything that is sensitive to its power field, or, as the proliferation of technology, food, and fashion happen regardless of the prevalence or lack thereof of conscious campaigns on their behalf, the question is whether the life and the public acts of a faithfully confessing church that should be drawing people toward discipleship. Bosch has unambiguous affirmations that the new witnesses ought to be effortlessly attracted to the church through its witness in the world, rather than having to pursue them through incessant projects of evangel-ism/ization. Another crucial question is whether it is ever possible to “faithfully articulate the *missio Dei*,” at any point in history, and whether such efforts are not an act of freeze-framing God, and penalizing God for a gift that has been graciously imparted.⁸⁰ The question we pursue is whether it is necessary part of faith in

⁷⁸ Bosch, *Transforming*, 10.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸⁰ Within his discussion on the “classical understanding of mission,” Wesley Ariarajah observes that “[t]he problem with the exclusivist understanding of salvation is that it does violence to the Christian understanding of God as the creator and sustainer of the universe. *It makes God a prisoner of God’s own*

God to posit a concurrent and corresponding relationship that is ascertainable in the real-time. On the other hand, it is a question whether the domain of faith could be anything more than one of disjunction in the present, wherein all affirmations and actions could only be authored in faith alone, and any discernment of the hand of God could only be made in the retrospective. We will explore this issue in the next chapter, in light of Karl Barth's attempt at removing God from any such possible grasp, while insisting on Christian confession in the context of Barmen Declaration as an oppositional word to every move of considering any aspect of the present as the eschatological end of history.

Kingdom or the reign of God is a constant theme that runs through Bosch's book and in much of the mission literature. The challenge of mission and of the study about it is construed as one of "relating the always-relevant Jesus event of twenty centuries ago to the future of God's promised reign by means of meaningful initiatives for the here and now."⁸¹ Thus, the mission in the broadest sense, not merely as in evangelism, is a bridge program that the Christians and the church comes up with between both ends of what defines the present time—between incarnation and parousia. The question that needs to be pursued is whether the Christian call is one to embrace a single or an array of items that needs to be resolutely carried out until eschatology. Or, whether it is a call to live freely without any particular mission, with the assurance that the sins that accompany all righteous actions, and for those humans are truly contrite about will invariably be pardoned. Where all three acts of answering of the call, relinquishing the previous

action in Jesus Christ; it places boundaries on where God might act in a saving way; it is built on the wrong premise that if there is salvation in Christ, God would not employ any other means of salvation; it refuses to take serious account of salvific experiences witnessed by those outside the Christian fold. Exclusivism is inconsistent with God's unconditional love for all humankind." Ariarajah, *Your God, My God, Our God*, 139. Emphasis added.

⁸¹ Bosch, *Transforming*, 24.

witness, and commencing new ones in light of the kingdom values, are rolled into one single event of becoming disciples and witnesses of the life, cross, and resurrection of Christ Jesus.

While being very generous and magnanimous in emphasizing Jesus' "all-inclusive mission" that simultaneously holds within its fold, "both the rich and poor," the "oppressed and the oppressor," the "sinners and the devout,"⁸² Bosch is not that eager to do so with the concept of election and what it could possibly encompass or entail. Bosch argues that "even Peter, Paul, and John, who had lived as righteous Jews, had to experience something else in order to be members of the people of God," and that "they had to have faith in Christ;" that the "Law as [a] way of salvation is superseded by the crucified and risen Messiah," and that "one of the things those who wish to follow Christ have to die to is the law."⁸³ The contemporary New Testament scholarship⁸⁴ after Bosch's writing of these words has complicated these contentions. Given the nuance and openness that Bosch has demonstrated within this work of his, we have reasons to believe that he would have certainly reevaluated these positions and nuanced them.⁸⁵ That is besides the argument we would want to investigate. With this understanding of the availability of salvation only in Jesus Christ, and that too only through an act of conversion and becoming part of the Christian community, it is the foundational source for mission focused on conversion of others. We will strive to gather resources to argue

⁸² Bosch, *Transforming*, 25.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁸⁴ For a different reading on the question of law and justification, see, Kahl, *Galatians Re-Imagined*.

⁸⁵ Bosch passed away in an accident in 1992, a year after the publishing of this masterwork, *Transforming Mission*.

that to live freely by witnessing Christ in and through the individual and communal witness could only be possible by being free of any mission. It also becomes a question of the source of transcendence as in who are the children of God and how does one become one. Bosch and other theologians striving to establish the rationale for retaining the enterprise primed for conversion of others, do so by building up a binary opposition between “Jesus and the Torah.”⁸⁶ The other trait they share with all liberal and liberationist theologians—the belief that humans could “initiate, here and now, approximations and anticipations of God’s reign.”⁸⁷ We will also strive to enlist theological resources to argue that the binary opposition between Jesus and Torah is hard to sustain and even detrimental to the cause of Jesus. And, we will also seek to dispel the cataphatic delineation of what the reign of God would resemble as not only an impossibility, but also as the sure route to the sin of self-righteousness or pride that perverts the life of the self and destroys that of the others. The witness of the reign that we have received through the prophets and Jesus could only be a negative scale of judgment to discern that something could not possibly be synonymous with the values of the kingdom, and thus organize our individual and collective lives in accord with that discernment, and also by fashioning our institutions accordingly.

The gospel of Matthew is being read as “essentially a missionary text,”⁸⁸ even

⁸⁶ “...the reign of God and not the Torah is for Jesus the decisive principle of action. This does not imply the annulment of the Law or antinomianism as though there could be a basic discrepancy between God’s reign and the God’s Law. What happens, rather, is that the Law is pushed back in relation to God’s reign. And this reign of God manifests itself as love to all. ...Now, however, God’s love begins to reach out beyond the boundaries of Israel. This, ...was an absolute new thing in the religious history of humankind.” Bosch, *Transforming*, 35-36.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

when Bosch has never provided a new definition for mission and missionary after enumerating many issues with the conduct of mission during the colonial period. We could only infer that the word “missionary” denotes someone or something similar to that which we encountered in the colonial times, as the zeal for acquiring new converts to the faith. The reading strategy adopted by Bosch would have the Matthew’s gospel as an inverted pyramid with a precarious balance by insisting on “the ‘Great Commission’ at the end of the gospel is to be understood as the *key* to Matthew’s understanding of the mission and ministry of Jesus.”⁸⁹ With these three verses at the very end of the gospel as the key to the whole book—and indeed to the whole of Christian scriptures and to the life, death, resurrection of Jesus Christ—Bosch reads the gospel as the inaugural of gentile mission. He construes “‘Israel’ [as] a theological entity [that now] belongs to the past,” as it is “no longer the ‘church.’”⁹⁰ Noted is the fact that the gospel is insistent on the fruits that are agreeable to the kingdom values, but all this producing fruits and the kingdom itself is dependent on the words calling for “baptizing them,” and “teaching them,” as the “real content of disciple-making, and therefore of mission in Matthew’s understanding.”⁹¹ Our task in the next chapters is to look for resources that would help us read Matthew’s gospel as an ellipse that is at once stable and yet capable of moving and producing movements. The twin foci of this ellipse could be the texts known as the Sermon on the Mount, and the one that is usually termed as the Judgment of the Nations. Under these twin foci, the commandments of teaching and baptizing could be understood

⁸⁹ Bosch, *Transforming*, 60.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 65.

differently and requiring the disciples to engage the nations with something beyond the conventional mission understanding of conversion as quintessentially changing religious affiliations. The conspicuous absence of ascension, and the assurance of being present among the disciples for all eternity, and the subtle dispelling of every possible sources of any notion of having entrusted with a mission, would make Matthew's gospel as one that resolutely dispels every sense of an overarching mission. Our task in the next chapter is to gather resources toward a different reading of the Matthew's gospel that we will try to do later on in chapter four.

The call to mission is not only the characteristic of those who seek conversion of religious others, but also that of those who want Christians to engage in the world to make it better reflect the values of the kingdom. The conversion efforts have developed into an enduring enterprise that requires nothing other than a singular resource to perpetually sustain itself. It is achieved through making all Christians guilty by the framing that the "God is missionary," the "church is missionary," thus Christians are and ought to be missionary, and therefore guilty before God for not carrying out the missionary responsibility of calling religious others to repentance and conversion. Liberal and liberationist framing of Christian responsibility also work under the very same template of mission that strives to beget action through a sense of guilt. The difference in the liberal and liberationist iteration is that the guilty are those who do not take a stand for the values of the kingdom, who do not discern where God is already at work, and thus not standing in solidarity with those with whom God has already demonstrated a preferential option. In the case of mission as in conversion, the guilt has proven an enduring source of resource mobilization and thus ensuring its sustenance well into a

foreseeable future. But, the guilty themselves are not taking up their supposedly primary Christian responsibility of converting religious others, but are only absolving themselves of the guilt by opening up their purse strings. This form of substitutionary atonement is not possible in the case of liberal and liberationist calls for mission, as those avenues of mission would require personal commitment and a different mode of existence in society. Thus, for the liberal and liberationist proponents who have embraced the category of mission as a readily available vehicle to enlist support for their causes, there is no lasting value in holding on to the notion of mission as a basis or framework for the call for the costly discipleship that Jesus requires and the world needs.

Every part of Bosch's book lay open to, or could be subjected to a deconstructive reading that would bring to fore the process through which conceptions of uninterrupted chronological histories emerge and the purpose this power/knowledge serve in maintaining or furthering certain aspects within that construed history. Even when there could be general agreement on the necessity for specific organized ministries to continue bearing witness to the mission of Jesus Christ, it is imperative to have timely and contextual understanding of what the mission and ministries entail. The force of continuist depictions of history could be observed if an exploration of the discussions around mission within the ecumenical movement from the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh (1910) to the present day could be done. When the whole of Christian history is being seen as perfect precursors to what has come to be in the previous five centuries, then the only possibility is to widen it with new experiences and needs, and never a total redefinition of what we have in our midst. Final chapter of Bosch's book and the ecumenical discussions of the past century testify to this fact. With this treatment

of Bosch, it would be helpful to account for the voices that strive to usher in a difference around this crucial conversation.⁹²

Apart from the chapter length treatments on the scriptural and theological rationale for mission, Bosch keep appealing to the fragment of the verse “give an account of the hope they have” (1 Pet 3.15),⁹³ as if it primarily provides a basis for the need to continue the mission as verbal pronouncement aimed at securing conversion of every non-Christian other. This epistle calls for right conduct from those who have set out to follow Christ and emphasizes the need to be willing to suffer for the sake of righteousness. This particular segment of the verse is part of a section of text that calls verbal articulation only as a third step in a continuum of doing the right things, thus sanctifying “Christ as Lord” through both actions and contemplation, and finally giving an account of hope whenever it is being demanded. Moreover, the emphasis is on the necessity to give any such accounting “with gentleness and reverence” (1 Pet 3. 16). Organized preaching primed to produce religious conversion cannot encompass the tripartite witness of righteous conduct, enduring the inevitable suffering, and finally, and only when an accounting of the source of such uncommon confidence is being demanded,

⁹² Dana L. Robert, and Lamin O. Sanneh brings in crucial components of gender and inculturation respectively into the purview of mission, but does not deviate much from the mode of Bosch’s apologetics for a model that emerged out of the missionary endeavors across the colonial period. In this scheme, there can be no renegotiations of the terms of reference and redefinition of the ultimate aims, with the only remaining possibility of certain additions of liberative components to the existing paradigm. See, Robert, *Christian Mission*; and, Lamin O. Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. 2009).

⁹³ Bosch, *Transforming*, 3, 176, and 420. While Bosch’s enlisting of this scriptural piece in pages 3 and 420, is to appeal for the necessity of verbal proclamation, the one on page 176, conjoins preaching with the responsibilities toward the kingdom of God. Bosch insists that “...only by accounting for the hope that is in them (1 Pet. 3:15) and by being agitators for God’s coming reign; they must erect, in the here and now and in the teeth of those structures, signs of God’s new world.” Reverting back to verbalizing on page 420: “Christians are challenged to give an account of the hope that is in them (cf 1 Pet. 3:15); their lives are not sufficiently transparent for others to be able to recognize whence that hope comes.”

the “sanctification of Christ as Lord” is being verbalized, and that too with utmost kindness and respectfulness toward those who demands it. In the final chapter of this exploration, we will return to this very aspect that distinguishes witness from mission—the question of how to testify to the living Christ with the very lives and bodies, and, if and when demanded, how to articulate the content of faith in spoken words.

Bosch perceives that “religion’s role in the future will be a diffuse one” and hence argues that “there is no longer any room for the massive affirmations of faith which characterized the missionary enterprise of the earlier times, only for a chastened and humble witness to the ultimacy of God in Jesus Christ.”⁹⁴ But it could as well be argued that ever since the emergence of Christendom in the fourth century CE and up through the colonial times, the numerical and geographical spread of Christianity was never by way of “massive affirmations of faith” in “God in Jesus Christ.” Christianization of lands and peoples across continental Europe and beyond were carried out as an invariable expression of faith in the political, imperial, and colonial dispensations and therefore as preprogrammed missions that any militaristic, civil, commercial, or non-governmental organization would embark on with the confidence of its own rationale, resources, goals, abilities, and strategies. To anyone who contends otherwise, MacMullen gently nudges them to consider the “parallel of Islam’s subsequent spread over the regions longest Christianized: from Egypt up through the Holy Land and Syria and across Asia Minor.”⁹⁵ Hence, the organized efforts in religious conversions during the period when the Church was the ruling power or had been an integral part could not be perceived as Christian

⁹⁴ Bosch, *Transforming*, 354-355.

⁹⁵ MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire*, 58.

witness or faith affirmation. This does not mean that there were no signs of witness and or faith affirmation during those times, but that they would have more often than not have happened only in opposition to the prevailing deification of the reigning dispensations and hegemonic ideologies, and invariably in opposition to them. Mission in terms of space exploration, military mobilization, poverty alleviation, disease-eradication programs, and many others could be created and carried out with diverse motivations ranging from altruistic, to mercenary, to downright condescending. However, mission in terms of offering salvation to others or considering oneself to be building the Kingdom of God could only be had from an abounding self-confidence. A pride that arises from the sense of having figured out everything from the origin to eschatology without any doubt or ambivalence, a certainty that comes from seeing everything clearly through the transparent glass crystal and not “in a mirror, dimly” (1 Cor. 13:12), and the clarity that comes from knowing fully well the mind of God.

2.2.3. Eschatology and Teleology

The whole text of Bosch’s book is held together by the theme of an appropriate teleology toward our current understandings of the eschatological promise of God in Jesus Christ. It is within this broader theme of teleology that could include all sorts of perceivable avenues of action, which he endeavors to secure an appropriate, respectable, and above all an inalienable place for the mission as in evangel-ism/ization and its ends of religious conversion and church planting. Bosch agrees that “missiology studies the growth of the Church into new peoples,” and thus, we “can no longer go back to the earlier position, when mission was peripheral,” and that “it is for the sake of mission that

the church has been elected, for the sake of its calling it has been made ‘God’s own people.’”⁹⁶ Even though in agreement with Karl Barth in most instances, on the question of eschatology, Bosch cannot go along with Barth as his eschatology is an “expression with which to repel even the slightest hint at human collaboration in bringing in the end.”⁹⁷ In the previous chapter, we have already noted Derrida’s effort at distinguishing between eschatology and teleology and thereby problematizing every effort at evolving a seamless teleology that is expected to take history toward its eschatological consummation. By insisting on the wholly otherness of God and refusing to allow even an iota worth of hold on eschatology, Barth should be perceived as one who is onto a two-pronged battle against both the liberal and conservative theologies that seek to knitting their own teleology of preference to the respective eschatological conceptions of their own predilection. We will gather resources to argue that Christian call is a freedom from all such teleological missions that promise to lead to a particular eschatology. Both the teleological missions and insistence on any particular eschatology would end the possibility of life in general, and especially the abundant life that Jesus revealed, as they would turn people into automatons or cogs in the whole scheme of teleology that is certain of achieving the eschatological end through its own means and power. Witness on the other hand is never a quest for any roadmap of confident teleology, but an effort to transform the present in light of the values of the kingdom, and one that possess the humility to leave the burden of eschatology to the providence of God and to trust the next battles of transformation to the future generations.

⁹⁶ Bosch, *Transforming*, 493.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 502.

2.2.4. *Resources for becoming Witnesses*

Bosch understands that the role of the church cannot be what it used to be in Christendom or in the colonial times, and thus calls for only a “humble witness.”⁹⁸ This quest betrays both the nostalgic yearning for previous modes of Christian existence in history, and on what ought to be the ideal mode of becoming the church in the world.⁹⁹ Irrespective of the scale of being massive or humble, Christian witness is a confession to the lordship of Jesus Christ, just as Karl Barth, Bonhoeffer, and the Confessing Church testified to in the Barman Declaration, and what the churches together did for almost three decades from the 1970s in the World Council of Churches’ Program to Combat Racism.

⁹⁸ “...one has to recognize that... religion’s role in the future will be a diffuse one. There is no longer any room for the massive affirmations of faith which characterized the missionary enterprise of earlier times, only for a chastened and humble witness to the ultimacy of God in Jesus Christ.” Bosch, *Transforming*, 354-355.

⁹⁹ It is not just Bosch alone (see Bosch, *Transforming*, 349-362), but many who enlist poststructuralist thought’s critique of modernity as a medium to channelize their own mourning for both Christendom and the supposed pre-enlightenment virtues of having people of supposedly lower origins, women, children, minorities of all categories, in their pre-ordained and thus permanent places. Poststructuralist critique of modernity is for not being sufficiently modern enough and for still holding on to many unexamined biases and opinions that are passed on as science. Above all, what the poststructuralist theoreticians critique the most is the missional nature of modernity that seeks to flatten all diversity and the efforts at setting history on a teleological course toward any sort of desirable utopia. It is instructive to hear David Tracy’s position on the futility of theological efforts at embracing postmodern thought to circumvent modernity: “A thinker today can only go through modernity, never around it, to post-modernity.” And also that the “post-modern thought... makes it easier than a great deal of modern thought (...) once did to appropriate positively many aspects of pre-modern thought... such as the greater attention to a range of forms besides concept and argument for theological content... the need to heal the modern separation of feeling and thought... All these pre-modern realities—and more—can be appropriated securely only by those post-modern theologians ready to move through, never around, modernity.” David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology: With a New Preface* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996), xv.

2.3. Saving *missio Dei* from accidental secular authorities

John G. Flett begins his book “The Witness of God,”¹⁰⁰ by getting straight into the question of natural theology serving as a “point of contact” between the church and the world, and Karl Barth’s negative judgment on all positions positing any awareness or “independent knowledge of God” beyond the revelation and “particular act of reconciliation in Jesus Christ.”¹⁰¹ This is so because there cannot be any relationship between humans and God beyond the “being in which both God and humans participate,” and Barth’s contention that the “essence of God which is seen in His revealed name is His being and therefore His act as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”¹⁰² Also that “no human action sets the conditions necessary to God’s acting; God alone makes himself (*sic*) known.”¹⁰³ Flett affirms that “church’s relationship with the world is a properly missionary one,” but is not comfortable perceiving mission as the “middle point between the church and the world,” and as preparing the “ground for the church’s own proper task—the proclamation of the word.”¹⁰⁴ This conception of mission, Flett avers, makes mission as a second-step activity and subsequent to the formation and existence of the church. Flett thus defines his task in this book:

A simple contention frames this work: the problem of church’s relationship to the world is consequent on treating God’s own mission into the world as a second step alongside who he is in himself. With God’s movement into his economy

¹⁰⁰ John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰² Karl Barth, *The Church Dogmatics*, vol. II, bk. 1, *The Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957) 273. Quoted in Flett, *Witness of God*, 2.

¹⁰³ Flett, *Witness of God*, 2.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

ancillary to his being, so the church's own corresponding missionary relationship with the world is ancillary to her being. Some general point of contact external to the church becomes necessary for the task of witness, supplying a positive account of the church's acting in relationship to the world and rendering that witness 'intelligible.' Mission, as one step removed from the life of the church, facilitates this point of contact both by clearing sufficient cultural space and by replicating the communal structures basic to the church's actual witness. In other words, this dichotomy between church and mission underlies the problem of church's relationship with the world. No simple focus on the practical issues solves this problem, for the cleavage of church from mission derives from the cleavage of God's being in his relationship to the world. Specifically, the fullness of God's being is presented without material reference or perhaps even in antithesis to his movement into his economy. The witness of God is, as Barth suggests, 'a problem of God,' for it is a question of how in anticipation his being in and for himself includes human existence with him. Only in correspondence to God's overcoming of the gap between himself and the world does the church live in her connection with the world.¹⁰⁵

Thus far, there is much to agree with Flett and his interpretation of Barth. There cannot be any illusion that human actions could motivate God to make godself known, or by extension, of any special apparatus or ability for humans in the real-time to designate any event, time, or happening wherein God is fully present or active. Such determinations of God's presence and activity in an historical event or movement could only be in the retrospective, wherein decades or centuries later humans could turn back and discern the unique ways in which God has enabled the turn of history in profound ways. A Rosa Parks moment of December 1955, or a Soweto Uprising of June 1976, or other historical events could be discerned as God's decisive word of "let my people go" only in the retrospect and no one could ever purport to produce or work toward producing one similar in the immediate present or even a distant future. However, without conscious and sustained human actions, no such moments of transcendence made visible in history could ever be possible, and God's shepherding of history could not be thought of as

¹⁰⁵ Flett, *Witness of God*, 3-4.

miracles happening over and against humans and their existence and endeavors. To be involved in any historical act or movement, it does not require the determination or assurance that a moment is a *kairos* or not.¹⁰⁶ The decisive positions in terms of righteousness and justice sought for as pleasing to God in the Hebrew Scriptures, or the ones recorded in the Christian Scriptures as required from those striving to follow Christ, could enable determining and fashioning the mode and measure of the current interventions. Along with these scriptural witness, the continuum of historical moments that the communities and nations testify as providential instances when the pages of history have decisively turned, could cumulatively be summed up as part of the tradition that enables persons and their collectives to continue authoring their own acts of faith and hope. Other than these two sets of tradition—scriptural and the historical witnesses—the only other aspect a person or community of faith requires to author their own acts in history is an unwavering trust in God that all sinfulness of their supposedly righteous and obviously unrighteous actions will be borne by God. Those who seek to follow Christ need not necessarily participate in an act, or take a particular social position, because they are certain or at least could reasonably discern that God is or could only be part of those particular acts or positions at those times. They do so just because their faith in God could only be expressed in actual, conscious, and sustained historical actions and positions. If one is not acting out of one's own volition, unconscious continuous acts that hold hegemonic and dominant sway over their times, the ones that are never merited with

¹⁰⁶ Paul Tillich, even when sympathetic of judging all times as imbued with the presence of “*kairoi*,” wherein the “Kingdom of God manifests in a particular breakthrough” and of the possibility of discerning moments of history as “*kairos*” as a “matter of vision,” and as an “involved experience,” is quick to point out the pitfalls of all such discernments. Tillich cautions that judging any event as *kairoi*, or any historical moment as *kairos* could (as evidenced in the experience of Nazism), “first, ...be demonically distorted, and second, ...be erroneous.” Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, 370, 371.

sufficient contemplation and problematization, will define a person's and community's faith. The conformist acts and standpoints could most often than not, be patently inimical to the professed faith confessions and best intentions of both persons and communities.

Along with Flett's disagreement on considering human actions in any way heralding God's movement in history, we very well could also agree with Bosch's critique of the "exponents of contextualization." Bosch observes that the proponents of contextualization claim to possess some special apparatus and knowhow in identifying "God's footprints in the world," and also for presuming to have "special or privileged knowledge about God's will and declare those who do not agree with them as suffering from 'false consciousness.'"¹⁰⁷ On the one hand, it is impossible to conclusively determine any particular moment in history as the right moment or as *kairos* when it is actually happening. And, on the other hand, there is no need to confer any designation of God's presence or partaking in any particular historical moment or movement for a Christian to be involved, as there cannot be a Christian without concrete actions in which the faith confessions is being continuously proclaimed. A particular action with regard to any historical moment is always already happening and the only option is changing actions or alliances, and never as question of action and inaction. The intense attention on apocalypse in the New Testament could be read as a demand to live as if it is the end of times for everyone living, and thus have their priorities and works structured as if it is the last day or moment of their lives. The efforts to map the exact times of the end of history, could be perceived as a skillful shield from this singular possibility of proclaiming the gospel in and through relevant, appropriate, and adequate actions and positions.

¹⁰⁷ Bosch, *Transforming*, 428, 429.

We can fully agree with Flett that “mission is one step removed from the life of the church,” and add that the word “mission” by definition could only be thought through as one with a breach between the body and the act, and never as one and the same. Flett goes on to argue that the second-step nature of the current conception of mission accords the church with an opportunity to remain contented with its internal ecclesial life of liturgical worship and sacraments, and thus with a luxurious choice on whether to be in mission or not. We cannot agree more, and when combined with the current refrain within the ecumenical statements that the “church by definition is missionary,” this second-step character of mission accords the churches and its congregations with a unique added luxury of choosing the most convenient of missions that in no way affects the status quo of both their church and their world. Most often, such missions could be had with some charitable investment of financial resources and occasional fly-by-night trips to the mission fields.¹⁰⁸ Enlisting some amount of surrogacy by way of paid personnel working on behalf of their patrons, missions could be yet another step removed from the churches and congregations originating and supporting them with rationale, motivation, and finance. Being in mission by surrogacy could be the current equivalent of indulgences over which Reformation framed its initial impetus, and then on its sustained attention on the question of whether there exists any comfortable and sure pathways to salvation as an achievement of human works.

In actuality mission could only be the third step wherein an entity (person,

¹⁰⁸ Majority of flights to Asia and Africa from both Europe and North America originates during night hours and they arrive at their respective destinations at early morning hours. Arundhati Roy have used this expression for critiquing the “fly-by-night PhDs pretending to be on the inside-track of peoples movements,”* and this critique could be extended to every attempt at safe-distance missions that feign participation without the life and career shattering risks that accompanies any of the actual social involvement. *Quoted in, Zachariah, *Alternatives Unincorporated*, 7.

organization, or community) calls into being a body with a designated mission, the so tasked organization equipping and sustaining itself for its mission, and the actual act of mission that is being carried out by that missional body. For example, a country constitutes an organization with an assigned mission of space exploration. Whatever this organization does before sending missions to the space could be necessary preparation for its mission, but they are not in the terrain of actual act of mission until and unless there is a real venture into space. Until that time when its commission is being rescinded, this organization could survive regardless of its record of accomplishment or lack thereof.

The main deficiency that Flett perceives in the current understanding of *missio Dei* is that:

“Sending” failed to refer to the particular actions of the Father, Son, or Spirit, becoming a metaphor indicative of an abstract dynamic vaguely constitutive of the life of Trinity. God is a sending God. For Matthey, this direct connection between divine sending and the life of the church encourages “transporting our own ideal conceptions of just or inclusive community into the doctrine of the Trinity.” Aagaard furthers this basic point. Without any determining criteria, everything the human does can become ‘identified with the historical *missio* of God, unqualifiedly and indiscriminately. In this way all secular activities can get a kind of divine sanction—and support—again indiscriminately and unqualifiedly.” Thus while the critical edge of the doctrine of Trinity distances the missionary task from Western culture, “sending” positively encourages other accidental authorities to take the place vacated by the West. This occurred during the 1960s with the coordination of *missio Dei* and communism, secularization, humanization, and so on. Reference to the Trinity simply reinforced the key cultural narratives of the period.¹⁰⁹

And also that the “*missio Dei*’s appropriation of the doctrine of Trinity concentrated at the level of ontology, and second, it did so without any theological

¹⁰⁹ Flett, *Witness of God*, 49. The references to other sources within this quote are: Jacques Matthey, “Mission als anstoßiges Wesenmerkmal der Kirche,” in *Zeitschrift für Mission* 28, no. 3 (2002): 236-37; and Johannes Aagaard, “Mission After Uppsala 1968,” in *Crucial Issues in Mission Today*, eds. Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (New York: Paulist, 1974).

method for moving into the economic Trinity.”¹¹⁰ The main contention of Flett is that the theology of *missio Dei* or a “revised Trinitarian theology of mission must begin with the identity of the one who lives his own proper life in reconciling the world to himself, and it is in his acting for the redemption of humanity in sending his Son and Spirit that ‘we have to do with His *being as God*.’”¹¹¹ And essential for this revision is an insistence on a “theology of God’s aseity—of God’s existence in and for himself—for this includes a necessary disjunction: God is God, and the human the human.”¹¹²

The issue with this reworking of Flett is that it is according reality status for the doctrine of trinity and transforming it into a scientific reality that in itself demolishes all notions of aseity that Flett is seeking to preserve. If trinity is a scientific reality, then there is no need for a creedal affirmation, and if we are certain that God is such, then we are no longer talking about God. The doctrine of trinity in its current configuration with an emphasis on “sending” could be sustained only in a particular cosmology wherein there is space for God to send from, retreat to, and accord human life with occasional visitations. Moreover, there needs to be times in which God is absent from history, wherein humans are left to tend for themselves, and above all have an opportunity to pretend themselves to be overlords of history as their God has entrusted it over to them.

A person situated on an island or on a boat offshore a continent could see the ends or edges of a vast landmass, and could appreciate the ridges that call to awareness the phenomenon of the continental plates breaking away ages ago. An astronaut who is on a

¹¹⁰ Flett, *Witness of God*, 50.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 201.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

spacewalk out of her spacecraft could look back and inspect the spaceship she was on a few minutes earlier and to which she is still tethered. It is difficult to perceive that the Hubble telescope or newer versions of it or any other technology of the future could ever present such a possibility to going beyond the edges of the space beyond the one we humans are situated, and to look back, then the concept of space, and that of time needs to be rethought. If God is in whom both space and time fuses and become one, and if there is no other space than this, then the whole reality could be thought of as in God. Just as the organs in the human body can never have a possibility of examining from the outside the body that houses it, humans could never have this possibility of either looking back at ends of the space that holds them, and also see that of the space that situates God.

Alternatively, God could be thought of as the source of all life, in whom everything crystalizes and dissolves, and as the hovering presence over all there is, even before the unicellular life forms began dancing on earth billions of years ago. It is to consider God as a perennial presence in every stage in the evolutionary journey until eschatology. In such a cosmological conception of space-time continuum, the notions of sending, coming, and going, would require revision. In such a conception, the chronological system of creation-fall-salvation become unsustainable and the revelatory events a community testify to could be perceived as God's witness to who God is and who humans could be. In the next chapter we will have a reading of Ecofeminist theologians, in order to weave together some of the strands of this conception of the wholly other who is proximate and imbues everyone and everything with transcendence.

2.4. Saturating the Empty Tomb and turning it into a Mausoleum

How we talk about the Trinity has an immediate effect on how we organize life on earth.¹¹³ Trinity is a confession that emerged out of the Christological questions that the early church encountered and that which the Christians continue to encounter to this day. In whatever mode or form one begins giving an account of the Christian faith and hope, it invariably ends up affirming the three distinct experiences of God and there could not be any better expression than the doctrine of trinity. It affirms the three experiences of God to which Christians confess as to be truly, fully of, and from God. The God who is being testified to in the Hebrew Scriptures as the creator of all there is and who journeyed along with Abraham and all the men and women in his tradition, who led the people of Israel from slavery to freedom, and who continued to have spoken through the prophets. The God whom Christians confess of as being fully and continually encountered in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and, the continuing presence of God that Christians experience in their communities and that they discern in the events and happenings in the world. Upon this tripartite affirmation, faith in Christ stands, and all three of these God experiences are magnificently captured in the doctrine of Trinity and there could not be any better expression for the Christian expression of the experience of God.

Yet, there is no specific merit in claiming that the revelation of Christ was to reveal the Trinitarian life (or character) of God that led to the doctrine of Trinity. But, the

¹¹³ To follow this discussion through different perspectives, see the works of Elizabeth A. Johnson, Catherine Mowry LaCugna, and Kathryn Tanner. Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Fordham University, 2002); Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993); Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (New York: Cambridge University, 2010).

doctrine of Trinity, in reality, is a fiercely negotiated and arduously settled interpretation of Christian experience. No revelation of God that is being testified to in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures are about transparently disclosing the inner workings of God. Each one of the revelatory experience uniquely disclose that in God there is love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness, liberation, and salvation in full measure, and what God requires of humans, or the presentation of a witness on how one could become truly human. The totality of law and the prophets on both becoming truly human and also on inheriting eternal life could be discerned from the commandment of Jesus in the context of the twin questions that could never be disentangled—“what must I do to inherit eternal life?” and “who is my neighbor?”—is nothing other than “Go and do likewise” (Lk. 10:37).

Within our discussion in the first chapter, we emphasized that there are no two separate discourses that privilege and disprivileges humans, but one and the same discourse that defines different social locations, and thus everyone having a definite and distinctive stake in deconstructing the discourses of their times, and consciously inhabiting this deconstruction process alone makes anyone human. Similarly, there are no separate pathways to eternal life and secular conduct, as the former could only be had within the latter. Faith and hope that one professes to hold could only be expressed in secular conduct, and since there cannot be any conduct that could be without a measure of violence, salvation is evermore a necessity of this life, rather than as an end of life achievement or as an adornment in the life to come. It is only with the assurance of salvation could humans act with confidence as otherwise the unknowns and end results of the various options that need to be turned down in order to act on any one of them would bear down any human soul contemplating on right historical actions.

Humans never come up with any creed affirming the natural forces or scientific realities like the gravitational force. There is no need for a creed affirming the force of gravity as there cannot be any life on earth without factoring in its effect and thus the whole life is built around this reality. And, this is true even before Isaac Newton's postulation of a theory of gravitational force, and Albert Einstein's reworking of it as a property of the space-time in itself. A credal affirmation is an act of weaving a new reality for the confessors and it becomes a reality for them only in far as they conduct their lives and actions as if what they affirm is truly a reality for them. It could be affirming an experience of God, and could be one that affirms a reality that encompasses the whole humankind. Yet, it is neither a reality for those other humans who do not profess the creed, or even for the God, as neither other humans and nor God have been a contributor in its production, and as they are never the ones who are professing it. A creed's veracity could be verified only through the testimony or witness of those others who out of their own volition and truthfulness and without any compulsion would testify that the professors of the creed conduct their lives as if it is genuinely an unavoidable reality for them who profess. This testimony of the disinterested outsiders could be similar to the one given by the Roman centurion at the foot of Jesus' cross: "Truly this man was God's Son!" (Mt. 27:54; Mk. 15:39; Lk. 23:47). In his discussion on the prevalent claims on the unsubstantiated virtues of neoliberal economic ideology, Joerg Rieger argues that "Jesus did not demand blind faith," but "provided some evidence" to the disciples of John the Baptist on the question of whether Jesus is "the one who is to come" (Mt. 11:4-5).¹¹⁴ Thus, routine recitations of scriptural texts, or the standard

¹¹⁴ Joerg Rieger, *No Rising Tide: Theology, Economics, and the Future* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2009), ix.

restating of formulaic preparations would not count as evidence for the veracity of any creed, however solemnly, emphatically, repetitively they are recited. Only lives and actions that reveal the confessing church's staunch belief would suffice for the substance of the creedal confessions. Otherwise, all confessions of Christ could only be a metonymy for the prevailing order of the times that is being sustained openly, or by covertly foreclosing themselves to its oppositional content, or through the most expedient of all possibilities—by busying themselves in a mission that does not trouble the self or the status quo.

