

Dimensions of Christian Spirituality and Implications for Mission

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Introduction

In our present setting many of the terms in the above heading are open to debate. Spirituality is a contested term. Christian spirituality is also not without its difficulties, given the diversity in the Christian faith. And mission has become a highly contested term in regard to understanding its scope¹ and given its link with the church's involvement in the colonial period. We seem to be so troubled by the past that there is the pressure that everything now needs to be framed in post-period categories. Post-colonial mission is one attempt at reframing, and there are concerns whether Christian spirituality also has coercive undertones.

However, the central thrust of theological and practical thinking is not only to deal with past problems, but more specifically to reappropriate the biblical narratives for their wisdom for today.

In this paper, I seek to be attentive to these matters, but not at the risk of a mediocre reductionism so that one has little to say. And particularly so, since this paper was written as a 'backgrounder' for some of the committees working on position papers for the upcoming Lausanne Congress in Seoul, South Korea.

Moreover, since I can't cross all the 't's and dot all the 'i's, I will be as bold and as clear as I can be. But I do so in an ecumenical and dialogical spirit. Feel free to disagree.

The link between Christian spirituality, ministry and mission is fundamental. Christian spirituality is not just about certain meditational practices. It has to do with a whole way of life in Christ and living in the way of Christ. And this involves both prayer and the work for justice, among many other things.

Attempting a Little Definitional Clarity

1. Spirituality and Christian Spirituality

Particularly in our present-day Western context, we need to be careful to identify that we are focussed on Christian spirituality. This is so, because spirituality in the West can mean almost anything that has to do with some inner reflective experience.²

2. Christian Spirituality and the World Religions

In the Majority World (but in the Minority World as well), Christian spirituality is simply one 'player' in a sea of religious diversity. While commonalities exist in spiritual practices, Christian spirituality is distinctive and a reduction to baseline commonalities does justice to none of the religious traditions. However, Christian spirituality can't ignore other religious spiritualities, especially not if it seeks to be both a witness and a prophetic voice. This is particularly the case in Asia's world of the major religions.

3. Christian Spirituality in the Church's Tradition throughout History

¹ David J. Bosch defines mission as 'a multifaceted ministry, in respect of witness, service, justice, healing, reconciliation, liberation, peace, evangelism, church planting, contextualization, and much more', in *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 512. More could be added such as interfaith dialogue and earth care, among other themes.

² David Tacey, *The Spirituality Revolution: The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality* (Sydney: HarperCollins, 2003).

One of the ever-present challenges facing the present-day church is finding a healthy balance between relevance and tradition. With the latter, we may be frozen in the past. With the former, we may be reductionistic and one-sided. The challenge is to be both relevant and faithful to the rich traditions of the church. And it could well be that our present-day Christian spirituality needs to drink more deeply from the wells of the past. By way of example, we may need to recapture for the present-day church Christian spiritual traditions associated with the desert fathers and mothers, that of monasticism and Celtic Christian spirituality, and that of the Anabaptist and Wesleyan traditions, among others. This is so, because we may be more reductionistic and culturally captive than we realise,³ and a careful listening to the rich tapestry of the entire Christian tradition may be a source of revitalisation of the contemporary church.

4. Christian Spirituality in the Majority Christian World

The Lausanne Movement seeks to be the voice of and for global Evangelical Christianity. Yet we need to raise the question as to what extent the voices of the Majority (non-Western) Christians are heard and integrated in all the Lausanne statements.⁴ It could well be, as was the case in the initial Lausanne Congress of 1974, that divergent perspectives will continue to be articulated. Christian spirituality in the Minority World will be different to that of the Majority Worlds and their diversity. To create a monolithic perspective risks reductionism. Is it possible to create a voice that reflects *unity in diversity*? Can Trinitarian theology help us in some way with regard to this? Is it possible to articulate a *continuum* rather than a platform? And could it be that Majority World Christian spiritual perspectives could challenge and enrich the perspectives held by those in the Minority World? Or will the voices from the Minority World seek to dominate?

