



Missio Dei and Missio Hominum: Top-Down-up Christology in Mission

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ABSTRACT

In Christian theology, Christology remains a distinct branch of knowledge offering articulation of the hypostatic union or relationship between the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ. Its exploration of Christ's nature and identity moves from the pre-incarnation to post-ascension as enclosing Christ's birth, earthly mission, resurrection, and ascension. Consequently, or in attempting to streamline such a complex knowledge, Christological theologians developed two categorization frameworks in the form of 'top-down Christology' and 'bottom-up Christology'. When sketchily integrated into missiological frameworks, the *missio Dei* conforms to top-down Christology, whereas *missio hominum* conforms more to bottom-up Christology. In their transient articulation of Jesus Christ's identity, the *missio Dei* on the one hand embraces the top-down Christology while the *missio hominum* on the other hand or correspondingly embraces the bottom-up Christology. Accordingly, or given the lack of missiological scholarship deriving the unique understanding of the *missio Dei* and consequently *missio hominum* through Christology, this article draws on literature to weave their novel understanding as anchored by Christ's hypostatic union. Consequently, it first rationalizes the *Missio Dei* within top-down Christology before anchoring the *Missio Hominum* within bottom-up Christology. Determinedly, further studies will be required to test the novelty of this approach, as there appears to be no existential science that interprets *Missio Dei* and *Missio Hominum* through top-down-up Christology.

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INTRODUCTION

Missio Dei is a Latin theomissional framework for the "mission of God," which expresses the idea that the work of salvation is fundamentally initiated and driven by the triune God. In other words, this framework underscores the theocentric perspective according to which the triune God is not only the source but also plays a central role in the work of redemption. Although the broad formulation of the *missio Dei* dates to the time of Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD), it has acquired unprecedented importance since the second half of the 20th century. The distinguishing features between these two eras relate, among other things, to the conceptual transition from the anthropocentric missionary inclination to the theocentric perspective, which consequently shaped missionary theology since the second half of the 20th century. This broad conceptual shift was predominantly implied within the

engagements of the International Missionary Council (IMC) conference held in Willingen, Germany in 1952, but subsequently intellectualized by the scholarship that followed the conference. Consequently, since the 1952 IMC meeting, the resulting scholarship largely confirms that human salvation is primarily the work of the triune God, in which the Church and the human race, in general, are implicitly mere participants. In other words, the *missio Dei* as a transcendently comprehensive *Missio Pater*, *Missio Christos* and *Missio Spiritus* emphasizes the central salvific work of the triune God in which humanity participates. Consequently, or at this very juncture, the ensuing intellectual explorations of the *missio Dei* yielded further unearthing of other related mission frameworks dedicated to emphasizing human participation in the *missio Dei*. Such human-centered mission frameworks include, among others, the *missio ecclesiae*, the *missio politica*, and the *missio hominum*, the latter being the focus of this article.

Both the *missio politica* (mission of politics) and the *missio hominum* (human mission) are somewhat late in missiology, while the *missio ecclesiae*, a Latin theomissional framework for ‘church mission’, has been extensively considered in connection to the *missio Dei*. However, if one compares the resulting scholarship on the *missio politica* and the *missio hominum*, the former appears to have attracted slightly more momentous attention than the latter. In other words, while on the one hand *missio politica* attracted reasonable scholarly attention, the same cannot unreservedly be said about *missio hominum*.¹ As a theo-missiological framework, the *Missio hominum* appears to have been first developed by Nicolaas Johannes Smith (1929–2010), also known as Nico Smith, who discovered its meaning through his resistance to apartheid in South Africa. His groundbreaking work entitled “From the *missio Dei* to the *missio hominum*” described the *missio hominum* as a derivative of the *missio Dei* in which humanity is called to contribute to the salvific goals of God's mission. He described that, contrary to the missionary tendencies of the time, which ignored the White-on-Black apartheid's injustices, his subsequent missionary work among the Venda people led him to realize that all human beings have a collective responsibility to participate in God's mission. Consequently, it can be said that he conceptualized this people-centered mission framework not only as a cry for humanness against the injustices of apartheid but as a missional appeal for humanity to actively participate in the work of *missio Dei*.² To this very end, Thinane concludes, ‘Significantly, *missio hominum* represents a fundamental theological paradigm by which human action is integrated or linked with divine action to achieve the goal of the *missio Dei*’.³ In other words, Nico Smith never intellectualized the *Missio hominum* as a distinct, human-based mission paradigm, but rather as a God-dependent mission theory that finds relevance only insofar as it emerges from and contributes to the context of the *missio Dei*. Interestingly, although Nico's pioneering work in this regard is commendable, very little has been done to develop the *Missio hominum* in close alignment with the *missio Dei*. In particular, it is notable that no scholarly work has ever intellectualized the undercurrents of the *missio hominum* as deriving from or related to the earthly humanity of Jesus Christ.