If at all Christian tradition possesses anything unique and unparalleled, then it is something that could never be possessed—the empty tomb. There is no coherent, historic or scientific reason with which this claim could be sustained. It could only be sustained as a faith testimony, and it is this emptiness or impossibility of intelligible explanation that serves as the quintessential ground of freedom that liberates Christ's disciples from every dispensation that strives to pretend itself as ends of history, and, also from their own productions that are purported to be of eternal verity. The empty tomb at the center of the Christian faith has to remain empty and the confessors of Christ have to conduct their lives by faith alone and without the confidence of any relic or the surety of any catacomb they could turn to for their own certainty and also as verification before others. Conferring reality status to discursive productions without the actual act of living out the confessions is an act of saturating the empty tomb and turning it into a mausoleum. The mausoleums most often than not are created not by those who truly yearn to pursue similar paths that were treaded by the departed, and not necessarily by those who yearn to continuously strive to emulate their vision and witness in any meaningful sense (Lk.

11:46-51). And it also often serves to escape the burden of having to live by or “grow up in every way” (Eph. 4:15) to the example set by the earthly sojourn of the one whom the mausoleum creators purport to revere, emulate, and immortalize.

It would not be right to have both the names of Stalin and Hitler held together in comparison. The former could be an example of benevolent intentions combined with absolute power turning into self-righteousness that invariably prove disastrous, while the latter and his political movement from the very inception is driven by amplified hate, bigotry, and downright malevolent motives. Yet, as an example of mausoleums and their legitimizing role and power, such a conjoining treatment could be tolerable. Stalin had it in Lenin’s mausoleum,¹¹⁵ and “Hitler anticipated a posthumous personal cult” around him and thus had “plan[ned] to build a mausoleum” for himself “in the shape of Hadrian’s Pantheon.”¹¹⁶

Christian confessions, including that of the doctrine of the trinity, could only be our best discernments on which we have common agreement, but they are not in the order of scientific realities like gravity or electromagnetism. The doctrines strive to make sense of and testify to what have happened in Jesus of Nazareth and that which continues to happen within our communities and in the world. Doctrines become realities insofar the communions that confess them act as if they are true for them and organize their lives with that reality as their anchor. Just as gravity is not a force that traverses space and

¹¹⁵ Tariq Ali notes: “‘After their death,’ Lenin wrote of revolutionaries, ‘attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons, to canonize them, so to say, and to hallow their *names* to a certain extent for the ‘consolation’ of the oppressed classes and with the object of duping the latter.’ After his death, against the cries of his widow and sisters, Lenin was mummified, put on public display and treated like a Byzantine saint. He predicted his own fate.” Tariq Ali, “What Was Lenin Thinking?,” *New York Times*, April 3, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/03/opinion/what-was-lenin-thinking.html>.

¹¹⁶ Alex Scobie, *Hitler’s State Architecture: The Impact of Classical Antiquity*, The College Art Association Monograph Series Book 45 (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 1990), 3.

differentially acts upon objects of differing masses, but the very curvature of space-time continuum that keeps the objects in its orbits. Likewise, space-time of humans invariably curves around the prevailing social system into which they are born and have to live. Confession of a faith in God is the very relativizing of this sociopolitical curvature of space-time as a relative and tentative/impermanent human construction that is situated within the eternal reality that lends this unparalleled playground and an appointed time, and continues to reveal what is pleasing and required of them (Mic. 6:8) in their performativity of becoming humans. A confession of faith thus renders the space-time curvature around human arrangements as of limited legitimacy and scope, and as that which are able to survive only when credibility is being voluntarily conferred or violently arrogated. Yet it is impossible to know the actual implications of one's own confession and thus to discern how the space-time is being curved around the divine that one confesses. This makes the habitus of the confessing church to be on an oblique angle to both the sociopolitical realities and of the divine.

2.5. Seeking a Progressive Theology of Mission for the Postcolony

Marion Grau's *Rethinking Mission in the Postcolony* is by far the most extensive and nuanced treatment of mission from an interdisciplinary perspective. Grau sets her task as "to rethink mission in the face of histories of genocide, repression, colonialism, changing socioreligious and global intercultural relations."¹¹⁷ In this work, Grau works out a hermeneutical strategy of "circumambulation" in order to seek a "polydox

¹¹⁷ Marion Grau, *Rethinking Mission in the Postcolony*, viii.

constructive theology of missionary encounter.”¹¹⁸ Along with an extensive range of significant theological and mission history texts, Grau enlists the works of Homi K. Bhabha, Spivak, Frantz Fanon, and other postcolonial and poststructuralist theorists, and strives to demonstrate the complexity of mission endeavors and the difficulty of arriving at simple and straightforward solutions. Drawing upon Joerg Rieger’s contention that mission ought to be thought “in terms of building relationships” and that “mission as relationship [ought to help] recognize that we are all connected and [thus] must not leave people to themselves,” Grau advances the method of “circumambulating” as a “way that can incarnate [such] relationship[s]” of mutuality.¹¹⁹ Grau enlists the concept of multilayered “productive friction” that inevitably arises when different peoples encounter each other, as one that could disrupt the “concept of monotheism” that bases itself in the “logic of the One,” instead pursues a “theology of multiplicity [that] seeks company,” while resisting the pitfall of dispersion within a “reduction to the many.”¹²⁰ Grau’s “polydox methodology for a theology of missionary encounter” draws in every possible nuance and sensitivity required in the interaction of different groups of peoples—from “intercultural mimesis,” hybridity, gender, equitable and just relationships, to being attentive and open about the “difference that the gospel makes” in the midst of innumerable influences that define the communities that come into contact.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Grau, *Rethinking Mission*, 25.

¹¹⁹ Joerg Rieger, “Theology and Mission between Neocolonialism and Postcolonialism,” *Mission Studies* 21, no. 2 (2004): 215; Grau, *Rethinking Mission*, 38.

¹²⁰ Grau, *Rethinking Mission*, 44.

¹²¹ Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of hybridity is not that of an alloy that comprises of different essences in differing ratios that are compounded together. It is a demonstration that the every conception of authority is being fashioned and sustained in and through construction, and that there is no essence to be

Grau tracks the complexities involved in the encounters at the borderlands of mission in three entirely different locations marked by distinct missionary histories and colonial engagements. Through the lands of ancient Rome, Maoris, Zulus, and of Alaska, Grau meticulously tracks the intentions, theology, actual actions, and the response of the missionary receiving communities. The extensive nature of interdisciplinary analysis that this work achieves would make it a guide for everyone embarking on forging relationships under the rubric of mission in particular, and for everyone seeking relationships with persons and communities of other faith traditions. The most important aspect that surfaces is the multiplicity of motives, influences, methods, lures, and mutual transformations that occur in the process of mission and conversion. The unavoidable aspect of violence and violations involved in all relationships and that very awareness required to be in any relationships is what Grau is able to surface through her circumambulations of the missional sites across medieval through twentieth century, and across many continents. Grau's interpretation of this experience is best captured in these words:

In the transformation of religiocultural identity and the presencing of Christian contents in cultures in particular, certain forms of violence and abuse of power do occur. The heritage of these forms of violence is a toxic residue that continues to maim and repress possibilities of flourishing. These losses are real and need to be acknowledged and mourned. Lament and remembrance can help to move from victimhood to survival, and if the process is mutual, empowering, and power imbalances can be named and renegotiated, some measure of reconciliation and modes of just reciprocity can be moved toward. Where we thought we were safeguarding ourselves from abuse, instrumentalization, self-subotage, or self-interest, we may recognize how easily we slip into it in intercultural encounters.¹²²

sought. Hence, it is possible to unsettle and problematize the supposed solidities of any identity or authority that pretends to be absolute and self-sustaining. See, Bhabha, *Location of Culture*.

¹²² Grau, *Rethinking Mission*, 284.

Given the complexities of the missionary enterprise, Grau calls for the “recognition and awareness of all forms of baggage, theological, intercultural, personal,” and thus to seek a “mutual mission” that neither romanticizes nor rejects the other.¹²³ Grau holds that “mission [could] be imagined as a *pharmakon*, a remedy that can both heal and maim, depending on dosage, context, and interactions with other practices.”¹²⁴ Here the *pharmakon* that Grau is recommending is “reciprocal” and not a simplistic unidirectional administration of a prefigured dosage. Grau’s working out of mission at the “zones of encounter and friction,” that aims at mutuality is a welcome change from the previous mission theologies that seek merely certain and quantifiable outcomes.

Almost all texts in mission theology, including the works of Bosch and Flett, is an effort in seeking to continue maintaining the church’s focus on the mission of religious conversion with minimum possible divergence and accommodations for the themes and thrusts that the stream of constructive theologies continue generating. What distinguishes Grau’s work from a typical effort at missiology is that her exploration of the previous sites of missional labor is not an effort at preserving any particular mode or method from the past, but a quest to seek manifold ways of being in contemporaneously relevant relationships with neighbors of other religious faiths. The kind of relationships that Grau strives to surface is not superficial ones bereft of any eventuality, but as a *pharmakon* that is capable of simultaneously changing both the self and other. Thus, Grau’s work is not one in the narrow confines of missiology aimed at the preservation of a singular focus on conversion, but one in the field of ecclesiology, where the quest is to discern relevant and

¹²³ Grau, *Rethinking Mission*, 281.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 285.

significant ways to continue becoming witnesses of Christ, and thus remaining open to be continually converted into the event of the church.

However, further exploration is needed as to whether the existence of the church necessitates encounters with the other with a certain intentionality of “presencing the Christian contents” in other cultures, or whether there could be other models that would thrive upon mutual intentionality. Circumambulating the previous sites of encounter indeed offer many lessons that could be assessed, addressed, remedied, lamented, mourned, and when imbibed in and through the contemporary theological conceptions, it will certainly raise the vigilance on not repeating the very same excesses, and to be attentive to innumerable nuances. Unfortunately, the definition of the word “mission” has traditionally been associated with a unidirectional act that the self has to administer regardless of the hostility or hospitality of the other. Under the rubric of mission, there is not much room for mutuality as everything that helps or hinders the undertaking merely contributes to the strategy involved in the conduct of the task, and they are never capable of altering the substance of the mission.

The difficulty is that Grau (Rieger, and many others) continue seeking relationships of mutuality within a paradigm that emerged alongside colonialism and one that continue to seek centrality through repetitive assertions of it being an inalienable responsibility and characteristic of becoming Christians. Everything Grau is able to surface in this very significant work do point to the need to have a different organizing principle other than what the word “mission” has been associated with in order to seek and sustain relationships of mutuality. Such mutually enriching relationships between peoples who intentionally encounter each other could only be had on the basis of shared

experiences of human predicament, and their respective independent witness weaved through tangible, appropriate, and adequate commitments and praxis.

Acutely relevant to our effort in this dissertation is Grau's discernment with regard to the liberal-progressive tendency of "decommissioning 'mission' from 'civilizing mission'" that would end up in a "tragic flattening" that is equally sheer "civilizing" and shorn of the gospel of Christ.¹²⁵ Equally valuable is the perception that the "cultures of the gospel are sets of practices and beliefs that function as negotiation grounds for [a] differently embodied *doxa*." The only addition we would seek to these insights is that the gospel of Christ cannot be carried to, translated for, or administered on any situation, and that the only way that both sustenance and transference of the gospel occurs is by way of a testimony that in itself is an evental performativity (Mt.3:8; 5:16). While welcoming the significant insights Grau offers, we raise the caution on the use of the term "mission" in itself. Every single nuance and caution that Grau has so ably surfaced on the spirit that needs to inform and imbue the Christian engagement with the other, would be better served by moving away from the concept of mission that requires a stably existing entity prior to any of its subsequent act. This act of moving away could only be brought about by considering the Christian to be solely emerging and remaining so in and through the acts that are currently assembled under the rubric of mission. To this reversed order wherein individuals and communions continue becoming Christian in and through the praxis that reflects their own faith confessions, Grau has already made an indispensable contribution.

¹²⁵ Grau, *Rethinking Mission*, 61.

2.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, we tried to unsettle the notion that there has always been a continuous and monolithic template ever since Jesus of Nazareth to the present times for inviting persons and communities to be part of the journey of becoming the disciples of Christ. We have accounted for the historical and biblical scholarship that complicates the contention that the colonial paradigm of mission that emerged in the sixteenth century and continues through these postcolonial/neocolonial times is just a continuation of what was always at work and thus needs to be sustained unto the eschaton. The argument we strived to advance is that this continuist view of omnipresent mission paradigm has always already been a retrojection from the Acts depiction of it, through Eusebius of Caesarea, and church historians ever since. Through our readings of three texts of mission theology by Bosch, Flett and Grau, we endeavored to establish that the beneficial and sustainable way to invite and initiate new persons and communities to the faith and hope in Jesus Christ is through the very witness of the community in itself. The task of the next two chapters is to track the theological and scriptural resources that would help authoring lives not encumbered by any overarching mission, but by living freely in an attentiveness to one's own witness and its relation to the confession of faith.

CHAPTER 3

Beyond *Missio Dei*: Theological Resources for the Journey

In this chapter, we explore the theological resources that would enable us to go beyond the conception of God having a mission in the world and that God is in a perpetual state of mission. Once again, it is not our intention to systematize and reconcile the different registers upon which the theologians base their works, and from whom we are drawing resources to argue that Christian life is *not* bound by any law that demands continuous instantiations, but an absolute freedom from all such requirements of rote observances. The resources we gather are to demonstrate that both congregational coming together in the name of Christ and the thus gathered communion's engagement with the world are not two separate aspects of life, but an integral attempt at proclaiming the lordship of Christ against the most acutely oppositional and threatening of lordship claims.

As we have already noted, oppositional claims are not just rival claims, but ones that make all competing claims of lordship as unsustainable impossibilities, and thus as irrelevant axes around which humans to organize their individual and communal lives. All rival religious claims relativize temporal realities and human constructions by considering them to subsist in an imperishable reality from which everything ensues and eventually returns. A reality that surpasses comprehension could be thought of in many ways, and as singular or multiple absolutes. The different ways of conceiving this reality

is not our concern here, but only the ability of such conceptions to relativize human productions and thus serve as a deconstructive lever that reveals the constructedness of everything in human realm.

We are not oblivious to the pervasive possibility of considering the divine to be the author of human constructions and thereby bestowing upon them deific ordination, infallibility, inalterability, and thus, eternal permanency. All exclusionary practices like patriarchy, caste, race, and similar others are sustained in this manner.¹ Similarly, the escalating inequality of wealth that continues to accelerate at a pernicious pace is also theologically introduced and maintained. As we have noted in the Introduction chapter, it is not that the discourses that produce and sustain injustices have god or divine as their organizing principle, or that they have the religious blessing, but that all of them are built upon faith and trust as their bedrock. There is no evidence or any particular reason to consider the contentions of market determinism, trickledown economics, deregulation, or any similar pronouncements to produce the effects it purports, and could only be held on as organizing principles for human lives with sufficient faith and staunch foreclosure of all the contrary corroboration. Religions generally, and especially the church in the West, preside over, justify, and sanctify, the rising income inequality, albeit indirectly, by foreclosing themselves either by busying in myriad missions that address the effects of inequality while skillfully evading its causes, and/or by pointing to the transhistorical bliss that awaits the faithful. Religions thus shelter themselves from the perils of a direct theological confrontation to that which is being theologically produced, while sharing in

¹ The liberation theology corpus continues to address this aspect of religious authoring, sanctioning, and sustaining of various exclusionary practices, and the skillful theological maneuvers that aid or at the very least help unseeing the sinfulness of sociopolitical texts that begets and ensures inequality by making social mobility a near impossibility, and those that which mete out all-round suffering.

the swag as a reward for their collaborative silence, by way of financial contributions collected on behalf of their respective missions—from charity, to efforts at religious conversion, to the supposedly subversive ones.

However, the oppositional claims are that which absolutize any particular aspect or the totality of a society at any given time and place as the final possibility of communal organization and thus construe them as the end of history in itself. This contention of finality for any particular phase in human history obliterates the ground for any yearning and hope of the whole creation captured in the prayer “your kingdom come” and “your will be done” (Mt.6:10), as there could be nothing better to arrive, or whatever could arrive is just an enhanced form of whatever already prevails, and arrives just to have it vindicated and made permanent. It is a mode of living in the “as if,” wherein humans conduct their lives “as if” they are *in essence* what their stations in life accords them with. Contrary to Paul’s insistence (1 Cor. 7:29-32) on begin living in the mode of “not as,” living “as if” is the manner in which one considers oneself to be in “essence” the lord, slave, owner, etc., and that the world is in its final and permanent form. In his commentary on the Epistle to Romans, Giorgio Agamben observes that the messianic calling is in the mode of,

‘*Hos me,*’ ‘as not’: this is the formula concerning messianic life and is the ultimate meaning of *klesis* [calling]. Vocation calls for nothing and to no place. For this reason it may coincide with the factual condition in which each person finds himself called, but for this very reason, it also revokes the condition from top to bottom. *The messianic vocation is the revocation of every vocation...* This obviously does not entail substituting a less authentic vocation with a truer vocation. ...the vocation calls the vocation itself, as though it were an urgency that works it from within and hollows it out, nullifying it in the very gesture of

maintaining and dwelling in it. This, and nothing less than this, is what it means to have a vocation, what it means to live in messianic *klesis*.²

Living in the mode of “not as” is neither a flight from the world—which is an impossibility—nor conforming to the status quo, or being in consistent open and direct confrontation. It is a unique mode of inhabitation that drains out the pretention of every social system as all-encompassing, final, and finest of totalities, and thus as the end of possibilities for both God and humans, and therefore as God ordained. This messianic calling could not be turned into a mission of perpetual “revocation” as it would then amount to posit a secure, static, and accomplished being that is prior to, and remains selfsame through and after the missional act, and one that could be ready or reluctant for the next episode of its benevolent or valiant act of mission. Moreover, the entity capable of authoring missional acts is never bound by any necessary requirement that it embark upon any “revocation of every vocation,” and all such acts would always remain in the domain of its freewill and never its constitutive component. Our attempt is to reverse the order and argue that an entity emerges only within an act and could sustain itself as such only within a persistent praxis that testifies to its own claim to be continually becoming an entity of a certain disposition.

All attempts at flights as in supposedly alternative societies of ashrams and secluded communities are all the more tethered to the status quo, and thus evermore sustaining and reinforcing. The efforts at conscientious dropping out in effect allow dominant order to remain in peace and tranquility, as they never subvert or even minimally disrupt the prevailing order in any manner. Manifestly, furtively, or

² Agamben, *Time that Remains*, 23-24. Emphasis original.

metonymically, the mode of human existence at any given point of time and place will always demonstrate a confidence or arrogance that proclaims that “My Nile is my own; I made it for myself” (Ezek. 29:3). Typically, human vision could only remain as one through a tunnel. A tunnel that emerges from the limitedness of the conditions that defines every particular life, the breadth of experience that it permits itself to embrace, or those which it forecloses, and through the sustainment of the posture of openness or abjuration to diverse experiences across the length of their lives. The voice from the whirlwind that confronts Job, reveals the tunnel through which Job is trying to arrive at the answers for the question that prompts everything worthwhile in life—the ubiquitous and inexplicable nature of the unwarranted suffering in this world (Job. 38). Thus the Christian proclamation of the lordship of Christ is an attempt at confronting the oppositional claims that absolutize any world order as final, and that with which those contentions demolish the very basis of the prayer and eschatological hope of the coming of the kingdom and the will of God (Mt. 6:20). All along, even though a proclamation could only be expressed in alternative constructions, idealizing and endeavoring to conserve any particular erection as of eternal verity is to idolize it. All such idols would inevitably assume the place of Christ and thereby siphon out the deconstructive potential and potency of Christ that is capable of melting every power and principality with the human performative of a prayer comprising merely three words—“Your kingdom come.”³

³ Leonardo Boff proficiently surfaces the performative nature of the Lord’s Prayer, where every step from invocation of the name to the resolution on to whom glory belongs, could only be uttered in and through acts. See, Leonardo Boff, *The Lord’s Prayer: The Prayer of Integral Liberation*, trans. Theodore Morrow (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983).

3.1. The Messiah who Abrogates Messianism

Reinhold Niebuhr, a public theologian from the United States, who rose to national and international prominence during the post- First World War, reads the revelation of Jesus the Christ against the broad framework of the different types of messianism that existed at the time of Jesus and the prophetic-messianic tradition that defined the first century Hebrew religion. The effort is to demonstrate why Christ is and needs to be both “foolishness to the Greeks,” and a “stumbling block to the Jews.” Niebuhr holds that the Greek thought by way of Platonism privileges the world of “being” wherein the Good resides, and perceives a power in persons that enables them reach this world of essence. This dualistic view of the world of changeless essence and that of the ever-changing “world of sight” renders the process of “becoming” or history as an inferior and irrelevant realm as the task of humans is to strive to reach the level of being through the power of reason inherent in them. The power of reason is of assistance only if it is being preserved without the taints that could come through sensory influence. Reason does not seek the principle behind the visible world, but it “contemplates itself until it is united and becomes identified with the ‘Authentic Being’ of the final ‘Good.’”⁴ Since identification with the absolute is a possibility for those who strive, Niebuhr argues that there is “no expectation of a Christ,” or “Messianic Hope,” in classical Greek understanding as there is nothing to be revealed. Niebuhr’s contention is that such a view reduces history as “essentially meaningless because it is partly imbedded in nature,” and since change is perceived as antithetical to the unchangeable being.⁵ This does not mean

⁴ Niebuhr, *Human Destiny*, 13.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

that both Greek and Roman thought is totally devoid of messianic anticipation, but only that it is not the crucial component that informs life in general. And, we can leave aside Niebuhr's discounting of being embedded in nature or embodiment per se, as we are already beyond those dualities of nature/nurture, spirit/matter, and his point that we are trying to bring on is not incumbent on these either.

Messianism is part of all cultures as history is regarded as a serious and desirable endeavor where both the will of God is encountered, and human life's fulfillment in part is primarily made possible. Niebuhr identifies three levels of messianism involving the "egoistic-nationalistic," the "ethical-universalistic" and the "supra-religious" elements wherein the supra-religious gets expressed in the Hebrew tradition as "Prophetism." The shortcoming of the "egoistic-nationalistic" element is that it perceives that "history will be fulfilled from the particular locus of the civilization and culture which has the [messianic] expectation," and thus making its particular experience as absolute, universally valid and desirable.⁶ Niebuhr traces this egoistic feature built into the Christian conception of the final consummation of history and the corresponding vindication of the believer and the damnation of unbelievers.

The "ethical-universalistic" level of messianism agonizes over the "triumph of evil in history" that deprives history of its ethical meaningfulness, and thus anticipates a "Messianic 'shepherd king' who will combine power and goodness," to set history right.⁷ Here the "seeming power of evil, and the seeming impotence of virtue in history is regarded as the greatest problem," and at the level of prophetic messianism, the

⁶ Niebuhr, *Human Destiny*, 16.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

expectation of reconciliation amplifies the universalist elements and thus extending the expectation beyond the nationalistic particularities.⁸ The messianism of the ethical and prophetic mode understands evil as the corruption of the good, and its origination within the very instruments created to administer and maintain peace and justice. Niebuhr terms it as the “greatest paradox of history” wherein it is recognized that the “creative and destructive possibilities of human history are inextricably intermingled.”⁹

Amos, the prophet, delivers the most radical anti-nationalistic word of God that shatters Israel’s notion of singular election and exclusive emancipation (Am 9:7).¹⁰ For

⁸ Niebuhr, *Human Destiny*, 20.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁰ Wherein one identifies the loci of the text is, or where one permits oneself to stand within a text, determines what one sees. The twin loci of the Hebrew Scriptures could be identified as the Genesis text affirming God as the creator of all humans regardless of their gender or nationality/ethnicity, and this text from prophet Amos insisting on the prevalence of other Exodus accounts that are being testified by every other nation on earth. If so, the way the other sections of humanity that are considered beyond the fold of Judeo-Christian traditions acquire new meaning, and God’s covenant and promise to the Hebrew people assumes a different significance. A particular reading of the history of Israel as presented in the Hebrew Scriptures and what could be known from other sources could offer sufficient ground to argue that through the many experiences of servitude, exile, and colonization, the nation of Israel had been continuously impelled and prodded to assume a paradigmatically different mode of nationhood that is not tethered to geography, or defined by it. A people who are capable of organizing, sustaining, and furthering themselves on the basis of a testimony of a covenant with God, the law that requires mercy and justice, and eschatological expectations of the reign of peace on earth. A people who are at once set free from the bondage to particular piece of land, while simultaneously made responsible to “till and keep” the whole of the land, and thus to preserve the earth until eschatology. That, it has been continually urged to assume a different kind of nationhood that would serve as a testimony before the whole world to configure national belonging primarily based upon shared affirmations and expressions thereof. Geography to become a related/relational concern on boundaries that provides essential components in defining life, experiences, expectations, and through it all, livelihoods. Necessity of borders, however defined and regulated, as one within which alone certain practices could be instituted, performed, enforced, and continually perfected. It could only remain as a matter of speculation and wild imagination on how this understanding of nationhood based upon shared affirmations, practices, and reverence for the whole of earth, rather than a piece of land one owns, would have worked. If at all it had been seized upon and thereby undoing the notion of nationhood as ensuing from essence—that which requires tremendous amount of policing and exclusionary practices to sustain—and embracing and acknowledging the basis as construction that never masquerades its evolutionary process or effaces its tracks. As one that constructs and sustains itself in persuasion and striving to build consensus, transparent about the violence it enlists and the ends thereof, and as forever open to protest and change. This does not mean that there will ever be a human society where the need for violence have been ceased, and that would only be either after the eschatological “hand[ing] over of the kingdom to God the Father” (1 Cor. 15:24), or in a nuclear winter, or climatic catastrophe that have extinguished all life on this planet. The only contention is that both violence and discrimination are to be

Niebuhr, a reading of Amos and other prophets demonstrate that the “real problem of history is the proud pretension of all human endeavors, that seek to obscure their finite and partial character and thereby involves history in evil and sin,”¹¹ and the “premature and pretentious efforts to fulfill what he (*sic*) cannot fulfill.”¹² Even when the prophesied divine judgment could be perceived as rightful punishment for their iniquities, the historical experience of the Jewish people imparted the understanding that the “jailors and executors of divine judgment were worse than they were.”¹³ The conception of thoroughgoing unrighteousness even within the supposedly righteous acts (Isa. 64:6), complicates both the prophetic question of why the virtuous suffer and the vile flourish, and its own answer of a messianic fulfillment in history that would vindicate the worthy. For Niebuhr, the question of whether there will be any worthy on the day of the Lord brings forth the question of how to relate divine judgment to divine mercy, and holds that Christ both fulfills and frustrates the prophetic messianic expectations.

Niebuhr argues that while Jesus embraces a form of prophetic messianism, he mounts a challenge to the legalism, which is a “kind of arrested and atrophied religion of history.”¹⁴ Legalism fails to be the “disclosure of divine purpose in history” and could

discursively instituted with the goals of wellbeing and justice for all as objectives, and is to be closely monitored to ascertain that it is working as intended with least possible ill effects. A mode and measure of violence that ensures social mobility, rather than that we have up until now, one that is aimed at preventing, curtailing, or drastically limiting such possibilities of movement. And that the necessity of violence is consistently being regulated judiciously in order to administer it appropriately and adequately, and that the organized and agreed upon means and manner of violence ought to be continuously deconstructed, lest them become callused into lineage or group privilege systems that produce un-traversable abysses of caste, class, serfdom, patriarchy, ethnocentrism, and the like.

¹¹ Niebuhr, *Human Destiny*, 25.

¹² *Ibid.*, 32.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

never “do justice to the freedom of man in history” as in the context of human “transcendence and self-transcendence, no order of nature and no rule of history can finally determine the norm of his (*sic*) life.”¹⁵ The relativizing of the law at the Sermon on the Mount verges on annulment of the law as an artificially imposed burden and turns it into something that needs to be consciously embraced, and of which the parameters can never be thoroughly and conclusively determined. Significance Niebuhr perceives is that the “law becomes a matter between God and the individual,” and it ceases from being a “vehicle of sinful pride” that the sense of even nominal observation of the law feeds in its adherents and practitioners. The ultimate problem of prophetic messianism as the “necessity of the vindication of the righteous over the unrighteous” is a matter of upholding the “human self-esteem” and Niebuhr holds that there is no answer for this within messianism.¹⁶ This is so because human interventions in history and the divine will cannot be synonymous and thus there cannot be anyone who is found righteous at the final judgment day, and the challenge is to overcome the “evil in every good and the unrighteousness of the righteous.”¹⁷

Jesus’s reinterpretation of prophetic messianism and its inability to come to terms to the reality that there cannot be any possibility of righteousness by way of intentional and predetermined actions is to remove the question of righteousness altogether from the realm of conscious actions. For Niebuhr, the reinterpretation of prophetic messianism is perfectly captured in Jesus’ description of the Last Judgment:

¹⁵ Niebuhr, *Human Destiny*, 40.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

The righteous are humble and do not believe themselves to be righteous. They accept the judge's commendation with the confession, "Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?" While the righteous are contritely aware of their unworthiness of this vindication, the unrighteous are equally unconscious of their guilt. The distinction between the righteous and the unrighteous is significantly not obscured. There are those who serve their fellowmen (*sic*) and there are those who do not. But the ones who do are conscious of the fact that in any final judgment they are discovered not to have fulfilled the law of life; while the ones who do not are too self-centered to know of their sin. Thus the final judgment, as Jesus sees it, actually includes both levels of prophetic Messianism, the more purely moral and the supra-moral. The distinction between good and evil in history is not destroyed; yet, it is asserted that in the final judgment there are no righteous, i.e., in their own eyes.¹⁸ *Mt. 25:37-39.

In the context of our discussion on the supposed mandatory of mission (imposed through incessant assertions), this interpretation of Niebuhr's assigning of the pivotal status to the scene of Last Judgment is very valuable for arguing that Christian life ought to be organized around the principle of witness rather than nominally meeting an obligation imposed by any law.¹⁹ There are at least three aspects involved in the actions of the righteous who receive the commendation of the Lord. The first is that their actions were conscious ones that require deliberate planning and systematic implementation. It is evident that these were not unconscious acts or commissions that humans customarily do without contemplation and thereafter be caught unawares of their positive or negative consequences. However, what never occurred to the doers is that the deeds of their own volition and discernment would be found favorable in the sight of God. (Volition and

¹⁸ Niebuhr, *Human Destiny*, 43-44.

¹⁹ The modern missionary movement builds its rationale on the New Testament passages that could be read as "sending," or as Jesus "commands" or have "ordered" precisely this preaching format and the paradigm of outreach. Among many possible references, see, Robert, *Christian Mission*, 11. We have already noted Leslie Newbigin's critique on ensuring a place for mission as if it is a law. See, Chapter 2, footnote 6.

discernment are not prior to acts, but begotten through the acts themselves.) Second aspect is that, even when these actions remain conscious and calibrated, they are never carried out as a mission wherein one is always on the lookout for opportunities to perform their own self-assumed or perceived to be conferred responsibilities. If the acts were deliberately organized, then the doers would be both anxious and conscious about the righteousness of their deeds. Consequently, they would be certain of their own righteousness. Third, the worthy deeds were not organized as part of a teleology that could lead to any particular conception of an eschatological consummation. In the context of this parable, the preferred outcome is what could be counted as a righteous deed. What defines the worthy actions is that they were performed in response to what the doers considered the right action in light of the historical circumstances and the means at their disposal, and never a prefabricated or mechanical response waiting for the opportunity to arise or were out on obsessive quests for opportunity.

The usual binary opposition inferred from the parable of the Last Judgment is between the good and altruistic doers versus the selfish non-doers. For Gustavo Gutierrez, this text and its context signify “the universality of the judgment and the central and universal character of charity.”²⁰ It is hard to maintain that those who did not find favor in the sight of the final Judge has never conducted an act of charity as in almsgiving when these are required by the social customs and the religious precepts of the hearers of this parable. Thus it is not whether one is charitable or not, but how they organize their action in light of poverty and oppression could be the main thrust of this

²⁰ The other significance that Gutierrez gathers from this text is the universality of salvation irrespective one’s being Christian or not. Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 112.

parable. Poverty and oppression are not mere historical realities and nor are they solely determined by socioeconomic and political realities of any time and place, but they are an expression of to whom the actual lordship of history is being ascribed to, and the lives carried out in and through that solemn understanding. It is possible to be charitable to nominally follow a religious or social precept, and this parable is in effect subverting the works carried out as mission to fulfill a mandate and the very concept of charity itself.

We are thus forever thrust within the Protestant problematic of works versus faith, and will not be able to extricate ourselves out of it immaculately without always falling back into the works paradigm. Both works and faith are indeed acts or deeds in themselves, as faith could only be expressed, ascertained, and realized in concrete acts (James 2:17). Believing cannot be equivalent to faith, as a person or community could profess any brand of belief and yet organize their acts in contradistinction to, and often contrary to, the particular or cumulative precepts of their professed beliefs.

The concept of charity is appealing to those capable of bestowing it, as they hope these acts could possibly beget both God's favor and the obeisance of the recipients of charity. The parable of the Last Judgment is better understood in the context of both the call for sabbatical and Jubilee years (Lev 25.1-13), and the kingdom parable on giving living wages to all the laborers regardless of the amount of work (Mt 20.1-16). On the other hand, charity should be limited to the concept and act of forgiveness alone as in Jesus' depiction of two debtors who had their debts forgiven (Lk 7.41-42). Both the call for sabbatical/Jubilee years and for living wages arise from profound social analysis on how inequality spreads and propose a plausible solution for addressing it. Charity as in almsgiving serves only to ensure the sustenance and furtherance of the status quo that

begets inequality that is being sustained through oppression, and is beneficial only to the giver and never to the recipient. Charity in most contexts other than forgiveness actually demeans the recipients and often robs their own personal and that of society's ability to address the underlying causes for mass disenfranchisement. Charity is an act that works well within the parameters of the hegemonic text that metes suffering and exclusion, and charitable acts could never subvert the status quo; rather reinforce them by pacifying the afflicted.