5. Christian Spirituality and the Denominations

Just as there are differences in theology and missional strategies, so there are differing Christian spiritual themes among the plurality of Christian denominations.⁵ While this constitutes much diversity as well as commonalities, the overall picture is now far more complicated. Three issues stand out: 1. In the Majority Christian World there are many new expressions of church with different accents of Christian spirituality. These voices need to be heard. 2. In many denominations there is theological and spiritual fragmentation. How do we respond to fragmentation? 3. Fragmentation is also a critical factor in present-day Evangelicalism. Where does that leave us in regard to a clear voice when we seek to speak on behalf of this entire movement? If a reductionistic commonality is not at all helpful, what is an alternative? Are global biblical and theological perspectives possible? Or do we need to live with ongoing dialogue and the creative tensions of a unity that we have in Christ through the Spirit, in fidelity to the biblical narratives?

³ The rich traditions of Christian spirituality are reflected in *The Study of Spirituality*, eds Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright and Edward Yarnold (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) and in Richard J. Foster's *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of the Christian Faith* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998).

⁴ See Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP, 1998); Jean-Marc Ela, *My Faith as an African*, trans. John Parman Brown and Susan Perry (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009); Gustavo Gutierrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984); and *Walking with God: Christian Spirituality in the Asian Context*, eds Charles R. Ringma and Karen Hollenbeck-Wuest (Manila: OMF Literature, 2014).

⁵ *Exploring Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Reader*, ed. Kenneth J. Collins (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000).

Sources of Christian Spirituality

Christian spirituality is not just a particular religious activity such as prayer or fasting. It is far more foundational to the Christian life. And it is far more multifaceted.

Given its richness and complexity, it is important, therefore, to ask the question: what are the sources of Christian spirituality?

The most simplistic answer is: passages of Scripture that talk about spirituality. The fuller answer is: all the biblical narratives. And those who are located in the Evangelical tradition need to be careful that they do not limit this to the New Testament. All of Scripture reflects God's creational, redemptive, missional and eschatological purposes, and since Christian spirituality has to do with living all of life in a particular way to the glory of God, for the building up of the faith community and for prophetic witness to the world, all of God's will and purpose must shape and sustain our spirituality.

But Christian spirituality is shaped by more than Scripture. It is also shaped by particular theological traditions and by the culture with its contours and issues.

Of significance in the fine-tuning of a Christian spirituality is the current shape and ethos of the church of which one is a part, and what are the particular 'death-dealing' contours of one's contemporary culture. But there is more. Christian spirituality deliberately seeks to respond to present-day religious, cultural and political issues, and as such it seeks to be both engaging and transformative. The implication of this is that much is at play in this complex dynamic and dance: engaging Scripture, the traditions of the church and one's socio-cultural context. Christian spirituality is not simply internally focused; it is also socially and missionally engaging. This involves a hermeneutic of the text of Scripture and of one's socio-cultural context. It involves listening to and living out God's voice and listening to and engaging one's world. This both/and listening is no easy task. And it is made all the more challenging when Scripture remains the defining and normative category.

What all of this reflects is that the church is always somewhere *in between*. It is between the first and second coming of Christ. It is in the liminal space of the now and not-yet nature of the reign or kingdom of God. And pragmatically, the faith community is between what it *is* and what it *longs to be*. It is between reaching forward in faith and by the leading of the Spirit and reaching back in recovering what may have been lost. It is between its own tradition and the traditions of other Christian churches. And it is between its own lived realities and what it seeks to bring to society in terms of prayer, witness and service. While this is challenging, it is also a blessing.

This in-betweenness makes the church dynamic, visionary, adaptive and hopefully ecumenical in being willing to learn from others. This makes Christian spirituality a very dynamic reality. And as such, it makes it always emergent and experimental, as well as grounded in the biblical narratives and in the life of faith and service.

Some Models or Typifications of Christian Spirituality

Because Christian spirituality has to do with a whole way of life in the grace and purposes of God, in Christ, through the Spirit, it is appropriate to give some shape to this way of life through the use of various models or typifications.⁶

But this needs qualification. No model is comprehensive. Every model is a form of abstraction. Therefore, every model has its limitations. At best, a model can be

⁶ See Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

suggestive and can function metaphorically. Maybe at best, a model is invitational rather prescriptive. Thus, a model always requires creative appropriation.