Given that Christology is not only concerned with Christ's divine transitions, such as from incarnation to resurrection but also considers the historical realities and nature of Jesus the Nazarene. Christologically, the divine mission is not limited only to Christ, who embodied the Logos as the only-begotten Son of God, but also to the earthly Jesus, who embodied perfect humanity as the son of Joseph from Nazareth. Furthermore, no mere human example other than Jesus Christ's human nature as witnessed during his earthly ministry is ever sufficient to provide the perfect model for the *missio hominum* in the context of the *missio Dei*. This paper draws on the literature of Christology in general and bottom-up Christology, in particular, to rationalize the fundamental practical aspects of the *missio hominum* within the entire humanity of Jesus Christ the Nazarene. Thus, in this article, Christology becomes not only a defining framework for the dual nature of Jesus Christ but also a perfect benchmark

¹ Johannes Reimer, *Missio Politica: The Mission of Church and Politics* (Langham Publishing, 2017); Jonas S Thinane, “Missio Dei's Complexity Prefaced in Synergism,” *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 79, no. 2 (2023): 8611; Jonas S Thinane, “Missio Dei through Complexity Theory: Complexity to Total Salvation,” *In Die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 56, no. 1 (2022): 8; .

² Nico Smith, “From Missio Dei to Missio Hominum-En Route in Christian Mission and Missiology,” *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* 30, no. 1 (2002): 4–21.

³ Jonas S Thinane, “Missio Hominum for Social Justice in South Africa: From Missio Dei to Missio Hominum,” *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (2021).

for rationalizing the *missio hominum* within the *missio Dei* as a comprehensive divine soteriological work. To achieve the above-outlined objective, this paper will first introduce the general idea of Christology yet to outline its soteriological inclinations. Second and perhaps correspondingly, it will briefly introduce both the top-down and bottom-up intellectual directions of Christology. Third, transferably, the broad implications of top-down Christology in general, are applied to the *missio Dei* while the specific implications of bottom-up Christology, in particular, are transferred to form the basis of the *missio hominum*. In keeping with the stated aim of this work, the final part defines the *missio hominum* as having its perfect origin in the humanity of Jesus Christ. Aphoristically speaking, the full humanity of Jesus Christ, as articulated in bottom-up Christology, is viewed through the lens of the *Imago Dei* as the ideal embodiment of the *missio hominum* within the framework of the *missio Dei*.

Christology

The term Christology is derived from the combination of two Greek terms Χριστός (Khristós) and -λογία (logia), literary articulating the knowledge or the study of Christ. Within the field of Christian theology, Christology refers to the scholarly endeavors aimed at achieving a methodical comprehension of both the being and the actions connected to Jesus Christ in both his human and divine personas.⁴ Jesus Christ's dual nature as God and human began to be a controversial point attracting intense debate during early Christian history.⁵ The very first Council of Nicaea (325 AD) was convened to address controversies surrounding the question of Christology and ultimately concluded that the Son of God is "of one substance" with the Father.⁶ Nearly 126 years later, the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) uniformly affirmed that Jesus Christ is fully divine and fully human and that his two natures remain inextricably linked.⁷ Consequently, Christology as the central tenet of the Christian faith characterised the central focus of the first seven ecumenical councils (4th-8th centuries), notwithstanding their covering of a wide range of other controversial theological subjects.⁸ Migliore similarly shows that among the many themes that express Christian theology, Christology is the crucial criterion based on which the Christian religion is validated.⁹ He asserts that 'Christology is not the whole of Christian doctrine, but it is the point from which all else is illumined'.¹⁰ Christology, with its various historical interpretations, primarily emphasizes the core principles of the divine embodiment in human form for salvation, rather than solely defining the nature of God as seen in Jesus Christ.