Thus, the Last Judgment parable cannot be about the charity of simple almsgiving or temporarily alleviating the sufferings of the assaulted, but about the acts that consciously problematize the conditions that create widespread prevalence of the deprivations of food, cloth, and shelter, and on the causes of sickness and mass incarceration. Every single act of empathy—providing food, drink, shelter, clothing, and fellowship even in the dungeons—depicted in the Last Judgment text is begotten through a different social analysis that subverts the commonplace and commonsense notions of the responsibility of those who find themselves in those dire situations. Moreover, none of these acts are consciously begotten to fulfill any particular commandment, but as an answer to the call of the other—the only way to becoming human and out of the realization that every other is wholly other. Thus, the argument is not to augment the prevailing ideological cruelty that calls for leaving the sufferers to meet their eventual tragic ends, but to author acts of empathizing with a different understanding and orientation that expresses an act of conversion and thus a different becoming. Mark Lewis Taylor, in his theological meditation on the passively accepted phenomenon of mass incarceration (majority of which are people of color) in the United States, strives to

change the regularly invoked phrase of “the crucified God” (Moltmann), to “the executed God.” Taylor argues that the phrase “the executed God,” would appropriately “remind us that the God who was bound up with the life of Jesus of Nazareth was exposed to material conditions so malignant that he was executed.”²¹ Our argument is analogous to Taylor’s, wherein it is not against acts of charity per se, but the motivating factors that beget and define those actions. James H. Cone’s thought is significant to this understanding on human action:

Indeed there may be some advantages in not consciously doing anything for Christ simply because one wants to be a Christian. The truly Christian response to earthly problems is doing what one must do because it is the *human* thing to do. The brother’s suffering should not be used as a stepping-stone in Christian piety.²²

In discerning the necessity of Christ in the face of many types of insufficient messianism and prophetic messianism, Niebuhr asserts that “each life and each portion of history are found to stand in proud and rebellious contradiction to the divine and eternal purpose,” and hence “only a transcendent mercy can overcome this contradiction.”²³ Even if we could agree with Niebuhr on the essential contradiction, we have to hasten to assert that there is no mechanism that has been bestowed on humans to discern in real-time, the divine and eternal purpose. Every effort to ascribe divine will on any historical happening or process is thus a source of the sin of pride, the pride of believing that one could seamlessly know the mind and working of the divine. The scriptural testimony and the witness received across the Christian tradition thus far could help discern the best

²¹ Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Executed God: The Way of Cross in Lockdown America* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 3.

²² James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986), 135. Emphasis original.

²³ Niebuhr, *Human Destiny*, 36.

course of action or intervention in any given situation, but that discernment could never completely correspond with what would be pleasing to God. Any construal of contingent historical discernments as divine purpose is at the least a penalization of the divine on account of the revelation in history, or at worst blasphemy. Even when we trust the promise of Christ to be with us until the end of time (Mt 28.20), we cannot confidently claim “God is with us” in any of our endeavors, and could only carry forward our lives with fear and trembling before the perennial question of “are we with God.”

3.2. Repentance: Renouncing Current Witness and Embracing a New One

Jesus begins his public ministry by calling everyone to “repent,” and the message of John the Baptist and that of the prophets were nothing other than a call to repentance. Jurgen Moltmann prefers the word “conversion,” instead of “repentance,” as the latter would be redolent of “self-punishment,” that most religions are adept at imparting, and thereby making it singularly as a matter of interiority of individual humans, and thus ensuring the sustenance of the status quo. For Moltmann, the notion of “conversion is turning round” and he considers Jesus’ call to repentance as exclusively addressed to the rich, and as a prompt for them to “turn from violence to justice, from isolation to community, [and] from death to life.”²⁴ This exclusive nature of calling the rich to conversion is because Moltmann understands Jesus as proclaiming to the “poor the kingdom of God without any conditions, and calls them blessed because the kingdom is already theirs.”²⁵ For Moltmann, “‘conversion’ is itself *an anticipation* of that new life

²⁴ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 102.

²⁵ Ibid.

under the conditions of this world,”²⁶ and the community of the converted becomes the “congregation of Jesus,” and this congregation inalienably “belongs to the ‘people of the beatitudes.’”²⁷ Moltmann distinguishes between the “people of the passive and active beatitudes,” as the poor who do not have to do anything to inherit the kingdom, and then there are those who need to and eventually do heed to the call to conversion. Those who thus convert strive to be the disciples of Jesus and thereby “become a single people, one with the poor, and welded into the new messianic community.”²⁸ Once again, James Cone helps widening our understanding with this contention:

[t]o repent is to affirm the reality of the kingdom by refusing to live on the basis of any definition except according to the kingdom. Nothing else matters! The kingdom, then, is the rule of God breaking in like a ray of light, usurping the powers that enslave human lives.²⁹

Moltmann holds that up till Constantine’s conversion to Christianity, “the Christian congregations were communities with a social commitment,” and it is only with the “Constantinian imperial church” there ensued a “tendency to spiritualize poverty,” and the church to significantly “confine itself to the salvation of souls.”³⁰ For Moltmann, without this detrimental imperial incursion, “the conflict which Jesus initiated with the gospel for the poor would have remained a living conflict and [that] the spiritual and political power in the Christian empire would have remained unharmonized.”³¹ Before

²⁶ Moltmann, *Way of Jesus Christ*, 102. Emphasis original.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 102.

²⁹ Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 117.

³⁰ Moltmann, *Way of Jesus Christ*, 104.

³¹ *Ibid.*

we problematize this binary of the poor as the people of the passive beatitudes and thus not needing any sort of conversion, and the rich as the originators and/or sustainers of every evil and thus squarely required to repent and convert, let us gather further evidence to this theme running across the liberation theology corpus.

The standard theological understanding is that the poor, the subaltern, and the oppressed need not repent for the status quo, and without any particular act on their part, they have the assurance of being inheritors of the kingdom of God.³² When read along with the verses calling on losing one of the members that causes one to stumble rather than having to suffer eternal damnation (Mat. 18:8-9), the life on earth becomes just a prelude to the eternal one that unfolds on the other side of death. In this context, the situation of the subaltern becomes an enviable one as they inherit the kingdom without requiring any particular act on their part. However, another text imparts the notion of absolute culpability on everyone's part regardless of their stations in life (Rev 13.16-17).

Before we proceed further, we should reassure ourselves that we are not indulging in Ivan Karamazov's inability to see beyond the "Euclidian, earthly mind," that is endowed with only limited capabilities that could merely ponder the questions of "three dimensions alone."³³ We could appreciate the contraction of time wherein someone "sentenced to walk a quadrillion kilometers in the dark" so that the "gates of heaven would be opened to him and he would be forgiven," would finally walk the walk and

³² Moltmann holds that that "Jesus proclaims to the poor the kingdom of God without any conditions, and calls them blessed because the kingdom of God is already theirs. But the gospel of the kingdom meets the rich with *the call to conversion* (Mark 1.15 par)." Moltmann, *Way of Jesus Christ*, 102.

³³ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Barnes and Nobles, 2004), 218.

arrive there miraculously, long before the required “billion years to walk” is up.³⁴ Also comprehensible is the cry that “those two seconds [in Paradise] were worth walking not a quadrillion kilometers but a quadrillion of quadrillions, raised to the quadrillionth power!”³⁵ What is unfathomable is that even when the heaven has long back “adopted the metric system,” why would some not do so after these many quadrillion of years! The position we are struggling to advance is that the other dimensions that we testify to and do witness in history every now and then are neither consciously produced nor intentionally administered. They are events that happen within our attempts to live faithfully in and through the accessible dimensions within which alone we could legitimately configure our thoughts and actions.

Liberation theologies are thus based upon the appeal to the privileged to have a kenotic experience of deliberately relinquishing their positions of privilege and power, and in the very process enter into solidarity with the poor or the subaltern, and thereafter become a part of their struggles for justice. However, this appeal is one that is made to the charitable hearts and minds of the privileged individuals, and thus, other than the charitable act of those who willfully embrace such a discomforting state for the sake of others, there is nothing that makes this an act that is binding or desirable for the privileged. There is a limit to this appeal to the charitable hearts and for them to choose to be on the side of the poor or the subaltern, even if this appeal is made with the accompaniment of the rationale that God have demonstrated such a preferential option and thus persons who claim to pursue God’s will need to follow suit. Apart from a

³⁴ Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 585.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 586.

miniscule minority, if at all any, that heeds to this altar call and makes conscious contributions within the struggles for justice and equality, there are at least three negative consequences to this appeal.

Foremost drawback of this call to solidarity is that it is an optional addendum and never perceived as an integral part of human or Christian becoming. Thus, only those who feel profoundly motivated to bring discomfort to themselves would ever venture and heed to the call to solidarity. Secondly, even when this call is framed as a Christian or religious or moral duty of humans, there are plenty of ways to nominally perform the requisite responsibility. Finally, since the acts of comradeship is exclusively for the benefit of the downtrodden, there is nothing of self-interest for the privileged to put themselves through situations that range from minor distresses to martyrdom. Accepting the challenge of this call to be in solidarity with the poor could impart to the privileged an aura of sacrificing their lives and suffering many hardships for the betterment of others. This act of altruism on the part of the privileged is equally demeaning to the poor or the subaltern as it makes them yet again an object of charity bestowed by the privileged. Moreover, charity is an act that comes only after solidifying and preserving the present and future means of those who could possibly demonstrate benevolence, thus is always a bestowal of what is dispensable/disposable, and most of all a surreptitious way of sustaining the status quo. Charity never become or ever contributes to anything subversive, more often than not, it is a clandestine effort at draining the subversive fervor that bubbles in any society.³⁶

³⁶ In responding to the budget proposals to reduce foreign aid, and instead increasing defense spending substantially during the financial year 2017-18, more than 120 retired US military leaders in a letter urged the Congress to continue current levels of funding as it is “critical to preventing conflict and reducing the need to put our men and women in uniform in harm’s way.” Yeganeh Torbati, “Retired U.S.

We have already noted in the first chapter, that becoming human is made possible by becoming responsible through answering or responding to the address or call of the *other*.³⁷ The “other” is a necessity for a self to continue becoming human. On the other hand, “othering,” is the process through which the self forecloses the call of the other, or shields oneself from every possibility of such a call, and thereby renders the other as a thing that is merely the sum of its parts, its utility or lack thereof, and nothing more. Thus the call of the other that sets in motion the process of becoming human for the self, in and of itself should be understood as a singular process by which the self becomes human in and through the act of deconstructing the hegemonic order in any given society and at any given point of time. This means that we deny the dualistic possibility of being and remaining human, while having an option of whether or not to deconstruct the texts of suffering. Else, in the case of the Christian, we deny the possibility of being and remaining Christians while maintaining the luxury of choice in whether or not to be in any mission. What we strive to dispel is the notion of a static being either as a human or as a Christian, and insist that there could only be a mode of becoming for both of these faith acts. Becoming human and or Christian as an act of faith in response to the call of the other and the wholly other. Since there is no other ethereal medium than the creaturely or the material, the discernment of the call of the wholly other too becomes an

military officers urge Congress to fully fund diplomacy, aid,” *Reuters*, February 27, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-budget-foreignpolicy-idUSKBN1661YK>.

³⁷ Spivak frames the “question of responsibility as being called by the other, before will,” thus as the very constitutive or summoning act of becoming human as response-able. Spivak, “Righting Wrongs,” 538. In another essay, Spivak “formalize[s] responsibility in the following way: It is that all action is undertaken in response to a call (or something that seems to us to resemble a call) that cannot be grasped as such.” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Responsibility,” *boundary 2*, vol. 21, no. 3 (Autumn 1994): 22. Thus, the most ungraspable of all calls, the call of God, is not beyond pale, and this call could only be received and only become actionable within the realm of a discursive discernment. In order to keep the possibility of receiving the call of God anew, the discursive components that render a call as discernible and actionable need to remain open to scrutiny and continuous change.

act of faith with all its imperfections and undecidabilities, and could only be wrought in and through the relationships that a self finds itself enmeshed within. A becoming that is an experience of a journey, and not of an arrival at any avowed destination, or of a possession of any particular status that stays intact in continuous perpetuity for all posterity, or above all, regardless of the witness of the sojourner.

If deconstruction of the texts of suffering is integral to the processes of becoming human and becoming Christian, then both the privileged and the disprivileged could have the same interest in deconstructing a text of suffering that equally prevents both from becoming human. This is so because there cannot be two different texts, one to accord privilege to one section of the society and another one that disprivileges another group. Everyone who is part of a discourse would be occupying distinct and different locations on the very same discursive text. Moreover, those locations always spread across a spectrum of locations that range from privileged, to underprivileged, to disprivileged. Patriarchy, class, caste, gender, sexual orientation, etc., are examples of discursive texts that authors suffering as in each case they accord privileges and disprivileges arbitrarily and disproportionately. For example, patriarchy is a singular text that both privileges men and withholds the same from women. Thus both men and women come to inhabit two different and opposite locations on this very same text of patriarchy. Since both privilege and disprivilege are meted out regardless of their respective merits, demerits, or “content of character,” the only way for both of them to become human is to deconstruct the text of patriarchy by way of a different mode of inhabitation. It includes a constant vigilance to prevent being upright with regard to the hegemonic text, or when thus discerned, to consciously struggle remaining in obliqueness. When the disprivileged deconstruct the

text and begin struggling to end their undue suffering that robs their possibility of becoming human, then only the privileged would comprehend their privilege as an undue conferring without any special act or worth on their part and thus robbing them of the ability to become human. Cone maintains that even the life of the privileged is “limited by another’s slavery.”³⁸

In Jesus’ call to deny oneself and take up one’s own cross and follow (Mt. 16:24), the notion of denying oneself could mean deconstructing the very text that privileges or disprivileges oneself. This is so because, in any society, conforming to one’s given station in life—even when one’s very rights and opportunity to become human are being continuously trampled—is the primary source of existential security and one that saves humans from violent physical death before their natural time of departure has come. Warren Carter interprets the call to “deny oneself” as the call to “turning from that which hinders faithful and lived commitment, and turning to trust oneself to God’s purposes, and [to the] unusual ways of Jesus’ suffering and death at the hands of the elite.”³⁹ Thus, Jesus’ suffering and death is not an enactment of a prefabricated script of salvation, but the result of a salvific living wherein humans seek to express their faith commitment and hope in and through their lives. It could very well be that the cross is not just Jesus’ lot, but it is a positive possibility for anyone who is faithful enough to follow and become human—“a call to martyrdom, to die as Jesus does.”⁴⁰ One way to circumvent this demand of the cross is to reduce it as a shallow and one-dimensional call to the other to

³⁸ Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 95.

³⁹ Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000), 343.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 344.

relinquish their current religious or secular faith practices and embrace the Christian religion. The call to repentance is not just for the initiation to discipleship, but a requirement throughout the journey of discipleship. On the other hand, actions organized as mission is a construct that forecloses this call to repentance, as it is a second order act that a self-contained, well-defined, stable, and enduring self executes in and through its own understandings of the self and the other, and above all, what the other needs to do in order to become human.

3.3. Counter-Apocalyptic Witness and Relational Becoming

The last book of the New Testament, through its sequential positioning and its supposed envisioning of the end-times, is often being effortlessly equated as the culmination or zenith of the Christian canon. This book entitled “The Revelation to John,” or “Apocalypse,” has been both a motivational source for a multitude of Christian and secular missions, and a “How-To” guide to organize missions aimed at ushering in enduring eschatological peace. Along with the text termed as the Great Commission in the Gospel of Matthew, Revelation to John serves to define the trajectory of both the salvation history and the history of the world, and how Christians may partake in them. The end of the world has been unambiguously foretold in Revelation, and in the so-called Great Commission, the task in the run up to that glorious fiery end is already being assigned in the parting words of Jesus. (What is conveniently being foreclosed is that the Gospel According to Matthew ends without a call to await an imminent second coming, but by reinforcing the reassuring theme of Immanuel, God being with us forever. Thus the charge of the so called Great Commission need *not* be understood as a law, and to

encumber oneself with the obligatory of presumptuous missions, but to live freely by discursively discerning what the spirit of the letters mean in each and every particular moment and place in history.) Thus, the only reasonable thing to do in the time that remains is to put on the blinkers to shut out all distractions and get on with the assigned task. The late twentieth century attempts by liberation theologians to recognize the fervent quest for justice that informs the text of Revelation, and thus its significance to contemporary praxis, still runs the risk of seeking a secure teleology to an assured eschatology that is already inaugurated and waiting only to be seized upon. Thus for everyone who program their interventions around the theme of mission, be they missiologists, liberals, or liberationists, it is only a matter of appropriate method and adequate effort to reach the destination, as what awaits is already finalized and foretold.

Catherine Keller reads the text of Revelation to John to surface the basic character of this, and for that matter, all texts: “the Apocalypse does not unfold *in* time—and certainly not outside of time—but rather constitutes a specific form *of* time.”⁴¹ The notion of time that cuts the circularity of earth rhythms and being ironed out as a straight line progressing toward a definitive end, informs the major Western philosophies of history that base their theorization either directly upon this apocalyptic text, or even for those secular ideologies that consider themselves as being beyond the taint of supernaturalism or idealism. Keller argues that Jesus would not have been “preoccupied with his own future status,” but was definitely “obsessed with the present work of the ‘kingdom of God’—the subtle transformations of life possible *right now*, when the people break bread and boundaries together, when the bakerwoman kneads the yeast through the dough of

⁴¹ Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 87. Emphasis original.

*everyday.*⁴² The concern for the present and transformation of history was not lost on the post resurrection communities, but the experience of intermittent persecution had tested their resolve and made them crave for the definitive end of this time of trial, and for the inaugural of a profoundly new and discontinuous reality wherein the faithful are vindicated and the tormentors avenged. Even though the yearning for justice forms the bedrock of the text of Revelation, the later theological articulations based upon it mostly became preoccupied with the seven chronological thousand year periods, and the major events of creation, fall, incarnation, resurrection, and the awaited second coming, serving as milestones.

Beginning with Irenaeus in the 2nd century, the church became the locus of Christ's imminent millennial rule. Yet, rather than yearning for its immediate arrival, a deferral of its appearance was what actually was sought after. By the time of Augustine of Hippo, this theological deferral that Keller terms as "anti-apocalypse," became the mainstream mode of exegesis wherein the fervor for imminent return of Christ was contained and sublimated in the rituals and liturgical cycle of the church. Augustine systematized the split between the spirit and the "time rhythms of the earth," by considering earth as a mere space through which the church as a pilgrim people is destined to navigate as they await the glorious end. Keller notes that Augustine did not relativize the world in terms of any utopianism, but as a foreclosure "*against* the very utopianism of hope," by limiting the action of Satan or evil to a mere parochial concern of "deconvert[ion] of Christianized nations," rather than having any part in the texts of

⁴² Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 92. Emphasis added.

suffering.⁴³ With anti-apocalyptic stance being coupled with Augustine's intense attention on the "individual soul and its eternal body," history became a "meaning deprived deferral" wherein the "apocalypse of collective, utopian aspirations for greater justice in history," are literally consigned to a form of apocalyptic fire.⁴⁴ The further that this fire that gotten kindled and emblazoned in and through Augustinian dualism between the church and the world have spread, the ashes of enmity to every other, especially every religious and nonreligious other, continue to overwhelm the world, and the enmity between religions increasingly appears poised to consume the world.

Joachim of Fiore, the twelfth century ascetic and prophet, by contrast, reimagines "history as a time not just for waiting, but for growth," and as a space where "there is something to hope for *within* history."⁴⁵ Varying from the by then standard theological view of the church being considered as the "vehicle of the Holy Spirit," and with a reinterpretation that overflows the text of Revelation, Joachim perceived the coming age as one of the Spirit. A "humanly appealing utopia," that is worth waiting for as it is defined by "justice, freedom, meditation, love, [and] friendship," and as one that in effect gives up the "bitter quest for a vindictive justice."⁴⁶ Joachim's act of "time-opening," thus the reworking of history as a meaningful enterprise, propelled and continues to propel many individuals and groups to be witnesses to the coming age of the spirit. Keller considers that the "recent social movements" including feminism share an indebtedness to Joachim's theoretical performativity of effecting an "opening in time," and thus

⁴³ Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 99. Emphasis original.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 107. Emphasis original.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

“reopening history,” and to the heritage of the movements from the “Franciscan radicals onwards” that his thought has ever since inspired.⁴⁷ For Joachim’s scheme of history, the trinity becomes a “template for the unfolding of time” wherein the “three Persons presides over a ‘*status*,’ or condition (something like an aeon, or age),” without strictly guarded boundaries, and thus as a space of overlaps and overflows.⁴⁸ The regular trinitarian equation of the church being considered as the domain of the Holy Spirit is being revised by extending the reign of the Son through Joachim’s own period, and thus releasing the Spirit to be free to usher in and guide the age to come.

This understanding of Joachim on the freedom of the Spirit with regard to the coming age could be extended to argue that it is beneficial for a genuine Christian discipleship to free all three persons from the church and the Christian. Instead, to affirm that the only humanly plausible possibility is of testifying to what one has witnessed, and equally affirm the impossibility of claiming an automatic and imperishable share just for being privy for a gratuitous revelation and for being the recipient of a promise. The witness that proves to be fainthearted, and the recipients of a promise that never even try producing befitting outcomes (Mt. 7:24), could only be a millstone on the neck of the one who bequeathed. The insistence on the automaticity of an inheritance serves no beneficial purpose for Christian discipleship, other than inflating unmerited arrogance.

The claims of inherent merit are an extension of the “affirmative action” that defiles and destroys all attempts at just communities—an “affirmative action” that arranges all acts or plays in a society in favor of the dominant to seize and securely hold

⁴⁷ Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 106.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 107.

all positions of authority. This is what continued, and to a greater extent, continues to happen, wherein persons of particular race, caste, class, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, nationality, etc., used to get all of the available opportunities to obtain and wield power and authority, and thus prevented others from having any chance at social mobility. Hence, what is currently termed, and often derisively so, as “affirmative action,” is in actuality a mere reduction of the original blatant and malevolent “affirmative action.”

The exact same affirmations on that which has been revealed and on the demands that the promise call for could be made as a faith confession with an accompaniment of fear and trembling arising from not being sure of the metonymies involved in one’s confession. This act of confession that acknowledges sheer faith in God alone, and not in a certainty of knowledge of any indwelling in the divine, would impart the necessary audaciousness that moves the mountains of sinfulness—the many oppressions, exclusions, exploitations, and similar attempts that deny transcendence to every one and thing—and testifies to the grace of God. The Spirit that both exposes the sinfulness of social texts, and that which hovers over the seas of humans who consciously bring their physical bodies to the public square on behalf definitive causes, and thereby be bold enough to have themselves identified as targets of violent repercussions as their names and place of abode become public.

Keller emphasizes the embrace of Spirit in the social movements that erupted ever since Joachim reconfigured the theology of history, and of the understanding of Spirit as both a “movement and as a representation of a movement,” and simultaneously as both the “medium and as [the] message” that “question the presuppositions by which history is

[being] framed.” This is a “particular spirit-consciousness [that] can empower certain persons (even female) as to begin to reopen history then and there, already, within their incarnate existences.”⁴⁹ In awakening this spirit-consciousness, the “Book of Revelation is [the] most radical critique of the status quo,” and one that is “mythologically relevant to any situation of historic rupture.”⁵⁰ Yet, the linear sense of time that the text of Revelation informs and founds is one wherein “The End as the goal of time... motivates the Western drive to future,” and every “allusion to the *space* of time” is being shunned.⁵¹ “The sacrality of the present was mainly captured in the denatured sacrament of a past saving event.”⁵² This linear time, in its late capitalist phase, is diced out into numerous dissociated moments, and is being mechanically and thoroughly filled out with disparate components. Against this “flat ‘now,’” Keller calls for “a certain *kind* of present,” or a “now” that is both “translucent upon its past” and “pulsat[es] tide-like toward its future,” while never being separated from the depths that engenders and propels any present.⁵³ Keller identifies the pitfall of an unproblematized hope that in itself springs from the “apocalyptic womb,” and instead proposes a counter-apocalyptic hope that envisions and sets in motion the “future, precisely *as* the possible,” as one that is “firmly re-rooted in the ‘organic quality’ of the present,” and as that which “comes with no guarantees.”⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 112.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 118-119. Emphasis original.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 116.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 125.

The “time sense of counter-apocalyptic” that Keller ushers is an “eco-social feminism” that would “retemporalize history [by] setting it in the context of galactic, geological, arboreal, animal rhythms, [and by] practicing... new habits in order to loosen the grip of self-destructive ones,” that denudes time of its in rhythm and density.⁵⁵ Physicist Carlo Rovelli contends that the best explanation available today for the question of “what is the world made of” is that the “space and time are approximations that emerge at a large scale,” and are in itself generated by “*covariant* quantum fields.”⁵⁶ Also notable is the insight that “it isn’t *things* that enter into *relations*, but rather *relations* are that ground to the notion of *thing*,” and thus “reality is reduced to interaction.”⁵⁷ Already in the last decade of the previous century, Keller is urging us to embrace a conception similar to that of a recent work of the physicist. The time of counter-apocalypse is a “helical movement” that “enfolds the inevitability of a relational process but not of a predictable progress.” Relations are not possible without “a spiritualization of place consciousness, [as] an attention to the spirit of a place,” and an appreciation “that *as body the self takes place*.”⁵⁸ Yet, relations are not subsuming into a seamless solidarity of sameness, but an invitation to a radical and realistic “counter-apocalyptic practice of daily deference to difference.”⁵⁹ It is a mode of “being-*in*-time as a less cutting way to become who we are...neither negligible nor enduring, such being just *is*-for the

⁵⁵ Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 131.

⁵⁶ Carlo Rovelli, *Reality is Not What it Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2017), 193-194.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 135. Emphasis original.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 193.

moment.”⁶⁰ The whole reality thus acquires a relational spiritual significance, rather than the pointlessness of a waiting room where the only two remaining desirable acts are to recruit more persons to begin waiting, and to preserve oneself from the taints of the world.

Since the notion of eschatology is imbued with apocalyptic overtones, Keller recommends a pneumatology that would be “dis/closive play of hope,” and as the “intersubject” binding together the many stories that crosses each other as in a double helix.⁶¹ This spirit or pneumatology that Keller is proposing is not that of a transcendent other, but one that is weaved in with matter—an enfleshed spirit. Since the spirit is encountered in and through materiality, there is a multiplicity of spirits that could pass the discernment process proposed by the First Epistle of John, and this notion of the plurality of spirits could pave way for interreligious exchanges, and thus keep every colonial aspiration at bay by preventing linear and progressive movements toward any imagined future. The spirit is not free of place either, but “indeed *is* that space.”⁶² Enlisting Moltmann’s conception of “immanent transcendence,” Keller envisions the spirit as one “lending space where relationships suffocate, resistance where they oppress, respect where they sustain, and mutuality where they are capable of love, spirit arises again as the *relation of relations*.”⁶³

Keller lifts up Martin Buber’s contention that community cannot be an ideal in itself, or a static institution, but that it “must be the moment’s answer to the moment’s

⁶⁰ Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 132.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 276.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 290. Emphasis original.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 300.

question, and nothing more.”⁶⁴ We are advancing this very same argument of Buber and Keller, that with regard to ecclesiology and witness, there cannot be a being for the church and the Christian, and it will forever be a continuous process of becoming. This process of becoming would not be a crusading and colonizing spirit of “missionary outwardness,”⁶⁵ and instead consider everything that the church involves in by way of becoming witnesses.

3.4. “Do this in My Remembrance”—Witness as Eucharistic Living

Towards the end of his life and ministry, Jesus summed up his teachings and the signs of reflexive living that he required from the disciples with this command of “This is my body, which is given to you. Do this in remembrance of me.” The institution of the Lord’s Supper is not one ritual among the many other forms of religious rituals, but it is a permanent testimony to what humans are singularly capable of doing, what they always do, and how the followers of Christ could transform this elementary act of living if they sincerely strive to follow Jesus. Paul considers his whole life as being “poured out as a libation” (Phil. 2:17). And, Ivone Gebara offers this insight that the only thing we actually do and are capable of doing is to offer our body and blood as food and drink to others: “‘Take and eat, all of you: this is my body and this is my blood.’ We are the food and drink of one another. We are one another’s body and blood. We are one another’s salvation.”⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 209.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 290.

⁶⁶ Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1999), ix.

In the earthly sojourn, turning the given share of flesh and blood into food and drink is what humans actually do. They do so for the upkeep of their own, for others, and for so many other earthly pursuits. In majority of instances, someone else would be extracting it from them involuntarily, and at times violently, with its ominousness obvious or discretely camouflaged. The persons who enlist themselves in the military and law enforcement, where bodily harm is inherently expected, makes this aspect more prominent, as what they enlist is their very flesh and blood. Even if it is not this evident in other avenues of life, spending their flesh and blood in particular ways is what humans essentially do in all careers and vocations. This is so because there would not be much time, energy, and opportunity left for anything else after one commits oneself to one particular field of involvement and service. The lives in which their share of flesh and blood is being spent for themselves alone could be a form of auto-cannibalism. However, its converse is not altruism, but a spending that fulfills one's own life through a different performativity that testifies their faith, hope, and yearning that sabotages (Acts 17:6) the social ordering of their times and places.

Jesus through his life that is the fullest expression of love, and one that was led without the fear physical death, presents a different model in the art of turning one's flesh and blood into food and drink for the multitude. Thus, Jesus' call to his disciples is to observe his memory by continuing to turn their own flesh and blood into food and drink for others, and to do so with great love for others, purposefully, and voluntarily. The Eucharistic celebration we have every time the community comes together is a prompt for persons to take up this call and to discursively see it through in the diverse situations they are placed in this world.

3.5. Substitutionary Atonement that Prevents *any* Theological Response

The understanding of mission as obligatory would necessitate individuals and groups to be in a constant search of avenues of fulfilling this existential requirement. In the broad spectrum of positions and praxis, the liberal and liberationist sections of various shades could end up addressing the effects of hegemonic texts that administer misery, rather than deconstructing the texts themselves. Even when deconstruction of texts initially informs the undertakings, soon enough, the mission takes a life of its own and renders further deconstruction either unnecessary, or shallow, or at worst, impossible. And since any mission requires objects in whom the mission has to be accomplished, and since the mission is being organized to fulfill the obligation of the subjects who unilaterally unleash their mission on the object others, any such mission becomes a “violent and violating” act.⁶⁷ On the side of the spectrum with individuals and groups that consider their singular mission as upholding orthodoxy or right belief, their missionary endeavors could end up merely sustaining previously negotiated settlements without any regard to—or even as an effort to foreclose—the promise that the “Spirit of truth” would lead to newer understandings. The missions thus organized on both sides of the spectrum falls into the very same pitfall of basing their contemporary actions on previously arrived

⁶⁷ With regard to teleological mission that is self-confident of carrying history toward an eschatological consummation in the Marxian vein, Spivak notes: “There is no state on the globe today that is not part of the capitalist economic system or can want to eschew it fully. In fact; within the economic sphere, Marxism—at best as a speculative morphology devised by an activist-philosopher who had taught himself contemporary economics enough to see it as a *human* (because social) science, and through this perception launched a thoroughgoing critique of political economy—can operate in today’s world only as a persistent critique of a system—micro-electronic post-industrial world capitalism—that a polity cannot not want to inhabit, for that is the “real” of the situation. To treat what is powerfully speculative as predictive social engineering, assuming a fully rational human subject conscious of rights as well as interpersonal responsibility, can only have violent and violating consequences. It goes without saying that a literary taxonomy that bases itself on the predictive framework, however subtle in its maneuvers, can be violent and violating in its own restricted sphere.” Spivak, *Critique*, 84-85.

settlements that are contingent upon the very best understandings of particular historical spaces and times, and thus prove incapable of summoning a confession that any present would necessitate.

Even in the case of liberal and liberationist options/attempts at mission, the concept of mission is a pitfall as it pushes persons and groups into their own respective silos of preferred mission and causes them to address the issues as if within a moving locomotive without doing anything to alter the course of train in itself. In the post-second World War era, humans have achieved much progress in the cause of justice in various fields, and Christians all over the world have very significantly contributed to this accomplishment. The thousands of years of oppressions and exclusions sustained through the violence produced by patriarchal, casteist, racial, colonial, and sexual, practices have become less prominent in the recent times through the *mission* embraced by a multitude of actors. Not just Christian mission, but by many religious and secular agents from issue-based associations to political parties. Yet, since not all mission is understood as proclamation, and since proclamation is perceived in the very limited and restrictive form of reciting a standard formula that salvation was made available in Jesus Christ and it is available for all those who embrace the pronouncer's word for settled truth, and, thereupon participate in the recreation of their preferred church structure. There is no real proclamation of the lordship of Jesus Christ in relation to the other lordships that are acutely competing or threatening to the lordship of Christ. It is not our insistence that the world should accept the lordship of Christ, but that those who claim to have done so are required to act as if there cannot be any other lordship for them, and thus obligated to confront the most ominous ones that diminishes the lordship of Christ. Even when many

texts of untold sufferings are being deconstructed through specific *missions* that are necessary and commendatory—addressing the many exclusions arising from patriarchy, caste, sexual orientation, and the like—the very understanding of who merits being termed as humans is being drastically altered. These dire changes happen because the blinkers of respective *missions* prevent Christians of all theological persuasions from their requirement of proclamation, as ushering in justice is being considered as witness and proclamation by some, and church-planting by others. For example, currently most churches identify human trafficking as a serious affront to both God and humans, and set out to address them by establishing special desks and groups within its governing structures. Addressing human trafficking seldom leads to question the fundamental assumptions and logic of late capitalism that sets itself as an oppositional claim of lordship against God (Ps. 24:1), and thus enabling and ensuring the sale of “human bodies and souls” (Rev. 18:13), by treating trafficking as just an isolated aberration of the political economy. Let us examine one issue, among many others that begs for a theological word on the lordship of Christ, and yet never receive one, and on the contrary one that have become an inherent part of the church’s organization.