These models are not placed in an order of priority. And it should not surprise us that, in differing ecclesiastical and cultural contexts, certain models will have more traction than others. This can be helpful in formulating a mosaic of belief and practice, rather than the over-formulation of prescriptive statements.

1. Upward, inner and outer.⁷ This model suggests that Christian spirituality is oriented towards the love and worship of God – typified by the term upward. It is inner-directed in a life of transformation, growth and conformity to Christ through the Spirit. Here both justification and sanctification are fundamental. And it is outward-oriented in living out the love of God by loving the neighbour. And it needs to be noted that love of neighbour involves engaging the neighbour in his/her context and circumstances of life. Thus, personal as well as contextual and cultural change are in view.

2. In, for, like and in the way of Christ.⁸ This construction reflects a Christological spirituality and is fundamental and important to Christian spirituality. This wording implies the following: 1. Christian spirituality finds its source in the 'in-Christ' relationship by grace, through faith, by the Spirit, expressed in repentance, baptism, incorporation in the faith community, maintaining spiritual practices and living a life of worship, prayer, service and witness so that God's salvation and shalom will cover the face of the whole world. 2. Christian spirituality is not only rooted *in* Christ, it is also *for* Christ. This acknowledges Christ's lordship not only over the church, but over the world, over all things.⁹ The church seeks to live out this lordship of Christ and bears witness to it, including to the powers that resist Christ's lordship – powers whether demonic, ideological or political. Christians are called to live for Christ, meaning for Christ's purposes for all things. 3. Christian spirituality is seeking to live *like and in the way* of Christ. This has normally been typified as the *imitatio Christi*. This is helpful, but is a contested space and not without its difficulties. The major problems with this construction are: a. in the history of the church with its problem of dualism, different aspects of the life of Christ and his ministry have been elevated over others, e.g., contemplation over action, virginity over marriage etc; b. seeking to be like Christ is not projected in the New Testament as a mechanical repetition, but as a creative Spirit-inspired reappropriation; c. different theological traditions and denominations tend to isolate certain features of the life and ministry of Jesus – Evangelicals, that of evangelistic witness; Anabaptists, that of community; Pentecostals, that of healing and exorcism; Mainstream Protestants, that of confronting the powers; Liberation Theologians, that of the option for the poor; the list goes on and on. So, the pressing question here is: how will a Christological spirituality be projected in the Lausanne vision without falling into preferential perspectives?

3. The Christian Spirituality of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King. Remaining with the challenges of a Christological spirituality, but possibly overcoming some of the tensions in the *imitatio Christi*, this broader construction may be helpful and more relevant today. The reason for this is that there are several pressure points facing the contemporary church. One of these has to do with creation, the issues of a theological anthropology and the issues of climate change and earth care. And the second has to

⁷ David Augsburger, *Dissident Discipleship: A Spirituality of Self-Surrender, Love of God, and Love of Neighbour* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2006).

⁸ Michael J. Gorman, *Participating in Christ: Explorations in Paul's Theology and Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019).

⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, trans. Edwin H. Robertson (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1978).

do with the work of renewal and prophetic ministry. Therefore, the challenge is to hold together the three ministries of Christ. Christ's *priestly* work is to be reflected in the spirituality and mission of the faith community in terms of restoration, healing and prayer. Christ's *prophetic* work calls the church to proclamation, resisting the powers, the work of justice and living in the light of God's final future. And Christ's *kingly* work calls the church to create sustainable institutions in all realms of life, including the educational, medical, technological and political, among other domains. It is rather obvious that in these three domains particular spiritual themes and practices will be at play. And it should not surprise us that particular denominations will highlight one ministry of Christ over the other. Developing more integrated perspectives will ever be the challenge. And the church, in seeking to reflect the kingly work of Christ, is faced with the challenge of not repeating the Christendom of the Middle Ages, nor the political alliances of the Reformation, nor contemporary attempts to gain political clout in the church's witness to the world.

