

## Providentia Missio Dei amid Adverse Global Conflicts

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### ABSTRACT

Since its reinterpretation in the second half of the 20th century, the *Missio Dei* has become a primary missiological framework that embraces human redemption as the direct work or by-product of God's intervention. Accordingly, or under the premise of *divina providentia* (divine providence), the *Missio Dei* then emphasizes God's absolute stewardship and preservation of all of His creation, which includes but is not limited to human creation. Although the idea of divine providence may understandably at times be questioned, it may equally be invoked by those in desperate search of divine salvific intervention or protection in the face of tragedy and adversity. That is to say, faith in divine providence may be relied upon perhaps to reinforce the much-desired salvific hope amid hardships such as destructive conflicts of the world. That being said, or to the extent that global conflicts not only damage the very nature of human societies but also worsen a crisis of faith in divine existence, constant theological justification of the divine providential plan encompassing salvation remains an absolute necessity. Consequently, this paper combines both *missio Dei* and divine providence to form the *providentia missio Dei* as a systematic framework in missiology redefining divine salvific acts amid global chaos. Accordingly, both the systematic and integrative literature research methods are utilized to reconcile Divine Providence and the *missio Dei* into *Providentia missio Dei*.

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### INTRODUCTION

The Latin theological framework known as *missio Dei*, or "mission of God," explains how the mission to achieve human salvation in its entirety finds its basis in God's essence. As a cornerstone of mission theology, the *missio Dei* has been used, especially since its correct interpretation in the second half of the 20th century, to emphasize God's direct active role in the mission of salvation. Although the historical open use of the *missio Dei* dates back to the time of Augustine of Hippo, its contemporary formulation is decorously linked to a conference of the International Mission Council (IMC) held in Willingen, Germany, in 1952.<sup>1</sup> As a result, its rediscovery gave rise to an extraordinarily extensive body of literature, which includes excellent academic attempts to rationalize the *missio Dei* as a fundamental theory that forms the basis of mission theology as a whole. Pioneers of missiology such as David Bosch (1929-1992), Lesslie Newbigin (1909-1998), Johannes Verkuyl (1908-2001) and

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Kemper, "The Missio Dei in Contemporary Context," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 38, no. 4 (2014): 188–90.

Ralph Winter (1924-2009), to name just a few, not only emphasized the importance of the *missio Dei* in missiology but also drew on it to shape contemporary missiological thinking and practice. Although the political context of this conference is sparsely discussed in the literature, it took place in the period after the Second World War when many countries were seeking independence and striving for political self-determination.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, or in particular, the session of this conference overlapped with ongoing global conflicts such as the First Indochina War (1946–1954), the Korean War (1950–1952), and the then-increasing Cold War tensions (1947–1991). In view of these ongoing global conflicts and in the context of the then-divided changing world, the Willingen IMC of 1952 not only had the ecumenical obligation to promote peace but also to set a new course for inclusive mission work worldwide. Such an integrative mission approach meant not only advocating for global peace but also actively facilitating healing for conflict-affected world populations. Another way to accomplish such an urgent task, especially given the ever-increasing frequency of global conflict, may be to promote theological research that emphasizes God's ongoing intervention in the universe.

Anchored in the *missio-politica* as the political commissioning of the *missio Dei*, this paper redefines the doctrine of *divina providentia* (divine providence) towards redemptive context to synopsise the *providentia missio Dei* in the face of global conflict. In other words, it unites these two theological concepts in a missiological framework that pursues the expression of *providentia missio Dei* in the context of and against destructive global conflicts. This exercise is currently essential since there appears to be no theological scholarship in general and no missionary research in particular that clearly expresses a framework that characterizes the simultaneity of *missio Dei* and divine providence in the context of world wars. In contrast to general divine providence, which expresses God's maintenance of the natural order of the universe, divine providence is here conceived within the framework of the *missio Dei*, thereby conveying *providentia missio Dei* in the face of deleterious global conflict. As theological concepts, *missio Dei* and divine providence are closely related, as both emphasize not only God's active involvement in the world but also his overarching plan of salvation, which undeniably includes innocent victims of global conflicts. Consequently, the hypothetical assimilation of these two theomissional concepts is not a mere intellectual exercise in a vacuum, but rather an expression of the existence of divine redemptive acts even amid international conflicts, restoring hope to those negatively affected by world wars. Lastly, or as already introduced above, the goal of this work is to develop the *Providentia missio Dei* as a comprehensive missiological framework that encompasses two theological tenets in the form of divine providence and the *missio Dei*. As such or at least, since these two tenets are used here not as an end in themselves but as tools in the work of constructing providential *missio Dei*, both systematic and integrative methods may very well be suitable for such an important exercise. On the one hand, therefore, the systematic method will enable the concurrent gathering or interpretation of divine providence and *missio Dei* at the same time, while the intergrative method will endeavor to harmonize them into *providentia missio Dei*.