3.5.1. Ontological Difference Instituted by the Concept of Human Resource

Management

Sometime in the middle of the second half the twentieth century, the “personnel departments,” in the private sector commercial establishments, and later on that within government organizations gave way to “human resource management,” (HRM) departments. The focus is markedly different, wherein, the former personnel departments

were meant to function as an “employee advocate” and “honest brokers” addressing employee benefits and grievances, and were termed as “welfare officers” in the “Quaker-owned companies such as Cadbury.”⁶⁸ The replacement of personnel departments with HRMs is chiefly attuned to maximize efficiency and profitability of the establishments by requiring “HR professionals to be concerned with the bottom line, profits, organizational effectiveness and business survival.”⁶⁹ Apart from the discussion on the desirability and or of the necessity of profits and efficiency of commercial organizations, what should come across as an affront against God for Christians is the construal that the humans or the “image of God” could be reduced as yet another resource that an establishment consumes in its operation. This construal should have raised the question of solely considering those who populate the boards of organizations as humans, and reducing the rest of humans employed in every establishment to merely the status of resources as any such other consumables or raw materials. (We are not saying that the natural resources could or should be treated with irreverence, but only that through the testimony of a

⁶⁸ Alan Price, *Human Resource Management*, 4th Edition (London, UK: Cengage Learning, 2011), 12. Price goes on to note that:

In the acrimonious industrial relations climate prevailing in many developed countries throughout much of the 20th century, personnel/industrial relations managers played an intermediary role between unions and line management. Their function was legitimized by their role—or, at least, their own perception of that role—as ‘honest brokers.’

But from the 1980s onwards governments with a neo-liberal or free market orientation such as Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative administration in the UK, reined in union freedom severely. Overall, there was a marked reduction in the importance of collective worker representation in many English-speaking countries. The perceived importance of collective bargaining reduced as managerial power increased. Trade union membership declined along with centralized pay bargaining and other forms of collective negotiation—and with them, the importance of the personnel manager with negotiating experience. The focus switched from the collective to the relationship between employer and individual employee to support this change, a variety of essentially individualistic personnel techniques were applied to achieve business goals. These include performance measurement, objective setting and skills development related to personal reward. *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

common creator, humans have an inalienable ontological equality regardless of their respective stations in life). The difference that HRMs establish between two groups of humans—between the boards, and the employees—who happen to inhabit different domains, most often than not, through the design of destinies that governed their lives, and not of their own choosing or of divine ordination, verge on positing an ontological difference between them. Yet, today most Christian churches and their organizations and ecumenical coalitions do proudly possess HRMs as a mark of their modernity and their capacity to change and adapt with the times. And, there is no theological opposition from any segment of the church that problematizes this conception that treats humans just as any other resource.

We lift up this question among many possible other similar or even grievous issues is because the whole of Judeo-Christian testimony of the oneness of God is the unassailable basis for the affirmation of the universal equality of humans, and any concept or ideology that effects inequality among humans is in actuality an act of positing the existence of more than one god. Even though this elementary understanding of most egregious affront against God could not be lost on the churches, it is possible continue living without moral qualms or outrage is because the current schema permits maintaining faith as a separate object that could be securely shielded from any effect of the church's actual witness in the world. The entity status of being and remaining Christian thus being firmly assured, the second-step possibility of choosing from a manageable and nonthreatening array of avenues as missional involvement enables communions to foreclose itself from issues such as this that invalidates its very confession of a faith in God who is the creator of all there is. If the possibility of

maintaining faith by itself is removed from the equation, then a faith and consequently a confession that testifies to the continuous act of becoming Christian could only be possible in an through a performative praxis. The discernable witness of such an act of confession in itself is its testimony, its fruit, and the very invitation before every other to join this journey of following Christ to the Galilees of this world.

3.6. Constructedness of *all* Religions, and the Witness of God and Christians

In order to prevent external authorities from having lordship over the church, Karl Barth insists on an understanding of “revelation attested in [the] Holy Scripture,” and enlists it to ward off the possibility of every other form of knowledge through which either the church, the Christian or other religious faiths could receive a credible testimony of God. Barth contends, “revelation is God’s self-offering and self-manifestation,” wherein “God tells man that He is God, and that as such He is his Lord.”⁷⁰ Revelation discloses something very new, without which humans would never have that unique understanding. All that humans have to do is “to be ready and resolved simply to let the truth be told us and therefore to be apprehended by it.”⁷¹ For Barth, even though “religion is unbelief,” and “is the one great concern, of [the] godless man,” yet, “the attitude and activity with which he met revelation, and still meets it, is religion,” and the faith that

⁷⁰ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. I.2, bk. 4: The Doctrine of the Word of God, 16-18, The Revelation of God: The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit, eds. G.W. Bromiley, & T.F. Torrance (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 17.2, 104. Here and in other quotes below, we are not riddling Barth’s text with the customary parenthetical “sic” to indicate that the gender-specific pronoun for humans and God is from the original version.

⁷¹ Ibid.

revelation instills unveils religion as unbelief and as an inhibitor of revelation.⁷² It is indeed unbelief because:

From the standpoint of revelation, religion is clearly seen to be a human attempt to anticipate what God is in His revelation wills to do and does do. It is the attempted replacement of the divine work by a human manufacture. The divine reality offered and manifested to us in revelation is replaced by a concept of God arbitrarily and willfully evolved by man.⁷³

We are in solidarity with Barth in his insistence on pronouncing the “no” on everything that is being considered as synonymous to or in accord with God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, with the gospel, or with the kingdom of God. However, the huge premium that Barth places on revelation could only be sustained by unseeing the fact that revelation is never a transparent transaction, but always discursive discernment of the faith community on what just have happened in their midst. None of those who sojourned with Jesus from Galilee to Golgotha ever had a clear and comprehensive understanding of Christ and the full meaning of salvation when they set out witnessing Christ as lord and savior. Nor did the one who had to transform his own self-assumed mission after being caught unawares by a profoundly new mode of combat—being confronted by an anguishing Jesus—and thus had to radically recast his life and the perception of orthodoxy, and had to continually discern the meaning and significance of Christ. The epistles that Paul composed testify to this continuing process of discernment and the truthful acknowledgment of never arriving at a transparency and mastery that humans so ardently quest (1 Cor. 13:12). Even then, it takes many resources and careful organization of the material, rigorous argumentations, and persuasions ranging from subtle to

⁷² Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. I.2, bk. 4, 104.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 104-105.

substantive, to surface the unique significance of Jesus Christ in the scheme of salvation of the world. The amount of construction that has gone into the writing of the Christian scriptures is a part of most primers that serve as basic introductions to the New Testament.⁷⁴

In his extensive study of Christology, Roger Haight tracks the pluralism of Soteriologies and Christologies within the New Testament, and accounts for five unique attempts at marking the salvific significance of Jesus Christ. These Christologies present Jesus Christ as the “Last Adam” in Romans 5:12-21, and I Corinthians 15:21-23, 45-49, the “Son of God” in Mark, “Empowered by the Spirit” in Luke, as the “Wisdom of God” in Philippians 2:6-11, Colossians 1:15-20, and Matthew 11:25-30, and finally as the “Logos of God” in the Prologue of John’s gospel.⁷⁵ Haight notes that the “religious question arises out of the negativities of human existence in this world, and it hopes for a new reality effected by the transcendent power.”⁷⁶

We note the prevalence of plurality in Christologies, and of the human matrix—recognition of human predicament and the quest to transcend it—within which any revelation could be received (as Barth himself acknowledges), is to explore another possibility to problematize the sway of external authorities that will always be part of the church and the Christian.⁷⁷ In his reading of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s contention that

⁷⁴ For example, see Ehrman, *New Testament*.

⁷⁵ Roger Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999), 155-178.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 158-159.

⁷⁷ Despite Barth’s insistence that “we are not in a position to apprehend the truth” and that the only thing needed is “to be ready and resolved simply to let the truth be told us and therefore apprehended by it,” Barth notes that “the attitude and activity with which” humans “met revelation, and still meets it, is religion.” Thus religion becomes a prerequisite for revelation to be communicative and assume meaning

writing as a supplement is devoid of full presence when compared to speech that is immediate and natural, Derrida goes on to demonstrate that there is only supplementation and that the “scandal is that the sign, the image, or the representer, becomes forces that make ‘the world move.’”⁷⁸ Thus, there is only supplementation or manufacture in the human realm, and it is the state of reality between the ellipses within which we receive a brief time to both comprehend the components that contribute to the state of affairs into which we are thrust, and to discern whether we reinforce or destabilize the set-up. If construction were the only possibility, then, acknowledging the constituents, the organizing principles and possible patterns of arrangements would be extremely beneficial to better problematize the givens and thereby seeking different possibilities. What actually corrupts and proves corrosive for the church are the unacknowledged components that end up becoming metonymies of Christ.

Barth could actually take to task the many of the fashionable notions about the possibility of “a direct road [that] leads from art, or morals, or science, or even from religion, to God” and dismiss them as “sentimental, liberal self-deception.”⁷⁹ We could not agree emphatically enough. Barth, however sees the need to be able to discern the presence of God in the world, and considers this could be discerned in the “true being of the Christian” who is “in perfect fellowship and even unity with Christ.”⁸⁰ Barth asserts that,

and significance that changes lives and help move mountains. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. I.2, bk. 4, 17.1, 104.

⁷⁸ Derrida, *Grammatology*, 147.

⁷⁹ Karl Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 337.

⁸⁰ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV.3.2, bk. 28, The Doctrine of Reconciliation, 70-71, eds., G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 221.

...the goal of vocation... and therefore the true being of the Christian... is to be understood as the perfect fellowship and even unity of the Christ who calls man with the Christian called by Him, or conversely of the latter with the Christ who calls him. Christ should live in the Christian by the Holy Spirit is the purpose of his vocation. 'In Christ' means that Christ lives where this man, the Christian is, in his time and place, in the sphere of his free thinking, volition, resolution and action, in such a way that He takes up His abode in what is most proper and remains most proper to him, in his innermost being or heart, being present there as the Lord of the house and understanding him better than he understands himself. ...conversely, the purpose of the vocation of the Christian is that he should live in Christ by the Holy Spirit. 'In Christ' means where Christ is, with Him in His time and place, in the center of His intention and action, in such a way that in the use of His distinctive sovereignty, ...Christ is not a stranger but his best known and trusted Neighbour whom he understands better than he does himself. In sum, the self-giving of Christ to the Christian and the Christian to Christ is the goal of vocation, the true being of the Christian.⁸¹

The affirmations on indwelling that Barth is making is both necessary and sustainable only as faith testimonies that impart sufficient confidence to relativize the orderings of the world that otherwise would appear as solid, permanent, and thus without any credible alternatives. These affirmations are not statements which become sources of considering the church as the "institute of salvation," and thus inflates its "egocentricity," but as prompts to a different habitus in this world, and never as a means for sanctifying the status quo as givens or as divine ordination.⁸² Otherwise, the danger is of falling back into the classical answer from which Barth is striving to move away. One that considers the "community of Jesus Christ" merely as a "*medium salutis* [means of salvation]" and thus ends up becoming yet another beneficial transaction that betrays the "monotonous *por me, por me* [for me, for me]," among countless other "possessive expressions" that

⁸¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV.3.2, bk. 28, 222.

⁸² In his effort at discerning the nature and goal of the vocation of the Christian, Barth argues that the classical answer of personal enjoyment of salvation "smack of the sanctioning and cultivation of an egocentricity." *Ibid.*, 194-195.

humans are all too well familiar and comfortable with.⁸³ Here Barth is making a concerted effort to give credence to authentic Christian witness without compromising the aseity or wholly otherness of God, and letting God be God. Barth's contention is that the "knowledge of God in the relation of revelation is akin to the secular knowledge of 'other' objects," and that "it is thus consciously and fundamentally conceptual knowledge." However, he is clear that one needs some special capacity or instrument to discern the activity of God in any immediate present—which is "faith."⁸⁴ Revelation is not something that comes across transparently to everyone as a simple occurrence with a singular valence as the sun or rain that God sends universally on both the righteous and the unrighteous (Mt. 5:45). Revelation requires acts of faith to affirm it as such, to continue to remain in its sway, and to invite others into its affective force field. We are in solidarity with Barth's quest to distance the church from identifying the hidden hand of God within any current event or in a general historical trajectory. M. M. Thomas observes that "[t]he creativeness of the Barthian approach is that it relativises not only religions [including the Christian religion] but also Atheism and [the] revolts against religion."⁸⁵ Yet another fruitful option would be to address the theological character of whole life on earth and thus engage in the necessary theological conversation around each and every supposedly scientific domains and disciplines around which life is organized in faith, trust, and hope.

⁸³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV.3.2, bk. 28,195.

⁸⁴ Barth, *Gottingen Dogmatics*, 353.

⁸⁵ M. M. Thomas, *Man and the Universe of Faiths* (Madras [Chennai], India: Published for the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, Bangalore, by the Christian Literature Society, 1975), 153.

In the first chapter of his book entitled “State and Revolution,” V. I. Lenin delineates what Friedrich Engels meant by “the state is not ‘abolished,’ [but] it withers away.”⁸⁶ Lenin tries to demonstrate the scientific character of this concept of “withering away,” as distinct and profoundly different from the simplistic absurdity of the “Anarchist doctrine of the ‘abolition’ of the state,” and the historical nature of the state as a “special repressive force” in the hands of ruling classes to enforce their oppressive will on the masses. Despite the arguments on the scientific nature of this concept, the question of management of desire that eludes any possibility of real containment—straightforward prohibitions, striving to shirk them, state or community sponsored curtailment of the sources of desire—and the regulation of the necessary violence to organize life in communities could never be fully factored into either scientific socialist or religious texts. The factor of undecidability—wherein the future effects of any decision could never be fully comprehended beforehand and the effects of those other possible decisions that had to be shunned in favor of the one decision that was ultimately chosen would always remain unknown and forever a source of intriguing contemplation—invariably surrounds almost all human actions. Undecidability that imbues all actions points to the fact that the majority of human actions fall under the domain of acts of faith. Thus, there is an ever-present possibility of both acting in good and bad faith. Spivak does a reading of Karl Marx’s conception of value and demonstrates that value is never a straightforward determination in any field, and evermore so in the economic text where it would always

⁸⁶ V. I. Lenin, *State and Revolution* (New York: International Publishers, 1932), 1. First chapter is available online at <http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic519973.files/Lenin%20State%20and%20Revolution.pdf>.

remain indeterminate and open-ended.⁸⁷ Paul Knitter points to the religious character of current economic hegemony: “The basic beliefs or principles of present-day neoliberal economics are generally presented as a dogma that one has to accept on faith and sometimes with a trust that looks like blind faith.... The authority of the market is generally presented and accepted as absolute, even infallible.”⁸⁸ Derrida thus brings forth the pervasive nature of trust and faith in all human realms:

Without the performative experience of this elementary act of faith, there would neither be ‘social bond’ nor address of the other, nor any performativity in general: neither convention, nor institution, nor constitution, nor sovereign state, nor law, nor above all, here that structural performativity of the productive performance that binds from its very inception the knowledge of the scientific community to doing, and science to technics.⁸⁹

If faith and trust is the domain in which actions are produced, then all actions and life in general is theologically wrought. This is true even when there is no accounting for any concept of divinity or of theistic/pantheistic/panentheistic transcendence in that which everything subsists and continuously become, and yet that which supremely and steadfastly surpasses the impermanence of all entities. If so, the components, processes, and the proposed destinies that every theology seek to produce and sustain—regardless of whether these theologies base themselves on either faith confessions on revelatory events, contemplative wisdom, or upon thoroughly secular conceptions—an ongoing conversation (and at times combat) among these theologies is not that which humans could recuse themselves. If they are not in such an open and constructive conversation on

⁸⁷ Spivak, “Scattered Speculations,” 107-140.

⁸⁸ Paul F. Knitter, “Introduction,” in *Subverting Greed: Religious Perspectives on the Global Economy*, eds. Paul F. Knitter and Chandra Muzaffar (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 10.

⁸⁹ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 80.

respective theologies, and/or in a self-assumed conscious and deliberative combat with the reigning dogma, they would always already be subscribing to the hegemonic one and thereby turning their own faith confessions into a metonymy of that which holds decisive power. To safeguard the aseity of God, Barth would be better served by uncoupling God from every grasp, including that of the Christian one, and deeming all human discourse about the divine as imperfect and incomplete renderings of the revelatory events to which communities testify. This could be achieved not by apophatic discourse alone, but by considering even the kataphatic as quintessential statements on what a communion refuses to believe.⁹⁰

In every form of society, the church, and for that matter, all religious organizations, in some form would practice a version of conformism in relation to the social order of the day. When feudal systems held sway, the church could only be part of it and even help oversee and administer it, and when slavery and colonialism is prevalent, the church could not stand aloof and be distant or reluctant from being a willing and often a blessing partner. Even when an eschatological expectation is being liturgically maintained, the church would often conduct itself as if living in a realized eschatology that necessitates no further quest for better ways of social organization. Thus the church will always be a hyphenated reality wherein it could only have been a feudal-church when feudalism was the organizing principle, a colonial-church when blatant colonialism thrived, a neocolonial-late-capitalist-church in the contemporary times, and will continue to be so until the end of times. There can never be a pure coming together of the

⁹⁰ Christopher Morse reads the Christian katphatic affirmations as statements of what they refuse to believe, and never as simplistic and literal pronouncements of what they positively assert. See, Christopher Morse, *Not Every Spirit: A Dogmatics of Christian Disbelief* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1994).

communion in the name of Christ, as Christ will always be a metonymy for countless practices that appear acceptable and normal at a time and place. Christ will continue serve as a metonymy for the many exclusionary and socioeconomic practices that are designed to beget and sustain inequality. Even when the name of Christ is being invoked to address and justly resolve the obvious and shrouded discriminations, Christ could only remain a metonymy in any actual present, and the identification of any such invocation as truly revelatory of Christ could only be made in the retrospective.

At normal times when persons and communities try to work with respective social systems and continue to confess their faith in them by considering them as best possibilities for sustenance of life and providing reasonable room for social mobility, this metonymy might not be that evident. However, when social divisions become pronounced and prominent, the skewed character of the social system comes to sharp relief, and when there is movement in the direction of change, this seemingly oblivious metonymy becomes hard to sustain as an innocent oversight and reveals itself as an interested institution, and thus a source of division within the church. We observe worshiping communities on both sides of the spectrum on any given social issue and them congregating with confidence in the righteousness of their respective positions and without any moral qualms. Barth, Bonhoeffer, and their comrades in the Confessing Church had their oppositional Christian force in the “Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Religious Life,” and, “The South African Council of Churches” that championed the anti-apartheid movement, had their ready opposition in the form of the “Christian League of Southern Africa.”

In the actual present or in the very moment of performativity, both these diametrically opposing options could only be metonymies of Christ. The thoroughgoing ambiguity and undecidables that surround human decisions and actions would make it impossible to confer correctness or ultimacy on any decision we make. In the real-time the options that a Christian or her church make to actively or passively aid and abet Nazism or apartheid, and the bold ones that muster sufficient courage to oppose them could only be considered as metonymies for Christ. Building upon Kierkegaard's conception of leap of faith, Derrida demonstrates that every "decision always takes place beyond calculation," and thus are made in the domain of an unavoidable darkness where the securities of knowledge, understanding, rigorous training, proves limited, and faith alone provides the final push to make that leap.⁹¹ Thus, what we mean by Christ will always be a metonymy in the real-time. It could only be a retrospective discernment whether a communion was blessed enough to have an action or decision of theirs come closer to Christ, or whether in spite of the best attempts it still remained intimate to the crass hegemony and dominance of a time and place. These retrospective discernments go on to become part of the tradition as pointers to that which could bring the communion closer to Christ, and that which has to be avoided, of possible to be shunned—just as the desirable yeast of the kingdom (Mt. 13:33), and the one that has to be perpetually beware of (Mt. 16:11). Thus, the metonymy as an unacknowledged confession is more lethal and detrimental to the proclamation of Christ as lord, savior, and liberator, than the acknowledged enlisting of Hegel, Marx, Derrida, Spivak or any other theoreticians in

⁹¹ Jacques Derrida, "Gift of Death," in *The Gift of Death and Literature in Secret*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2008), 95.

order to make sense of the contemporary times and its many emphases, thrusts, aspirations, and above all, its idolatries.

The relativization of religions begins early in Barth's career, and he asserts that "however clearly and precisely the Gospel is preached, the divine incognito still remains," and that "all human thought and action and possession—however orthodox—are no more than a parable."⁹² Even when the "Church is the fellowship of MEN who proclaim the Word of God and hear it," it could only be a place of "blessed terribleness" where humans are "exposed as liars, precisely when they hear and speak about God," and only such a church "alone is observable, knowable and possible."⁹³ Surprisingly enough, Barth contends that the "unholy and unbelieving children of God are... not 'objects' of our preaching and pastoral care, of our evangelistic missionary, and apologetic activities, of our busy efforts for their salvation, they are not objects of our 'love.'" This is so because "long before we appeared on the scene to have mercy on them, they had been sought and found by the mercy of God," and "they had been thrown existentially upon God!"⁹⁴ Contrary to the obsession that idolizes the form and order of the church, Barth calls the church to "recapture its understanding of the communion of saints as the fellowship of sinners dependent upon forgiveness, and so [to] be rid of that nervous, devastating, vigorous founding of new societies... [and] to abandon all striving after, attaining, and boasting about visible goals and successes... [and be] directed to wholly

⁹² Karl Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 333.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 341. Emphasis original.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 364.

and altogether towards the unknown, living, free God, and concentrate its preaching upon the Cross of Christ....”⁹⁵ We cannot agree enough with Barth’s contention that,

There is an obvious difference between regarding the Church as a religious brotherhood (*sic*) and regarding it as a state in which even religion is “sublimated” in the most comprehensive sense of the word. There is an obvious difference between regarding faith as a form of human piety and regarding it as a form of judgment and grace of God, which naturally and most concretely connected with man’s piety in all its forms. That is the decision to be made.⁹⁶

The religious association that resembles the issue based nongovernmental organizations, or a conglomerate that encompasses numerous such voluntary nonprofit organizations addressing every imaginable issue under the sun, cannot be a religion, and certainly not the church per se. The current path of the church is certainly in the direction of proliferation of issue-based institutions that are being identified as necessary components to contemporary expressions of mission. However, the difficulty we are having with Barth’s position is not whether or not faith should be perceived as a testimony of the “judgment and grace of God” expressed in every single aspect of human conduct, but the contention that it could be the possession of any particular religious faith, rather than a witness they are striving to inhabit in all forms of their piety. No religion including the Christian one could legitimately consider itself as having a role in *administering* the judgment or grace of God, or consider itself as the channel through which these are made available in the world. The only human possibility until eschatology could be to faithfully *minister* to the reality of God’s judgment and grace by testifying continuously and boldly to each and every aspect of human life and at all places and times. Moreover, the aspiration for “sublimation” is yet again another “liberal”

⁹⁵ Karl Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 368.

⁹⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. I.2, Bk. 4, 17.1, 84.

pitfall that Barth should have been adept enough to sidestep. No form of evil is ever overcome or abrogated, and humans would always have to live with what has shown its ability to devastate human communities and thwart even the very best of human objectives and efforts, and it is that which all communities struggle to contain with much difficulty. It will always be an ever-present possibility that there will always be forces wanting to annul the already existing protections of citizens from being illegally imprisoned, from exploitations, exclusions, and from being denied the swift and due process of law. And, there will always be persons and groups that would hunger for the annihilation of all those others that they consider as enemies or deviants to their particular notions of purity, both in terms of essence and life choices.

Nikos Kazantzakis, in one of his last and semiautobiographical work, “Report to Greco,” recounts an incident when he and a friend out on a walk on a “high snow-covered mountain” and had lost their way. Night had fallen, and the desperation of their long walk was making Kazantzakis dizzy and unsettled. At last, they spotted the distant lights of a village down in the plains. Upon sighting the lights, a strange phenomenon overcame him, and he walked forward with a “clenched fist at the village,” and “shouted in a furor, ‘I shall slaughter you all!’” Kazantzakis insist that the “raucous voice” was not his own, and assured his startled and querying friend that it was not him, but someone else. The explanation or contemplation of this incident by Kazantzakis is also one on the impossibility of sublimation:

It was someone else. Who? Never had my vitals opened so deeply and revealingly. From that night onward I was at last certain of what I had divined for years: inside us there is layer upon layer of darkness—raucous voices, hairy hungering beasts. Does nothing die, then? Can nothing die in this world? The primordial hunger, thirst, and tribulation, all the nights and moons before the coming of man, will continue to live and hunger with us, thirst and be tormented

with us—as long as we live. I was terror-stricken to hear the fearful burden I carry in my entrails begin to bellow. Would I never be saved? Would my vitals never be cleansed?⁹⁷

With this citation of Kazantzakis, we are not claiming that genetics is destiny and thus there is no possibility of conversion or redemption. Rather, to convey the notion that conversion and redemption are springboards for acts of faith that which is a constant mode of staying awake (Mt. 26:40-41). It is a vigilance on the range of horrendousness that has become evident as to what humans are capable of doing to each other, and that which are contrary to what the self would willingly solicit (Mt. 7:12), and that which has its basis in a process of othering that denies ontological parity and transcendence to the other. Once something dreadful makes its appearance on the world scene, and even when it has been driven away from immediate vicinity and is being thought to have been completely overcome, the possibility of its different iterations of varying intensity and reach cannot ever be extinguished. The only way to prevent or minimize that possibility is through liturgical enactments that keeps the memory of the past events alive and thus fortify the present with the due diligence that is necessary to prevent the possibility of its reoccurrence in a different form and magnitude.

Johann Baptist Metz tries to read the scriptures as an account of dangerous memories that invoke the “liberative and redemptive dangerousness of the remembered freedom of Jesus,”⁹⁸ in order to invite the community and the Christian to inhabit

⁹⁷ Nikos Kazantzakis, *Report to Greco*, trans. P. A. Bien (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), 25-26.

⁹⁸ Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 2007), 89.

“*within*” the social reality with a “critical liberative task” to embrace.⁹⁹ We could only side with Metz on the first part of his contention on dangerous memories, and would very much want to be in solidarity with Barth in his disrupting of common notions of living in “eschatological tension” with the present world, or to institute or edify a “distinctive Christian ethos,” or remain in the bliss of “reception, possession, use, and enjoyment of the salvation of God.”¹⁰⁰ The difficulty that Barth identifies with Christian ethos, is that it would “be an end in itself,” and a paltry routine of “unconditional commanding and an unconditional obedience.” As an alternative, Barth posits Christian ethos to be ensuing from what both the one who “commands” and the Christian “who obey are in themselves in their mutual relationship prior to their commanding and obedience.”¹⁰¹ As we can see, both Barth and Metz comes at it from the same angle of secure prior relationship between Christ and the Christian before any particular inhabitation of the social text by way of commanding and obedience. What we are trying to argue is that there cannot be a reality status to any prior relationship, and there cannot be any real awareness of an indwelling other than as a faith statement that would simultaneously prompt to and provide sufficient confidence to fashion a particular habitus that testifies to the lordship of Christ. Becoming Christian in a habitus that is simultaneously oblique to the social text, and equally to Christ too, as there is no secure way to conclusively and impeccably discern what, whence, and where the Holy Spirit is on to at any given moment and place. Becoming Christian is never a single shot accomplishment, but a continuous act that is

⁹⁹ Johann Baptist Metz, *Theology of the World* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 115. Emphasis original.

¹⁰⁰ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV.3.2, bk. 28, 71.4, 186, 189.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 188.

being carried in and through all the big and small aspects of life. It is neither a programmatic production, nor a recursive submission to any set of statutes, but a reflexive living that finds significant and adequate ways to confess Christ in and through the various aspects of one's own life. There are only open-ended directive principles and pointers on what is pleasing to Christ, and never an implementable program that could be instituted and carried out incessantly. It is an act of faith to discursively discern both the social situation and the most appropriate and adequate close approximations of these commandments that subverts the convenience of machinability that humans continuously seek as an attempt to achieve an unfettered "fit it and forget it," state of mind.

The Hebrew scripture begins by announcing ontological equality of all human beings by unambiguously testifying God as the universal creator of everyone rather than a tribal deity creating and presiding over a single people and a nation. Yet, who belongs to the human family is always a contentious question that is constantly mired with the many otherings that deny the full belonging to a multitude of humans. As we have seen in our discussion of Gayatri Spivak, the great philosophers of the Enlightenment tradition, Kant and Hegel, did not automatically consider everyone to come under the scope of this definition of human. Hence, their contention of human as the mark and measure of everything does not include a whole lot of humans, but just some humans. Moreover, as the Mark's gospel records, Jesus was the first to pronounce human as the measure of all things (Mk. 2:27). A theological response to Kant and Hegel cannot merely rest on the effects of their philosophical thinking would have on the character of the Church, merely of an "absolutism with which man... made himself the center and measure and goal of all

things.”¹⁰² It need to begin with the intolerable heresy and anathema on every attempt that ontologically distinguish among humans, and thus of the sin of ethnocentrism, patriarchy, casteism, classism, and the like. It is so because all efforts in ontological separation renders certain humans as the center of the universe, even when it is being carried out in the name of God, revelation, election, church, scripture, and tradition. This sin ontological separation points to the theological nature of the contentions of even those who strive to lead their lives in and through reason alone. Thus, the battle-lines is not between theistic and secular, or between Christian and other religions, but on the theology that undergirds all human thought and endeavors, and on the affects they engender. And, what should not be lost on us is that the supposedly reverential rendering of everything dependent on and thereby authorized by God is the best way to present human productions as divinely ordained and promote them as such.

We can only agree with Barth that “Jesus Christ is now his Lord, and [that] man belongs to Him, and lives under Him in His kingdom, and serves Him, and therefore has all his consolation in life or death in the fact that he is not his own but is the property of Jesus Christ.”¹⁰³ However, this could only be a faith statement that leads to acts and the way in which individual Christians and communions inhabit the social text. Otherwise, we will be back in the Donatist territory of considering who are pure and congruent enough to be termed Christian. Barth and his comrades in the Confessing Church is the preeminent model of this testimony that Jesus is Lord, and not Nazism or racial superiority. Yet, as we have already noted, there were also Christians who wanted to

¹⁰² Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. I.2, bk. 4, 17.1, 96.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 95. The gender specific pronouns in the original.

purge Christianity of Jewish influence, and there were Christians who wanted to preserve the apartheid regime in South Africa. Examples of this sort are abundant and it is difficult to ascertain who the Christians are at any particular point and place. To step aside this Donatist pitfall of seeking purity, it is better to consider every single one of those who are trying to follow Christ by taking up their own particular crosses, not as Christians per se, but everyone confessing a faith in Christ as “becoming Christians.” Everything the church does by way of the service of the word and sacraments as both a reminder to this calling to become Christians, and as a communal affirmation of the salvation in Christ that enables persons and communions to live in freedom and courage to construct their own respective witness in relation to their immediate situation and in accordance with their gifts, abilities, and means. For Barth, the “true Witness” in whom the “pronouncement, revelation and phenomenon of truth, the truth itself, which unmask man as it encounters him, is the living Jesus Christ present in the reconciled world in the promise of the Spirit and acting in and towards it in exercise of His prophetic office.”¹⁰⁴ Thus, Jesus Christ is the true witness, and it is in relation to this true witness that Christians try to becoming witnesses. In this relational witness of Christ and Christians, Barth holds that,

... it is not out of any need, but in this special demonstration of mercy, that Christ calls His people... Their ministry of the Word, and they themselves as Christians, are necessary in this sense. Superfluously in this glorious sense, they live only by the fact that Christ permits and commands their ministering co-operation which He might well despise and dispense with... And they do in fact live by this as those who are called by Him in fellowship with His life and in the fellowship of their action with His. ... their action can never match up to His, nor their word to His authentic, original and direct proclamation of the work of God... their word and action can and should always be concerned with Him, with His Word of the kingdom and reconciliation... be the sign which accompanies and confirms His

¹⁰⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV.3.2, bk. 28, 10.

self-revelation—no more and no less. ...what they do in their all too human fashion... for all its dubiety as human work it is a work which is well-pleasing to God in His relation to the world and promising for the world in its relation to God. In its own place and manner it takes place in participation in the history of salvation, and it may be incontestably described as the co-operation of the Christian in the work of Christ.¹⁰⁵

In this scheme of witness, at the outset Barth establishes God's aseity by insisting free choice on the part of God. However, towards the middle of this quote he enlists a Chalcedonian like unity between Christ and the Christian and goes on to present human work as "well-pleasing to God" and makes it part of the "history of salvation." It is in effect breaching the aseity of Christ, arrogating Christ to the Christian, and in effect suffocating Christ by restricting the scope of "I will be what I will be" (Ex. 3:14). This close identification and secure tethering is very similar to Barth's own charge against the *anologia entis* that the realists propound, as if they "confidently supposes that in what is given he [the realist] is able to encounter something similar to God, and this confidence gives definition to his teaching."¹⁰⁶ Christian theology and doctrines of the church are an effort to comprehend what just happened among their midst, the unity with God that has been revealed is a unity with the whole of humanity and not just with those who claim to be Christians. All that Christians do, and are capable of doing as humans, is bearing testimony to this fact that God is indeed in whom the whole subsists, and invite humans to live in this awareness that they are not destined to live by considering human productions as enduring, and conclusive, but as constructed and temporal. It is neither to posit transcendence that is selfsame for all eternity in which the transient emerge, subsist,

¹⁰⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV.3.2, bk. 28, 236.

¹⁰⁶ This quote of Barth is from, Gary Dorrien, *Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit: The Idealist Logic of Modern Theology* (Oxford, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2012), 563.

and vanish, but as the “most moved mover” in the utmost freedom could become whatever is being chosen to become and thus keeps future open, and yet stays beyond every religious grasp and imprisonment.¹⁰⁷

It is exactly as Barth himself insists that the “witnesses who can and must declare what they have seen and heard like witnesses in a law-suit.”¹⁰⁸ However, in a lawsuit, a witness need not be in any manner related or obliged to either the plaintiff or the defendant, but are bound only by his or her own situation of being witnessed an event or being privy to a relevant information that they choose to divulge or conceal. The previous chapter accounted for the historical and the New Testament scholarship that bring forth a picture of Christian faith as a social movement that emerged and experimented with diverse practices and belief systems, before them being formalized through continuous and often intensely conflictual negotiations. The settlements that communions arrive on the best way to perceive, believe, and behave on unfathomable matters beyond the ellipses are essential, as they are the faith affirmations that define and guide life between the ellipses. Yet, these negotiated settlements cannot be elevated to the status of scientific reality and in turn used to hold history in suspended animation. Christians are those who are being gripped by the inescapable event that revealed God in Christ as love, mercy, forgiveness, liberation, salvation, and reconciliation, and cannot escape the force field of this vision and could do nothing other than testify to what they have witnessed. Giving of a testimony is not just because of the confidence in the offer of an assurance of

¹⁰⁷ The “most moved mover,” or God “alone is adequately moved by what moves” all creatures is the conception of Charles Hartshorne. See, Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God* (New Haven: Yale, 1948), xvii.

¹⁰⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV.3.2, bk. 28, 203.

indwelling, but in spite of every discernible presence and surety, and most acutely so in the midst of complete absence of it. Faith ensues in the certainty of the vision (Heb. 11:1), and not the reality of any presence, but as a testimony to the possibility of presence despite the dismal conditions of existence and the certainty of finitude. It is a presence that is not *in* anyone or anything in particular, but one that surfaces and “takes place” *amidst* relationships.