4. A Trinitarian Christian Spirituality.¹⁰ Given that this way of understanding Christian spirituality seems to be underdeveloped (and maybe undervalued), it may be important to give this more attention, particularly in the light of the current resurgence of Trinitarian theology.¹¹ While we wish to retain the importance of a Christological spirituality, and while we recognise that each of the 'persons' of the Trinity is involved in the work of the other, it may still be helpful to think of Christian creation spirituality, Christian redemptive spirituality, Christian renewal spirituality and Christian apophatic and mystical spirituality, and how these may co-inhere and interpenetrate. Thinking in this way would allow us possibly to develop a Christian spirituality that is more in keeping with the riches of the entire Christian tradition. It is also possible that such a Christian spirituality may have more resonance in the Majority World. The singular problem with a focus primarily on a Christological spirituality is that it too quickly moves to the *imitatio Christi*. And a primary focus on a pneumatological spirituality may move too quickly to spontaneity, creativity and enthusiasm. A full-orbed Trinitarian spirituality may well overcome fragmentation of thought and practice.

5. Head, Heart and Hand.¹² This typification may also provide a framework for understanding and living Christian spirituality. This typification, like the others, seeks to overcome a too narrow understanding of Christian spirituality. Here, head functions as a metaphor for orthodoxy. Heart represents spirituality and spiritual practices and is captured by the term orthopathy. And hand has to do orthopraxis. These three not only belong together, but they in-here – they interpenetrate. If we only have head, we have good ideas but that may lead to mere intellectualisation. If we only have hand, we may have mere and unsustainable activism but lack overall coherence. And if we only have heart, we have passion, concern and empathy but lack coherence and practical outworking. Clearly, Christian spirituality is a fully orbbed activity that involves what we believe (theology), how we are motivated and live ethically (spirituality) and what we seek to do in serving the purposes of God in our world (missiology). There is nothing too creative in this typification – Mark's Gospel provides the basic template:

¹⁰ It is disconcerting that important and credible contemporary writings on Christian spirituality fail to deal with Trinitarian Christian spirituality. E.g., Lawrence S. Cunningham and Keith J. Egan, *Christian Spirituality: Themes from the Tradition* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996); Bradley Holt, *Thirsty for God: A Brief History of Christian Spirituality* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1993); Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995); and *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, gen. ed. Glen G. Scorgie (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

¹¹ Colin E. Gunton, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2003).

¹² Charles R. Ringma, *In the Midst of Much-Doing: Cultivating a Missional Spirituality* (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global, 2023).

'you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength ... [and] your neighbour as yourself' (Mark 12:30-31).

6. Double Movement of Contemplation.¹³ We are all too aware that we are prone to put things in boxes and thereby become reductionistic. Christian spirituality is richly textured, all-embracing and integrated. Love of God and love of neighbour belong together. Hence this paradigm may be helpful. Simply put, contemplation has both a transcendent and an immanent orientation. It moves towards and reflects on God and it moves towards and reflects on the situation and needs of the neighbour and hence the world. In moving towards God in worship and a whole gamut of spiritual practices – such as prayer, meditation, fasting and other practices – one brings oneself not only to God, but also to others for whom one prays and is concerned. And whenever we seek the face of God, God will ask us: where is your brother/sister and neighbour in need? And in the immanent or incarnational orientation of contemplation, when we engage the neighbour in understanding his/her circumstances and needs – and so face both personal and structural issues – we are drawn to prayer, seeking God's wisdom and help because these needs are always way beyond our capacities, particularly when we seek to do all of God's good to others. The neighbour thus brings us to God and God brings us to the neighbour. In seeking the face of God we see the neighbour in need, and in responding to the neighbour we cry out to God for God's redemptive and healing work to be fulfilled in the neighbour, even in the enemy.

Cultivating, Sustaining and Growing in Christian Spirituality

Christian spirituality, as we have noted, does not constitute an *aspect* or *dimension* of the Christian life. It is *intrinsic to Christian life as a whole in all its dimensions*. This means, then, that it is fundamental and important, and needs to be given full attention in understanding and living the Christian life.