To achieve the above objectives, the work presented in this paper is organized by first presenting the incremental nature of global conflicts from their historical actualities to their manifestations in the contemporary context. Second, the general idea of divine providence is presented and concretely described in a way that opens the discussion of the inexorable presence of the *missio Dei* in the context of global conflict. Third, the historical background of the *missio Dei* itself is described in a way that makes its meaning transferable to a variety of contexts, including but not limited to the context of global conflict. In other words, the historical background of the *missio Dei* is explained in a way that, among other things, allows its meaning to be applied to the context of destructive global conflicts and other undesirable real-life situations. Fourth, or more systematically, the *missio Dei* is traced to its historical proximity to global conflicts that, among other things, shaped the thoughts of participants at the 1952 IMC conference. The first part of this section traces the broad political context that shaped the church's mission from the effects of the Second World War to the beginning of the Cold War. In particular, however, it reflects how the climax of the Chinese Communist Revolution (August 1, 1927 – October 1, 1949), while ending years of government unrest,

<sup>2</sup> Edward A Laing, "The Norm of Self-Determination, 1941-1991," *Cal. W. Int'l LJ* 22 (1991): 209; Gregory H Fox, "Self-Determination in the Post-Cold War Era: A New Internal Focus?" (HeinOnline, 1994).

also ushered in political changes that negatively affected Christian missions in China and elsewhere in the world. Consequently, the background of such an unforgettable historical context, which, although negatively affecting the missionary activities of the Church, revealed how Divine Providence leads the world toward salvation even in the face of devastating global unrest. Comprehensively, the theocentric approach to mission in the second half of the 20th century recognized the centrality of divine providence as expressed in acts of salvation (*providentia missio Dei*), even amid destructive human history as encompassing global conflicts.

### Global Conflicts

Global conflicts constitute a somewhat popular topic in the literature and therefore almost all disciplines within, but not limited to, the broad academic spectrum of the humanities and social sciences have addressed their manifestations and dynamics. Traditionally, conflicts that are referred to as global conflicts usually arise from transnational actors or multiple countries pursuing conflicting interests. On the other hand, intranational or intrastate conflicts are often limited to the borders of a single country, just as regional conflicts are more broadly limited to continental zones. However, some “geographically limited conflicts” are sometimes considered global or take on a global dimension to the extent that they either involve transnational issues, have detrimental effects on global stability, involve global influences, or simply attract global attention. For example, regional conflicts such as those in the Middle East or East Asia have not only destabilized that region but have also recently had detrimental effects on global economic stability and security).<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, the reverse also applies, particularly in sporadic cases in which global conflicts not only destabilize but also either spill over or exacerbate existing local tensions to the point that internal conflicts arise. For example, in recent years the conflict in Syria has expanded and exacerbated historic tensions leading to internal conflicts in countries such as Lebanon and Iraq.<sup>4</sup> An uncontrollable situation develops where parties are not only theoretically at odds but also actively fighting to defend their interests or claims—be they autonomy, power, or resources.<sup>5</sup> What occasionally begins with minor ideological differences, tribal disputes, historical grievances, territorial disputes, religious tensions, or even environmental factors as indirect underlying factors often develop into direct confrontation, triggering major global conflicts.<sup>6</sup> Although there has never been a time in human history when conflicts of a global scale could be said to have been less damaging or had fewer devastating consequences, they have become increasingly complex and multifaceted over time. The present-day global conflicts are characterized more than ever by a multitude of actors and advanced technological capabilities that, among other things, surpass traditional solution strategies. This is supported by Spencer, Spencer & Yang submitting that the character of typical contemporary global conflicts differs significantly from wars known before the establishment of the United Nations (UN) by the global community in the mid-1940s.<sup>7</sup>

Consequently, evolving conflict strategies, technological advances, and the involvement of non-state actors, among other factors, throughout history have made peacemaking institutions such as the United Nations appear ineffective in the face of damaging global conflicts.

Although the number of global conflicts appeared to be declining since 1946, or at least following the founding of the United Nations (UN) about 79 years ago, there appears to have been a

<sup>3</sup> A. Fogaš and V. Verba, “Ongoing Conflicts in the Middle East and Their Impact on Europe,” *European Journal of Geopolitics* 4, no. 1 (2016): 51–67; Andreas Leutzsch, “Global Lines in Conflicts in the Middle East,” *Güvenlik Stratejileri Dergisi* 15, no. 29 (2019): 151–97.

<sup>4</sup> Reinoud Leenders, “‘Regional Conflict Formations’: Is the Middle East Next?,” *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 5 (2007): 959–82; Bassel F Salloukh, “The Syrian War: Spillover Effects on Lebanon,” *Middle East Policy* 24, no. 1 (2017).