Accordingly, the categories of Christology developed in this context include among others, ontological Christology, functional Christology, and soteriological Christology, which focuses on the meaning of Christ as Savior.¹¹ Consequently, all forms of Christology while important in and of themselves, gain some degree of legitimacy when viewed through the lens of soteriology, which interprets Christ's incarnation and earthly ministry as solely focused on the salvation of humanity. As a way of amplifying the veracity of this assertion, the upcoming section handles and presents soteriological Christology exclusively, laying the groundwork for its conformity to soteriological precepts found in the *missio Dei's* framework. Broadly speaking, soteriology differs from other branches of theology, in that its study is primarily based on the question of salvation and its implications. Apart from its secondary focus on the question of who is saved and from what, its primary focus is on Christology, asking the question of salvation 'by whom or by what means'. In other words, soteriology is inextricably linked to Christology because of its centrality to the primary significance of

⁴ J. Knox, *The Humanity and Divinity of Christ: A Study of Pattern in Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967); Gerald O'Collins, *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus* (OUP Oxford, 2009).

⁵ W. Frend, "Christianity in the First Five Centuries," in *The World's Religions*, ed. P. Clarke et al. (London: Routledge, 2004), 142–66; J.S. Siker, "Christianity in the Second and Third Centuries," in *The Early Christian World*, ed. P.F. Esler (London: Routledge, 2002), 257–83.

⁶ A.E. Burn, *The Nicene Creed* (London: Rivington & Co publishing, 1909); Canon J N D Kelly, "The Nicene Creed: A Turning Point1," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 36, no. 1 (1983): 29–39.

⁷ R. Price and M. Whitby, *Chalcedon in Context: Church Councils 400-700*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press., 2009), 70–91.

⁸ Fred Sanders, "Biblical Grounding for the Christology of the Councils," *Criswell Theological Review* 13, no. 1 (2015): 93.

⁹ D.L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014).

¹⁰ Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 163.

¹¹ Khaled Anatolios, "The Soteriological Grammar of Conciliar Christology," *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 78, no. 2 (2014): 165–88.

Christ as Savior. In the same way, Christology analyzes the person of Jesus Christ, whom described in soteriological terms, represents the only source of salvation as the crucial objective of the incarnation chronicle. That means, excluding one from the other is as good as banishing the sun from the day since both teachings aim to give a consistent expression of Jesus Christ or God the Son in the context of salvation. Consequently, Christology addresses the hypostatic natures of Christ starting from the incarnation (top-down) to the Ascension (bottom-up). The series of Christological considerations extends from the descent (immanence) of the pre-existent divine person of Jesus Christ into the material realm (earthly ministry) to the ascension (transcendence) after the resurrection, which signals Christ's return to the divine realm. To this end, what will be categorized in the next section as 'Christology from above' encompasses divine manifestation in the material realm while 'Christology from below' unconventionally addresses Christ's earthly ministry and resurrection leading to his subsequent return to the divine realm. These two approaches to Christology embrace soteriological objectives, not only in the sense that they focus on Jesus Christ as Savior but also present him as a model for human participation in the *missio Dei*.

Top-down Christology

The top-down Christology, or what some may at times call high Christology or Christology from below, broadly refers to the study of the divine nature of Christ from his pre-existence.¹² Such systematic exploration of Christ's nature typically begins at the incarnation,¹³ extends through his material manifestations framed within soteriological objectives and culminates upon his subsequent transcendental return (ascension).¹⁴ Although the Incarnation was *terra incognita* and *sub specie aeternitatis*, that is, inconceivable to the human eye, it was the product of the early church's desire to define the hypostatic union of Christ in response to heresies then emerging. In layman's terms, while the idea of the hypostatic union of Christ comes primarily from biblical evidence, the Incarnation itself resulted from the early church's deeper engagements and repudiations of early heresies that denied the hypostatic union of Christ.¹⁵ Consequently, the early church's engagements shaped what is known as the incarnation sequence, namely the transition from the sphere of divinity to humanity. That is, it successively shaped the doctrine of the incarnation by asserting that the Son of God took on human flesh and consequently became fully human, while at the same time retaining fully divine nature.¹⁶ As the next immediate section attempts to show, the conceptualization of the incarnation was adopted by the early church not only *ad majorem Dei gloriam* (AMDG) but also its essentiality in relation to human salvation, which represented an *ad hoc* objective.

According to some scholars, the incarnation was not meant to be an end in and of itself nor limitedly serve the greater glory of God (AMDG), instead, the realization of human salvation as its intended objective, justified its central functionality.¹⁷ In other words, although the incarnation itself involves the divine process *sub specie aeternitatis* (SSA), it also revived the *missio Dei*, in which the missionary God in the person of Jesus Christ brings human creation back into invariable divine benevolence. To the extent that the Incarnation ushered in human redemption, Christ's subsequent physical manifestations during his earthly ministry not only incarnated divine immanence in the universe but also embodied perfect human nature in the sense of the pristine *Imago Dei*. In other words, Christ's existence not only revealed the fullness of God's perfect transcendental nature but also epitomized the perfect human nature in the context of restored fellowship with God. Correspondingly, the next section shows that while the incarnation epitomized the perfect divinity as ushering human salvation, Christ's ensuing physical manifestations epitomized the perfect humanity partaking in salvific mission, as such warranting 'Christology from below'. That is, while the Christology from

¹² Andrew Chester, "High Christology: Whence, When and Why?," *Early Christianity* 2, no. 1 (2011): 22–50.