Christian spirituality is profoundly personal, inter-relational, ecclesiastical, social, missional and eschatological. It has to do with one's personal journey of faith. It has to do with all our relationships lived out in the spirit of the Beatitudes. It has to do with our participation in the faith community as it lives under the Word, in sacramental fidelity, in mutual love, encouragement and fellowship, and in witness and service to the glory of God, as a sign and servant of the Reign of God. This spirituality undergirds our life in family, work and community, and in every dimension of Christian ministry. And Christian spirituality is eschatological as it anticipates God's final future through the present inbreaking of the kingdom of God.

1. The Genesis of Christian Spirituality

Christian spirituality is the *fruit* and *way of life* of one's personal faith appropriation of the grace of God in Christ through the empowering Spirit. It is a gift from God. It is marked by conversion and ongoing transformation into the likeness of Christ and into living God's purposes for the world.

Being grounded in Christ, and being enlivened by the Spirit, and living in fidelity to the gospel as a way of life will ever find its source in Christ's salvific work and God's presence in all we seek to be and do.

Said differently, we will never outgrow the beginnings of the Christian life since it is grounded in the grace of God in Christ and a life of faith.

¹³ Segundo Galilea, *Following Jesus*, trans. Helen Philips (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1994).

And it needs to be stressed, in the light of the ongoing emphasis on individualism and the fragmentation of social life, that Christian spirituality is communal. It is the spirituality of the *people* of God.

2. Cultivating Christian Spirituality

Any gift and any blessing (and for that matter any good thing) needs to be cared for, nurtured and enhanced. This is also true of Christian spirituality. It is a spirituality in which one becomes more deeply grounded and in which one grows. Christian spirituality needs to be 'shepherded' – and cultivated. The Lord's Prayer reflects this in the prayer for daily bread.

Throughout the history of the Christian church this has received a lot of attention, and all sorts of markers and ladders were used to indicate stages of growth in Christian spirituality and Christlikeness, ranging from Luther's classic notion that we remain sinner/saints to all sorts of notions of deification.¹⁴ Taking seriously the Pauline notion that we will continue to live the Christian life by putting off the old nature and putting on the new, and that we are to grow in greater fidelity to Christ and to the gospel, we take the position that we are ever on the way in our journey towards God and God's purposes of restoration.

In the light of this, we can give some attention to what we mean by cultivating a Christian spirituality.

First of all, growth in Christian spirituality is not the fruit of self-effort. Growth takes place in response to God's grace and goodness in our lives.

Secondly, growth in spirituality can occur in a whole range of ways and includes psychosocial development, vocational formation, life experience and growth in maturity. In the Reformed tradition, we speak of the gifts of God's special grace but we also celebrate the gifts of God's common grace. The latter gifts have to do with the gifts we receive in family, education, the workplace and other life activities. These latter gifts are what I have in mind here. Recognising this is important when we think of the further formation of Christians for specific areas of ministry. Simply put, God uses both natural talents and skills *and* the spiritual gifts in our formation and mission.

Thirdly, cultivating Christian spirituality involves growing in the Word and in the life of the Spirit under the lordship of Christ. And as such, it involves the personal disciplines of a range of spiritual practices, including prayer, contemplation, meditation, fasting and giving, among others. It is important to recognise that, in the challenging times in which we are living, this may well include relinquishment, forms of asceticism and suffering.

Fourthly, growing in spirituality involves participation in the life and disciplines of the church and one's ongoing formation in Word, the sacramental life and ministry. The gift of life together, being part of small groups and friendship networks, and being mentored and receiving spiritual direction and guidance are important means of Christian growth. The communal nature of the Christian life is fundamental, as Paul makes clear with his notion of the 'body of Christ'. And, as a consequence, this should mark missional activity – instead of the solo ministry that has marked so much of modern missional activity, we need to recover both a communal missional spirituality and communal missional practices.

¹⁴ Michael J. Christensen and Jeffrey A. Wittung, eds. *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007).

And finally, growth takes place through ministry and mission. It is in the midst of life with all its challenges and opportunities that we can grow. This means that serving others is not simply the depletion of our resources, but is an avenue for growth in greater conformity to Christ, who was the great Suffering Servant in the purposes of God.