<sup>5</sup> Scott Atran, “The Devoted Actor: Unconditional Commitment and Intractable Conflict across Cultures,” *Current Anthropology* 57, no. S13 (2016): S192–203; H. Rosa, *The Uncontrollability of the World* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2020); S. Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> L. Sjoberg, *Gendering Global Conflict: Toward a Feminist Theory of War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Siniša Malešević, “The Sociology of New Wars? Assessing the Causes and Objectives of Contemporary Violent Conflicts,” *International Political Sociology* 2, no. 2 (2008): 97–112.

<sup>7</sup> Dayle E Spencer, William J Spencer, and With Honggang Yang, “Closing the Mediation Gap: The Ethiopia/Eritrea Experience,” *Security Dialogue* 23, no. 3 (1992): 94–98.

significant increase in recent years.<sup>8</sup> Some of the major conflicts that took place at the global level since then include but are not limited to the Korean War (1950-1953), Vietnam War (1955-1975), Cold War (1947-1991), Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), and Gulf War (1990-1991). This list must undoubtedly include a series of military regional interconnected conflicts between Israel and its Arab neighbors, including, but not limited to, the Arab-Israeli War (1948), the Six-Day War (1967) and the Yom Kippur War (1973). The intensifying regional conflicts in Mali (since 2012) in West Africa and Ethiopia (2020-2022) in East Africa on the one hand and the civil war in Myanmar (since 2021) in Southeast Asia on the other hand, among others made 2022 one of the deadliest years since the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. That is, although some of these conflicts are not typically categorized globally, they still had devastating impacts and impacts that were felt beyond their limited borders. The situation is aggravated by two major ongoing conflicts at the global level: the Russo-Ukrainian war (since 2014) and its recent intensification from 24 February 2022 and the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian war (since 1948) and is interconnecting with the above-mentioned Arab-Israeli wars. Notwithstanding other ongoing conflicts, the Russo-Ukrainian and Israeli-Palestinian wars alone not only continue to result in an ascending humanitarian catastrophe marked by an inexorable rise in human displacement and casualties but also disrupt global trade and food security.

### Divine Providence

Etymologically, the term providence is derived from the Latin term *providentia* denoting foresight or forethought and providence or provision of care by the deity in the religious sense. However, more than merely knowing about the future, or at least as per the unembroidered implication of Latin *providere*, the word providence carries the connotation or literal meaning of 'foreseeing' *Sub specie aeternitatis*. To this end, or perhaps far more than in an effort to emphasize divine sovereignty, leading ancient philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, followed by Stoic philosophers such as Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, emphasized providence in the context of the omniscient plan. In religious frameworks, it is assumed that the divine being or God of monotheistic religions created the universe specifically with perfect foreknowledge and eternal intention to sustain it. Consequently, or at least against the possibility of minimizing God's involvement in his own creation, monotheism holds that the universe exists under His constant sovereign guidance and fatherly care. In particular, monotheistic religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam support the concept of divine providence through the belief that God is not only actively involved in the universe but his eternal will also guides it to its sustenance. This is naturally against positions such as deism, which among others teaches that the creator of the universe, initiated it, and then withdrew to allow it to operate somewhat autonomously.

Nevertheless, it is safe to say that traditional theism in general and Christian theology in particular believe that God created the universe and placed it under his sovereign guidance and governance. Furthermore, Christian believers in particular acknowledge not only God's sovereignty over the cosmos that encompasses the world but also his providence in loco parentis over human destiny. That is, the core Christian belief in this regard is that God, as sovereign Creator, could not abandon His own creation or allow it to run its course without His omniscient guidance. Although different Christian traditions and resulting theologies interpret divine providence differently, they generally view it as one of the central principles that further underscores God's benevolent plan for human salvation, particularly within the framework of special providence. To this end, the next two sections focus on distinguishing or deriving special providence from general providence, particularly with the *ad hoc* objective of highlighting the importance of human salvation, first, within divine providence and, second, in relation to the *missio Dei*.

In Christian theology, a distinction is often made between general and special providence, the former referring to God's preservation of the universe as the natural order in general, while the latter refers to his extraordinary intervention in human life in particular. Although some argue otherwise that general providence includes human creation in general while special providence includes the people of God (עַם הָאֱלֹהִים) in the sense of the Hebrew Bible context, this article, on the contrary, categorizes

<sup>8</sup> D.A. Backer and P.K. Huth, "Global Trends in Armed Conflict, 1946–2012," in *Peace and Conflict 2014*, ed. P.K. Huth, J. Wilkenfeld, and D.A. Backer (Routledge, 2016), 18–22.

comprehensive creation under "general providence." and reserves the "special providence" for human beings. This distinction finds its biblical support largely in several writings that express the open idea that God's providence, although intended generally for all of creation, extends in a very special way to the human sphere (Amos 9:8; Is. 43:2-5, 14; 1 Tim. 4:10; Rom 8:28). On the one hand, God's providence continually sustains all of creation and even guides it toward its eternal goal, but on the other hand, the same providence is exercised with a certain degree of specialty when directed toward human creatures. Furthermore, this distinction arises from the creation account, according to which God first created everything *ex nihilo*, but then created humans in His own image (*Imago Dei*), i.e. sui generis in a class of God's creatures. Consequently, evil will never triumph over such a specialty, for God as its Creator is not abstractly overprotective (Exodus 20:5-6), but takes practical measures to free all of humanity from the destructive fortress of evil infinitely.