¹³ John Macquarrie, "The Pre-Existence of Jesus Christ," *The Expository Times* 77, no. 7 (1966): 199–202.

¹⁴ D. Farrow, "Ascension and Atonement," in *The Theology of Reconciliation*, ed. C.E. Gunton (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 67–92; Roy Yates, "From Christology to Soteriology," *The Expository Times* 107, no. 9 (1996): 268–70.

¹⁵ Huw Parri Owen, "The New Testament and the Incarnation: A Study in Doctrinal Development," *Religious Studies* 8, no. 3 (1972): 221–32.

¹⁶ A.J. Spence, *Incarnation and Inspiration* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2007).

¹⁷ D. Schrader, *On the Motive of the Incarnation*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2019); Thomas F Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ* (InterVarsity Press, 2015).

above comprised the incarnation *sub specie aeternitatis* towards human salvation, the Christology from below commences Christ's earthly ministry as retaining the divine agency but principally embodying the perfect humanity living *Coram Deo*.

Consequently, the incarnation itself is not a mere “holy divine act” *ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*, but the intentional *missio* (sending) process by which the triune God takes on flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, with the definite commitment to offering human salvation. In the context of Christology from above, particularly insofar as humanity is created in the image of God, the incarnation is a unique divine action that restores humanity's true synchronicity with divinity (*imago Dei*), as consequently embodied by Jesus Christ from birth. Furthermore, Christology from above or ‘high Christology’ presents the consequent earthly ministry of Jesus Christ as encompassing the series of divine physical presence in the work of offering true human salvation to the physical world. Put differently, while bottom-up Christology would naturally shed partial light on the divinity of Christ, top-down Christology is intentionally designed to shed full divinity from the stage of the incarnation, its various manifestations within Christ's earthly ministry culminating in the Ascension. Consequently, the entire biblical narrative that encompasses Jesus Christ, especially from the perspective of the incarnation, throughout his earthly activity and up to the resurrection and ascension, intelligibly epitomizes God-self activism in securing the eternal life of human beings. Consequently, top-down Christology becomes transferable to the extent that the perfect divinity of Jesus Christ embodies the *missio Dei* while giving rise to the *missio hominum*. Correspondingly, or as the next sections will largely show, understanding the full divinity of Christ from the perspectives of top-down Christology itself identifies the *missio Dei* as informing the *missio hominum* as per the interpretation of the *Imago Dei*.

Bottom-up Christology

The bottom-up Christology, or what some may unassumingly refer to as base Christology or Christology from below, broadly refers to the study of Jesus' post-incarnation human existential nature from his birth and during his earthly ministry, which includes both his crucifixion and his resurrection (Pre-ascension).¹⁸ In contrast to Christology from above, which is incarnational and applies *ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*, Christology from below by implication is more earthly-human-oriented, in the sense that it represents complete humanity in relation to high Christology. On the other hand, high Christology is more heavenly-divine-oriented (*sub specie aeternitatis*), and about the eternal process encompassing the divine manifestations of Jesus Christ through. Despite emphasizing Christ's pre-existent or incarnational realm equally, this form of Christology primarily aims to explain the significance of Christ's earthly life within the framework of human salvation. This is because Christology, particularly when viewed from Christ's earthly ministry in the New Testament context, is twofold in that it presents Jesus Christ as a human being interacting between his divine and human dual natures. In other words, prefacing ‘Christology from Below’ through reciting high Christology not only seeks to emphasize the centrality of incarnational ministry in a vacuum but steadily sets the stage for the rationalization of Christ's human nature in an enriching way. Furthermore, the discourse on Christology from below, or at least as will be seen below, will primarily use the title ‘Jesus of Nazareth’ to underscore Christ's human nature or as a human figure, but still culminates in high Christology and thus systematically embrace “Jesus Christ”.