We need to be generous with regard to the language we use in relation to cultivating a Christian spirituality. We can speak of learning. We can talk of being disciplined. We can use the concept of formation. We can think of being mentored. There are multiple relational ways in which we can grow and be further trained. If, however, a single primary term is insisted upon (though I am for a multiplicity terms), then I would settle for the contemporary term 'formation'. We can then speak of formation in spiritual practices, formation in discipleship, formation in prayer and formation in mission. And we then need to think about how these are all interrelated.

However, we need to be careful that we don't elevate the Western 'banking system' of training in relation to formation and discipleship, and particularly not when we apply this to mission. So much learning takes place *in situ*. As a consequence, I remain mystified why more training for global mission does not take place in the settings in which one seeks to serve. If one is called to serve in Myanmar, there are seminaries in that country!

3. Sustaining and Growing in Christian Spirituality

The Christian lives in Christ and in the world. The Christian has been impacted by the grace of God in Christ through the Spirit, and the Christian is impacted both by the goodness and the worldliness of the world. Simply put, two 'forces' are impacting the Christian. The Christian thus, while at 'peace with God', is in a state of conflict and is ever called to prayer and discernment.

Ambiguity, uncertainty, doubt and many other factors are at play in living out a Christian spirituality. So, how do we sustain and grow in Christian spirituality when that is outworked in life in general or more particularly in missional settings?

First of all, we need to recognise the reality of 'seasons' in the Christian life. Neither our theology nor our spirituality nor our ministry will remain unchanged over time. There will be times of generativity and times of consolidation. There will be times of waiting and praying and times of more active service. There will be sabbath periods and periods of further training. And importantly, there will be times of handing over to others, times of divesting, times of letting go. I have not seen this done well in the various missional settings where I have worked. Just as we have our personal 'seasons', so churches and ministries have theirs.

Secondly, being sustained and growing in Christian spirituality is not necessarily a straightforward movement. There are difficulties on the road of Christian discipleship that will need to be faced and hopefully overcome. There will be setbacks. And there are the problems of growth and success. Rather than always thinking that our main challenges lie outside of us, we need to also realise our internal challenges. I personally think that our greatest challenges do not lie at the genesis of a project but in its success. We as Christians are not better than others when it comes to the lure of success, power and influence.

Thirdly, we need to rethink our Western conceptions of growth that tend to be linear. Things are meant to get bigger and better. The Gospels seem to disagree. They speak of the blessing of pruning. And rather than linear notions of growth we may need to think of circular concepts. Growth may have everything to do with going back to beginnings and processes of revitalisation. The language of the recovery of our initial charism needs to be heard today.

Understanding Mission

The main biblical theme regarding an understanding of mission is that the God of the biblical narratives is the creator and redeeming God, who draws humanity into God's reconciling and restorative love and purposes, and calls this renewed humanity to be an embodiment of and witness to God's saving purposes for the whole world.

The missional God calls into being a missional people. This people, sustained by the grace of God and empowered and led by the Spirit, is to be a second 'incarnation' and a hermeneutic of the gospel. It is to be a worshipping, praying and missional community shaped by word and sacrament.

The scope of the church's mission is to bring the whole gospel to the whole world by the whole people of God.¹⁵ The church seeks to be a servant of and witness to the purposes of God for our world. But it is to serve in God's way, seeking to live in the way of Christ, in the power of the Spirit.

To serve in the way of Christ involves proclamation – the *annunciation* of the good news – and the deeds of love. Such deeds involve the whole scope of forgiveness, reconciliation, renewal, healing, peacemaking and the work of justice. This is for individuals and for communities. And in the light of the Creator God, this includes the task of earth care.

But serving in God's way also involves the task of *denunciation*. God is the God of grace and judgment. The people of God, therefore, are to expose what is unjust in the world. They are to be a healing people, but also a prophetic people. They are to speak truth to power.

The task of the church, through its institutions and through the people of faith in their daily lives, is to penetrate every domain of life as a seed of the kingdom of God. The church is to be in the world as light, salt and leaven.