### *Missio Dei*

The term "*missio Dei*" means "mission of God" and comes from the Latin theological expression that includes "missio" (sending) for "mission" and "Dei" (God). Although this mission framework broadly originated even before the era of Augustine of Hippo and consequently found in Martin Luther's thoughts about mission, it has been increasingly revolutionized in missiology since the second half of the 20th century. In particular, the 1952 conference of the International Missionary Council (IMC) (hereinafter 1952 IMC Conference) held in Willingen, Germany, redefined *missio Dei* back to mission theoretical prominence. While the previous years were characterized by an "anthropo-ecclesiocentric" understanding of mission, the 1952 IMC conference gave mission theology a "cosmotheocentric" twist. Although the term '*missio Dei*' as it is used today did not appear in the conference materials themselves, it was formulated in broad terms by the Swiss Reformed theologian, Karl Barth (1886-1968) as encompassing the inherent activity of God (*actio Dei*) in the context of human salvation.<sup>9</sup> Building upon such foundation, it was then first coined in 1934 by the German theologian Karl Hartenstein at the IMC in Madras, India, broadly emphasizing God as the source of mission.<sup>10</sup>

Consequently, it was further developed at or following the 1952 IMC conference as a central theme of Christian mission theology, particularly as contained in Hartenstein's Report of Willingen, which presented mission as an invitation for human participation in God-self sending. What was striking, however, in the context of the 1952 IMC conference is its emphasis on a Trinitarian basis for mission, perhaps far stronger than the phrase '*missio Dei*' with its initial ambiguities.<sup>11</sup> The *missio* formula, which emerged from or characterized the 1952 IMC mission theology emphasized mission as proceeding from triune centrality wherein God-Self is sending God the Father (*missio Pater*), God the Son (*missio Christos*) and God the Holy Spirit (*missio Spiritus*) into attaining human salvation. Thus, or as will be shown next, the *missio Dei* as a sending formula, encompasses the triune God's purposive action (*triune-actio Dei*), carried out within the framework of divine providence in pursuit of human salvation.

Monotheistic faiths firmly believe in one God who is not only omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent, but also actively involved in the preservation of the world and the entire universe.<sup>12</sup> In other words, the three monotheistic religions, particularly Judaism, Christianity and Islam, uniformly believe that everything that happens within or in the universe happens under God's sovereign control, that is, under divine providence.<sup>13</sup> Correspondingly, and yet in contrast to other monotheistic

<sup>9</sup> David J Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (London: Orbis Books, 1991), 389; Jonas S Thinane, "Missio Politica in Missio Dei: Integrating Politics into God's Eternal Mission," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 43, no. 1 (2022): 1–8, 5.

<sup>10</sup> P.V. Joseph, "Towards an Indian Trinitarian Theology of Missio Dei: A Study of the Trinitarian Theologies of St. Augustine and Brahmabandhab Upadhyay" (Boston University, 2013), 27; Musung Jung, *Toward a Theology of Pareo Dei: Exploring a Contextual Theology of Missio Dei for the Missiological Reconciliation of the Korean Protestant Church* (Asbury Theological Seminary, 2012), 40.

<sup>11</sup> Tormod Engelsen, "Missio Dei: The Understanding and Misunderstanding of a Theological Concept in European Churches and Missiology," *International Review of Mission* 92 (2003): 481–97, 482.

<sup>12</sup> J.F. McGrath, *The Only True God: Early Christian Monotheism in Its Jewish Context* (University of Illinois Press, 2022); Bertrand Russell, "Is There a God?," *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell* 11 (1952): 1943–68.

<sup>13</sup> J. Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence* (Westmont.: InterVarsity Press, 2009); Junghyung Kim, "Toward a Comprehensive Theology of Divine Action," *Theology and Science* 10, no. 1 (2012): 95–101..

approaches, Christianity also holds the view that God the creator consists of the inseparable unity of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.<sup>14</sup> Although the early ecclesiastical articulations of this doctrine were never without controversy or what some call the Arian Controversy,<sup>15</sup> consequently the first Councils of Nicaea (325 AD) and Constantinople (381 AD) correspondingly expressed its conventional comprehension.<sup>16</sup> The Trinity encompasses the triune theological sequence in which the three divine figures (God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit) successively yet inseparably advance the history of human salvation.<sup>17</sup> That is, belief in the triune God is based on the understanding that God's revelation in the economy of human salvation is successively manifested in Triune facets encompassing Divine-self sending of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>18</sup> To that end, the Christian understanding of the triune community is not an end in itself, but a fundamental belief in the eternally progressive but inseparable divine unity in the service of human salvation.