Within the framework of bottom-up Christology, the birth of Jesus the Nazarene begins as in the case involving the process of incarnation *sub specie aeternitatis*, the process that culminates in death by crucifixion. In other words, Jesus, who was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary and becomes known as the son of Joseph of Nazareth, is presented as an adult in the Gospel of John, thus initiating the process around which Christology is built from below. As a historical phenomenon, Jesus of Nazareth moves almost immediately from the social context of his childhood into an adult figure within the religious context of his earthly ministry. His earthly ministry included not only his teachings, parables, sermons, and miracles, but also his prototypical human existence, which founded the apostolic community and gave rise to the early church. Consequently, in the course of his public ministry, Jesus

¹⁸ Edward L Krasevac, “‘Christology From Above’ And ‘Christology From Below,’” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 51, no. 2 (1987): 299.

the Galilean manifested himself not only as one accompanying the long-awaited kingdom of God¹⁹ but also as a historical figure who possessed an unparalleled but communicable righteous humanity.²⁰ The great prophet did not only possess unparalleled priesthood authority but also embodied complete humanity that enabled the early church to understand or see the true *imago Dei* in him.²¹ The perfect humanity of Jesus the Nazarene is not only fully expressed in his communion with his heavenly 'Abba', but also in his fraternizing with imperfect humanity in the form of the unbelievers, hated and tax collectors and sinners in general.²² Furthermore, Jesus' earthly evangelical mandate was *ad gentes*, or of a global character, even though He maintained his religious identity as a Jew from Nazareth.²³ Although bottom-up Christology elaborates the downward movement of Christ's reconciliation with temporal humanity, it nevertheless culminates in an upward movement in which his divinity reconciles His eternal Abba.²⁴

Consequently, Jesus Christ is not only the divine means of achieving human salvation but also fully embodies God's consequent plan for perfect humanity *sub specie aeternitatis*. In the context of Christology from below, God the incarnate demonstrates the restitution of human perfection to the extent that humanity is originally made in God's self-image and likeness, or at least notwithstanding its consequent fallen status (Genesis 1:26-27). Therefore, Christology from below presents Jesus the Nazarene not just as a mere supreme human creature, but as a primal likeness that models human perfection in the sense of the *imago Dei*. Consequently, the entire account of the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity, which initiated the ensuing Christ's earthly ministry culminating in the resurrection, is irrefutably *Ad hoc majorem Dei Gloriam* but primarily about the restoration of human perfection. In other words, while bottom-up Christology sheds partial light on the divinity of Christ, it is intentionally designed to represent the full humanity that emerges from the embodied person of Christ. The retrieval of humanity's perfection as anticipated in the *Imago Dei*, will only be achievable through the understanding and imitation of Jesus Christ or Jesus the Nazarene, as presented in the framework of Christology from below. Consequently, bottom-up Christology becomes transferable to the extent that the perfect human nature of Jesus epitomized the *missio hominum* in the context of the *missio Dei*, or at least as the next sections will show. Understanding the full humanity of Christ from the perspective of bottom-up Christology itself describes the necessitous nature of the *missio hominum* pursuant to or in the context of the *missio Dei*.

Top-down *missio Dei*

Consistent with the logic of 'Christology from above' or top-down Christology as discussed already, similarly the top-down *missio Dei* will articulate the theocentric perspectives of God's salvific acts (Bouteneff 2008:93-106). Furthermore, the primary mission theology or its related *missio* frameworks that emerged from the 1952 Willingen IMC conference emphasized that mission has its origins in the nature of the triune God.²⁵ As such, the Triune divine plan for human salvation, which existed eternally long before the fall of Adam, is the basis of top-down *missio Dei*, even though it was ultimately manifested in the person of Jesus Christ.²⁶ In other words, to the extent that the Triune divine plan for human redemption existed eternally, before creation itself and the consequent Adamic fall, such heavenly realism in and of itself describes the eternal nature of the *missio Dei*.²⁷ All of God's eternal

¹⁹ V.P. Elizondo, *A God of Incredible Surprises: Jesus of Galilee* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003); J. Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God, The Message of Jesus Today* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995).

²⁰ Malan Nel, "Discipleship: The Priority of the 'Kingdom and His Righteousness,'" *HTS: Theological Studies* 73, no. 4 (2017): 1–9.

²¹ Stanley J Grenz, "Jesus as the *Imago Dei*: Image-of-God Christology and the Non-Linear Linearity of Theology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 4 (2004): 617; Reuben Archer Torrey, "Jesus, the Prophet, the Priest, the King," 1920.

²² John R Donahue, "Tax Collectors and Sinners: An Attempt at Identification," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 1971, 39–61.

²³ Edgar Krentz, "'Make Disciples'--Matthew on Evangelism," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 33, no. 1 (2006): 23–42.