Barth explicates the meaning of “calling” with a reading of the acts of calling in the Hebrew Scriptures, from Abraham onwards to Moses and all the prophets, and the respective tasks entrusted to each of them. There is no act of calling Jesus, “because He is called essentially.”¹⁰⁹ Jesus the man, stands in the place of Yahweh and “encounters other men, calls them to Himself and His service, and constitutes, equips and sends them forth as His witnesses.”¹¹⁰ Barth perceives John’s Gospel to be the best place to begin investigating the nature and vocation of witnesses, and contends that, in the accounts of calling, apart from that of Philip, there are no “express reference to any task or mission” and that “in the intention of the Gospel, it undoubtedly is, and exactly as it is narrated.”¹¹¹ That, “what they are called to—there is no mention of personal salvation or perdition in this story—is highly practical recognition of His existence and commitment to it.” Also, in the John’s Gospel accounts, the significance that the first disciples did not require a call and that they recognized Jesus because “in His being as the One He was, as the completed work of God, He was also the Word of God which as such had both the

¹⁰⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV.3.2, bk. 28, 211.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

content and power of calling.” Since making “proselytes has always been a fine occupation for the righteous,” the call is not to form a “God’s party” of the unblemished, and initiate yet another movement of proselytism.

Even with this awareness of the open-ended nature of the call to discipleship, Barth incurs a great amount of effort to read them as synonymous with all the task-specific calls in the Old Testament.¹¹² Barth begins the section seventy of *Church Dogmatics* with a discussion on who could be termed as a “True Witness,” and does an extensive reading of the Book of Job, and identifies that the “relationship between *Yahweh* and Job has the character of freedom,” and that this “freedom is not caprice.”¹¹³ Jesus, the man is the “true Witness” in a relationship that in which God reveals the “divine nature, God as He is,” and “man in faithful confession of His humanity, man as he is.”¹¹⁴ Barth notes that in Job, there is not a full “unity of God and man [as] in the existence of Jesus Christ,” and the dissimilarities between them is that in Jesus, it culminates in the “work of salvation being accomplished.” Yet, Barth contends that despite many “dissimilarities...with suitable qualifications, Job may thus be called a type of Jesus Christ, a witness to the true Witness.”¹¹⁵

If the faith of Job is closer to that of Jesus Christ, then, what unites them is not what God instantaneously does for them, or would eventually do as a reward for their faith. The only thing that matters for them is how they could express their faith in God with their own lives, and to be able to continue doing so unto the very brink of the

¹¹² Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV.3.2, bk. 28, 204-212.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

destruction of their lives. What marks their witness is that both Job and Christ could testify the presence of God in the world despite the absence of God in their personal lives during their most excruciating times of their lives, and for someone who is continually becoming Christian could not expect anything more than this. This disjunction between the prominent presence of God in whom everything subsists, and the human left with the only option of testifying to this presence with their very lives, could only be perceived as the domain of faith. This act of testimony could be wrought despite the uncertainty of the real and immediate presence of God available to them, and the ambiguity of the means through which they ought to make this testimony. Thus, the domain and every expression of faith is thoroughly a human enterprise without any synchronous tethering to God, and comporting otherwise would render faith into the domain of science, and would thus reduce God as an object that lends itself susceptible to observation, comparison, and experimentation.

Towards the end of section seventy-one, Barth forsakes the notion of freedom and holds Christ captive of the Christian: “the true being of the Christian consists in the life of Christ in him and his life in Christ.” If for Barth, Job is only a little different than Christ, then the awareness and faith that God has revealed in a particular and unique way in Jesus is sufficient for the Christian too, and no transactional assurances that makes faith in Christ similar to other ordinary sources of commercial profitability. Both Job and Jesus act in the darkness of total absence of sureties and that model is sufficient for the Christian as someone who cannot act differently owing to the graciousness of a vision that they have partaken.

Tethering Christ to Christian serves no necessary function of faith, and serves only to amplify either arrogance, or the need of discrimination on who is a Christian. The most celebrated of Christian martyrs of twentieth century, the one who plotted to annihilate Hitler and consequently had to walk to the gallows, did so in the name of Christ. Those who continue to bomb women's health centers across the United States claim to do so in the name of Christ. The discernment of in whom Christ lives is better left to Christ alone as it is never a simple determination of what one mean by Christ. The church could very well make this discernment on the presence of Christ in events or individuals in the retrospective. However, it could only remain as a statement of faith that is open to interpretations and revisions, and never as a pronouncement made from the side of Christ, but one accompanied with the due trepidation and prayerfulness that this human utterance be close enough and pleasing to Christ.

Human life and its discernments will always be in the template of Psalm 139, wherein the most sublime is always soaked in blood and vileness. The only human possibility is to imperfectly and failingly attempt testifying or giving witness to the vision that gripped one and hence cannot do anything else but that alone (1 Cor. 9:16).¹¹⁶ Faith in Christ lends courage and impetus to the fragile attempts at turning one's flesh and blood into acceptable food and drink for others and could only be done in fear and

¹¹⁶ Christopher Morse notes that "there are no exact English equivalents for the Greek verbal forms, 'I traditioned,' or 'I gospelsed,' used, for instance, by Paul in 1 Cor. 15:3: 'For I traditioned [*paredoka*] to you as of first importance what I also received.' The English translation if the New Testament verb 'to gospel' is usually given as 'to proclaim' or 'to preach,' neither of which suggests the inseparability of the medium and the message, or better, of the mission and the message, that Paul's original redundancy of 'I gospelsed the gospel' conveys. That the English derivative, 'to evangelize,' deviates from the original sense is apparent from the fact that in English the Apostle could not have said, 'I evangelized the evangel.' This alien English sense may help to explain why so-called evangelism in some denominations is so often mistakenly identified with proselytizing and with strategies for denominational expansion." Morse, *Not Every Spirit*, n3, p356.

trembling for not knowing what one is actually doing, its posterity, and ultimately, whether it is pleasing to the Lord or not. Straightforward and strict implication of Christ with Christian defeats Barth's own insistence upon aseity of God. Uncoupling them and affirming what is humanly possible is the way to becoming Christian. A Bonhoeffer or a Mandela do not need a concurrent assurance and ascertainment that God is indeed present with them in order to beget the actions through which they have expressed their faith. On the other hand, the self-righteous who fly projectiles into buildings and bomb women's health centers require the assurance that they are indeed in a mission of fulfilling the will of God. If the reality that humans could only testify of, and minister to a mystery that was graciously revealed to them, and cannot pretend to have any real-time grasp of it, let alone administer it, could be made exceptionally obvious, then the Dorothy Day and the Martin Luther King, Jr. of all times could continue authoring their particular expressions of faith with their own lives, and there ceases to be a ground for religious lending of certainty and assurance to the self-righteous in their acts of bloodletting and carnage. Theological statements to the effect of certainty and assurance of the promise of God are necessary as faith statements that provide confidence in the reality of salvation, and not as reality per se. If everyone always remains in the category of "becoming Christians," then we as a tradition could continually capture the experiences of significant witnesses as that which the tradition cherishes and invites all to behold.

In a short essay written as an excerpt of the part two of the volume four of *Church Dogmatics*, and as a reflection on Dietrich Bonhoeffer's book entitled *Discipleship (Cost of Discipleship)*, Barth brings forth his theological conception of discipleship in a

succinct way.¹¹⁷ Barth argues that the call to discipleship is not a call to any “idea of Christ, or a Christology, or a Christocentric system of thought” or a “conception of a Father-God.” And nor is it the “recognition and adoption of a programme, ideal or law, or the attempt to fulfill it,” and “not the execution of a plan of individual or social construction imparted and commended by Jesus.”¹¹⁸ Discipleship as an act of obedience to Jesus “involves an about-turn and therefore a complete break and a new beginning,” a “renunciation, withdrawal, and annulment of an existing relationship of obedience and loyalty.”¹¹⁹ This obedience is an “inward liberation from everything in which we might otherwise put our trust,” thereby radically calling “everything else that we have” into question.¹²⁰ Barth notes that the pitfall of “as if not” is that it is very possible to lead a life of “discipleship” while deliberately subverting the directives of Christ. This could be achieved by making believe both self and others that one is always waiting for the most appropriate opportunity to follow “that which is [being] concretely demanded.”¹²¹ Barth contends that discipleship as obedience is not a posturing of “about to leap,” but a condition of “already leaping,” and that it is not a “simple obedience that is legalistic,” of the “monks, fanatics, and other legalists,” but the “arbitrarily discursive and dialectical obedience which evades the command.”¹²²

¹¹⁷ Karl Barth, *The Call to Discipleship*, trans. G. W. Bromiley, ed. K. C. Hanson (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003).

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 19, 20.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 32-33.

Barth posits discipleship and obedience as an “onslaught” wherein “all the so-called ‘given factors,’” and the “supposed natural orders, all the historical forces,” that claim “absolute validity and worth” are constantly put under erasure. Yet, this is not an “inner emigration” that evades earthly realities, or a “matter of saving our own souls in the attainment of a private beatitude,” but a “concrete step out into the open country of decision and act.”¹²³ If not, it will amount to accepting the “given factors and orders and historical forces” as absolute, and will lead to the private living out of faith through a “very radical opposition in inward attitude” that becomes a source of “joy and secret pride.” Barth contends that such a discipleship of convenient interiority is “quite useless as witnesses” as they “will avoid giving offence to anyone” by “evad[ing] the obedience” that is in the nonconformist mode that make them “conspicuous, suspicious, and offensive.”¹²⁴ Yet, it is neither the deliberate pulling of the lion’s tails for the sheer pleasure of heroism, nor an “army of Christ (*militia Christi*),” as it is not to “add to the sufferings of the others,” or to “fight against them,” others, as it is primarily a “conflict against oneself.”¹²⁵ None of this is a machinizable/missionizable generic call that encounters everyone equally, but a thoroughly exclusive address that “comes to each individual in a highly particular way in one’s own particular time and situation.”¹²⁶ Thus, it is not a mere replacement of the “legalism of the world as determined by the dominion of those gods” of the status quo, for “the legalism of another generality” that merely seeks the simple “destruction of the first.” Jesus has not established a “counter-front of an

¹²³ Barth, *Call to Discipleship*, 41.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

action which is normative for all his disciples in every age and situation,” and there is “no new and revolutionary law to which his disciples are no less subject than others are to the old law of the cosmos dominated by these false absolutes.”¹²⁷ The calling to obedience “does not require the same thing of everyone, or even of the same person in every time and situation,” only that, if no authoring action is “effected,” then “there is no obedience to him.”¹²⁸

Barth surveys the many of the Gospel sayings of Jesus and maintains that “all these can hardly be formulated, let alone practiced, as a general rule for improved social relations,” and that these commands of Jesus frees persons from the “universal dominion and constraint of what constitutes social status and dignity and importance.”¹²⁹ Also traced are the sayings on the relationships that ensue from essence. Barth contends that the “captivity to the clan,” and the pervasive seeking of the “indolent peace of a clannish warmth” is the mark of an erstwhile dispensation, as the “coming of the kingdom of God means an end of the absolute of family.”¹³⁰ Again, Barth reminds that there is no missionizable law in these directives regarding relations defined by presumed essence, and that “bogy of monasticism” need not deter from seeking ways to loosen the absolute grip it has on human relationships and the ways in which it thwarts communities. With regard to abounding variety in the observance of piety, Barth considers Jesus requiring secrecy, and observes that the “witness of the disciple consists in the fact that he refrains from attesting his piety as such,” and that “no official religiosity will readily acquiesce in

¹²⁷ Barth, *Call to Discipleship*, 46-47.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 62.

the silent witness of this restraint.”¹³¹ Barth observes that, even in the case of piety, it is “not a matter of formulating and practicing principles,” as Jesus’ address is to “particular men in particular situations, demanding from them a no less particular obedience, the obedience of discipleship.”¹³²

Barth emphasizes that the “concrete shape” that any particular discipleship takes “will always be shaped by this correlated picture” wherein the “specific content is not fixed by the specific content of his call there and then as we have learned it from the Gospels,” but as in the “encounter between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of the world.”¹³³ Barth frees us from past understandings of what obedience might resemble, with the insight that the “living Son of Man is [not] confined... to the sequence of his previous encounters.” Hence, it is not for us to “simply reproduce those pictures” and “therefore to learn directly from what they were commanded, [in order to ascertain] what we are necessarily commanded, or from their obedience [to discern] what our own obedience must be.”¹³⁴ All that could be known about the call to discipleship is that there needs to be a “break with great self-evident factors of our environment,” and Barth denounces the efforts at rote machinizing that attempts to model current efforts at discipleship as sheer copying of past struggles of becoming. Imitation of the past attempts could be the ultimate act of disobedience as it circumvents the responsibility to discursively discern what is being sought of a disciple at any particular time and place. Underscoring Bonhoeffer’s expression of “cheap grace,” Barth observes that all

¹³¹ Barth, *Call to Discipleship*, 66.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 67.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

unmindful and easy routines of imitation and observances are in fact quests for cheap grace, and that the cost of the salvation of the world has only grown much costlier than it has ever been. The manner in which persons were “concretely ordered and [that they] concretely obeyed... with the call issued by Jesus, [forms] the content of the New Testament *kerygma*.”¹³⁵ Barth thus redeems *kerygma* from being reduced to a nonthreatening and undemanding benignity of formulaic recitation of a string of words considered as singularly trained at religious others, and makes it one that demands a different habitus that forever stays beyond an outright programmatic grasp.

Jesus sans life, Barth sans Barmen: Christian theological contemplations often occur without sufficient consideration of the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth, and similarly, Barth is often read without much consideration of how his involvement with the Confessing Church should inform the reader of Barth’s theological corpus. Christopher Morse notes that the Greek “term [for] *tradition* (*paradosis*), like the term *gospel* (*euangelion*), is in the first instance used as a verb and only secondarily as a noun,” and that it is being used in the New Testament to mean “delivering something,” “handing on,” and or “handing over.”¹³⁶ Paul writes about handing on what he himself received (1 Cor. 15:3) and the Gospel of Luke’s prologue notes about what the eyewitnesses had “handed on” (Lk. 1:2). These acts of handing on, Morse terms as “*paradosis* of freedom.” However, the same term of “tradition” is used to account for Judas act of handing over Jesus (Mt. 25:45, Mk. 14:41), and Pontius Pilate’s act of handing over Jesus to crucifixion (Mk. 15:15). This is termed by Morse as the “tradition

¹³⁵ Barth, *Call to Discipleship*, 68.

¹³⁶ Morse, *Not Every Spirit*, 47.

of betrayal.”¹³⁷ Also relevant is to note that the Latin word “*traditor/traditores* represents those who have deserted to the side of the enemy, handing over (*trader*) themselves and...physical objects...[like] the sacred books, vessels, and other church goods, rather than risk legal penalties.”¹³⁸

We enlist these array of meanings to argue that both mere edifying of oneself in the corpus of written work of a theologian, or the repetitive partaking of the rituals in themselves count for nothing other than as a preparation for following through what the pioneers or the pointers of those habitus prompts. This author belongs to the Indian Orthodox Church that had a reformation experience in the early nineteenth century. Entrenched habitus in this particular tradition could not be an end in itself, but a call to continue its mark of distinction. Similarly, a Lutheran cannot be someone who simply studies what Martin Luther have written and done, but as one who by the strength of this contemplative preparation and continuing sustenance from the community, would be capable of and willing to subvert the contemporary commercial offerings of salvation. Else, even the diligent edifying and pious partaking in the tradition could only count as a traitorous handing over, one that keeps the subversive character of the tradition under skillful and constant captivity.

We could only agree with the Chris Boesel’s contention that “God speaks a particular, determinate Word that is to be heard by a particular, determinate

¹³⁷ Morse, *Not Every Spirit*, 47-48.

¹³⁸ Maureen A. Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories: The Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa*, Translated Texts for Historians, Volume 24, trans. and intro. by Maureen A. Tilley (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University, 1996), ix.

addressee.”¹³⁹ This also means that construing Jesus Christ, the determinate Word, as simply trained against other rival religious claims of determinate word, is a quest for a “cheap grace” that preserves the grain from falling and dying, and an effort at foreclosing of the fact that the Word renders every present as provisional. The readily available instrument to foreclose oneself before the threat that National Socialism posed to the Word would have been to impressively intensify the church planting efforts elsewhere and comport that one is out of breath and resources due to the momentousness of “proclamation” that one is involved in. Barth and his comrades did not choose this nonthreatening non-path of feigning proclamation, and instead unflinchingly confronted the most antagonistic and corrosive word of their times. Whatever reservations one might have about the Barmen Declaration and the coming together around it, the meaning of “threefold form of the Word” and proclamation that Barth communicates could only be gleaned when read alongside his most significant attempts at witnessing. This costly witness is the address, invitation, and that which preserves the communion for the posterity and would prompt coming generations to embark on their own respective journeys of witnessing.

3.7. Conclusion

Our discussion on the Messiah who rescinds messianism yield an understanding equally on the undesirability and the impossibility of missionizing or mechanizing Christian life as something that could be gotten through repetitive actions that requires little to no discernment other than on strategies. Thus the fact there is nothing within the

¹³⁹ Chris Boesel, *Risking Proclamation, Respecting Difference: Christian Faith, Imperialistic Discourse, and Abraham* (Cambridge, UK: James Clarke, 2010), 59-60.

call to discipleship that could be automated permanently for all posterity, points to the need for a different form of becoming that continuously testify to the true lordship in the life of a Christian and her communion. The call to repentance as a permanent imperative, rather than a initiating impetus, in the process of becoming Christian is an insistence on continually examining the personal and communal witness in order to sustaining them in such a fashion that best testifies to the love, grace, and salvation that one have come to witness in Christ. We strived to emphasize that Eucharist is not a special and specific Christian act in contradistinction to the various acts around which other religious traditions organize their faith life. Eucharist as a testimony to the memory of Jesus' breaking his body and pouring out his blood into food and drink for his comrades, could be seen as a call to a different form of performative living in and through the very normality of human life in itself. Life in its normal mode is turning one's share of flesh and blood into food and drink for oneself, as in autocannibalism, serving the self alone, or perhaps a little more broadly, for one's kith, kin, clan, and at the most to the nation too. The Eucharist as a call to reorder this very ordinary and inescapable act (of turning flesh and blood into food and drink) differently by both redefining how one identifies one's own people, and by how one summon this transformative enactment in every moment of their lives and thus in an enduring fashion. The counter-apocalyptic witness and relational becoming points to a way of be-ing in the present as spirit filled moments of enfleshment, and not as either forcing any eschatological consummation, or as a deferred existence that feigns dropping out of the world while in effect reinforcing it as such. A supposed deferral, which in itself becomes an astute instrument to simultaneously belittle the world, and thereby permit oneself devour it with willful abandon.

We stayed with Barth for a long stretch to demonstrate the significance that he is writing differently, when the main activity of the church around him, and thus the sole sign of life for the European, and the US churches had been sending missionaries to Asia and Africa. In marked difference, Barth does not place Christian becoming under the rubric of mission or missiology, but under the doctrine of reconciliation. In every aspect of the doctrine, Barth walks to the brink of the abyss with statements we have previously accounted for, and such as that “the rest of humanity does not need the community [the church] in respect of its new and true reality [in Christ],” and that the “world would not necessarily be lost if there were no Church.”¹⁴⁰ Barth accounts for the constructedness of all religions including Christianity, and yet immediately walks back to affirm the conventional doctrines of the church, albeit with modification. However, just as the Magi was asked to take “another road,” than the previous ones they have already treaded (Mt. 2:12), the option is not to relapse, but be faithful to the new vision or warning and to go forth by a different road. It is hard to see how the nomenclatures of “dialectical” or “paradoxical” would suffice in order to continue business as usual until mission as NGOization of the church will finally make it irrelevant, as there will always be a better NGO to be far more efficient in the conduct of the mission. Barth himself has demonstrated the faithfulness that surpasses the routine circumvention of danger, with regard to proclamation in the face of tyranny. A new theology of witness that redefines the role of communion and the Christian is necessary, as it will certainly overflow the old wineskins. Next, we account for the scriptural resources that define the call to

¹⁴⁰ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Volume IV.3.2, trans. G. W. Bromiley, eds., G. W. Bromiley, and T. F. Torrance (New York: T & T Clark, 2004), 826.

discipleship as witness, and by extension, a call to give up all aspiration to the ease of automaticity and untroubled conscience that the construct of mission provides.

CHAPTER 4

Witness of God and the Risk of Proclamation

Mission envisioned and executed as an inalienable component of God's will in history, or in order to hasten any particular understanding of an eschatological consummation, could only be produced and sustained in and through an excessive self-confidence. Such an understanding of mission fashioned to lead toward, or to be an indisputable part of any eschatology, could become tyrannical, as they more often than not tend to be non-reflexive endeavors striving to achieve their own self-confessed goals. What such missions consistently foreclose is the humility to acknowledge that with regard to eschatology, "we know only in part" and that our best vision could still only be hazy (1 Cor. 13: 9, 12). Organizing actions in light of an eschatological hope to address historical challenges is never the same as conjuring projects that is hoped to realize, or at the least considered to aid an eschatological end. History is replete with both secular and religious attempts on arriving at aspired for eschatological ends and the desolation it brings in its wake. The aftermaths of the obviously malevolent projects as Nazism could be evident even before they ascend, but the supposedly righteous quests like Communism turn tragic just because they are intended to be the guaranteed path to a certain eschatological end. Once firmly aligned with an eschatological vision, the effort is to uncompromisingly implement the plan in its totality and not to waver from it. Since it all could only be good in the end, it is easier, and at times necessary, to disregard the

immediate social situations and results of the interim steps. At least with the totalitarian secular plans, it is possible to problematize their contentions and discredit the concomitant eschatological visions.

Apart from the historical lessons of eschatological missions, a life bound by a singular mission pursuing a particular eschatological end is undesirable because it robs the required reflexivity and replaces it with an obstinacy that would struggle to attain the goal regardless of the costs and the detrimental effects to both the self and the other. Thus, everything here on earth and history becomes a means to that particular end and they cease to matter other than as cogs in the missional machine.¹ However, it is not so in the case of the plentitude of little missions that are necessary to live and thereby address the historical challenges before us. These little missions are organized to address the question at hand, and even when they are organized around an eschatological hope, they could be totally abandoned when evidence proves it to be a futile or detrimental endeavor, or be replaced with many possible other arrangements when demanded by the context, and other historical changes.

In the case of religious projects, it is difficult to build a case against them as they are claimed to be the will or commandment of God, and that which only some people are privileged to peer into. The question is whether a transparent understanding of the will of God on the present and future is an actual possibility, or whether such discernment should always be placed in the domain of the retrospective. A historical event, social

¹ Given the historical evidence of the calamitous effects of organizing teleology toward any assured eschatology, Derrida, while upholding “the irreducibility of affirmation and therefore of the [eschatological] promise, as well as the undeconstructibility of a certain idea of justice (dissociated here from law)” emphasizes the need to distinguish teleology from “messianic eschatology.” Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 112.

system, or legal expression, could be understood to have captured a perceptible fragment of the will of God as it is being testified in the scriptures and within the tradition of a religious community that is carrying out the retrospection. Events and expressions so discerned could rightfully become part of a faith's cumulative tradition, and the actions enlisted to attain them could become a guide to future involvements. The self-assured confidence in the ability to unequivocally discern the will of God for the present and future is inconsistent with Christian conception of God and humans. Religious traditions could realistically do only one thing, and one thing alone, and it is to testify on the need to give to God that which is God's alone. And, that is to turn to God by affirming that all they are capable of is to failingly and frailly strive to organize actions around *what* is being apparently understood as pleasing to God, and trusting that the sinfulness of all actions involved in pursuing them will be borne of by God. In terms of discerning on the *how* to achieve what is pleasing to God, the resources and apparatuses at the disposal of religious persons and their communities are exactly the same as any other human being with or without a religious profession, and the terms of reference under which they could possibly operate could be none other. The religious, if they truly are whom they claim to be—as persons placing their ultimate trust in the Divine—then they could very well rest easy and trust that God is capable of assembling human actions toward an eschatological consummation of which God alone is in the know.

A few arguments from our discussion thus far would be worth reiterating at this point as we explore the scriptural resources to live a life of witness. We understand witness as a mode of living that is infinitely open to both God and the world, and thus *without* a sense of mission that considers itself as a necessary component of any

particular eschatological vision. A life of witness could only be had through sustaining reflexivity, the quintessential sign of life, and the ability to discern the precepts of God in relation to the context and its challenges and potentials. Even the living God cannot be perceived to be preoccupied with a singular overarching mission whose goal is certain and the methods involved are transparent. Restraining God from having reflexivity amounts to distorting the Christian understanding of God, or having the divine domesticated. Abundant life is one that is free to live reflexively in the moment and without the constraint of any mission as a commandment to be unwaveringly followed. The two major troubles with law or a commandment in general, and any “mission as law” in particular is that, either its demands could be nominally satisfied, or else, the law or commandment could be mechanized as something that require little to no mindfulness. Worse still, the notion of mission could become a source for an obsessive behavior that stifles life of both the self and of every other who happen to be at the receiving end. Any particular understanding of mission as a law could become an automaton that authors unreflexive tenacity in achieving its stated goals, and thus uncaring in judging others who do not tow along or are unconvinced of this imperative. A study of mission and missionary practices would testify to this reality. The framing of Christian mission as an unquestionable law requiring every Christian to convert every other beyond its fold imparts guilt on all who do not diligently pursue this unavoidable obligation. The guilty would be more than eager to find someone else to take on this responsibility on their behalf and thus absolve them of their guilt for not carrying out this supposedly inescapable mandate. The sequence of imparting guilt on every Christian through the insistence on conversion of religious others as their primary responsibility, and the ready

availability of an enterprise that could carry out this responsibility on behalf of all those guilty and thus absolve them, keeps the established theory and practice of mission intact. Thus, the organized attempts on conversion in effect ends up becoming a unique form of substitutionary atonement, and perhaps the only human enterprise where lack of success is beneficial for ensuring the sustenance. Failure in achieving the conversion of all becomes an evidence for intensified vigor and increased investment in the present and for all future to come.² Even though, one should acknowledge that not all mission theology and missionary work is based in this thinking alone, much of the prevalent missiological thinking and mission work around the world, especially in what have come to be termed as the “third world” clearly falls within this category.

It would be helpful to recall our discussion from chapter 2, on the gospel according to Matthew being read by the mission apologists as an inverted pyramid precariously balanced on a three verse pericope towards the very end of the gospel, one that is understood as the “Great Commission.” David Bosch begins his discussion on this book with the statement that the “first gospel is essentially a missionary text,”³ and gives a missionized interpretation to every single verse of the text. Our reading here is in agreement with Warren Carter, who argues that “implausible is a view that claims an evangelistic function,” for this gospel, and also that, even if “some of the material might be used to gain new followers of Jesus, the gospel material is generally concerned with forming disciples out of those already committed.”⁴ We could add that it is not just

² See the comparison of mission enterprise with Apple Corporation in note 25, in Chapter 2.

³ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 57.

⁴ Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 7.

“forming disciples,” but the gospel could be perceived as unambiguously stating that the conduct of the “already committed” is the one and the only way to gain new followers, be they born and raised within the tradition, or those beyond its fold. There are ongoing missions of various hues during the writing of this gospel, and since there is an ever-present possibility of having a plenty of missions, Matthew’s text could be read in light of two massive disassembling of all sort of missions as in Mt. 7:22-23 and 23:15. The whole text could be read as a knocking down of every construct of mission, and as a quest for fruits alone, regardless of the numerical strength of the community. It is not the simplistic and much touted binary of works versus faith, as no one could ever legitimately work for their own salvation because there are no actions beyond the taint of sin and there could never be an unambiguous determination of righteous action.⁵ Since persons and societies

⁵ For the most part of twentieth century, the whole world embraced the technologies of mega dams, and of the industrial agriculture that is heavily dependent of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Among those who championed these twin causes, most could be seen as having a genuine conviction of these being ‘the’ most effective way to pursue the noble causes of addressing the challenges of food security, and the efficient management of water resources. As in every other case of public intervention, there could have been some with a profit motive or of not so prudent intent. However, a vast majority of them proponents could only be perceived as acting out of their very best intentions, motives, and compassion, even if they would have been arrogant or self-righteous about their policy prescriptions and panaceas, and stubborn in their zeal for achieving their goals. None of these genuine men and women who rallied behind these ambitious programs could have ever imagined in their wildest dreams that their certainties would be on shaky grounds and that their judgment and motives would fall to disrepute in just a few decades time. Thus, what is deemed righteous at a point in time in history would not always remain so, or would be wholly recognized as such in the span of a couple of generations, if not within a decade or so. Nevertheless, humans do not have the luxury of inaction, as there is no real thing or possibility as not acting, and by just finding themselves here in the world and within a web or social relationships, they are forced to either act *for* something or *against* something. Even when persons think they are doing neither, they always already are. Among the many resources on the adverse effects of the ‘scientific’ agriculture that ruins the land within a relatively short span of time, when compared with the previous technologies that allowed land regeneration and were in use for many millenniums, see, Vandana Shiva, *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2015). On the question of mega dams, see, World Commission on Dams, *Dams and Development: A New Framework for Decision-Making—The Report of the World Commission on Dams* (London: Earthscan/Routledge, 2000). And, on how mega dams have proved detrimental to the 50 major river basins across the world, see the report from the World Commission on Dams, entitled, “The State of the World’s Rivers,” available at <http://www.internationalrivers.org/worldsrivers/>, accessed April 12, 2016. For a Christian theological and ethical reflection on “Narmada Bachao Andolan,” or the Save Narmada Movement, India’s most influential and ongoing struggle since 1985, against a series of mega dams across the river Narmada in Northern India, see, Zachariah, *Alternatives Unincorporated*.

are always at work, or else, can never stop working, the question is how to organize actions, problematizing the ones that produce disastrous results, and striving to have them replaced with those capable of desirable outcomes. Yet, never attaining perfection, and never able to retain the previous achievements as sacrosanct or inviolable.⁶ Thus, the challenge is on how to organize works in order to be a disciple and how to stay away from the pitfall of mission. The notion of mission either becomes an inconvenient obligation that needs to be minimally/literally attended to satisfy the precepts, or could devolve into an obsession that would seek ways to retain the possibilities for mission just so as to be able to fulfill obligations.

Missions evolved to adhere to the demand for right works and results would always seek to maintain sufficient space between the domain of the doer and the arena of mission so that it seldom affects the status quo of the doer, and thus retain a safe space to retreat to when things go bad in the field. Mission is always something that is being carried out on the doorsteps of the other who is geographically, socially, or hierarchically separated from the self. It seldom becomes an act in one's own domain/domicile that

⁶ The "Magna Carta" of the thirteenth century England, protects citizens from illegitimate or unlawful imprisonment and ensures appropriate, and due legal proceedings within an acceptable/justifiable timeframe. However, ever since its adoption in 1215, almost every generation of almost every nation had to fight many times just to establish these very rights, or to reinstate them. The very first casualty during any emergency is these elementary protections of governance by consent. Colonial administrations, totalitarian regimes under fascist forces and supposedly communist ideologies, political emergencies like the one in India during 1975-1977, the apartheid regime in South Africa, to the reauthorized version of the US Patriot Act of 2011, could all be examples for governments considering indefinite imprisonment of citizens without an access to due legal process as essential to national security. Thus, no legal achievement is secure unless persons and societies work to keep the vigil and maintain a permanently willing, able, and ready disposition to fight any and every infraction. Christian worship is an act of continuous preparation wherein persons are regularly reminded of the possibility of unlawful political imprisonment and execution—cross as its quintessential symbol and reminder. Liturgy as a work of reaffirmation on the actuality of God's judgment, and of the community's testimony, faith, and its declaration of commitment that unjust power and persecution will never have the final word in this world, or in the one to come.

could impact or inconvenience the missionizer, and more often than not, a skillful construct to foreclose the inconvenience that such a possibility would entail.

The efforts by Presbyterian Church (USA) to divest⁷ from the companies profiting from the conflict between Israel and Palestine, the most daring, praiseworthy, and controversial of missions among all the US churches, is a very good example for drawing the contrast between witness and mission. Being in solidarity with the Palestinians who are facing apartheid-like situations is the most righteous, natural, and commendable option before any nation, church, or other religious communities. As opposed to mission, the difference that the concept of witness makes is that such a daring act could only be an integral part and a natural extension of what the Church is already doing with the subtle yet immensely successful discriminatory and exclusionary practices encountered by the persons of color and their communities in the United States. The church witnesses—sees/observes—and discerns what is happening around it, comes up with appropriate and adequate actions and positions that demonstrates its witness in history as a testimony on whom they always claim to be, and whom they truly strive to become, and thus testifies or witnesses to its actual faith and hope in Jesus Christ. Thus, the Presbyterian Church, or any other church anywhere in the world could have a response and involvement in Israel/Palestine or elsewhere, only as an extension of their ongoing involvement in their own neighborhoods. Thus, a church actively involved in addressing racial or ethnic discrimination in its own body and around it would have much to share with an Indian church that is equally involved in addressing the issue of exclusionary practices based on

⁷ For a general understanding on the issues involved in the divestment movement of the Presbyterian Church (USA), see, “Frequently Asked Questions: Divestment,” Available at, http://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/ga221-middle-east-faq.pdf.

caste. Sharing of resource in this context is a sharing of the respective witness in order to strengthen and sustain both the partners. On the other hand, most often than not, mission becomes a mechanism to foreclose oneself from the neighborhoods, and instead procuring a less threatening way to painlessly satisfy a supposed mandate with the help of the surplus resources that a communion might have at its disposal.