Furthermore, the biblical manifestations of God the Father in the Old Testament and of God the Son and the Holy Spirit in the New Testament epitomize the infinite unfolding of the triune God in the service of human salvation. Consequently, the doctrine of the Trinity is not only the fundamental truth on which Christianity is built but also articulates the *missio Dei* as incorporating the triune God's active involvement in the work of human salvation. The concept of *missio Dei* therefore confirms, or as subsequent research from the 1952 IMC conference did, that the active redemptive work of the Triune God extends beyond the biblical era into the contemporary chaotic world, which includes the devastations of global conflict. Accordingly, the next section is dedicated to highlighting how global conflicts have historically characterized the *missio Dei* from biblical accounts and culminated the *missio Dei* amid biblical cosmic conflicts, but also how global conflicts characterized the Willingen context of 1952 and beyond.

### **Missio Dei Amid Global Conflicts**

The significance of *missio Dei* in a religious context has been extensively documented in theological literature ensuing from the 1952 IMC conference. However, academic discussions surrounding its origins rarely address its significance in relation to the context of world politics and global conflicts in particular. More importantly, or as it shall be seen below, it was political rather than religious factors, so to speak, that reinforced the theocentric character of the *missio Dei*. The global political unrest that preceded the 1952 IMC conference included, among others, the Chinese Communist Revolution of 1927–1949, the Berlin Blockade of 1948–1949, and the Korean War of 1950–1953. As if that were not enough, the immediate years after the conference saw the Hungarian Revolution and the Second Arab-Israeli War in 1956, the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, and the Vietnam War, which lasted from 1964 to 1975. As part of the post-World War II Cold War, the Chinese Civil War was the third largest global war fought between the Kuomintang or Nationalist Party (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) from August 1, 1927 until December 7, 1949. Although this war continued intermittently from that period, it consequently intensified in its second phase (1945-1946), especially with the CCP gaining the upper hand and consequently proclaimed the People's Republic of China with Beijing as its capital on October 1, 1949. As such, years of civil unrest in China came to an end in the latter part of 1949, when Mao Zedong, the leader of the Chinese Communist Revolution, issued this victory proclamation. This proclamation, while rightfully marking the end of years of unrest in China, also heralded the start of distress for missionary endeavors both in China and elsewhere in the global space. In other words, or as shall be seen below, the proclamation or the events that followed were the coin with two opposing sides, representing a victory for the secular world but almost a disgrace to church

<sup>14</sup> J. Orr, *Christian View of God and the World* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1989); T.F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> R.J. Feenstra, *The Trinity. In Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (Philadelphia: Routledge, 2013); W.G. Rusch, *The Trinitarian Controversy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1980).

<sup>16</sup> D.E. Henderson and F. Kirkpatrick, *Constantine and the Council of Nicaea: Defining Orthodoxy and Heresy in Christianity, 325 CE* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> W.J. Hill, *The Three-Personed God: The Trinity as a Mystery of Salvation* (Washington, D.C.: CUA Press, 1982); Catherine Mowry LaCugna, "Re-Conceiving the Trinity as the Mystery of Salvation," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 38, no. 1 (1985): 1–23.

<sup>18</sup> Chris Gibson, "Fountain of Salvation: Trinity and Soteriology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 65, no. 2 (2022): 394–98; F. Sanders, *Fountain of Salvation: Trinity and Soteriology* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2021).

missionary activities there and elsewhere. Consequently, the 1952 IMC conference in Willingen did not take place in a historical vacuum and its convening not only coincided with global political unrest but was also politically creative in its redefinition of the *missio Dei*.

In general, power dynamics are the root cause or crux issue leading to large-scale conflicts taking the form of nationalism, militarism, alliances, and imperialism among others.<sup>19</sup> Although petty global political power dynamics and the resulting conflicts may seem so insignificant in the eyes of eternity that they could be described as dust in the scales (Isaiah 40:15), their devastations on human communities are terrible and undesirable. Global conflicts have been an ongoing pandemic throughout human history, so profound that feeble attempts to seek refuge in religious texts such as the Bible could be dispirited upon discovering their haphazard occurrence in religious contexts. In fact, the Bible, as a religious text, has been considered an important guide to peaceful solutions in times of conflict for centuries, precisely because it contains accounts of major conflicts between nations. That is, the Bible contains references to large-scale conflict situations not only because of its propensity for or high valuing of peace but also to the extent that the biblical world also had its own share of large-scale conflict. The Bible itself contains accounts of violent, large-scale conflict, particularly involving the Israelites in the Old Testament (Exodus 17:10-13).