²⁴ Joas Adiprasetya, "Incarnation and Ascension: The Forgotten Relationship of the Two Doctrines," *Veritas: Jurnal Teologi Dan Pelayanan* 21, no. 1 (2022): 53–64.

²⁵ Carl E Braaten, "The Triune God: The Source and Model of Christian Unity and Mission," *Missiology* 18, no. 4 (1990): 415–27; R.M. Doran, *The Trinity in History: A Theology of the Divine Missions*, vol. 1 (University of Toronto Press, 2012).

²⁶ John G Flett, "Missio Dei: A Trinitarian Envisioning of a Non-Trinitarian Theme," *Missiology* 37, no. 1 (2009): 15.

²⁷ Flett, "Missio Dei: A Trinitarian Envisioning of a Non-Trinitarian Theme"; S. Kang, *Salvation History: In View of Creation and Fall* (Georgetown County: Covenant Books, Inc., 2018).

salvation plans not only have their roots in the Trinity,²⁸ but are also consequently anchored in the biblically transmitted, intermittent salvation manifestations of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.²⁹ However, or even beyond the eternal triune transcendental foresight of human salvation, the top-down *missio Dei* is successively embodied in the events of the Old Testament, which represent the episodic descent of the Divine into the material world for the direct advancement of human salvation. Moreover, both the incarnation and the preternatural salvific acts of Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, virtually permanently capture the transcendental nature of the *missio Dei*, which consequently culminates in the descent of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, or at least as the next section further attempts to demonstrate, the top-down *missio Dei* articulates the triune transcendental yet terrestrial execution of the work of human salvation.

The transcendental or mystery-centered Son of God performing the extramundane role in the work of human salvation is encompassed by the top-down *missio Dei*,³⁰ in contrast to the bottom-up *missio Dei*, which includes the immanent Son of David performing mundane saving act. The unfathomable redemptive acts of Christ are emphasized by the high, top-down Christological construction of the *missio Dei* while the human nature of Jesus' fathomable saving acts is emphasized by the bottom-up Christological construction of the *missio Dei*. Furthermore, unlike the *missio Dei* from below, which emphasizes Jesus' redemptive works close to his human genealogy, the *missio Dei* describes Christ's redemptive work as a consequence of his eternal divine nature as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. Put differently, or at least regardless of the far-reaching mission reality that results, the top-down *missio Dei* undoubtedly seeks not to limit Christ's redemptive acts to his human proximity, as was the case at the beginning of his earthly ministry. Instead, this descending approach to Christ's redemptive work reflects better the great commission that manifests Christ as the incarnate Word of the triune God instructively directing the manifestation of the divine redemptive mission to the nations (*ad gentes*). It is important to stress, however, that Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, is the Savior as long as he continues to be consubstantial with other members of the Trinity, specifically within the framework of the top-down *missio Dei*. All the manifested aspects of Christ's earthly acts when considered within the framework of bottom-up Christology are not an end in themselves, but reflect God as the agent and commissioner of the greater salvation.³¹ The fact that Jesus, the Nazarene, remains the only chronological human-divine figure who embodied the divine physical appearance in no way ignores the inseparability of the triune unity in fulfilling human salvation.³² Consequently, the top-down *missio Dei* sees Jesus Christ as the unambiguous triune prototype who pays direct homage to the physical world to fulfill the divine eternal plan of human salvation. Somewhat harmoniously, Scherer, as stated in Engelsviken, argued that the theocentric *missio Dei* is equally expressed by Martin Luther (1484-1546), who consistently argued that the mission of salvation is eternal and manifests itself consistently in the saving work of the triune God.³³ Recognizing this very inherent Trinitarian character of *missio Dei*, missiologists such as Cronshaw concluded that *missio Dei* is essentially *missio Trinitatis* since the work of human redemption is enduringly shared by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.³⁴

34

²⁸ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, "Re-Conceiving the Trinity as the Mystery of Salvation," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 38, no. 1 (1985): 1–23; F. Sanders, *Fountain of Salvation: Trinity and Soteriology* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2021).

²⁹ Philip J Rosato, "Spirit Christology: Ambiguity and Promise," *Theological Studies* 38, no. 3 (1977): 423–49.

³⁰ Theo Sundermeier, "Missio Dei Today: On the Identity of Christian Mission," *International Review of Mission* 92, no.367(2003): 560.

³¹ D J Konz, "The Even Greater Commission: Relating the Great Commission to the Missio Dei, and Human Agency to Divine Activity, in Mission," *Missiology* 46, no. 4 (2018): 333–49.