Witness, as discussed earlier, is a triadic act of remaining open and perceptive to the context in which the church finds itself, relating the challenges and possibilities of this context to the witness it has received in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and expressing the church's confession in appropriate and adequate proclamation of faith, without a preference or precedence on any one component, or any strict delineation on which to serve as prompt and on which to follow, but always held together as a faith response to the realities that define communities. It is a proclamation or giving an account of the hope (1 Pet. 3:15) amidst and to the situations that demands it. We have already noted in the previous chapter that proclamation is not an act of parroting a standard formula. It is always a new creation of becoming the gospel in itself, as Paul writes in his impossible to translate phrase of "the gospel I gossiped to you" (1 Cor. 15:1-2), which for lack of a better word gets translated as "the gospel that I proclaimed to you."⁸ Thus, "to gospel" or "to proclaim" cannot be a verbal recitation of an incessantly insisted upon interpretation of what the gospel or good news entail, and it could only be discerned anew in relation to the conditions that determine a time and place. Appropriate and adequate actions need to be emphasized, as the response should match the challenge, and nominal response to convince themselves and others that one is addressing the issue,

⁸ See, footnote 116, in Chapter 3.

serves nothing positive other than covertly sustaining it. The acts of seeing and hearing are also not a transparent process produced by the virtue of possessing the biological instruments of perceiving images and sound, but how they are trained to see, not see, see through, and how to hear, not to hear, or always hear only that which one wants to hear. This triadic witness wrought through the total dedication of heart, soul, and mind (Mt. 22:37), has to become persistent. Based upon this enduring triadic witness, when the church hears about similar situations across the world, it gets involved as an extension and solely as a relational act of witness of what it is always already doing within its own immediate environment. Involvements in far off lands cannot be considered as the primary witness of a community, and such could only be of a secondary status and an expression of solidarity with what the churches and other groups in those lands are already doing. Such associations could never be a replacement, or a convenient vehicle to escape the issues of the neighborhood where the congregations are called to witness Christ, and thus avoid the uncomfortable consequences such an involvement would bring about. In the divestment-focused attempt at mission, the church does not face any demand for change to its own structure or that of the society wherein it is rooted, or face any mortal threat as its partners based in the conflict zone would obviously encounter. Since the Church is far removed from the immediacy of Middle-Eastern conflict, the congregations could lead their lives in the US without any disruption, and often oblivious of both what is happening in their Church's prime field of action, or even about such an involvement altogether. Moreover, since there are no direct actions and expressions of solidarity here in the US around the question of the latent yet persistent systemic exclusions that could be seen as similar to that of the Palestinians, the congregations

could continue living peacefully even when the town around them is going up in flames due to racial tensions and rioting.

Thus, even for the most daring of attempts at political intervention, the construct of mission could at times become a skillful instrument that provides a path to escape the painful consequences of involving in the issues of conflict at one's doorstep. The theological construct of "God is in a mission," and therefore, the "Church ought to participate in that mission of God," leads churches to scramble for opportunities to fulfill this self assumed mandate in such a way that does not threaten its existence. Yet, the construct of mission ensures that the demands of discipleship are technically taken care of, but always with minimum inconveniences, and forever without major upheavals. When the aspect of professional workers who as surrogates carryout these specialized attempts at mission in distant lands is factored in, it completely relieves the congregations from both direct involvement and immediate danger inherent if they were attempted in their locale. Everything would change if the same issue of divestment were taken up as part of the church's witness. The church will have the eyes trained to see what is happening around it and will already be in the vanguard addressing the issue of systemic racism in the US. The particular and immediate experience of its own involvement in the issue of racism would provide the church with better eyes and ears to see and hear what is happening in far off places. In relation to this real and fully committed ongoing involvement alone, she will seek out partners in those lands and strive to enable them address the issues in their respective environs. Remembering the poor in Jerusalem (Gal 2:10) and by extension the poor and the excluded in every land, and making collections and expressing solidarity with them is imperative (1 Cor. 16:1-3, 2 Cor. 8:1-15).

However, it could never be a replacement for addressing the arrangements in place that consistently churns out the poor and the excluded in vast numbers. (Paul is actually framing it as a question of fair balance and of wealth redistribution (2 Cor. 8:13-15), and not as mere act of charity.) Charity and solidarity attained through the painless disbursement of disposable wealth would serve only as a dexterous attempt at foreclosing oneself from the systems that impoverish communities and individuals.

The effort here in this chapter is to read the gospel according to Matthew through a stable, yet dynamic model of an ellipse with the twin foci of the teaching texts of “The Sermon on the Mount” (chapters 5-7), and “The Judgment of the Nations” (25.31-46), along with its steadfast and absolute insistence on good fruits. These twin foci and the quest for fruits make it impossible to have any singular or overarching mission until eschatology, as none of these teachings could be easily missionized/mechanized as they are always situation specific, and since the situation is never transparent enough, the method to fulfill them would always remain ambiguous. Moreover, the nature of the fruits whether they are good or bad may not be apparent immediately, even the good ones would bring in some unpalatable consequences in its wake, or else, what in the beginning appears to be good could eventually turn out to be the dreadful evil that one set out to prevent. Another way of imagining this gospel is through the image of the figurines balanced on a tiny point by organizing its center of gravity in order to render the whole system the required stability. The teaching texts mentioned above becoming the weights at the end of the arch that is in turn being balanced on a single verse that demands that the disciples must “change and become like children” in order to having a chance at entering the kingdom of God (Mt. 18:3). We will try to read this unequivocal pronouncement as a

commandment to always stay beyond the lures of eschatological missions. Ones that betray the intransigence of the adults who become blinded by ideologies, playing god, and leave unbearable wreckage, and the painful task of rebuilding communities for everyone that survives these eschatological missions and for all those who come after.

4.1. Matthew's Manifesto on Being Witnesses and Living Reflexively

Maintaining purity in life, especially in terms of sexual conduct, despite every personal circumstance and socioeconomic situation, is construed as the central tenet of religious virtues. Within the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, even the other offences are frequently interpreted as or are seen as comparable with the acts of sexual transgression. The basis and norms for sexual purity is that which has been previously established and purported to be of eternal veracity and validity. Based upon the purity norms and right conduct that are supposedly timeless, it is possible for the deeply devout to fall into the pitfall of becoming unforgiving on oneself and others, and judging everyone and everything in life through this singular characteristic. Thus, certain personal sexual conduct or notion of purity based upon historically contingent and previously defined parameters becomes a quintessential source of mission that has to be carried forth irrespective of circumstances, requirements, or evidences that history brings forth. Persons following different religious paths often equate holiness to certain practices of sexuality and vow to adhere to them unwaveringly, and consequently consider everyone with other practices and experiences as deviants at the least, or as the condemned at the worst.

The gospel according to Matthew makes its opening by demolishing the basis for any such possibility of organizing lives of unipolar mission around this supposedly supreme and singular pathway of a life that could be considered as worth striving for, dying for, and even killing⁹ for. By including the five women (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary) in the genealogy of Jesus irrespective of their irregular sexual histories—questionable in the case of Mary for conceiving while unwed, Matthew is complicating the discourse around sexuality. It can no longer be one of simple choice, or a continually straightforward affair wherein the uprightness could be determined in one and only one particular way.¹⁰ Dennis C. Duling notes that the presence of “four women in a male line of descent is extraordinary,” and also that despite their history of “improper sexual relations,” it is equally amazing that they are being “admired in Israelite legend” and being considered as integral and “important in God’s plan.”¹¹ Drawing from the works of feminist scholars Elaine Wainwright and Amy-Jill Levine, Carter emphasizes the nature of the social situation that forces women to use sex as a tool for survival, and of their ingenuity and initiative in discerning the circumstances, their options, and upon

⁹ The commandments to kill and the actuality of being killed for straying from the supposedly virtuous conduct in sexual morality is neither unusual, nor is it a fringe phenomenon. However, the regulations on sexuality are integral to the evolution of civilizations. From the Hammurabi to the Leviticus codes, honor killings that continue to happen even today in many communities around the world, the attacks on the sexual minorities and that on the healthcare facilities for women, history is awash with evidential proof.

¹⁰ The complex nature of a person being prostituted and its essential close connection with socioeconomic and political realities are discussed in countless volumes. A recent resource on the discussion around this subject from a feminist theoretical perspective could be found in Maddy Coy, ed., *Prostitution, Harm and Gender Inequality: Theory, Research and Policy* (New York: Routledge, 2016). Among the texts that approach the question on social control of women’s sexuality through the framework of political economy, see the works by Karl Marx: *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*; *The Communist Manifesto*; and, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*.

¹¹ Dennis C. Duling, “The Gospel According to Matthew Introduction and Annotations.” Pages 1665-1721 in *The Harper Collins Study Bible. New Revised Standard Version, Including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books with Concordance*. Revised edition. Edited by Harold W. Attridge et al. (New York: Harper One, 2006), 1668.

that basis evolving those unusual and subversive strategies. The reflexivity they all demonstrate through their acts is reflective of having the right social analysis, a wisdom of their options regardless of the precepts that prohibits them in acting in certain ways, and these are the qualities that eventually get them and their acts recognized as part of God's plans and actions in history. None of these acts was ever envisioned in any way to be part of God's plan and since their choices were evidently sinful under the prevailing norms, and those who have walked these controversial paths would have done so with a heavy heart. These lives being favored by God complicates the act of living, as it ceases to be one of one-dimensional mission of adhering to laws, and points to the necessity of human contemplation and discernment even in following the precepts of God. Above all, what pleases God also becomes a complicated and complex issue that eludes an unambiguous judgment. Also notable is Levine's observation that the presence of these five women signifies that "marriage is not... the prerequisite for righteous or just action or salvation."¹² It becomes ever more acute when the most blessed in Christian tradition is an unwed mother and a child whose paternity is forever debatable, and could only be affirmed as a testimony of faith. Contemplation on this fact is capable of arresting all missions organized around ensuring paternity within the bounds of marriage alone, and striving to place insurmountable hurdles before single mothers. A parallel in the Hebrew scripture could be the women involved around the birth and survival of Moses—Shiphrah and Puah, the two midwives, Jochebed and Miriam, the mother and sister of

¹² Amy-Jill Levine, *Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Social History*, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 82. Quoted in, Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 60. Also, see, Amy-Jill Levine, "Matthew," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, Expanded Edition with Apocrypha, eds., Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 341.

Moses, and the Princess, the daughter of the Pharaoh. All of them become part of God's plan through their own independent acts of defiance and disobedience of human edicts that are unjust, and it could be termed as the first recorded "civil disobedience in defense of a moral cause."¹³ Thus, any single-minded missionized/mechanized obedience without a healthy measure of reflection and reflexivity is actually an act of tarnishing both God and the image of God in humans.

It is not that the insistence of law on right conduct in sexual relations is erroneous, or that licentiousness and lust need to be celebrated as virtuous, or at the least that certain infractions should to be condoned in extraordinary situations. The contention is that life and the source of life are the supreme mysteries and life is given to be lived reflexively and not bound to anything as an automaton. Law and every other arrangement are an aid for pursuing this mystery reflexively and never to reduce oneself as a thing for one's own sake or for another. Transforming law into a source of missionized/mechanized action or living that could be pursued simplistically or obstinately would extinguish life and turn it into a machine. It is pointless and futile to forge a life of mission around the literal prescriptions of the law, and then to mechanize them to work in a singular way regardless of social situations so that the law might be fulfilled and through which alone one is expected to be held acceptable and pleasing in the sight of God. Prophets and the words of Jesus as recorded in the scriptures testify to the nothingness of such mindless missions set on autopilot to literally observe the law while ravaging its intent that calls for compassion and justice within all human interactions. Called for is a reflexivity that surpasses simplistic adherence to the law and thus keeping the precepts of the law beyond

¹³ Melanie J. Wright, *Moses in America: The Cultural Uses of Biblical Narrative*, AAR Cultural Criticism Series (New York: Oxford, 2003), 71.

the purview of missionizing that is in effect akin to mechanizing. Missionizing and mechanizing works in both ways wherein it is possible to either seek minimal fulfillment that does not inconvenience in any way, or else, it could assume an overzealousness that turns something necessary into a sledgehammer that could hurt the other while doing no good for the self. Such obsessive attachment to missions are capable of leading persons and communities to even give up their lives for what they perceive is for a supposedly noble cause, while they serve nothing other than express their love for the self alone. It is possible to give up both possessions and even life without love (1 Cor. 13:3), and those obsessive missions end up becoming greater threat than the insignificant adherence of the mandates.

On the significance of the arrival of the “magi,” Carter draws a contrast between the “Jewish religious leaders who know the scriptures” well enough, and the magi who “*are* observant enough to notice... motivated enough to travel some distance to identify the special person to whom the star bears witness.” Magi as the ones who are “astute enough to know that the star attests [the birth of] a new king, and discerning enough to know that worship is the appropriate response.”¹⁴ Apart from an historical appraisal of the role and significance of magi in the ancient societies, for our discussion on mission, the qualities of the magi that Carter notes are significant, as also the aspect of discerning the signs of the times, be they in nature, or in social relations. Carter holds that “throughout the gospel the natural world, [when] properly interpreted, attests God’s presence and purposes (Mt. 5:45; 6:26, 28, 30; 10:29; 24:32-33)¹⁵ including Jesus’

¹⁴ Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 76. Emphasis original.

¹⁵ Hereafter, when referring to verses from *The Gospel According to Matthew*, NRSV, only the chapter and verse numbers will be listed in parenthesis.

crucifixion (27:45), death (27:51-53), and return (24:29-30).” Thus, it cannot be simplistic or unthinking missionizing of any scriptural principle, but enlisting all fields of human knowledge to discern what is being called for by the precepts at any particular place and point of time in history. Equally evident is the overconfidence that scientific knowledge and historical awareness would impart, and cause those who consider themselves to possess them to become self-righteous about their own right assessment of the signs of the times and of its very imperatives. Theoretical certainty without a healthy measure of an understanding of “undecidability” involved in all decisions, and thus the requirement of fear and trembling in one’s sojourn on earth, would render the actors oblivious of the consequences of heightened self-confidence in their own ability to predict the future.¹⁶ The “lack of political astuteness” of the magi causes the death of countless children, untold anguish to their families, and testifies to the human inability to perfectly predict the future. The child they prophesied about never became a king in the traditional understanding of the term. It is not that reasonable predictions for the foreseeable future is out of place, or that prophecies about eschatological consummation are pointless, but that actions could only take the cue from them and never be organized as an attempt to realize the predictions per se.

¹⁶ Derrida notes: “undecidability is always a *determinate* oscillation between possibilities (for example, of meaning, but also of acts). These possibilities are themselves highly *determined* in strictly *defined* situations (for example, discursive—syntactical or rhetorical—but also political, ethical, etc.). They are *pragmatically* determined. ...I say ‘undecidability’ rather than ‘indeterminacy’ because I am interested more in relations of force, in differences of force, in everything that allows, precisely, determinations in given situations to be stabilized through a decision of writing (in the broad sense I give to this word, which also includes political action and experience in general). There would be no indecision or *double bind* were it not between *determined* (semantic, ethical, political) poles, which are upon occasion terribly necessary and always irreplaceably singular. Which is to say that from the point of view of semantics, but also of ethics and politics, ‘deconstruction’ should never lead either to relativism or to any sort of indeterminism.” Derrida, “Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion,” 148.

We have already discussed in the previous chapter on the preeminent and thus irreplaceable significance of the call to repentance that both John the Baptist and Jesus makes as the central demand of their respective movements. Repentance is neither an individual act that happens in the interiority of persons, nor a once in a lifetime activity in the lives of individuals. Repentance is an instantaneously internal and external act as there is an immediate change in public conduct, and it could never be a singular instance as there cannot be a conduct that is free of both the possibility of either being tainted at inception itself, or of being corrupted over the course of time. Confession of sins, thus, is a declaration of a commitment to not be in what is being identified as sin at this point of time and to choose a very different path of existence. It does not mean the new path will never be revealed as somewhat or outright sinful in the course of time. Thus, repentance as a continuous act of self-interrogation of the current conduct is an inevitable responsibility of the renewed. The demand to “bear fruit worthy of repentance” insists on both the perpetual nature of repentance that requires continuous evaluation and ascertainment of the nature of the fruits, and thus of continuing acts of repentance that strives on ascertaining the character of the fruits, that they may be perceived as sufficiently worthy.

In the baptism narrative, Carter observes, what Jesus seeks to “fulfill” (3:15) is not a perfunctory insistence on “merely to do God’s will,” but an indication that “what is happening in Jesus’ ministry (or accompanying circumstances) is consistent with, and so enacts or accomplishes, God’s will previously declared in the scriptures.”¹⁷ The “justice/righteousness” that Jesus seeks to fulfill is not simply “God’s saving activity” or

¹⁷ Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 102.

“doing God’s demand,” but an action that is “faithful to commitments and relationships” and that which conjoins “God’s gift and human action.”¹⁸ The regular reading of the gospel is that Jesus dutifully obeyed God, the Father, and hence the church and Christians ought to so obey the Great Commission and make Christians out of all humans. Our reading hopes to demonstrate that the call to baptize the nations is to have them live in accordance to the twin foci of this gospel, and that it does not have anything to do with religious conversion or numerical increase of the church. At present, let us see if the baptism narrative could point to another interpretation that takes down the notion of mission as building up Christian community over and against every other basis for human association.

The event of the baptism of Jesus could be understood as an act of his joining the movement of John the Baptist, and if so, it puts the supposed missions by “independents” and lone wolves, who consider themselves to be too pure and too radical to join causes with anyone else, to severe disrepute and even unsustainability. History shows that there has not been any religious, social, or political leader, who has effected revolutionary changes within their field of action, and has never joined a cause that had been already evolving into a movement. Gandhi, Sojourner Truth, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, and many others who defined the course the twentieth century testifies to this fact. Those who resist joining with people and established or evolving causes in order to protect their purity, and their right revolutionary zeal and its intensity, could only be ultimately counted along with those who try preserve practices and institutions that have turned poisonous and thus detrimental to human dignity. M. M.

¹⁸ Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 102.

Thomas, an Indian Christian theologian and ecumenist, who had consistently involved in social and political causes at both the national and international levels, used to frequently emphasize the need to be involved in the social process. “Only participants earn the right to be prophets,” Thomas often cautioned the young activists who begin to consider themselves as righteous, theoretically pure, and so very deeply dedicated that they cannot possibly join any of the flawed movements or organizations around them.¹⁹

The Sermon on the Mount that spans between chapters 5 and 7 is the first locus among the twin loci that we identify in Matthew’s gospel, and as a text keen on the systematic takedown of all possibilities of mechanized and overarching mission. In opening the discussion on the Sermon on the Mount, Carter observes that the “sermon is not... a comprehensive manual or rule book, no[r] a step-by-step ‘how-to’ book,” and that it is rather a text that is “direction-pointing, more than giving commands, suggestive and illustrative” and never intended to be “comprehensive.”²⁰ Along with the assurance of justice (5:6, 10, 20; 6:1, 33), the insistence of the sermon is on “perspectives, practices, and character of the community of disciples, training them to discern and live in ways faithful to, and imitative of the reign’s just presence and future.” The sermon also invites the “audience to a voluntarily marginal way of life as a minority community.”²¹ Carter argues that first four beatitudes are based upon Isaiah 61, and hence they cannot be an emphasis on “personal qualities, but oppressive situations of distress or bad fortune,

¹⁹ Jesudas M. Athyal, George Zachariah, and Monica Melanchthon, *The Life and Witness of M. M. Thomas: “Only participants earn the right to be prophets”* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

²⁰ Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 128.

²¹ *Ibid.*

which are honored or esteemed because God's reign reverses them."²² Thus, the "poor in spirit" need not be understood as any sort of internalized version of poverty, either spiritual or voluntary, but as an effect of literal material poverty, one that diminishes the spirit. Out of the nine beatitudes, none of the first four—being poor, sorrowful, humiliated, and being wronged against—are desirable situations or personal qualities. It is both a problematizing of the social situation that makes persons and communities go through them, and a declaration of what God's reign will do to these situations. Moreover, the reign is not an eschatological end, but one that has already been inaugurated. The next five are not personal qualities that could be gotten or cultivated through any of the practices that are traditionally associated with that of religion. They are the result when humans consciously engage in actions that address the social organizations, powers, and the principalities that cause people and societies deteriorate. It is not possible for anyone to work towards or evolve a perfect program or mission on becoming merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, being persecuted for righteousness' sake, cause people to revile, persecute, and slander oneself on account of Christ. All these are a response or testimony of others who witness the work of a person or community, and there is no sure way to precipitate these responses to find oneself within the scope of these categories of blessedness. Moreover, it is not possible to enlist the beatitudes in the opposite manner as if Jesus was conveying, "if they didn't mourn they wouldn't be allowed into the kingdom."²³

²² Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 131.

²³ Ehrman, *New Testament*, 111.

Matthew's attempt is to open the gospel with Jesus' teachings on social conditions that cause unbearable situations for individuals and communities, and his calling upon human initiative and efforts to address them. Jurgen Moltmann holds that the "church loses its fellowship with the messianic mission of Jesus if it is not the 'people of the beatitudes' and does not consist of the poor, the mourners, the meek, those who hunger for righteousness, the pure in heart and the persecuted."²⁴ Here the word "mission" does not indicate the mechanistic and obsessive insistence on a singular responsibility of having the whole world embrace the Christian religion, or of any particular social involvement set on a robotic mode. Within the theological trajectory of Moltmann, the word mission denotes an insistence on church's necessary engagement with the world and about the requisite reflexivity in discerning the most acute challenges of the day. Thus, the word "mission" used by Moltmann could be seen as a synonym for witness, while we are striving to demonstrate that they are not synonyms, but conceptions of very different order, if not diametrically opposite to each other. The essential difference being that the witness is an event that happens as a response to a situation—as in all testimonies of epiphany, beginning with the burning bush. The one who witnesses becomes the testimony on what they, or their community perceive to have been revealed, reflects a new becoming that in turn reveals how this revelation sheds new light on the historical situation, and thus become a new creation with regard to both the revealer and the world. This new way of becoming in the world in light of the received revelation is not a matter of interiority or belief that a being adds on to itself, but a way of *performative* becoming or be-ing that testifies to the transformation that one continues to experience (2 Cor.

²⁴ Moltmann, *Way of Jesus Christ*, 81.

5:17). On the other hand, an overarching eschatological mission is an attempt at carrying out a *performance* that a finished and secure being puts forth in order to satisfy a mandate imposed from without. Since there cannot be a doer behind the deed, this notion of secure and finalized being is in itself a becoming that is achieved through consistent foreclosure to every experience, evidence, and the continuity of revelation and grace that envelops human life. Such an understanding of a succeeded being serves no necessary function of faith, rather it is a statement of the inessentiality of faith that renders the self to stay beyond all metaphysical enclosures, and be open to wonder, awe, and innocent suffering of the other. The barrenness that the notion of foreclosed and finalized being engenders could only be addressed though embracing a singular mission or a multiple of it, and busying oneself with the hope of both achieving its own self-assumed eschatological ends, and also to fill every waking moment with activity to stifle the possibility of doubts from arising. Intensifying the magnitude and diligence of missions in proportion to growing apprehension on the virtue of one's chosen mission would invariably turn tyrannical, if not catastrophic—as in totalitarian experiments of fascism, to the supposedly righteous cause of communism, to the manifest destiny of civilizing, development, and democratization.

On being the salt and light of the earth (5:13-16), Carter emphasizes the exhortation as a call to lead lives that are “flavoring, purifying, [and] sacrificial” through the good works that capable of making others aware of God and thus glorify God.²⁵ With regard to Jesus' insistence that he has come to “fulfill” the law, and the many simplistic interpretation of it as Jesus *being* the very fulfillment or supersession of the law and

²⁵ Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 138.

prophets, Carter denounces that construal by emphasizing Matthew's choice of the verbs like *poieo* and *tereo*, that conveys the meanings of "do" and "keep" respectively.²⁶ Thus there is no supersession of the law, but an invigorated and reflexive keeping of the same through a "righteousness that exceeds" any and every ostensible or mechanistic mission of observance. Such a Pharisaic/scribal mission demonstrates "a vested interest in maintaining [and] not reforming the current hierarchical unjust social structure,"²⁷ and is always adept in keeping the letter of the law while dissipating the intent that could prove to be inconvenient. Thus, the command to "exceed" in righteousness could be read as a call toward ending the missions that turn meaninglessly repetitive, and evolving pathways of witness that at once refuses half measures and escape routes, and never seek the perpetuation of the cause as an opportunity for fulfilling one's religious mandate.

In place of the NRSV translation "do not resist an evildoer" (5:39), Carter proposes to translate it as "do not violently resist an evildoer," as the former he perceives, could be taken as God approving of evil actions and "requires disciples to capitulate to and collude with [and] not oppose evil action."²⁸ The verb *antistenai* denotes "armed resistance in military encounters." Since the beatitudes emphasizes the need for problematizing the deeds of the evildoers and thus strive for a justice and righteousness that surpasses the benign standards or norms (5:20), Carter justifies his translation that introduces the adverb "violently" to be a legitimate translation, as the "issue is not whether to resist or not, but *how* evil is resisted."²⁹ Also, the next verse on turning the

²⁶ Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 138.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 143.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 151.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 151.

other cheek, Carter observes, is offering a third way to the usual responses of submission or violent retaliation, a new way of “active, nonviolent response to a system designed to humiliate.” When read along with Jesus’ act of not turning his cheek and instead questioning the rightness of the being struck (John 18:23), what is relevant to our discussion is that none of the precepts are susceptible to be missionized and set on automated uncritical execution as a standard practice until eschatology. Thus the verses on loving both one’s neighbors and enemies (5:43-48) undoes the most elementary aspect of missions wherein it is never possible to love the other—be they a neighbor or enemy—unless and until the other is being converted as a self belonging to one’s own community and in sync with one’s own disposition.

Ehrman notes that “for Matthew, to follow Jesus... does not mean abandoning the Jewish Law and joining a new religion that is opposed to it,” and that the author has Jesus himself delivering the determinative word of fulfilling the Law (5:17-20).³⁰ The “antithesis” (5:21-48) of the Law that Jesus articulates do actually deepen its meaning and intent, and its observance become rigorous enough to render everyone deprived of any credible source of pride that comes with both minimalist or utmost obedience. It is not the “overly scrupulous attention to detail of the Law [that] is what really matter to God,” but a different “kind of strict obedience to the letter of the Law,” that takes it beyond the grasp of uncomplicated missions of adherence.³¹

The prevalence of missions obsessed with conversion of others without any consideration for fruits is being testified in the statement on making the new convert

³⁰ Ehrman, *New Testament*, 111.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 113.

inheriting double share of hell (23:15). It is not that those who were saying “Lord, Lord” were not doing anything at all, but that were very diligent doers who were continuously prophesying, casting out demons, performing powerful acts in the name Jesus (7:22). It is that the pronouncers had missionized/mechanized these actions in order to *save* themselves from the trouble of seeking the “merciful and transformative actions of the type envisioned throughout the sermon.”³² Not a single teaching of the sermon is susceptible to unproblematic automation, and they could only remain as principles on how any specific situations could be analyzed and addressed appropriately. The steadfast insistence on the “will of my Father in heaven” (7:21) brings back the focus on what the prophets were after and on Jesus’ repeated appeal for good fruits (7:15-19). The righteousness that the prophets sought and the good fruits that Jesus demand defy the possibility of perpetual missions with set itineraries, and instead calls for actions that thoroughly reflects the issue at hand and their desirable outcomes based upon evidence, available means, and options. Missionizers who are confident of their own goodness and in the correctness of their praxis (7:22), become the “evildoers” (7:23), as they foreclose the very reflexivity required in invoking “Lord, Lord,” which is in effect a foreclosure of the abundant life in itself. An abundant life that refuses to be stifled by metaphysical enclosures, is perpetually aware of its own metaphysical constructions, and is thus capable of continuing to transform them, according to the changes in evidence and understandings. Human constructions could ideally be based upon available evidence, but often as in many ideological situations, could also be primed against it, or the evidence is always assembled and maneuvered to serve the ideological predilections.

³² Ehrman, *New Testament*, 191-192.

Among the parables of the kingdom of God that is assembled in chapter 13, the one especially of the yeast that leavens the whole, invalidates the purposiveness of the act of mixing and expecting a singular end, and presents the change of status of the whole flour as something spontaneous and thus in the category of a miraculous induction. The Greek verb *enekrypsen* (13:33) usually translated as “mixed in,” however, actually means “hid in.” Carter posits the hiddenness of “God’s reign [that] works over time,” and as the yeast is actually a corrupting influence on the flour, Jesus’ actions that diametrically differ from that of the Empire, actually transforms it by corrupting it with different practices and ways of living.³³ The scholarly interpretations of this parable regularly draws parallels to Sarah’s act of kneading the three measures of flour (Gen. 18:6), the significance of a women being the main character in a single parable out of a string of seven within this chapter, and the positive characterization of leaven as opposed to its negative provenance in other Hebrew and Christian texts.³⁴ Our contention is that the verb choice of “hid in” (also in Lk. 13:21) is deliberate, as it places this act beyond the commonplace normality of the purposeful act of mixing the dough with certain intention and confident anticipation. The element of unintentionally encrypting that the act of “hid in” signifies, and thus the surprise of finding the whole flour being transformed through an unpremeditated act that frees the kingdom of God from the realm of “teleological calculation.”

In the text wherein a woman anointing Jesus with an expensive perfume (Mt. 26:6-12), the response of his disciples is one that is characteristic of social activists with

³³ Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 291.

³⁴ For example, see, Levine, “Matthew,” in *Women’s Bible Commentary*, 345.

blinkers/blinders or tunnel vision that tend to discern and define everything through the singular cause of their choosing and of their unwavering commitment to it. Anyone varying from his or her perspective of the appropriate action of utmost precedence would fail to pass the test of right social analysis and that of appropriate response expected from everyone. Duling observes that “the act of one marginal—probably a “promiscuous” woman who encounters Jesus at table—appears to override social concern for other marginal, in this case, the poor,” and that the ““preferential option for the poor’ in Matthew is qualified by the woman’s symbolic act of preparing Jesus for burial.”³⁵ Carter underscores the location as a marginal site as it being the “house of Simon the leper” that brings forth various issues of “physical suffering, social isolation, religious exclusion, and economic difficulties” and that the text leaves the reader with the question of whether Simon was actually healed by Jesus and why he is yet being identified by his disease.³⁶ Apart from these important questions, our focus ought to be on perils of any overarching and singular mission, however virtuous, right, necessary, and impressive they may appear to be, they siphon out the essential quality of reflexivity that imparts vitality and mysterious uniqueness to life. Jesus’s words on the perpetual presence of poor, Duling notes, are neither to “canonize” nor to “spiritualize” poverty. For us it could read as a statement on human inability until eschatology to author a text of social relations that ceases to produce poverty. If it is impossible to have a social organization without violence and discrimination, and one that removes the avenues of sinfulness invariably involved in the act of living, then history could never be salvific in itself, and thus

³⁵ Dennis C. Duling, *A Marginal Scribe: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew in Social-Scientific Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), 134.

³⁶ Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 502.

without the necessity of a savior. Since the words on the presence of the poor are expressed within the total thrust of Matthew's gospel against involuntary poverty, they could not be enlisted as a reason for resignation from actions addressing and remedying the systems that engender poverty. However, they adeptly demolish the dreams of those who strive to end poverty in their "own generation" and thus have a society that does not make people poor. Recall the slogan of the World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh 1910: "Evangelization of the world in this generation." The quest for achieving the stated goal of overarching missions in their own lifetimes is the typical and the most disastrous of aspects of the overarching missions primed at eschatological fulfillment. Ending poverty should be a commitment for any generation, but undertaking it as an eschatological mission that would lead to a society that would not produce poverty anymore is either a recipe for disaster, or for a benign and mediocre existence that is as good as the dead.

What any generation could legitimately attempt is to evolve programs addressing poverty from the experience of the past, a reasonable calculation on a near future, and imbue themselves with an eschatological longing for a world without poverty. Not as a program to achieve any eschatological vision, but only as a response to what it is witnessing, and as a witness of what it strives to become, and a testimony to the posterity on how they walked along with God, and navigated the face of earth with utmost humility. The rest they could very well trust that the future generations would take care of, and, especially of the eschatological end, they can be certain that God is in charge and that humans need not be burdened with things that are beyond their means and capacity.

We have already discussed, in the third chapter, the significance of the Last Judgment text (Mt. 25: 31-46) as one that undoes every sense of messianism with which humans often clothe themselves for various reasons. Hence, we are not once again elaborating the importance of this text that we consider as one of the loci of Matthean gospel, but highlighting another common contention that it disrupts—the prevalence of poverty and the poor.³⁷ Moltmann observes that if this text is embraced as crucial for ecclesiology, then the “conflict between a ‘dogmatic’ and an ‘ethical’ Christianity” could be resolved. Moltmann is quick to point out that, since the “coming judge is already hidden in the world,” “it is not a question of the integration of Christians outside the church into Christianity in its ecclesiastical form,” rather “it is a matter of the church’s integration in Christ’s promised presence: *ubi christus, ibi ecclesia*.”³⁸ Equally emphatic is the pronouncement that the “fellowship of the crucified one cannot be lived in any other way than in fellowship with the least of the brethren of the Son of man.”³⁹ It would be better to surface the significance of the text we consider as the “center of gravity” of the Matthean gospel in our discussion around the theme of mission—the verses that demand turning or becoming like children.

³⁷ Gutierrez emphasizes that the “obligation to care for the poor means that the poor are not persons being punished by God (as the doctrine of temporal retribution implicitly asserts), but rather God’s friends. To give to the needy is therefore to give to God: ‘He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord’ (Prov. 19:17); and conversely, ‘He who oppresses a poor man insults his Maker’ (Prov. 14:31; see 17:5). The full implication of this disposition toward the poor, and the full extent of the obligation it impose would become evident when Christ identifies himself with the poor of this world (see Mt. 25:31-46).” Gutierrez, *On Job*, 40.

³⁸ Moltmann, *Way of Jesus Christ*, 126, 129.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 97-98.

4.1.1. *Turn and Become like Children: Begin Living without Eschatological Missions*

The regular scriptural and theological interpretation of the verses that unambiguously deliver the devastating word on the impossibility of entering the kingdom of heaven unless one deliberately initiate a turn and begin a perpetual process of becoming like children (Mt. 18:3-4), is often glossed over with a supposed childlike humility that humans could often feign. The discussion often progresses by enlisting every reference in the scriptures to children and childhood, and culminates with the theme of obedience to God the Father that Jesus the child demonstrated throughout his life.⁴⁰ In elucidating the contours of humbleness, what gets lost is the attention to its antonym of “arrogance,” against that which this inescapable demand of the required turning about and around is being made. The source of arrogance never get problematized, and the fact that affected humility in itself could become a symbol of arrogance that minimally comes across as off-putting, and maximally as extinguishing the life of all who deviate or disagree with the supposedly humble.

Carter observes that being “humble” is not a “personal character” or one that denotes the hypothetical “innocence and purity of children,” but a “social location of powerlessness.”⁴¹ And, that the construct of the “empire of heaven/s” is not a “stable concept with fixed content,” but “a symbol that is tensive, open-ended, expanding,” and one that “evokes the general memory of God acting in diverse ways and circumstances on behalf of God’s people.”⁴² Rather than the commonplace understanding that turns the

⁴⁰ For example, see, Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Unless You Become Like This Child*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991).

