

# “Together Towards Life” (TTL) *Mission Towards Fullness of Life*

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I have been asked to dwell on the main affirmations of the new WCC Mission and Evangelism statement entitled “Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes” (hereafter referred to as “TTL”). I focus here on only a few important affirmations of TTL.

First and foremost, according to TTL, mission is essentially affirmation of Trinitarian Life. In this sense, what TTL offers is *Missio Trinitatis*. It affirms that the Triune God is the God of Life and that we are called to participate in the life-affirming mission of the Holy Trinity, itself the source and fountain of mission. Hence, TTL would define mission as the outpouring of love, justice, mutual sharing and equality that characterize and bind together the Holy Trinity.

The Trinitarian Life that TTL affirms is the result of *perichoresis*, the mutual indwelling and sharing of love, justice and peace among the members of the divine Trinitarian community. Trinitarian Life or fullness of life, therefore, is in clear contradiction with “abundant/luxurious life”, which is being privatized and enjoyed by an elite minority, often at the expense of the vast majority. Trinitarian life is derived from a Trinitarian economy, which fosters sharing, justice and fairness: fullness of life for all. However, economic globalization today has effectively supplanted the God of Life with its own “ungod” of Mammon – the god of free market capitalism which propagates a “soteriology” of “saving” the world through creation of undue wealth and prosperity. Countering such idolatrous visions and denouncing the economy of greed in the strongest language possible, TTL offers a counter-cultural missiology. TTL also affirms, in no uncertain terms, that “a denial of life is a rejection of the God of Life” (TTL, Para1). It implies that a Trinitarian mission is one that affirms *all* life.

TTL treats life in its holistic sense, inclusive of biological, human, non-human and eternal dimensions of life. This is an inclusive vision of mission which would challenge all forms of discrimination on any basis.

*Mission, therefore, is to turn to the Triune God of Life.*

Secondly, the missiology of TTL is Spirit-centred. A distinct focus on Pneumatology is one of the salient features of TTL. The Holy Spirit is discerned wherever life in fullness is affirmed; where the oppressed are liberated; where broken communities are reconciled and healed; and where creation is restored. Thus, the scope of the mission of the Holy Spirit is not confined to the ecclesial community alone, but is encountered outside the church as well where struggles for fullness of life and justice take place.

Another major highlight of TTL is the specific accent on Mission as Spirituality. Christian witness is not only what we *do* in mission, but also how we live out mission. In other words, the being mode of mission is as important as the doing mode. Authentic mission is sustained by spiritualities that have deep roots in the Trinitarian community of love, justice and integrity of creation. Put differently, mission as *askesis*, expressed in authentic Christian life styles is what accords mission of the Spirit credibility. To the extent that our lives in the world around us match with that of Christ, we witness to Christ. In other words, when there is no mismatch between what we proclaim and how we live out the gospel, mission is authentically and powerfully exercised. In our own times, the influential example of the present bishop of Rome, Pope Francis, is a great manifestation of mission as *askesis* – Mission as Spirituality.

The Mission Spirituality that TTL articulates as part of the mission of the Spirit is transformative. It “resists and seeks to transform all life-destroying values and systems wherever these are at work in our economies, our politics and even our churches” (TTL, para 30).

TTL reinforces this radical dimension of Mission as Transformative Spirituality by echoing the similar challenge expressed in the Edinburgh 2010 Common Call:

“Our faithfulness to God and God’s free gift of Life compels us to confront idolatrous assumptions, unjust systems, politics of domination and exploitation in our current world of economic order” (TTL, para 30).

This means, as TTL would put it, that mission of the Holy Spirit also necessarily entails discernment of evil spirits where forces of death and destruction of life prevail.

*Mission, therefore, is to turn to the Holy Spirit who transforms life.*

Thirdly, TTL affirms a missiology that is Creation-centered. It articulates a missiology that begins with creation. Creation and celebration of all life is deemed a missionary activity of the Triune God. In fact, the very act of *Missio Dei* begins with the act of creation. TTL affirms the gospel as "the good news for every part of creation and every aspect of our life and reality" (TTL, para 4).

God's mission therefore is cosmic. When the planet is facing such serious threats as global warming, climate change, exploitation of nature due to excessive greed and undue profit motives, mission as quest for Eco-justice is hugely important. Here again, TTL breaks new grounds in that it goes beyond those understandings of mission that tend to understand and practice mission as something done *by* humanity *to* others. We tend to forget that in many ways creation is in mission to humanity (TTL, para 22). For instance, nature and its resources have the power to heal. In other words, TTL does not present creation as a mere object of human concern, but as an active agent of God's mission that channels divine grace and blessing.

*Mission, therefore, is to turn to creation.*

Fourthly and lastly, TTL affirms Mission from the Margins.

In my view, the defining feature of TTL is its delineation of the paradigm: "Mission from the Margins". In today's world, all life is imperiled. The most crucial threats to life today are manifested in the form of social, economic, ecological and nuclear injustice. Life is valued hierarchically in contexts where systems of social and economic hegemony are in control. This is where "Mission from the Margins" as an alternative missiological paradigm which "seeks to counteract injustice in life, church, and mission", assumes great pertinence. It challenges the conventional missiological wisdom that mission is always done by the powerful to the powerless, by the rich to the poor, by the global North to the global South and by the centre to the margins. As TTL would put it: "People at the margins have agency and can often see what for the centre is out of view . . . people on the margins know what exclusionary forces are threatening their survival and best discern the urgency of their struggles . . . through struggles in and for life, the marginalized people are reservoirs of the active hope, collective resistance and perseverance that are needed to remain faithful to the promised reign of God" (TTL, para 38 and 39). Through the pain and pathos of daily experiences of life denying forces, the marginalized come to know their God of Life. This is the unique epistemological faculty of the marginalized that TTL considers as important in discerning the Life affirming Spirit in mission. To borrow the words of Gopal Guru, a leading Indian sociologist, only the marginalized have the moral stamina to effect social change

and transformation. This is the dynamic agency of the marginalized that TTL advocates through “Mission from the Margins”. This is mission **from** the margins, not **to** the margins or even **at** the margins where the marginalized are treated as mere recipients of charity. Mission from the centre, motivated by paternalistic attitudes and superiority complex, has often been complicit with life denying and oppressive systems (TTL, para 41). In its place, the alternative missionary movement of “Mission from the Margins” claims active agency of mission for the marginalized. God chooses the vulnerable and the marginalized- those at the margins- to fulfill God’s mission of establishing justice and peace. People at the margins are thus the primary agents of God’s mission where as Jesus said: “ the last would be the first” (Mtt. 20:16). The purpose of mission here is not simply to move people from the margins to the centre but to challenge those (systems and people) who remain at the centre by keeping people on the margins. This has implications for churches as they are challenged to transform their own power structures. This is an urgent challenge that the global church, mission agencies and the ecumenical movement as a whole need to address urgently.

*Mission, therefore, is to turn to the margins*

Churches are called to meet the Triune God of life at the margins where the victims of oppressive and life-denying forces have already taken over the agency of God’s life-affirming mission. This should also challenge the church to join civil society initiatives that are already engaged in struggles for human rights, justice and fullness of life. What can and must challenge the ecumenical movement today is nothing other than the cries of people at the margins for life. Let us echo these cries for justice in prayer and action.

Let us commit ourselves to the mission of God by turning to the life-affirming Triune God. We will do that in humility and hope, with courage and commitment, by choosing life over against death, by joining the margins where struggles for justice, peace and integrity of creation are already on. With those in struggles for life, let us pray together:

*God of life, lead us to justice and peace. Amen.*