³² W.J. Hill, *The Three-Personed God: The Trinity as a Mystery of Salvation* (Washington, D.C.: CUA Press, 1982); Sanders, *Fountain of Salvation: Trinity and Soteriology*.

³³ J.A. Scherer, *Gospel, Church & Kingdom: Comparative Studies in World Mission Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987); Tormod Engelsviken, "Missio Dei: The Understanding and Misunderstanding of a Theological Concept in European Churches and Missiology," *International Review of Mission* 92 (2003): 481.

³⁴ Darren Cronshaw, "Missio Dei Is Missio Trinitas: Sharing the Whole Life of God, Father, Son and Spirit," *Mission Studies* 37, no. 1 (2020): 119.

Bottom-up *missio Dei*

Firstly, or perhaps somewhat at odds with the logic of the *missio Dei* from above as explicated above, the bottom-up *missio Dei* articulates the immanence reality of the *missio Dei*. That is, even though theocentrism dominates both top-down and bottom-up *missio Dei* equally, it particularly strives for the saving work that Jesus Christ carried out on earth, albeit in his divine capacity. Consequently, the understanding of such divine immanence is fundamentally implied or established within the framework of Christ's earthly existence, i.e. bottom-up Christology, so to speak. In a sense, the *missio Dei* from below represents the fundamental anthropo-theocentric shift that the 1952 IMC conference had to absorb into its approach to the *missio Dei*. Just as the incarnation was not an ultimate self-end, the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ deciphered the divine physical manifestation not only for the glory of God but as a divine means of setting in motion the greater goal (total human salvation). Although the hypostatic union of Jesus Christ remains indissoluble, his divinity constitutes the significance of his essential manifestations from the incarnation through his entire earthly ministry to the resurrection and consequently culminates in the ascension. Consequently, or as will be clearly emphasized below, the *missio Dei* from below embodies the realism in which the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ embodied the fully divine nature in missionary action for salvation.

Unlike the *missio Dei* from above (*Sub specie aeternitatis*), the *missio Dei* from below begins on earth with the second person of the Trinity, who actively demonstrates divine direct involvement in the work of salvation. The manifestation of the divine is preceded by making it clear that the presence of Christ means the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, which indicates that God himself sends the Son on the mission of salvation. The Trinitarian God, although embodied in the person of Jesus Christ, remains not only the source but also the supernaturally acting subject in the mission of salvation. The physical manifestation of the Divine is anchored in the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ and represents *missio Dei* wherein God is depicted intrinsically as both the Sender and the one being sent. In this way, the nature and outward expression of God in the person of Jesus Christ directly inform God's mission. The Kerygmatic Christ not only encompassed human-centered teachings, parables, and sermons in a vacuum but also involved the physical aspects of divinity actively in the work of human salvation. In essence, the earthly nature of Jesus Christ meant the divine direct carrying out of the work of human redemption. That is, while Christ's mortal ministry included great attention to his miraculous deeds, his loving-kindness, his long-suffering, and his compassionate use of priesthood authority, its principal priority is the physical manifestation of divine operational action in the work of human redemption. Consequently, Christ's earthly work within the framework of the *missio Dei* from below is primarily not about his humanity, but rather about the divinity of the triune God incarnate, who actively and visibly accomplishes the work of salvation.

Missio hominum

Christology as a doctrine is important not only as a foundation upon which other Christian teachings are built but fundamentally because it describes divinity through the highest form of humanity embodied by Jesus Christ. In other words, the significance of Christology is that it essentially describes the perfect *imago Dei* embodied in the person of Jesus Christ as inaugurating the perfect humanity. Although the idea that humanity was created in the image of God existed before Christ's earthly ministry, such an image remained fragmented until its perfection was witnessed in the person of Jesus Christ. Although the human purpose was formulated well before the historical reality that encompassed Christ's earthly existence, the human mission (*missio hominum*) found true synergy with the *missio Dei* through his material existence. Christologically speaking, the earthly Jesus Christ, or Jesus of Nazareth in the narrower sense, demonstrated the true *missio hominum* in indissoluble synergy with the *missio Dei* throughout his earthly ministry. The genuine *imago Dei*, as expressed through the humanity of Jesus the Nazarene, represents a lasting divine intervention aimed at reconciling the *missio hominum* with the goals of the *missio Dei*. If the *missio hominum* was at all unclear in the context of the Old Testament, then the invisible was undoubtedly made visible through the humanity and person of Jesus Christ. Consequently, this is precisely the core of Christology from below, on which the example of

the earthly Jesus Christ authentically unfolds human life or the *imago Dei* in complete harmony with the divine life in the sense of the *missio Dei*.