⁴¹ Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 362.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 93.

kingdom into a private inheritance of the disciples, Carter posit it as a general mode of “participating in God’s purposes” and thus “to be vindicated in the judgment” of God, as it is being testified in the texts of the Sermon on the Mount, and the Judgment of the Nations. In place of the arrogance of the earthly empires and the wealthy, Carter interprets the turning and becoming humble as a call that the “disciples live this (missional) lifestyle” by deliberately embracing the “change/turn,” and by becoming “socialized out of dominant cultural patterns and into new practices and relationships appropriate to God’s empire.”⁴³

Thus, it becomes obvious that what Carter has in mind is an oppositional “mission” to the many prevailing, emerging, and evolving hegemonic and dominant missions as that of the Roman Empire, the religious elite, and also in contradistinction to the other countercultural and liberationist groups. It is yet another “mission,” however, one that is more righteous of all, as it emerges from the other side of power equations, and is thus one that is capable of translating what has become transparent about “God’s empire” into appropriate relationships. Moreover, it bases itself on the contention that a clean dropping out or becoming “socialized out” is a possibility for anyone who strives hard enough. Such a position is beyond the nuanced, or, in fact the tragic realism that everyone who has to live under a particular system just gets tainted with its mode of organizing violence and discrimination, in their very act of living (Rev. 13:16). In order to discern the significance of this commandment (become like children) and the verdict (unattainability of the kingdom) rolled into a single verse, the characteristics of remaining humble and its antonym of being arrogant, need to be understood differently.

⁴³ Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 363. The parenthetical material in the original.

From Nietzsche onwards, there has been a consistent attempt at what has come to be termed as escaping the enclosure or the “closure of metaphysics.” Jean-Luc Nancy observes that “metaphysics denotes the representation of being as beings and as beings present,” and that such a conception necessitates a “founding, warranting presence beyond the world.”⁴⁴ This scheme of stable being/beings author and sustain all binaries from “the immanent and the transcendent” to every other oppositional pairs, and finally ends up defeating its institutive purpose of defining the contours of a world and yet keep it from closing in on itself. The necessary incommensurability required for thought to arise “ends up proving to be a phantasmatic dissociation between the unimpeachable empirical real and the inaccessible real or intelligible surreal.”⁴⁵ Yet, it is not a downright disavowal of metaphysics either, as it is impossible on the one hand, and pointless exercise on the other. Human life could only be organized around metaphysical constructions, and giving up some of them as in religious or of certain ideological ones that seek liberation and justice would only leave space for other openly malevolent, oppressive, and downright catastrophic ones. Nancy holds that: “In truth, metaphysics deconstructs itself constitutively, and, in deconstructing itself, it dis-encloses in itself the presence and certainty of the world founded on reason. In itself, it delivers forever and anew the *epekeina tes ousias*, the ‘beyond beings’: it foments in itself the overflowing of its rational ground.”⁴⁶ Even when it is being acknowledged that Christianity “designates nothing other, essentially... than the demand to open in this world an alterity or an

⁴⁴ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, 6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

unconditional alienation,” it is being quickly insisted “however [the] ‘unconditional’ means not undeconstructible.”⁴⁷ This means it is deconstructible.

Our insistence from the very beginning in the first chapter onwards is that everything we utter about the unconditional is deconstructible, however, the unconditional, in itself would remain undeconstructible and forever beyond the pair of ellipses within which humans live in and through their own respective constructions. The unconditional is the quintessential deconstructive lever that unsettles every construction, and frees up space, resources, and possibilities for renewed constructions that reckon previous otherings and strives to stay beyond their grasp. Nancy sums up Nietzsche’s contention that Christianity is the “precept of living in this world as outside of it—in the sense that this ‘outside’ is not, [or] not an entity.”⁴⁸ We come from another vantage point and argue that this very precept that is essential and incontrovertible basis for Christianity (and for that matter for all religions, and human life in itself), even though in its actual practice, the “outside” is being enlisted to author, condone, and accommodate everything as the everlasting citizenship is eternally elsewhere. This outside or elsewhere is given definite form and content in order to foreclose both the tracks and components of one’s own constructions, and to remain unmindful of what is being instituted and sustained by such texts that metes out suffering. Christian theologians of various provenance, including the liberationist, feminist, and the ecofeminist, have ably problematized how this essentialized entity of an elsewhere, and an insistence on an unambiguous equation of human constructions to Christ itself ontologically others sections of human family,

⁴⁷ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, 10.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

other members of the creation, and above all leads to the destruction of the planet. Thus, the contention of being ‘outside’ of the world becomes the best mechanism there is to create or participate in texts unmindfully and without anguish, guilt, or remorse.

Nancy defines sense as the “concentration and crystallization of an absolute *value*,” and that there is “no sense that is not shared,” and hence “divided in this sharing,” and thus a “sharable sense is a sense separated from itself, freed of its completion in a final and central signification.”⁴⁹ It is an imperative or obligatory for beings to “make sense and produce sense, or else produce ourselves as sense.”⁵⁰ Since the requisite of sense being insisted upon as settled, and thus ruthlessly policed, Nancy borrows Roland Barthes “double refusal” of “‘solid sense’ (acquired and fixed sense), and that of ‘zero sense’ (that of the mystics of liberation). This double negation is in order to “keep, [or] to protect sense from being filled, as well as [from] being emptied—that is *ethos*.”⁵¹ What Barthes calls for is “*an* exemption from sense,” and Nancy defines it as a “withdrawal from that signifying will, [as] a retreat from a wanting-to-say that can step aside to give pride of place to saying.”⁵² Willing is “subjectivity making itself into its own work” and thus renders itself as a “projection of an assumed interiority into the reality of an exteriority.” In willing there is no actual saying or speaking, but always a conscious production of an “end-oriented sense,” or “teleological obligation.” Exemption from sense on the other hand “designates a wanting-to-say in which the wanting melts into the

⁴⁹ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, 121.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 124.

saying and gives up wanting, so that sense is absent and makes sense beyond sense.”⁵³

This sense “depends on nothing but a receptivity, an affectability, a possibility: what there is of sense is what comes to me, strikes me, disturbs me.”⁵⁴

Jesus’ commandment and verdict on the need to becoming like children or to risk being denied entry into the kingdom, is in effect a call to turn oneself into a mode of becoming wherein all metaphysical conceptions of the possibility of realized beings, and metaphysical delusions of eschatological missions would never even arise. It is to stay perpetually open to the possibility of awe and wonder, and never to foreclose oneself with metaphysical constructions of one’s own, or those being inherited or imbibed.⁵⁵ Being humble like children is not living without any touch of metaphysics, but being cognizant about the limitedness of them and remaining open enough to be not insistent on the correctness of them in so far as to annihilate one’s playmate.

Humble enough to know that the play of life has to be kept open-ended and the points earned in one session should not be carried forward to the next. Even when one become arrogant enough to insist that next rounds begin with previous points being considered as score already earned in the fresh round, one would not ultimately justify it and would be willing to eventually give up the obstinacy after a few innings. Best yet, even when one would pass on the benefits of one’s winnings to their progeny, humble

⁵³ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, 126.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁵⁵ We are aware that wonder and awe in itself never prevents metaphysical closures of missions that sow untold suffering. Hannah Arendt’s charge against Martin Heidegger’s flight of wonder and his subsequent dalliance with National Socialism is being poignantly and forcefully surfaced by Mary Jane Rubenstein, and on exactly the answer to this very charge, we side with Rubenstein’s call for not less but more wonder as a safeguard to prevent such pitfalls of metaphysical confinements. See, Mary-Jane Rubenstein, *Strange Wonder: The Closure of Metaphysics and the Opening of Awe* (New York: Columbia University, 2008).

enough to not use the accrued power to buy a game for their children, or fix it in their favor. Humbleness that emerges from the awareness that however justly and judiciously the rules of the game are set, however diligently the players partake in them, at the end of each round, there would still certainly be those who earn the crown and the runner-ups. Hence, the equal responsibility to see to it that there would be equal and open opportunity at a fresh start unencumbered by previous outcomes. It is a solemn commitment to keep the fresh rounds of the play as open as possible, and with least minimum possibility of generationally accrued comparative advantages or disadvantages of the players affecting the outcome. The Hebrew scriptural concept of providing an opportunity to the fallen behind to recoup every Sabbatical year, and a complete restart of the whole series of the game every Jubilee year, calls attention to this very possibility of persons becoming enslaved, and of the potential path to their restoration without revolutions and bloodshed (Lev. 25).

4.1.2. Making Disciples, Baptizing, and Teaching

If there is not a single aspect of any of the precepts spread all across the gospel of Matthew that could be simply missionized without the necessary discursive process of discerning what is especially called for in each particular context, then the concluding command of the final three verses could not be something that is transparent enough for unitary execution. In verse after verse, it is not just the conversion missions that are being taken out of the purview of being operationalized, but the possibility of evolving any kind of singular mission that could be instituted and sustained as such until eschatology is being skillfully frustrated. It is not by direct delineation of norms and boundaries, but by

placing every precept and command within a textuality that requires painstaking discernment, and continuous reenactment of the decision making process for any witness to remain relevant. If every decision is confronted with the “undecidability” that induces “fear and trembling” because of the unknowable nature or the lack of certainty about the outcomes of both the innumerable options that are being given up and the one that is being embraced at the end of the decision making process. Thus, discipleship, baptism, teaching and proclamation becomes a mode of becoming that reveal the struggles, effects, and affects of salvific living, and not a verbal pronouncement of any standardized schema of salvation.

4.2. Seize the Miracles and Seek Resurrection

Since the advent of modernity, the miracles to which various religions testify to have fallen into serious disrepute. Lack of tidy scientific explanations in terms of proof and repeatability has placed them in domain of implausibility. Richard Horsley recounts how the Western historians discounted the anticolonial peasant struggles in India, just because most of them emerged and sustained themselves as faith movements. The parallel he draws is that the “established New Testament scholars... embarrassed by demon possession and exorcism and people swept up in ecstatic spiritual behavior have given such phenomena little attention, [and] even downplayed them.”⁵⁶ Bart Ehrman, in his introduction to the New Testament, has a special chapter to discuss the problem of miracles. At the very outset, he observes “it is probably better to think of miracles, not as supernatural violations of natural laws, but as events that contradict the normal workings

⁵⁶ Horsley, “Unearthing a People’s Movement,” 4.

of nature in such a way as to be virtually beyond belief and require an acknowledgement that supernatural forces have been at work.”⁵⁷ This is not to answer in the affirmative, either the philosophical problem of whether miracles could indeed happen, or the historical problem of “whether miracles can be shown to have happened, even if they did.” In our discussion, we are following the position that Ehrman observation of miraculous events that appear to be so and yet could have perfect scientific explanations.

Miracles and healings continue to be the terrain of religions, and without them, there is no sense of awe and wonderment that testify to the transcendence of life that is beyond the confines of material bodies and the structures that delimits tangible physicality. If miracles could be defined as events that present humans with novel and astounding opportunities to totally redefine the way, their individual and collective lives in communities are organized, then there is a need for a perpetual attention to miracles, and there are many miracles that occur in human life. Seizing these miracles in life requires training or habitus of remaining open to the possibilities of life and human history that cannot be foreclosed by any force on earth. It could be as a play on the expression, “seize the day” (*carpe diem*) as “seize the miracles”—*carpe miracula*.

To be weary of is the position that humans can in any way produce miracles, or that they could transparently discern the hand of God behind the events that appears to be miraculous. Humans have no such abilities for direct production, or of clear-cut discernment, and yet are immensely capable of acting miraculously when historical opportunities present themselves, or when everything in life looks bleak and destined for doom. It is not that Christians could confidently discern the act of God inherent any

⁵⁷ Ehrman, *New Testament*, 241.

particular historical event or physical happening, and in turn organize their acts as a response to them. Rather, it is because they could only strive becoming Christians by organizing actions around the events and happenings in history. Religions testify to the miracles in its collective past as in revelatory events, scriptural witness, and the continuing witness within its tradition. Through constant reenacting of this corpus of miracles in liturgical practices, religions thus render its participants to be open to the miraculous in life and thus attune them to have eyes and ears to behold the unfolding of miraculous in individual and collective lives. The miracles thus testified are perfectly in the human realm and within the confines of science and history. Since our faith is in the source of life that is forever the supreme and eternal mystery, and since our hope is in the reign of God, the miracles are the one that demonstrates or witnesses to the downsides and patent injustices of contemporary arrangements, and thus opening of opportunities to envision fresh reaffirmations of just ways of living.

The recent events around the Great Recession during the years 2007-08, could be read as nothing short of miracles, even if every component of it could be discerned as totally shaped by human actions. As it is evident by now, the practice of banks originating loans that they very well knew will never be repaid, and those very loans being bundled as mortgage backed securities and sold to investors ranging from governments, institutions, pension funds, to private individuals, caused the great recession of 2007-08.⁵⁸ When an individual or institution that do not have the whole amount of money for the property they want to purchase, they are simultaneously buying

⁵⁸ U.S. Congress—The Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission, *The Financial Crisis Inquiry Report: Final Report of the National Commission on the Causes of the Financial and Economic Crisis in the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2011), http://fcic-static.law.stanford.edu/cdn_media/fcic-reports/fcic_final_report_full.pdf.

two things—the property in itself, and the mortgage with the most favorable terms that is being offered in the financial market. The owner of the property that is being offered for sale will never part with their asset without realizing its maximum possible value according to the market conditions and their own personal situations. However, the banks and other financial institutions were more than willing to part with their money for whoever could provide them with a social security number. This was so because there is more profit to be made instantaneously by selling off the mortgages bundled into marketable securities and with least minimum or no risk to the loan originators as very soon the bad debts will be someone else's problem. Imagine a scenario wherein the banks and other financial institutions involved in loan originations, securities bundling, and rating agencies that guaranteed them as of excellent quality, were able to get rid of these loans from their books before the defaults became pervasive. Also, imagine if all these securities backed by bad debts ended up with the pension plans, and in the retirement and investment accounts of private individuals. If these meticulously planned and executed human acts had gone through to its rational finales, then, there would not have been any financial crisis that would have merited massive bailouts by governments. There would only have been gravely impoverished people with their retirements, investments and very lives vanquished, and there would have been no one to blame other than themselves for the bad investment decisions they and their pension plans have made. This would have provided the corporations with endless supply of workers who would have to work for a pittance, as they would be left with nothing other than their ability to work and to sell their labor to whomever willing to buy it regardless of whatever being the thoroughly depressed price. Even if the financial crisis caused millions to lose their jobs, houses,

investments, if the financial institutions were successful in transferring everything related to bad mortgages from their books, there would not have been any governmental intervention to rescue institutions and individuals holding investments backed by toxic assets. Since the year 2008, the world recovered from the great recession through governmental intervention and those globally coordinated efforts raised the world economy from the dead. With it, people who lost resources in the downturn has recovered at least a part of their life's savings. It is nothing short of a miracle that the carefully designed plans to defraud workingmen and women of their life savings and their very lives⁵⁹ itself did not get to run its full course and was derailed midcourse.

The events that led to the great recession of 2008, do not defy the rules of scientific explanation, of history, or of human involvement. Yet, it could be counted as a miracle as it presented humans with a profound and unique opportunity to drastically alter the ways around which they organize and conduct their lives. The miraculous moments wherein movements get galvanized and change the course of history as in a Rosa Park event or a Soweto Uprising are actually centuries in the making through the prayers, preaching, teaching, and organizing that problematizes the acts of grievous atrocities and inhumanity. Hence, they are miracles of a very different order as they were consciously yearned for, and worked for, and become God's moments of responding to cries of the people and admonishing "let my people go." Those who would have come to face the ill effects of the financial corporations in and through the recession of 2008 did never have had anything to do with the appearance of this miraculous revealing of the perversity of the political economy around which they have organized their lives. This

⁵⁹ Recall the description of trade in "human bodies and souls" in Rev.18:13.

miracle presented itself without human efforts, and actually, in spite of the best efforts from those at helm of both governmental and private institutions to prevent and conceal its appearance. It demonstrated the status of the world governance and its inner mechanisms of deceit and wrongdoing with all of its gravity, and those responsible were left without any plausible alibi. The doors that guard the secret of normalcy had cracked open miraculously, and it is upon humans seize this miracle and to put a foot in and prevent the door from shutting close and also to further push them open and create something new out the opportunity that presented itself and without seeking.

Resurrection is not just being raised from the dead, as it is very much the inauguration of a new state of becoming. Nancy meditates on the resurrected Christ's words of "do not touch me" (*noli me tangere*) and observes that "to touch him or to hold him back would be to adhere to immediate presence, and just as this would be to believe in touching (to believe in the presence of the present), it would be to miss the departing [*la partance*] according to which the touch and presence come to us."⁶⁰ Also that the "glory [of the risen body] does not belong to it and the resurrection is not an apotheosis; to the contrary, it is the *kenosis* continued," and that "it is in the emptiness or in the emptying out of presence that the light shines."⁶¹ The command of not to touch is because there is no gain in trying to seize, and everything to get lost, as "it is a question of *opening one's eyes in the darkness* and of their being overwhelmed by it, or it is a question of sensing [or smelling, *sentir*] the insensible and of being seized by it."⁶²

⁶⁰ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Noli me tangere: On the Rising of the Body*, trans. Sarah Clift, Pascale-Anne Brault, and Michael Naas (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 15.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 42.

Imagining being capable of materializing presence in any respect, either in the sacraments, or in any particular office, or in the communion itself, serves no necessary function in maintaining a faith that is open and keen on being seized, but an attempt at not being seized, or worse still, to seize and invest it in service of self-serving schemes. Nancy claims that “‘revelation’ is not the sudden appearance of a celestial glory,” but that “it consists in the departure of the body raised to glory,” that “in absenting, in going absent, that there is revelation, but it is not he who leaves that reveals; it is she upon whom the task is conferred to go and announce his departure.” Thus, “finally, it is the carnal body that reveals the glorious body.”⁶³

Every single account of the being raised from the dead in the New Testament is marked by the feature of the one who was previously considered to be dead coming back to life as themselves—recognizable as such to all those who knew them previously—and continue with life as before. However, in the case of the resurrection of Christ, the writers of the scriptures introduce the device or construct of unrecognizability wherein Jesus of Nazareth is not at all identifiable in the resurrected body. The only thing that connects the body that suffered death to that which is being testified in the gospels as having resurrected on the third day, is the marks of victimhood. Thus, the miracles as the great recession is not a call to raise the dead, as in restoring the economy to its previous state—*reparatio* and *renovatio*—but it is a call to resurrection. The only recognizable feature from the past that is being testified in the new resurrected body politic ought to be the experience of the victims and the vanquished, and it ought to be a very new creation that bears no resemblance to the previous state of affairs. For this to happen, their needs to be

⁶³ Nancy, *Rising of the Body*, 48.

faith that moves mountains gained through an habitus that keeps watch on the memories of suffering (Johann Baptist Metz), and reinforces the hope and yearning for that eschatological feast where no one waits for leftovers.

As we have already noted in chapter two, in the context of “restoratio” of the Roman Empire, that the attempts at restoration are futile, as they are facile and fizzle out too quickly, and thereby squanders the enormous amount of energy and resources spent in restorative endeavors. Instead, what we are called to seek is resurrection, where the marks of identification include the re-production and continuation of the positive aspects of love, fellowship and care that made previous body unique and a source of longing even after its departure. In the scriptural accounts, resurrected Christ is recognized only through the acts of fellowship like breaking bread, teaching, and that of the visible marks of suffering. Resurrection thus become a declaration of commitment that the new body will not at all resemble the previous one in any manner, and an act of ensuring that the erstwhile modes of systemic othering would not return surreptitiously, nor would they go unchallenged. The constant act of liturgical recounting the previous otherings is the mode of remaining vigilant to the possibility of both their recurrence, and on the emergence of new forms of disprivilege, or downright mechanisms that extinguishing life in itself.

The current ecclesiology based upon an assertion of a state wherein the Christian body becomes the resurrected body of Christ, and thus deriving the power and authority of the church here on earth. This way of assertion is no different from the arrogant self-serving assertions that certain groups of people are somehow pure and superior to every other people across the world, and from all ideologies that derive their power and security through their own conviction to having possession of correct eschatological vision and of

being certain of the means to achieve them. This type of power and authority is not that which a Nelson Mandela would accrue through their acts of turning their flesh and blood into palatable food and drink for countless of their contemporaries and thereafter continue to serve as an inspiration for all who happen to walk on earth after them. Hence, a realistic and humble ecclesiology for these and future times need to hold on to the current assertions of the communion as the body of Christ as an aspirational goal toward which the community continually strives and never as an assertion of a reality that is already being realized.

The context is foreclosed not by shirking a response, but by redirecting response and keeping oneself fully occupied in a nonthreatening or a less uncomfortable path of action of one's choice rather than the one that is being persistently thrust upon by the conspicuousness of one's immediate context. It is analogous to the fact that betrayal is only possible in and through an act of endearment (Mt.26:49; Mk.14:45; Lk.22:47-48). In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk.10:25-37), certain persons evade or foreclose themselves to the immediate context they encounter in the form of the traveller who had been stripped, beaten, and left half dead. This foreclosure of the immediate context is made possible with their own respective missions or the purposes of their individual journeys of that particular day, and that journey's relevance and significance in the overall mission of their lives.

Jesus lifts up the act of the Samaritan as the one who have "showed mercy" and thus becoming a true "neighbor" for the wounded, and as an act that needs to be emulated for receiving eternal life. The quintessential characteristic of the Samaritan that earns him this determination has been his willingness and ability to interrupt or ruin his respective

mission for that particular day, and to remain unfazed by the ramifications of this detrimental disruption could have on the overall mission of his life. To be able to act reflexively and to be thus redefined by the plight or the call of the other is the entirety of spirituality. This ability to disrupt one's own individual or communal mission in order to answer the call of the other, and remaining predisposed to exclusively letting the demands of the issue that is being thrust upon oneself to determine the method and practice becomes the basis to "inherit eternal life." Above all, it is to beget this unbound performative response to the call of the other without any specific intention or expectation of obvious or surreptitious benefit for the self or her community. It is an instantaneous reflexive response that does not delay itself to weigh or even remotely seek benefits for self by way of accolades, material or affective gains, treasure in heaven, or even the religious conversion of the other. The acute intention of the self that could define these interventions is solely the wellbeing of the other. The plight of the other could in turn serve as a call to repentance and conversion for the self. It is a call that makes the self aware of its unproblematized participation in the socioeconomic and cultural organization that disgorges both humans and other constituents of the creation, after their use-value have been exhausted, or after being deemed as utterly useless persons, communities, or objects.

Thus, the call of this parable could not be to erect yet another "ambulance ministry"⁶⁴ for treating those mangled and spewed to the wayside by the system, but to forever remain able, adept, and willing to unsettle every such ongoing mission, and

⁶⁴ Kairos Theologians, *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Churches: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa*, rev. 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1986), 30.

reimagine interventions entirely in accordance with the immediate context that a communion or the Christian would actually encounter. Even when the possessions and the body are handed over as part of a mission, it is more often than not, an act of self-love in order to secure a heroic end to an insecure being, as Paul rightly identifies this very possible phenomena (1 Cor. 3:3). Nancy terms this act of wrecking one's life for the sake itself as "sublime heroism," and considers it as a "version of nihilism."⁶⁵

4.3. Law versus Faith: "Justification by Faith" Re-imagined

Messianic hope is the flower that bloomed in the prophetic garden of the Hebrew tradition. In the Christian hands, it becomes like a flower from the florists, a flower that retains its exquisiteness and fragrance, but one that seldom reveals the labor relations, land use, and market forces that is behind it being made available for procurement and enjoyment. For example, Justin Martyr, the second-century church leader, claims that the Hebrew Scriptures had only a singular value of being the "prophecy" about Jesus and that "they were *always and only* about Jesus."⁶⁶ It took until the emergence of liberation theologians for the prophetic tradition and its central theological question of the treatment of the other to gain its rightful place in theological articulation. Reading the binary opposition between faith and law, one that Paul insists in his letter to Galatians (Gal. 2:16), as one between the Jewish law and faith in Christ, did contribute to the harsh treatment that the Jewish people faced across Christendom. When aligned along with many of the strict binary delineations insisted upon by the major Western philosophical

⁶⁵ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, 123.

⁶⁶ Wes Howard-Brook, *Empire Baptized: How the Church Embraced What Jesus Rejected, 2nd–5th Centuries* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016), 71. Emphasis original.

traditions, it gave rise to the perpetual othering of many groups of people, especially women and whoever were perceived as deviants, and it also feminized earth in itself. And, at the end of a long chain of perpetual marking out of self and other, we eventually get the horrendousness of the Holocaust.

Within the burgeoning scholarship exploring Paul and his communities in the context of Roman Empire, Brigitte Kahl has made a magisterial contribution that especially revisits this question of faith versus law in the context of the axiomatics of imperialism that impact Galatia in myriad of very significant ways. Kahl rereads Paul's letter by placing it in the very context of first century Galatia, and thus on how the themes that Paul is invoking would have come across to his intended first audiences. To aid this understanding, an enormous amount of textual and archeological evidence is being considered with due attention to detail and significance. The question that Kahl pursues is:

A focal question of our exploration is whether Paul's criticism of 'works of the law' (Gal 2:16) needs to be first recontextualized within the framework of Greco-Roman euergetism—a term like the Latin-derived *benefactor/benefaction*, literally means 'doing of good works'—before its specific relationship to circumcision or purity as *works* of Jewish law (Torah) can be understood.⁶⁷

The friezes of the Altar of Pergamon, that depicts dying or vanquished Gauls/Galatians as a symbol of the other who need to be incessantly hunted down in order to create and sustain a notion of self: "a worldwide Roman power claim requires the construction of a worldwide terrorist enemy."⁶⁸ The Roman amphitheater through its regulated admittance, hierarchical seating arrangement, the never-ending slaughter of the

⁶⁷ Kahl, *Galatians Re-imagined*, 196.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 74.

“others” as sacrifices for the sake of unity, peace, and endurance of empire, when combined with creation myth of “Enuma Elish,” becomes a sacred space of “self” creation through the “collective consumption of ‘mother’ nature and human flesh and blood.”⁶⁹ It is against these imperial monotheistic ritual acts of “self” creation that, Kahl argues, “Paul’s most subversive image is located—the image of God-self being crucified as lawless and worthless other or conversely, of a crucified lawless and worthless other being resurrected, vindicated, enthroned as God-self.” Kahl holds that it is not only against the imperial “world created out of blood and battle,” but also against the “split of humanity into deserving and undeserving as core of the imperial Genesis narrative,” that Paul is proposing the “new type of oneness and community.” A community gathered together through “concrete everyday practices that transform the blood-drenched oneness of the nations in *Caesar* into a messianic mutuality and solidarity of the weak and strong, insiders and outsiders, Jews and Gentiles/nations *in Christ*.”⁷⁰

The works of euergetism included exchanging of gifts among equals, and charitable giving to those hierarchically lower, and the “gratitude and reverence they evoked on the side of the inferior recipients.” Charitable donations get “directly translated into social compliance with and acquiescence to the local and provincial power structures, as well as devotion to the imperial divinity that was behind and above all donations received.”⁷¹ The “system of euergetism, in conjunction with patronage and the codes of honor/shame, represented and inscribed the imperial law and order of *In/Out* and

⁶⁹ Kahl, *Galatians Re-imagined*, 163.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 166. Emphasis original.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 196.

High/Low on the provincial body.”⁷² Kahl holds that “to establish the messiah and God-self as crucified and dying like one of the Dying Gauls, and to do so ‘publicly,’ is the most fundamental attack on the normative way of ‘seeing.’” Moreover, it subverts the imperial construct of the “image of the divine, the image of Caesar, and the image of Dying Gauls/Galatians/Giants themselves.”⁷³ The gospel that gossiped by Paul destabilizes the “‘monotheistic’ imperial construct” of the “exclusiveness of the imperial deity who claims to be the sole god capable of granting the mercy/favor/grace (Greek *charis*) of survival and justification to those who are doomed to die for their lawlessness.”⁷⁴ It is against this imperial monotheism and justification that Paul is gospeling the justification by faith as,

the option of a peace on terms completely different from Caesar’s Pax Romana; of a God who belongs to all *ethane/tribes/nations* but does not speak with the voice of and fight on the side of the conquerors; of a “divine son” (*divi filius*) dying in solidarity with the vanquished and being resurrected by a power other than Rome’s; of a local yet global practice that functions horizontally instead of vertically, fundamentally subverting the imperial world order of self versus other by creating mixed communities that cultivate nonviolent conflict resolution and share mutual benefactions based on need rather than the hierarchical obligations endemic to the Greco-Roman codes of patronage, euergetism, and honor.⁷⁵

Paul’s discussion on foreskin and its relation to imperial justification wherein the Hebrew people as the only ones who were exempted from direct worship of imperial deity, yet provided with other opportunities of participation in the people-making play of the empire, is being treated at length by Kahl. The only significance we note is that, for

⁷² Kahl, *Galatians Re-imagined*, 199.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 206.

Paul, the dynamics between foreskin and the lack of it is not a straightforward binary opposition between Jews and Gentiles, or between those who do the works of the Law and those who have faith in Christ. Simple adoption of circumcision becomes an act of playing by the rules of the empire that permitted exemption from emperor worship, moreover, an easy escape from the charge of sedition for not partaking in imperial liturgy. Within the frame of our discussion, what Paul was preventing and dispelling was the easy option of mission that allows one to be a disciple through convenient mode of parting with what is in effect inessential (foreskin), and thus be able to feel fulfilled to one and consider to be so before God too. As we have already tried to delineate, our argument is not against any single act that individual Christians or their communions currently perform under the rubric mission. We are seeking the dispel the contention that it is possible to have a Christian entity who could subsequently author certain actions as the mission of its choice, and to reverse this ordering wherein a Christian and her communion continually becomes or emerges in and through the acts that testify their own confessions of faith and hope. In this reversed format, action is a response to the immediate context and could never be a circumvention of it, and the modes and methods are singularly determined by the specificities of the question at hand. The significance we draw from Kahl for our discussion is that, if the binary opposition is not one of simple opposition between Hebrew law and the faith in Christ, then both observing the law and having faith are discursive acts in themselves, and not simple enactments of repetitive undertakings.

4.4. *Marturion Dei* and the *Marturia* of the Disciples

In the first chapter, we have already noted that God with a mission is not at all being testified to in the Hebrew or Christian scriptures, but one who from the land of Ur to the Empty Tomb, who consistently demolishes essence and dissimulates every notion of presence that could be grasped and preserved for posterity. Even the assured presence of Jesus amidst disciples (Mt. 18:20) is exactly that the presence is amidst or in-betweenness within a relationship of love and fellowship. Thus, it is not the place, building, rhyme and meter of the liturgical verses, or sacramental elements that make the presence felt, but a place between persons which is no place at all, and one that could only be traversed in faith. We have already noted the difficulty of unambiguously gathering in the name of Christ without any hint of metonymies. A notion of mission obsessed deity is generated and sustained through the continuist argument of the enormity of God's time (Ps. 90:4), and its marked difference with what constitutes time for humans as it is being diced into neat units of days, weeks, months, years, and so on. In the scriptures, since we encounter a God who testifies to godself in relation to what is being witnessed/observed within the framework of human social arrangements and human relationships with their immediate environment and the planet in general, there cannot be a *missio Dei* who is beyond and behind the one who is being testified to in the scriptures. The contention of a God with any particular or all subsuming mission serves only to author and authorize missions of those who profess to have received authority from the one whom they perceive as being in a consistent mission regardless of whatever happens on earth and within human relations. On the one hand, the construct of mission help circumvent a threatening and destabilizing possibility, and instead enable to tackle a

comfortable option that could be addressed through minimum expenditure of accrued material resources spent on hired hands and procured time. This construct would simultaneously help partake in the status quo without moral qualms, and yet be able to appear both as slightly alleviating the real suffering of those at the receiving end, and also as making the burden of guilt bearable for one's own direct or indirect involvement in the system's ragged setup and skewed outcomes.

In an essay entitled "Poetics and Politics of Witnessing," Derrida meditates upon a very brief selection from the poet and Holocaust survivor Paul Celan's poem called "Aschenglorie," to surface the "experience of bearing witness," the "question of testimony (*testimonium*)," and its quintessential equivalence to "*testamentum*" (testaments).⁷⁶ Also, on the "enigma of testimony" and the "irreplaceability of singular witness." The selection from Celan's poem reads: "Ash-glory behind... / ... / No one / bears witness for the / witness." Since the word "ash," brings forth the memory of Auschwitz, and along with it the pervasive possibility of annihilation without a reminder or a witness, Derrida maintains, "*as soon as* [a testimony] is guaranteed, certain as a *theoretical proof*, a testimony *can no longer* be guaranteed *as* testimony."⁷⁷ This is so because "to be guaranteed as testimony, it cannot, it must not, be absolutely certain, absolutely sure and certain in the order of knowing as such."⁷⁸ In the "Latin etymology, witness, *temoin* (*testis*), the one who testifying, is the one who is present as a third (*terstis*)," person at an event and yet have survived it, and thus could bear witness. This

⁷⁶ Jacques Derrida, "Poetics and Politics of Witnessing," in *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, by Jacques Derrida, eds., Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (New York: Fordham University, 2005), 66.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 68. Emphasis original.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

understanding of the presence of the third in legal parlance gains the characteristic of proof. However, in the Greek, there is “no explicit reference to the third, to surviving, to presence, or to generation: *martus*, *marturos*, the witness, who becomes the martyr, the witness of faith, does not literally entail any of these values (third, surviving, presence, generation), [and] *marturion* means... ‘bearing witness,’ but also ‘proof.’”⁷⁹ As opposed to the irreducible and singular experience of bearing witness, this notion of proof points to the “theoretical-constative certitude,” and Derrida strives to problematize this simple correspondence to certainty and argue that “*bearing witness* is not *proving*,” and considers it as an account in the “first person.”⁸⁰

The act of bearing witness is one without a reminder, as “the addressee of the testimony, the witness of the witness, does not see what the first witness says she or he saw, the addressee did not see it and never will see it,” and “this ab-sense is essential” to the event of witnessing.⁸¹ In that event of witnessing, even the first witness is not present to what she claims to have been privileged to be part of, and the testimony then becomes a production wrought in and through the resources of language that is at the disposal of the testifier. A testimony could be delivered only with an appeal to and an accompaniment of belief as a key component, and thus it is not in the order of a scientific knowledge that does not *similarly* appeal to belief. The distinction between them being that a witness “*engages himself (sic) with... someone else, by an oath that is at least implicit,*” and “*promises to say or to manifest something to another, his addressee: a*

⁷⁹ Derrida, “Poetics and Politics of Witnessing,” 72, 75.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 75. Emphasis original.