However, God's peaceful actions are depicted in nearly half of the Old Testament stories, particularly those involving Israel and Judah starting with the civil war that Rehoboam (972-914 BC), the son of Solomon, instigated (1 Kings 12-14). This remains the case even in the face of the controversial and complicated arguments that, perceptibly irrelevant to the scope of this paper, vainly attempt to implicate God as the cause of most major biblical conflicts.<sup>20</sup> Although all protracted biblical conflicts had disparaging outcomes, perhaps like the Israel-Judah war which among others culminated in a series of imprisonments and exploitations (597&538 BCE), such adverse outcomes were never devoid of God's redemptive interventions (2 Chronicles 11; 20). Retrospectively therefore, it is no coincidence that the grand Old Testament narrative largely embraces peace-oriented teachings (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3). Correspondingly, or at least equally harmoniously represented by Trinity-centered process theology,<sup>21</sup> the fact of Christ's earthly peace-professing ministry (Matthew 5:6 and John 14:27), unequivocally embodied the *missio Dei* in the context of the New Testament. Consequently, or as emphasized below, the post-biblical to contemporary missiology that culminated in the 1952 IMC conference underscores, among other things, the ongoing presence of the *missio Dei* amid global conflict.

Although China was never colonized in the true sense of the word, an anti-colonial vision and fears of imperialism nevertheless characterized much of its history of struggle in the 20th century. Some political historians suggest that these feelings may have arisen from suspicions that foreign influences were progressively and increasingly exploiting China's weak state since the beginning of the 20th century.<sup>22</sup> The Chinese Communist Revolution of 1949 brought various socioeconomic and political reforms, including land redistribution, agrarian collectivism, and industrialization, to immunize the government's centralized control of national resources from any external influences. These nationalist reforms were consistent with China's historical view of the Christian faith as a foreign religion with missionary ties to Western powers, therefore, prompting measures to contain its spread. As a result, the communist government of China, led by Mao Zedong, implemented a series of radical measures that included not only the subjugation of religious institutions in general but also the restriction of Christian missionary activities in particular. The policy of state atheism allowed the Chinese government, among other things, to gain control over the property of Christian churches and establish state-controlled churches, strategically control their missionary activities, and then isolate

<sup>19</sup> Evan Allan Hoffman, "Power Dynamics and Spoiler Management: Mediation and the Creation of Durable Peace in Armed Conflicts," 2009; Kelly Kadera, *The Power-Conflict Story: A Dynamic Model of Interstate Rivalry* (University of Michigan Press, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> G.A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (InterVarsity Press, 2014); M. Pearse, *The Gods of War: Is Religion the Primary Cause of Violent Conflict?* (InterVarsity Press, 2007).

<sup>21</sup> R.K. Gnuse, *The Old Testament and Process Theology* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016); Kilian McDonnell, "A Trinitarian Theology of the Holy Spirit?," *Theological Studies* 46, no. 2 (1985): 191-227.

<sup>22</sup> T.J. Christensen, *The China Challenge: Shaping the Choices of a Rising Power* (WW Norton & Company, 2015); R.G. Sutter, *Chinese Foreign Relations: Power and Policy since the Cold War* (Rowman & Littlefield., 2012).

them from the global Christian community. Furthermore, the enforcement of such restrictions made it increasingly clear to Christian missionaries that their presence was suddenly unwelcome in China, leading to sudden withdrawal, evacuation, and expulsion. Moreover, since the resentments of Christian missionaries were not limited to China but prevailed in many countries around the world,<sup>23</sup> the global wave of decolonization in the early 1950s, among other things, disrupted the worldwide spread of Christianity (mission).<sup>24</sup> Against the backdrop of these changing realities that threatened the life of missionary activity in the global world, the 1952 IMC Willingen Conference had to adapt and redefine mission theology in integrative terms.

### ***Providentia Missio Dei***

Providence in and of itself is the assertion made by mission theology, in one way or another, that *missio Dei* indicates or denotes that God is actively administering the world's salvific mission. The theoretical framework of the *missio Dei* thus underlines that the omniscient God not only directs the universe, but also actively foresees the care of his creatures, and in particular the mission of human salvation. In this regard, the divine act of redemption points to the ideas of providence, which indicate that God continually maintains the order of his creation, which includes, among other things, human creatures. Furthermore, to the extent that sin is, according to any interpretation, an act contrary to the nature and will of God, the *missio Dei*, which includes God's extraordinary act of human salvation, therefore falls into the category of divine distinct providence. Divine administered salvation, as asserted by the *missio Dei*, places the universe, and human beings in particular, under the protective care of God, consistent with the implications of providence.