While the mission is to express a world-formative, and not a world-denying, form of Christianity, its calling is not to control but to renew. The church has a servant task in the world. It is to be healing presence.

But it is only ever a seed, a witness, a sacrament, and only ever an anticipation of the full restoration that awaits God's final future.

Towards a Missional Spirituality

Mission and spirituality are often put into separate 'boxes'. Mission is the *active* dimension of the Christian life and spirituality is the *reflective* dimension. And in the history of the Christian church the one has often been placed above the other – contemplation above service.

That mission and spirituality belong together should be obvious. Prayer leads to deeds. And in our activism, we are called back to prayer. Mission is both birthed and sustained in prayer, and our ministry enriches our spirituality; in fact, it makes our spirituality authentic.

Mission involves leaving and going in order to serve the other. It is a form of self-giving. It is marked by precarity. It involves entering the 'world' of the other. It is marked by liminality. This means that particular dimensions of Christian spirituality are *accented* in the missional task, such as: surrender, relinquishment, learning, and working on behalf of, identifying with and suffering with others, among other themes.

¹⁵ 'The Manila Manifesto', in *Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement, 1974-1989*, ed. John Stott (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 225-248.

This being the case, therefore, we may speak of a missional spirituality. And while this may be true in an acute way of cross-cultural workers, it is true of all Christians.

Undoing, Liminality, Dark Night of the Soul and the Apophatic

The contemporary Western Evangelical tradition has tended to see itself as the fruit of the Reformation and of various renewal and revival movements – the Wesleyan movement is only one example. This raises the question: what about the rest of the Christian story? What of the Church Fathers? What of Monasticism? What of Celtic Christianity? What of Roman Catholicism and the Eastern Orthodox traditions? The Christian story is a colourful one.

So, we need to take on board the question: have we narrowed the story too much?¹⁶

I am proposing that the challenges facing the church in the West – its need to re-evangelise, to respond to contemporary cultural diversity and to continue to work cooperatively in the Majority world – mean that we may need to recover a much fuller story of Christian spirituality.

I make three basic suggestions.

The first is that any form of cross-cultural mission involves the process of undoing as one transitions into another culture with differing worldviews. This process of undoing impacts one's theology and spirituality. This is both complex and challenging, invigorating and life-giving.

Second, any change at a personal level does not immediately land one in a place of certainty. It usually lands one in an in-between place. This is the place of liminality, where past certainties are under question and new certainties are still emergent.

Third, Evangelical Christian spirituality still tends to be more pragmatic. In the challenging environment of the 21st century, it may well need to take on board notions of St John of the Cross' concept of the dark night of the soul and the challenges of Christian mysticism¹⁷ and apophatic Christian spirituality.

This in no way is an appeal to embrace all sorts of vague and esoteric notions. But our tendency towards rationality and pragmatism needs modification by the rich traditions of Christian spirituality. Mark's Gospel, as we have already seen, sets the template through its call: 'And you shall love the Lord your God with all your *heart* and with all your *soul* and with all your *mind* and with all your *strength* ... [and] you shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Mark 12:30-31, ESV, my emphasis).

There are a lot of present-day concerns about the wellbeing and sustainability of those who serve in the church and in mission. It is possible that much more attention needs to be given to psycho-social health, diet, exercise, sabbath and other spiritual practices, formation, discipleship, mentoring, cooperation and so much more.

The Christian serves God in both the clarity of the gospel and the specificity of God's call, but at the same time, in the mystery of God's sovereignty and human responsibility and in the 'messiness' of life in all its complexity.

A Passion for the Impossible: A Hermeneutic of Hope

¹⁶ Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999); and Charles R. Ringma, *Hear the Ancient Wisdom: A Meditative Reader for the Whole Year from the Early Church Fathers up to the Pre-Reformation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013).

¹⁷ Bernard McGinn, ed. *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* (New York: The Modern Library, 2006).