⁸¹ Ibid., 76.

truth, a sense that was or is in some way present to him (*sic*) as a unique and irreplaceable witness.”⁸² That does not make believing a lesser aspect of life, as Derrida avers, every form of relationship with the other begins and sustains itself with belief, which means life is possible only in and through belief. The appeal to belief opens the possibility of witness being erroneous due to either perceptual difficulties or maladies, or a deliberate deception as in “deceit, perjury, and bad faith.” Openness to these less than ideal possibilities is necessary for there could not be an act of bearing witness. Without terming as such, the Christian mission version of witnessing is accounted for as one wherein a person bears witness before others, and in turn considers them recipients

as witnesses to what he (*sic*) first of all takes *himself* (*sic*) as witness to, the fact that he (*sic*) is sufficiently conscious, self-present, to bear witness in front of others, of what he (*sic*) bears witness to, of *the fact that* he (*sic*) bears witness, and *of that to which* he (*sic*) bears witness, in front of others.⁸³

Derrida considers this contention of witnessing that could turn the recipients into actual witnesses of the original event on which the speaker is bearing witnessing, as “one of the irreducible folds of bearing witness and presence, of being present as witness, of being present as witness, in existence, as presence: it is the fold as *self*-presence.”⁸⁴ The assertion is that it is possible for a person claiming before others that they have witnessed something, could turn themselves into a transparent medium and be able to transfuse the witness they claim to have been part of to their hearers and thus turn the receivers into witnesses at par with the witness bearer. It goes against the basic condition of being a witness, which is to “having been sufficiently *self*-present *as such*,” and Derrida argues

⁸² Derrida, “Poetics and Politics of Witnessing,” 82. Emphasis original.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 79. Emphasis original.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

that I can “claim to offer reliable testimony only if I claim to be able to witness about it in front of myself, sincerely, without mask and without veil, only if... I claim to know what I know and mean what I know.”⁸⁵ This “self-presence,” is being termed as the “classic condition of responsibility,” which is “having-been-present to other things and to the presence of the other, for instance, to the addressee of the testimony.”⁸⁶

Conversely, the perjurer is also “sufficiently self-present” to the truth as a secret that they are withholding or skewing in and through their testimony aimed at deception. Owing to this close compact of secret, responsibility, and testimony, it is being affirmed that “there is no lie or perjury without responsibility, [and] no responsibility without self-presence.”⁸⁷ This self-presence need not be understood as a transcendental self-consciousness that remains selfsame through various instances of testimony. Instead, Derrida claims that this self-presence is the “phenomenology of an experience that is itself phenomenological,” as in a “*presentation*” that is the “presentation of a presentation, the testimony of or about a testimony: here there is witness for witness, testimony for testimony.”⁸⁸ Thus, self-presence in itself is a testimony that is constantly being brought about as performative and not a stable achievement. And, with regard to bearing witness, the other has “no other choice but to *believe* it or *not believe* it,” and a “verification or transformation [of this testimony] into proof, contestation in the name of ‘knowledge’ belong to a foreign space,” and since it “presupposes the oath, it takes place

⁸⁵ Derrida, “Poetics and Politics of Witnessing,” 79.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 80.

in the space of this *sacramentum*.”⁸⁹ Derrida insists that the scenes of bearing witness are not just the formal settings alone, but every word, glance, look, and gesture is accompanied by a silent “believe me.” Since bearing witness is an “*act of faith without possible proof*,” and “because it *remains alone* and without proof, this *bearing witness cannot be authorized through a third party or through another bearing witness*.”⁹⁰ In fact, this is the crucial point we have been insisting upon from the very beginning—that for both the individual Christian and their communions, there could only be a singular mode of becoming Christian, which in itself is a bearing witness to oneself as oneself and to everyone else. This singular becoming could be had through a multitude of acts and events, but there is no possibility of an outsourcing, as witnessing by definition is non-outsourcable. And, there is not a single avenue that is beyond the purview of bearing witness and thus of becoming Christian.

Coming back to Celan’s poem, Derrida reads it as both a “constative description” that “no one can” bear witness for the witness, and at the same time as a “prohibiting prescription” the “no one should” that “no one can, for it must not be done.”⁹¹ Taking our cue from this reading of Celan’s poem, the Church have received a witness of God in Jesus Christ, and recounting this event in itself does not count as witness and such a witnessing is impossible. Just as in Paul’s phrasing of “the gospel I gospels,” a bearing of witness could only be a new creation for which there cannot be any templates, as each instance is defined by the context and its specificities. Derrida insists that “no one can

⁸⁹ Derrida, “Poetics and Politics of Witnessing,” 82.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 83. Emphasis added.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

replace anyone as witness,” and “no one can bear witness *for* the other as witness,” and that “one cannot bear witness for a bearing witness without taking its worth as bearing witness (which must always be done in the first person).”⁹² This impossibility of replacing, acting on behalf, and bearing witness for the witness, could apply for traditions and civilizations too. Thus, the witness of Christ could only be borne in and through the experience of the cross in the present times. Yet, this experience of the cross is neither a quest for avenues for an “imitation of Christ” in and through the contingencies of a place and time, nor is it echoing of a standardized formulaic statement of salvation being made available through Jesus of Nazareth’s following a prefabricated script couple of millennia in the past. It is rather akin to a “*resistant* reading” that Stephen D. Moore observes within the colonial subject’s approach to the Bible—a reading that refuses the Bible’s “sublation into a transcendental, transcontextual, transcultural signified.”⁹³ The continuing experience of the cross is the performativity that refuses the possibility that the gospel of Christ could be testified without the wounds a communion receives through its being present in the most acute aspect of its immediate situation that makes the claim of Christ’s lordship unsustainable, or that which subsumes the lordship of Christ under its aegis.

⁹² Derrida, “Poetics and Politics of Witnessing,” 88.

⁹³ Stephen D. Moore, “‘And the Gospel Must First Be Published Among all Nations’: The Postcolonial, the Postmodern, and the Evangelical,” in *Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), 95.

4.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, we have tried to read the Gospel of Matthew as a consistent effort at dispelling the various sources and avenues of straightforward missions and bring in nuance to every aspect of living, and thus remove them from every easy embrace of eschatological and perpetual missions. Every precept, commandment, blessedness, and salvific living is being placed under the rubric of reflexive living. The author of this Gospel has expended an enormous amount of effort to carefully distance every possible aspect of life in general, and religious life in particular, from being able to be set on a repetitive course regardless of the issues and challenges of time and place. Thus, the verses termed as the Great Commission could only be read in light of that great effort at dismantling the options for repetitive missions in order to usher in reflexive living. The mode of reflexive living is a constant effort to give witness of oneself to and in relation to what one is witnessing in the world, and to become a witness to the witness of God revealed in Jesus Christ. We have noted Derrida's description of this act of bearing witness as a singular one without any possibility of outsourcing. We have to add that since the process of discernment of what is being witnessed or observed in the world cannot be wrought individualistically, the communion of saints becomes a necessity. Evermore so, in the domain of authoring the witness of individuals, a community or ecclesia becomes a necessity to discern what an appropriate and adequate witness could be, and to translate that discernment into a witness that is substantial to have an impact, and to be sustainable.

CONCLUSION

Behold the *Marturion Dei*, Witness Courageously, and have Life Abundantly

The modern mission enterprise that emerged in the sixteenth century continues to edify the church, and it has irrevocably established that the church ought to be defined by its praxis, and that the service of the word and the sacraments are not sufficient in themselves for the church to be considered as the church of Christ. Immediately after the integration of the International Missionary Council (IMC) into the World Council of Churches (WCC) at the New Delhi Assembly of the WCC in 1961, a study entitled the “Missionary Structure of the Congregation” was launched, and its final report was published in 1968. This report entitled, “The Church for Others and the Church for the World: A Quest for Structures for Missionary Congregations,” emphasized that the “message and structures of the churches can only be formulated with respect to the immense variety of actual realities amidst which we live,” and that “it is the world that must be allowed to provide the agenda for the churches.”¹ And, that the “churches today need to discover and proclaim what is their Lord’s will in relation to what is happening in the world at large,” and by “discover[ing] who are the modern counterparts of those whom Christ requires them ‘to give food, to give drink, to clothe, and to visit.’” This is so because:

It is Christ’s work that was accomplished in principle on the Cross, not ours; and because since then Christians live not by their own achievement of holding fast to

¹ Kinnamon and Cope, *Ecumenical Movement*, 347.

certain habits, but in permanent repentance and the receiving of new life from him, the churches too must permanently repent of what they have been, even of the apparently good things, and stand open to receive the life appropriate to the new situation to which he has brought them.²

Repentance thus becomes the preferred perpetual mode of existence, because, what people—both within and beyond the communions—perceive/observe/see (witness) in church’s existence is neither what it verbally claims, nor what it actually does in order to satisfy any supposed missional mandate, or what it discerns and considers to be its responsibility at any given time and place. It is the overall import and impact of the church’s existence that both the persons within and beyond would perceive, and this witness could never be in sync with the faith confession of the church, and hence the constant need for repentance and conversion that reflect attempts to minimize this variance between confession and existence.

C. F. Andrews, a Christian missionary from Britain, who had been a close friend of Gandhi, and a very active participant in India’s struggle for independence, was tasked to guest edit “Young India”—the weekly journal that Gandhi edited during the 1920s—while Gandhi was on a hunger strike for an indefinite period. In his guest editorial “on the eighteenth day of the fast,” Andrews drew a parallel between Gandhi’s fast and Lamentations 1:12, and he “ended it with this sentence: ‘As I looked upon him there and caught the meaning of it all, I felt as never before in my own experience the meaning of the cross.’”³ E. Stanley Jones, a U.S. Methodist missionary, has worked alongside Andrews in India, and has been an equally influential participant in India’s efforts for

² Kinnamon and Cope, *Ecumenical Movement*, 350.

³ Quoted in E. Stanley Jones, *The Christ of the Indian Road* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1925), 79-80.

independence, and a friend of Gandhi and other leaders of the independence movement. Commenting on Andrews' testimony that India is seeing Christ within the praxis of Gandhi, Jones thus expresses his assent, appreciation, disappointment, and above all his honest admission:

While this inspires us and we are deeply grateful for it, nevertheless, it is a sword that cuts two ways, for some of us have been there these years and deeply regret that Christianity did not burst into meaning through us. However, we are glad that India is seeing. *And let it be quietly said that we too are seeing.*⁴

The last sentence in the above quote is the key to our discussion within this dissertation. Jones is candid enough to confess that it is not just India alone that is “seeing,” but also those who were keen on making India see are also seeing it for themselves. Thus, it is neither the verbal pronouncements and preaching, nor the benign or even the purportedly radical/heroic actions assembled to fulfill a supposed mandate that is somehow presumed to announce the gospel of Christ. But, the very act of “seeing” for anyone—for both those within and beyond the fold of Christian communions—is possible only as a gospel being gospeled anew in and through the most pertinent issues of the context. It is an act of the Gospel being gospeled adequately enough with an ardent quest to have a significant impact on the most acute issues that define a context, and it alone is capable of occasioning the “seeing” for all who have eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts that are sufficiently open, perceptive, and empathetically poised.

Gandhi laid out four suggestions before Jones so that “Christianity [could be] naturalized in India.” The Christians “must begin to live more like Jesus Christ;” “must practice [their] religion without adulterating or toning it down;” “must put [their]

⁴ Jones, *Christ of the Indian Road*, 80. Emphasis added.

emphasis upon love, for love is the center and soul of Christianity;” and that they must “study the non-Christian religions and culture more sympathetically in order to find the good that is them, so that you might have a more sympathetic approach to the people.”⁵ Gandhi’s suggestions point to the fact that the frame of reference or judgment is not any extra-constitutional labor, but what constitutes the communion in the first place—the performativity of its faith and hope confessed in and through the pertinent issues that define its immediate milieu. Thus, the witness that it leaves for others to observe is all that matters, regardless of the rubric under which their words and actions are being begotten. The comment that Jones makes to Gandhi’s second suggestion on adulterating or toning down is eye opening, or even startling for its brutal honesty: “The greatest living non-Christian asks us... not to meet them with an emasculated gospel... But what are we doing? ...we are inoculating the world with a mild form of Christianity, so that it is now practically immune against the real thing.”⁶

Our argument all through has been that this inoculation with mild form of Christianity is being achieved by considering the Christian and her church as an entity effected and sustained through the partaking in a set of ritual actions, who are thereafter capable of establishing actions as their mission without any particular impact on their status as a Christian entity. James Cone contends that the “work of God is not a superimposed activity but a part of one’s existence as a person,” and that “being good is not a societal trait or an extra activity, but a human activity.”⁷ And, in a convoluted

⁵ Jones, *Christ of the Indian Road*, 118-120.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁷ Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 135.

manner, it would permit the church and the Christian to choose a nonthreatening mission within their immediate location or at a sufficient distance so that it would in no way inconvenience the missional actor, and thus once again help preserve their supposed status as a Christian entity.

Jones dedicates considerable portion of his book to account for the questions that he frequently received at the end of all of his speeches at various mission meetings across India. The questions included that of colonialism, imperialism, racism being practiced by Christians, the emergence of the Ku Klux Klan in the U.S., the supposedly Christian nations dragging the whole world into the First World War, the burgeoning materialism, the dependence on force and armament, and the like. Jones' purpose in listing these questions and concerns that emerged within his encounters with non-Christian Indians is comparable to the argument we are trying to assemble. That, it is neither the verbalizing as proclamation, nor any particular action marshaled toward fulfilling a mandate of mission, that matters for peoples who witness/watch/see them, but the living, vibrant, relevant, and adequate Christian confession wrought in and through the spontaneous and responsive involvements in their own immediate situations.

The missionary movement has established that the church could only be defined in and through its praxis, and the notion of the world setting the agenda for the church's praxis is around for almost half-a-century. The whole spectrum of liberation theologies has best espoused both of these emphases. However, the ability of both the Christian and her church to be considered as permanent, static, or accomplished entities, and the praxis that they undertake as a second-step or subsequent act that does not have any constitutive bearing on its entityhood, bestows them with the luxury of choice to assume a praxis that

is comparatively nonthreatening to its worldly existence. Our effort in the first chapter was to problematize the very notion of entity, and demonstrate that entity, identity, or being is the effect of a consistent performativity.

Thus, the Christian and her church could continue repenting and converting by confessing their faith and hope in Jesus Christ, only in and through their praxis that confronts that most pertinent lordship that unswervingly nullifies or circuitously subsumes underneath it the church's profession of Christ's lordship over history. The actual actions and the avenues of praxis would continue to be the same as what the church currently does under the rubric of mission. However, it is in and through these actions as the very act of confession of faith and hope in Jesus Christ, that the Christian and her church could continue becoming and sustain itself as an entity as such. This way praxis becomes an inalienable constitutive component through which alone a faith confession could be wrought and maintained. It would thus become impossible to foreclose themselves from the detrimental lordships that define the immediate context of a communion. Consequently, the confession of faith and hope in the gospel of Christ would inevitably become an oppositional theological word against those other prevailing lordships that are either obvious or duplicitous in making evident their intentions of either obliterating the Christian claim to Christ's lordship over history, or subsuming the Christian proclamation underneath them. The essential difference that the giving up on the conception of static, complete, or accomplished Christian and her church is that the mode and method in which a confession of faith could be made is purely determined by the context, and thus no particular mode or method of proclaiming the Gospel could be construed as of eternal verity. If the situation demands preaching, or immediate assistance

to alleviate the suffering, then those would be the preferred mode and method of communion's performativity of its confession. If it were something else that the context calls for, then that would become the chosen vehicle of expression, and no mode or method could ever be insisted upon as requiring relentless prosecution. An insistence on any particular performative mode or method would in itself become an attempt at foreclosing oneself from the significance of the context and that which it necessitates.

We began our journey with a conversation with what we have termed as the Joban tradition. Beginning with the biblical Job, who helped us identify the impossibility and futility of organizing life around mandatory predetermined acts that are perceived to be beneficial to the other and for the common good. In fact, it gets proven as acts that serve oneself to feel righteous and also to assuage one's own guilt for the social ordering that continue reproducing the many texts of suffering and exclusions. It is not a question of systemic solutions versus individual or communal charity, but one wherein performative actions by the self are evolved in response to the call of the other. Since the call of the other is the very inaugural of the never-ending process of becoming human, the self would have an equal interest as the other, albeit, the interest of a different order, to address the question around which such actions are being imagined and engendered. Job turning vindictive and contemptuous against the former recipients of his charity, mercy, and justice, points to the separateness of the social locations of the privileged and the disprivileged. With the help of Sandra Harding's call to the privileged persons to become "traitorous" to one's own social location, we strived to argue that it is necessary to conceive both privilege and disprivilege as being produced by a single discursive text, rather than two separate ones meting out privilege and disprivilege respectively. The only

way to remove actions from the domain of benevolence, charity, and mission, that does nothing other than sustain the texts of othering, is to consider both the locations of privilege and disprivilege as defined by a single text, rather than separate ones.

The texts—of many oppressions, injustices, exclusions, and suffering—that thus prevent both the privileged and the disprivileged from becoming human, and thus requiring both to have an equal interest in deconstructing the texts that metes out unwarranted suffering to one and unearned ease for the other. Thus we have argued that becoming human is a singular act of being called to responsibility by the other, and that the possibility of being and remaining human need not be sustained in any other facet of life other than to assert equality of all before the law. This would keep open the possibility for everyone to be permanently considered human within the parameters of state apparatuses, and also the possibility for entering and striving to remain within the trajectory of becoming humans by heeding to the call of the other, or the wholly other. On the secular side of the spectrum, the authority of this insistence on everyone's humanity derives from the theory of State that derives its sovereignty from those who constitute it—"we the people..." and on the religious side, the affirmation that God created everyone in God's image, and thus endowed them with inalienable rights and reverence.

By extension, we argued that there cannot similarly be a possibility of being or remaining a secure or accomplished Christian who in turn is able to assume various missional engagements, and that it is only within responsive and responsible actions that a Christian or a disciple of Christ could become possible. The voice from the whirlwind that addressed Job emphasizes that there is only the process of coming into responsibility,

and thereby, for our purposes, there is only a process of becoming Christian or becoming human, and never a complete resolution to the texts of othering. Thus, while remaining complacent by foreclosing oneself to the call of the other is sinful, trying to force a total resolution by setting up teleological missions toward any particular understanding of eschatology could only be catastrophic, and perhaps even demonic. Fascism and totalitarian communist experiments of twentieth century have amply demonstrated the downside of striving to precipitate any particular eschatological end that is thoroughly defined and the pathway to it was deemed to be manifestly clear.

With the help of Gayatri Spivak, we tracked the act of foreclosure at play within the philosophical traditions, and which in turn precipitates itself as civilizing missions. The mission that is doomed from the very start owing to the axiomatics of imperialism within which such acts are authored, makes it possible to foreclose the affect of the other's cultural and social heritage, and thus to the denegation of all homologous components encountered within the subject context. With the help of this concept of foreclosure, we tracked the history of Christian foreclosure of affect from other religious traditions. This abiding foreclosure of affect has propelled to disparate parallel tracks that which ought to be always held together, inform each other, and remain open to mutual influence and resultant change—the genuine attempts at theologically accounting for the prevalence of other religious traditions, the efforts at securing religious conversions, and the various other social engagements.

Since missions trained to attain, or at the least to be attuned to a particular eschatology through a particular teleology could only be thought of through the possession of an essence that remains selfsame, inheritable, and irreducible, we have

strived to read the Christian testimony as a never-ending demolition of every conception of essence. If there is no such essence could be thought off, or if the conception of essence is patently antithetical to the Christian testimony, then a Christian could only performatively become in and through their witness. We have strived to read the scriptural witness from the call of Abraham from the land of Ur to the Empty Tomb as a consistent effort at subverting the conception of selfsame essence. With the help of Spivak's attempt at problematizing the exclusivist binary subject-predications that either in the "idealist" version perceives the subject as consciousness alone, or in the "materialist" as "labor-power" alone, we tried to complicate the missional efforts that strive to ultimately reach the consciousness of persons. Even when material components are accounted for, it is merely perceived as a secure way of reaching the ultimate target of consciousness, and Spivak demonstrates the inability of neatly delineating the two predications that are being considered as oppositional, and the many interplays that define them both, and thus the impossibility of securing one alone.

Barth places a very high premium on the act of preaching and considers it as one form in which Christ could make available his presence before the congregation. However, it is important to recognize that Barth is not referring to the preaching that solely seek the conversion of the religious other, but as church's encounter with the word of God. He is sufficiently vigilant enough to not make this understanding of presence as automatically occurring every time someone preaches, or as a presence that could remain as a permanent possession or residue after the event of preaching. More often than not, preaching gets too easily equated with the proclamation that Christ is lord, and it disregards the fact that this simple equation of preaching to proclamation is not how

Barth and his fellow Christians confessed the lordship of Christ with Barmen Declaration, during the most difficult times in human history. Since almost all preachers in the settings where conversion is being sought strive to make Christ present before their hearers, we bring in Jacques Derrida's work around the concept of presence. What Derrida demonstrates is not that there is no presence at all, but the impossibility of producing or calibrating presence. We enlist this understanding to argue that any presence is possible only within critical pondering. That any claim to having access to a pre-critical presence is an attempt to surreptitiously author certain political dispensations that proves beneficial to those appealing to producible or simplistically available presence and enlisting them to serve their own productions.

We take note of Gilles Deleuze's work that shows that uniqueness and universality are the properties that arise from the problem that is being encountered and not a quality of the answers. The obvious significance we gather is that the uniqueness of a religious answer to the human predicament arises from the problem of predicament in itself, and not from the respective answers. If so, the mode of engagement needs to become one of conversation around the question of human predicament and the strengths and merits of the respective answers. Since an answer arises from an encounter with a specific problem, the not so obvious, and thus the matter of utmost significance for us with regard to our discussion on becoming Christian and human is that that without any contemporary encounter with a particular problem, the previously codified answers would not suffice. This calls for genuine contextual encounter with the problems, before any answer thereof could be produced and promoted as unique and universal. Fortright encounter with the context and the performativity that emerges out of this encounter, and

that which is the confession of church's faith and hope in Jesus Christ, is not a deliberate act on the part of the church to have or demonstrate such a witness. The witness of the church is what becomes evident in and through its eventual performativity, and no amount of calibration is capable of producing the witness that is being readily and sincerely given by both Andrews and Jones on Gandhi's praxis.

In the second chapter, we began by trying to unsettle the continuist reading of Christian history as singularly fashioned through incessant preaching. Jesus preached and begot the apostles, who then preached and generated the nucleus of the ecclesia, which in turn would continue diligently with preaching and become successful enough to convert the whole of Roman Empire and other parts of the world. This has provided the rationale to continue with the model of incessant evangelical preaching as the sole begetter of followers, and that which is being portrayed as synonymous to Christian being and existence. We have tracked enough material to argue that it is not possible to sustain such a claim of incessant preaching aimed at religious conversions for the period before Constantine's embrace of Christianity. We argued that the difference that the community demonstrated in its life, and the Gospel it thus performatively announced in opposition to the imperial gospel of salvation, did serve to turn it into a magnet that attracted to it everyone who was receptive to its force field. And, from the time of Constantine, with or without the accompaniment of preaching, no conversion to Christianity could be thought of as totally beyond the sway of the axiomatics of imperialism.

With our different understanding of the source of conversions to Christianity in the pre-Constantine era, we had an extensive tracking of themes of David Bosch's book entitled "Transforming Mission," a text that has become part of the missiological canon.

We did note Bosch's recounting of the history of modern mission enterprise, and the relatively recent enlargement of the notion of mission to encompass disparate agenda items under its broad canopy. Our attention has been on Bosch's reading of the Gospel of Matthew as an inverted pyramid being precariously balanced on a three-verse pericope at the very end of the book, and as one that anchors the law and the prophets for Christians who have impeccably sublated the law of the Jewish tradition. And, we did note how Bosch understands mission as an inalienable component of a secure teleology that is supposed to usher in an eschatology that has been already foretold. All that is required since the Christ event is an unwavering and heightened involvement in the mission. Bosch notes his quarrel with Barth for removing eschatology from human grasp and for thwarting human ability to pursue a teleology that could be coordinated with an eschatological end. We note this quest that securely weds any teleology to an eschatology that has become transparent to the proponents of any mission, as both the quintessential pitfall of the construct of mission, and the one against which we have been mounting our deconstructive problematization. What makes Bosch weary of Barth is that which we consider as the unique and enduring foresight of Barth's theological contribution.

We sided with John G. Flett's contention that mission has become a second-step activity that the church as a secure entity institutes and sustains. However we strived to problematize his remedy of solidifying the trinitarian interpretation of "sending" and in effect rendering Trinity as a scientific reality that would never require a faith affirmation or acts thereof. And, we tried to read it as an attempt at "mausoleumification" that contributes nothing significant to the faith formation and sustenance, while ascertaining it to atrophy as a benign artifact.

With regard to Marion Grau's work, we are in accord with its general sensibilities, her impressive effort to cherish and affirm the mission history of both the previously missionary sending and receiving communities, and of what it ultimately seeks in terms authentic engagements with those beyond the fold of the churches. Grau ably surfaces the pitfalls and challenges involved in the conventional conception of mission and of its usual conduct, and has helpfully redefined the terms and practices involved in engagement between peoples of different social and geographical locations. With her emphasis on mutuality, and envisioning the encounter between peoples of differing contexts and religious belongings serving as a *pharmakon* capable of changing both the self and other, Grau is well beyond the bounds of the extra-constitutional, second-step, and unidirectional construct of mission that seeks changes only within the existence of others. If the encounter is equally the *pharmakon* for both the self and the other, then it would continually undo and remake both of them, and thus would become a constitutive component for them both. And, this *pharmakon* could be nothing other than the incalculable and non-constructible witness that invariably envelops both the self and the other, and that which even though ensues from the whole of their own individual becoming, their respective witness would always remain beyond any deliberation or calibration of either of them. Thus, Grau's retaining of the word "mission" could then only be considered as a synonym for engagement and encounter with the other, and not as an endeavor that arise from the security of the contention that the entityhood of the missional self is a given, regardless of its being in any such act of engagement or not. With her insistence on encounter and responsible engagement as mutual *pharmakon*, and with her non-insistence on any particular mode or method as the preferred vehicle of

engagement, and the non-seeking any singular outcome for the mutual engagements, Grau's work has already transitioned and have become an exploration of the concept of witness. Thus, as Derrida considers Hegel as the "last philosopher of the book and the first thinker of writing," we could very well consider Grau's work as the last book on mission and the first one on witness.⁸

We have argued that by continuing to work within the rubric of mission would deprive the churches from a genuine encounter. The choice and convenience that the concept of mission provides would enable the churches all over the world, and especially those in the West, to be in a mode of subpar living by conveniently choosing fields of mission far off from their immediate vicinity. As opposed to unilateral missions originated by an accomplished entity, we have proposed "witness" as a process within which alone any entity could be thought of as emerging and continuously sustained; a witness that would come across as attentive, open, confident, and courageous enough to address the challenges in the immediate domain of the churches. Such a witness is essentially the faith confession and proclamation, and the doctrines and creeds could only be perceived as prompts to such a costly confession, and never as the confessions in themselves. The relationship that such a church would then seek out with near and distant other peoples and partner churches would thus become an extension of what it is already confessing within its own neighborhood.

We have examined the theological contention of the widely accepted contemporary concept of Human Resource Management that reduces a vast majority of humans into subhuman status of mere resources or usable things. We also examined the

⁸ Derrida, *Grammatology*, 26.

incident of the financial crisis in 2008, and we tried to read it as a contemporary miracle as the train of events astonishingly stopped short of attaining its full potential and final goal of merely impoverishing individual persons while saving the institutional perpetrators. Then there are the constructs like deregulation that remain in currency for the last few decades. Just as God could hand over Job to the designs of the devil, the theory and practice of deregulation contends that there are some humans who have both the godlike power and the impunity to handover other humans, whom they consider as different or lesser than themselves, to endure the premeditated cruelty that some humans are capable of accumulating into their commercial enterprises. There seldom arises a theological word of anathema or condemnation from the church on any of the hegemonic concepts that govern the contemporary world for over a few decades now. The theological import of these concepts are so elementary that it requires no particular theological genius to discern their direct opposition to Christ's claim to lordship and the consequent claim of universal human equality. What helps the church to foreclose itself from these militantly detrimental claims of lordship is the notion of a securely existing Christian and her church that could become and remain as such regardless of its actions. When combined with the reduction of the Christian proclamation as a mere echoing of a formulaic assertion of salvation being made available through Jesus' death on the cross, and with the endless options of subsequent or second-step involvements that the church could beget as the mission of its choosing, the foreclosure of the context becomes absolute and intractable. This three-part combination that includes the notion of an enduring existence of the Christian entity regardless any of its actions, its ability of administering both a truncated proclamation that it chooses to solely verbalize, and the

missions that it seeks out of its own will and pleasure, ensures the status quo of both the church and the world.

To delineate the contours of witnessing as confession in itself, we tried to account for the theological heritage being bequeathed to us. Reinhold Niebuhr interprets the “Judgment of the Nations” section of the Gospel of Matthew, as Jesus’ way of affirming the messianic while abrogating messianism, and forever placing it beyond the grasp of stifling legalism that lends itself to missions of either nominal compliance or zealous insistence and institution. In either of these modes, what get lost is the very intent of the messianic imperative to keep history open by not considering as absolute any of the human constructions and interpretations thereof. When combined with Jurgen Moltmann’s reading of Jesus’ call to repentance, we strived to surface it as a constitutive component of a life of witness. Repentance becomes an inalienable part of life for persons and communions to continue interrogating their current witness, and thus to conjure relevant ones as necessitated by the *metanoia* they go through. It is not the impossible format of a retreat and return with a renewed focus, as humans could never stop working on behalf of or against something, but a change brought about in the performativity in itself.

With her reading of the Book of Revelation, Catherine Keller prompts us to the possibility of a performative witness that simultaneously strives to keep alive the hope for justice within the materiality of ecosocial relationality, while circumventing the ever-present temptation of seeking eschatological consummation through human actions, or through divine omnipotence. Ivone Gebara lends us resources to reaffirm Eucharist as a *sign* for the very commonness and the single thing that humans are capable of doing—

turning their share of flesh and blood into food and drink for themselves, for their own, or for others. To affirm and participate in the Eucharist as a *signal* to perpetually remembering how the witness of God—Jesus of Nazareth—has carried out this singular act. Thus, the partaking in the Eucharist is to behold the witness or the *marturia* of Jesus, and to receive it as a prompt to “Go and do likewise” (Lk. 10:37), in our own situations and within our own abilities.

We considered the Confessing Church and its Barmen Declaration as paradigmatic to Christian witness, and we continued to argue that the construct of mission in fact thwarts the possibility of similar confessions that are required in every time and place. As an example for an issue that begs for a theological word from the church, we have noted the recently emerged conception of “human resources” and the ontological difference it posits—those who own, govern, and operate, as humans, and all others who have to work for a living as mere resources akin to any of the other consumables.

We did an extensive reading of the Barth’s concept of witness and witnessing, not only through his theological compendium, but also in light of his own witness as a steady participant in the sociopolitical affairs of the world, and especially as the one who composed the Barman Declaration. Our attempt had been to demonstrate that it is possible to read some of Barth’s unfavorable words on other religious traditions, as the ground for a different understanding on religious faith itself. We strived to re-present Barth’s conception of the constructedness of religions as a liberating act that would enable all religions including Christianity to embrace a humble witness. A witness that is simultaneously confident and courageous enough to risk itself to make its confession

visible, relevant and pertinent, yet would consistently resist making its constructions synonymous to the Divine that they strive testifying.

In the final chapter, we have tried to do a reading of the Gospel of Matthew with the twin foci of the texts of the Sermon on the Mount, and the Judgment of the Nations. We attempted to demonstrate that, when read in light of this twin foci that keep every desirable aspect and acts of life beyond the simplistic grasp of repetitive missions that could either be carried out minimally or maximally, the pericope termed as the Great Commission turns out to be something entirely different than is currently purported to be. Discipleship, baptism, and teaching become thoroughly discursive acts for which there could not be set precedents or templates, and perpetually could only be a new creation that could solely emerge with a solemn discernment of the context within which these are being effectuated. When combined with the verdict that none enters the kingdom of God unless one turns and become like a child, the call becomes one to be continuously aware of the metaphysical enclosures within which humans invariably live and cannot do without. This call, we have tried to read as one to not make missions out of any particular metaphysical enclosure, but to be consistently attentive to this very feature and possibility of every metaphysical conception to turn missional.

We noted Brigitte Kahl's work on the concept of "justification by faith," one that in effect defined the modernity in the West through the Protestant Reformation, as something vastly different when read along with the many works of justification that the Roman Empire offered in order to define its self and other. Apart from challenging the received notions of justification, what we tried to account for, on the one hand, is the politics involved in keeping "justification by faith" as a mere polemic against Hebrew

law. And, on the other, considering “faith” as something of a person’s interiority, and social structures as bereft of any theological import, allows contemporary Christians to consider themselves as justified within the social systems they are entrenched, and concurrently consider themselves to be also justified before God through their private faith. Being masters of two private and separate domains of justification allows persons and communions to serve two masters with finesse and without feeling guilty. As a way of a different avenue of existence that combines these two, the now separately held private domains; we have highlighted the need to cease the miracles that keep appearing every now and then and to seek resurrection instead of *reparatio* and *renovatio*.

We did note that the resurrected body is thoroughly new through the construct of unrecognizability that the gospel writers invoke. The wounds of victimhood that mark the resurrect body and that which alone establishes its actual and sole connection with the previous body, simultaneously declares the resurrected one’s steadfast solidarity with the victims of the dispensations that are passing away, and calls for perpetual vigilance until the eschaton against the ubiquitous possibility of othering. The attempts at *reparatio* and *renovatio* are efforts aimed at reinstatement and revival of the previous body, or bringing to life of all that are dead, with the aim and hope of recapturing and reliving past practices and orderings. The attempt at seeking resurrection in and through worldly events and happenings would testify to church’s faith and hope in Christ, and would leave a credible witness before everyone on what the church means by Christ when it invokes this name. This eventual witness in itself would serve as an invitation to everyone to either re-envisioning one’s Christian becoming, or for those beyond the fold of the church to become part of its journey of bearing witness.

By way of a prolegomenon we have noted in our introduction chapter, the understanding of faith with which the exploration within this dissertation is being carried out. We have accounted for the constitutive character or the necessity of violence, violation, and discrimination in every single avenue of human life and these very requirements becoming the source of sinfulness—thus sin as original and inescapable. The ambiguity and inability to exactly determine the required amount and mode of these constitutive necessities that induces fear and trembling, and that which cannot ever be *a priori* resolved. We also noted that the emergence of subjectivity is a work or struggle with what is already present and never a pure construction out of pristine components, and hence religious faith as embracing the wholly other becomes similar to what Jesus called—to be born again. This act of being born again is not a singular event, but a continuous characteristic that could only be brought about through a constant beholding of the witness of God, or the *marturion Dei*. The courageous witness that thus ensues is to have life abundantly—a life not tethered to any notion of an overarching mission. Thus, go forth and behold the *marturion Dei*, witness courageously, and have life abundantly...

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