Accordingly, both Divine Providence and the *missio Dei* not only assert unaltered that the omniscient God continually reigns over every aspect of His creation, but also affirm that human salvation is far more than just an accident, but controlled by the active hand of God. This underscores the reality in which God's providence is driven by his eternal mission to preserve creation as a whole but especially to facilitate the saving of humanity from the devastations of sin. In many ways, then, the *missio Dei* affirms the extent to which providence encompasses divine active actions directed toward the preservation of humanity even in the face of radical evil. Nevertheless, these divine acts of salvation, as envisaged in the *missio Dei*, are not accidental; rather were predetermined by divine providence before the beginning of material time. In other words, divine providence is central to the salvific landscape of the *missio Dei*, perhaps far beyond being merely an auxiliary doctrine. Consequently, the *providentia missio Dei* emphasizes that the mission of salvation in its entirety and the activities resulting from it were not only initiated by the omniscient God but are relentlessly advanced by the mighty hand of God-self.

God's providential mission (*providentia missio Dei*) underscores continued divine action to preserve human creation, even in the face of harmful human-orchestrated events such as global conflicts. In other words, although divine providence largely describes or implies divine transcendental rule, the *providentia missio Dei* focuses specifically on the divine transcendental yet immanent preservation of his human creation from rampant destruction. However, it is particularly important at this point to recognize unreservedly that the ways of divine providence, even in the context of the *missio Dei*, remain a mystery, strikingly shrouded in unfathomable enigmas. The mystery of divine providence may perhaps be particularly questionable when considered in light of serious evil acts, be they devastating life events, protracted destructive conflicts, or the wide spectrum of war devastations. This is the kind of divine providence that Jesus Christ spoke of regarding the sale of two sparrows for a penny (Matthew 10:29), that, regardless of their supposed insignificance, not a single one of them would fall without God's sovereign permission. He further supported the logic of this providence by affirming that divine omnipresence conceals every aspect of the universe, as he even omnisciently recorded the exact sum of hairs on each person's head. The salient dimension of this *providentia missio*

<sup>23</sup> Donald E MacInnis, "A Chinese Communist View of Christian Missions in the Nineteenth Century," *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 2, no. 2 (1978): 49.

<sup>24</sup> Udi Greenberg, "Protestants, Decolonization, and European Integration, 1885–1961," *The Journal of Modern History* 89, no. 2 (2017): 314–54; Antony G Hopkins, "Rethinking Decolonization," *Past and Present* 200, no. 1 (2008): 211–47.

*Dei*, however, is that although not all are perceptibly spared from boundless misfortunes (Matthew 24:15-31), harmful tyrannies, and streams of ordeals (1 Peter 4:12), such fateful eventualities do not rescind God's work of preservation. Instead, or at least as Karl Heim (1874-1958) would advocate, especially in the midst of destructive atrocities, *providentia missio Dei* designates the missionary God as steadfastly preserving human creation, albeit through consequent restitution at every facet of annihilations. In other words, the *providentia missio Dei* conjectures that, among other things, God's work of preservation is tirelessly carried by God-self even in the face of destructive contingencies aimed at annihilation.<sup>25</sup>

Consequently, *providentia missio Dei* embraces God's operational restorative work as omnisciently preserving human creation despite chaos,<sup>26</sup> in addition to being preservative of all creation following his eternal plan or purpose (Colwell 2000:131-138). This is another way of arguing that as divine sovereignty is depicted as having prevailed over primordial chaos itself (Genesis 1:1-2), the *providential missio Dei* too apprehends such immutable sovereignty in saving human creation from its self-created chaos.<sup>27</sup> Analogously, if one looks unconventionally at the reality of Christ's crucifixion, one can even say that God not only saves from chaos but can sometimes even use chaos to save humanity.<sup>28</sup> Despite the reality that human deceitful activities appear to be constantly undermining the divine mission of salvation,<sup>29</sup> the divine eternal plan of human preservation itself is far from being demoralized by the widespread conflicts and their devastating consequences.<sup>30</sup> Just as the divine supratemporal realm remains extraordinarily mysterious (*sui generis*) as per its orchestration in eternity (*sub specie aeternitatis*), His salvific ways equally remain far beyond human understanding.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, the ceaseless growth of the human population around the world, especially in light of the ever-increasing mortalities owing to global conflicts,<sup>32</sup> underscores God's eternal plan of salvation, which omnisciently synchronizes human reproduction and even restructures it into perceptible societies. The *providentia missio Dei*'s tenacity is perhaps illustrated by several observable real dynamics, such as the expansion of human populations in spite of the devastating effects of international conflict.<sup>33</sup> One of the primary causes of the exponential growth of human populations in the face of catastrophic conflicts is the statistic that in many regions of the world, childbearing, and birth rates have for years remained astronomical.<sup>34</sup> Second, while one death is too many, advances in both health systems and medicine mean more people are living longer and mortalities from global conflict could fall far below historical levels.<sup>35</sup> Third and correspondingly, humanity is blessed with technological advances which enable rapid access to humanitarian assistance in the form of safe healthcare, efficient food supplies, and a rapid transition to security (migration).<sup>36</sup> Finally, over the years, despite devastating wars around the world, human communities have developed

<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth A Johnson, "Does God Play Dice? Divine Providence and Chance," *Theological Studies* 57, no. 1 (1996): 3–18; Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence*.