The premise of the *missio hominum* is essential because it is human nature not only to experience one's true self in communion with the Supreme Being but also to develop one's true humanity in relation to the divinity of God. That is to say, an authentic *missio hominum* is only realized when every human life is lived appropriately with and in service to the *missio Dei*, following the example of Jesus Christ, who became the perfect *imago Dei*. This is particularly true in the context of the *missio hominum* (human mission), which only finds its authenticity when it is pursued or guided as part of human participation in the *missio Dei*. Consequently, the human mission only derives its authentic significance from embracing the *imago Dei*, which faultlessly manifested in the humanity of Jesus Christ during his earthly ministry. While the *missio hominum* as a new framework may be viewed not only as a highly complex but also somewhat controversial agenda due to its anthropocentric orientation, the content of this work so far has briefly shed light on its instrumentality in the context of the *missio Dei*.

Consequently, or at least given that humanity was originally created in the *imago Dei* before sinning in the person of Adam, God-self enables the reversal of this human corruption throughout the soteriological history (*missio Dei*). Furthermore, the God-Self is offered in the person of Jesus Christ and not only reforms the *imago Dei* but also physically manifests the accomplished human mission (*missio hominum*) amenable to the mission of God (*missio Dei*), i.e. *missio hominum* in the *missio Dei*. Parenthetically, Christ's earthly sufferings culminating in crucifixion on the cross (*via Crucis*), substantiates Christ's envisaged *missio hominum* as having no material existence (*οὐκ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου*), but having spiritual or divine existence (*ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ*) (John 8:23; 1 Peter 2:11). Actually, Jesus Christ Himself, throughout His earthly ministry leading to the reality of the Cross, not only teaches abandonment of self-centred life, but also invites others to follow his example of the *missio hominum*, conceived for the *missio Dei* (Matthew 16:24). In addition, or perhaps correspondingly, *suam post resurrectionem et ante ascensionem* (post-resurrection and prior-ascension) for forty days Jesus Christ commissioned his disciples to sway the whole world (*ad gentes*) towards emulating his mortal paradigm of *missio Dei* synchronized *missio hominum* (Matthew 28:16-20). Accordingly, or far as bottom-up Christology encompasses the person of Jesus Christ as manifesting the divinely reformed *imago Dei*, that means his entire earthly ministry was, inter alia, aimed at modeling the impeccable *missio hominum* in the context of the *missio Dei*. The bottom-up Christology offers a panoptic view of Christ's earthly work, not as an end in itself, but as Jesus the Nazarene obedient to the task of redirecting *missio hominum* to serve the *missio Dei*. Consequently, while top-down Christology offers the divinity of Jesus Christ as the vicar of the triune God inducting human salvation, the bottom-up Christology offers the humanity of Jesus the Nazarene as perfectly typifying (intrinsic *imago Dei*) spellbinding *missio hominum* to *missio Dei*.

CONCLUSION

In the broad context of *missio Dei*, the emphasis is on the triune God as the author or source of human salvation, to which the human mission (*missio hominum*), as perfectly expressed in the earthly manifestations of Christ, plays a contributing or participatory role. This paper emphasized that bottom-up Christology underscores the earthly Christ as contributing not only to the restoration of the *imago Dei*, but also representing the immanent realignment of the *missio hominum* toward the *missio Dei*. As an anthropo-constructed framework, *missio hominum* itself not only has its origin in the *missio Dei* within the framework of the *imago Dei*, but its entire existence is intended to serve the *missio Dei* as shown or embodied by the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ from Nazareth. Primarily, this paper concludes that the perfect humanity of Jesus the Nazarene, as projected by bottom-up Christology, constitutively restored *missio hominum* as engrossed within the *missio Dei* and reflective of the perfect *Imago Dei*. Furthermore, it has profitably advanced the knowledge of the *missio hominum* in relation to the *missio Dei*'s redemptive framework wherein the top-down Christology augmented *missio Dei*'s transcendental philosophy while the bottom-up Christology intrinsically fortified the Christ-centred *missio hominum*. All arguments considered, the greater body of this paper not only justified the *missio*

hominum within the cosmic Christology but also congruently accentuated the *missio Dei* within the transcendental Christology. Consequently, or to the extent that this is the first paper to link Christology with the *missio Dei* to endorse *missio hominum*, further studies are needed not only to verify its conclusions but also to uncover its Theo-doctrinal inconsistencies.

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