The faith community, in its worship and witness, is an *anticipatory* community. It awaits what will yet be in the purposes of God. And in prayer and service it strains forward towards God's final future and the redemption of all things in the new heaven and new earth.¹⁸

The church is also an *eschatological* community, which, while looking back to what God has already revealed and in faith embracing the presence of God in word, sacrament and fellowship, nevertheless looks to the future. It longs to see that what is already true in heaven becomes a reality in the here and now.

This means that the church is a community of hope. Its hope lies in the revelatory power of the Word, the inspirational power of the Holy Spirit and the promises of God's presence and faithfulness in being with God's new humanity, until God will be all in all in the new heavens and a new earth.

What the faith community hopes for it will live toward. And so, the church is ever restless for God's empowering presence and for the transformation of the world.

A Critical Hermeneutic

Every attempt at formulation seeks to be some sort of answer to a question or questions, whether explicit or implicit. Often, far too much is implicit.

The Lausanne committees are seeking to make statements that will benefit and guide global Evangelicalism. And they are concerned with a lack of fidelity to Evangelical theological and ethical convictions, a lack of formation in discipleship, the need for the integration of spiritual and missional practices, a greater witness of the church as an embodiment of the gospel, inter-church cooperation and the recovery and/or maintenance of evangelisation as a core calling of what it means to be followers of Christ.

This is an awesome task, particularly because Lausanne can only play an exemplary and advisory role to global Evangelicalism. Its voice, thus, can only be embraced voluntarily.

But in this awesome task there must be room for critical questions. Because so much of the work of formulation still needs to be done, these questions can only be anticipatory and general. But the question or mandate or briefing for a project is that, while it gives direction, it may also exclude the possibility of a wider vision.

As a consequence, attention needs to be given to what one is asked to do and to probe whether more needs to be at play. This is a healthy process.

And so, let me ask some questions. I see these questions as normal and not in any way as seeking to undermine the good work being done:

1. To what extent are the current attempts at formulation based only on perceived global Evangelical church problems, and not enough on creative initiatives that can chart a way forward for Evangelical churches?
2. Is the fundamental concern to lay the basis for Evangelical thought and practice in order to deal with increasing diversity? Is the task thus a normative one to give a new cohesion to global Evangelicalism? If so, is this basically a conservative rather than a prophetic move?
3. Is the current project global enough or still too Western-centric?

¹⁸ J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014).

4. Is the current project too focussed on a Christian spirituality for the mission of the church and not enough on what Christian organisations and movements, and what 'lay' people, are doing in daily service and witness? Is there a need for the older Lausanne emphasis on the calling and task of the 'whole people of God'?
5. Do the proposed formulations and statements give enough scope for the concept of 'unity in diversity'?
6. To what extent is the work being done a 'mono voice' for internal purposes, namely, only for the Evangelical community?
7. To what extent does the Lausanne movement have a Christian duty to engage and be in dialogue with other parts of the Christian church in their quest to fulfil God's missional mandates?
8. To what extent is there engagement with the contemporary concerns of climate change, AI, the refugee crisis, scepticism about social and political institutions, the rise of Neo-Nazism, and ongoing poverty and warmongering, among other issues?
9. And finally, to what extent is there a clear articulation that the mission of the church is based in the power of the gospel and the Spirit and not in making political, economic or other alliances?

Conclusion

The task of the various committees in formulating various position papers and a possible declaration for the forthcoming Lausanne Congress in Seoul, Korea, is a monumental one. This is so, because the Lausanne Movement seeks to be a key voice for global Evangelicalism.

My understanding is that Lausanne seeks to be both an anchoring and a guiding voice. It seeks to say: 'this is what we have in common and this is what defines us as Evangelicals' and here are 'directions and challenges facing Evangelicals'.

Given the globalisation of Evangelicalism, its presence in many denominations, its heartbeat in many new Majority World church movements marked by ethnic diversity but spread globally and its identity in many solo standing churches across the world, Lausanne's forming and encouraging and forward-looking task seems to be overwhelming.

We can only pray that the Spirit will guide them in this challenging task and that their work will bear great fruit in a time when great challenges face our world.

Since the concern about Christian spirituality and the church's mission in the world are contested notions and subject to a spectrum of interpretations, I have sought to make a small contribution to the debate in this 'background' paper.

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