<sup>26</sup> Sjoerd L Bonting, "God's Action in the World: Influencing of Chaos Events?," *Sewanee Theological Review* 47, no. 4 (2004): 372; T.A. Carlson, *The Indiscrete Image: Infinitude and Creation of the Human* (University of Chicago Press, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> Steven D Crain, "Divine Action in a World Chaos: An Evaluation of John Polkinghorne's Model of Special Divine Action," *Faith and Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (1997): 41–61.

<sup>28</sup> Kenneth Grayston, "The Darkness of the Cosmic Sea: A Study of Symbolism in St Mark's Narrative of the Crucifixion," *Theology* 55, no. 382 (1952): 122–27.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Joseph White, "On the Universal Possibility of Salvation," *Pro Ecclesia* 17, no. 3 (2008): 269–80.

<sup>30</sup> Chris E W Green, "'Let It Be': Predestination, Salvation, and Divine/Human Agency," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 23, no. 2 (2014): 171–90, 185.

<sup>31</sup> M.A. Rae, *God of Salvation: Soteriology in Theological Perspective*. (Routledge, 2016); H.J. Schoot, "Divine Transcendence and the Mystery of Salvation According to Thomas Aquinas," in *Divine Transcendence and Immanence in the Work of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Goris J.M.J (Peeters Publishers, 2009), 255–81.

<sup>32</sup> Ariel Karlinsky and Orsola Torrisi, "The Casualties of War: An Excess Mortality Estimate of Lives Lost in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," *Population Research and Policy Review* 42, no. 3 (2023): 41.

<sup>33</sup> Vincent Sabathier and G Ryan Faith, "Present and Future Human Expansion into Outer Space," *Brown J. World Aff.* 14 (2008): 147.

<sup>34</sup> Jeffrey D Wall and Molly Przeworski, "When Did the Human Population Size Start Increasing?," *Genetics* 155, no. 4 (2000): 1865–74; Ansley J Coale, "The History of the Human Population," *Scientific American* 231, no. 3 (1974): 40–51; Michael Gross, "Human Population at the Crossroads," *Current Biology* 33, no. 1 (2023): R1–3.

<sup>35</sup> S.R. Kaufman, *Ordinary Medicine: Extraordinary Treatments, Longer Lives, and Where to Draw the Line* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); Kevin M Murphy and Robert H Topel, "The Value of Health and Longevity," *Journal of Political Economy* 114, no. 5 (2006): 871–904.

<sup>36</sup> Mirca Madianou, "Technocolonialism: Digital Innovation and Data Practices in the Humanitarian Response to Refugee Crises," in *Routledge Handbook of Humanitarian Communication* (Routledge, 2021), 185–202.

a remarkable ability to reorganize themselves into identifiable populations, whether religious or cultural.<sup>37</sup> These factors among others, represent a fraction of the divine providential and salvific activities which, although alien to human intelligence, are nevertheless synchronized by the missionary God to save humanity from annihilating global conflicts.

## CONCLUSION

*Missio Dei*, especially when viewed in light of its scientific interpretation following the 1952 IMC conference, emphasizes that the mission of salvation is not only initiated by the Triune God but that He also remains the principal force driving its resulting activities under the sun. To this end, or in some transferable way, the body of this paper argues cogently that the salvation of the Triune God is therefore eternally present even in the face of global conflict. Its broad and yet absorbed argument is formulated to encompass the doctrinal harmony between *divina providentia* (divine providence) and the divine mission of salvation (*missio Dei*) towards conveying *providentia missio Dei* in the context of deleterious global conflict. Consequently, or based on such a unique approach, God's salvific intervention is consistently expressed as not only being at work in a peaceful environment but providentially preserving His creation even in the face of global conflicts. Given the realities of ever-deteriorating world politics, this paper among others achieved the intellectual exercise of describing the *missio Dei* within the doctrine of divine providence, thereby underscoring God's preservative manifestation even in harmful world conflicts. Furthermore, the supposed assimilation of these two teachings is not a mere intellectual exercise but is inherently aimed at restoring hope in the inexorable divine presence of those negatively affected by world wars. Overall, or particularly in the light of the doctrinal arguments presented, this paper is not an end in itself, but the manifestation of the *providentia missio Dei* theoretical framework pursuant to deepening the understanding of the providential facet of the *missio Dei* in the context of global conflicts.

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