



NORWEGIAN
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Missio Dei

Laying a Foundation for a Missional Ecclesiology of the Church of the Brethren

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Abstract

In the midst of the turbulent changes of the contemporary pluralist society, the church is preoccupied by the pressing issue regarding her identity and role in our time. The West that used to be considered the stronghold of Christianity is again a mission field. This situation calls for the thorough reconsideration of our ecclesiology. Since the second half of the 20th century, the theology of mission has become the main source for rethinking of ecclesiology.

The goal of this thesis is to lay a foundation for a missional ecclesiology of the Church of the Brethren (Církev bratrská), an Evangelical church active in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. My premises are that the triune God is a missionary God and that ecclesiology has to be subordinated to missiology. Therefore, I approach the ecclesiology of the Church of the Brethren from the starting point of *missio Dei*.

This study is divided into five parts. Part I introduces the research problem, presents used sources, specifies the method of the research and its ambition. Part II is dedicated to the presentation of the theology of the Church of the Brethren and then focuses on her missiology and ecclesiology. Part III deals with the origin and two different interpretations of *missio Dei*. Here, the concept of *missio Dei* as presented in the work of the British missiologist Lesslie Newbigin is outlined. Part IV aims at the intertextual constructive synthetic re-interpretation of the ecclesiology of the church of the Brethren from the perspective of Newbigin's concept of *missio Dei*. Part V briefly summarizes the outcome of my work; the ecclesiology of the Church of the Brethren is formulated in terms of eschatological participation in the witness of the Holy Spirit to the Kingdom of the Father revealed and accomplished in the Son.

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I would like to dedicate this study to the congregation of the Church of the Brethren in Hradec Králové, Czech Republic, where I could “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

The triune God who lives eternally in mutual self-giving love wills to include creatures in that community of love. The welcoming of the other that marks the life of the Trinity in all eternity is extended towards us. Through the divine missions of Word and Spirit, God welcomes creatures to share the triune life of love and community. In the mission of Jesus Christ God forgives sinners and opens the way to their reconciliation with God and others, and in the mission of the Holy Spirit God empowers our participation in the triune God's life of outgoing, self-giving love to others. The mission of the church has its basis and model in this reaching out to the world by God, this missio Dei or divine missionary activity.

Daniel Migliore (in Guder 2015:28)

PART I: Introduction

1.1 Research Problem

In November 2006, the representatives of the Czech member churches of the *Community of Protestant Churches in Europe* (CPCE) met in Prague at their fourth synod. The central topic of this meeting was the mission. Pavel Černý (1949), the chairman of the *Council of the Church of the Brethren* and the president of the *Ecumenical Council of Churches in the Czech Republic* at that time, began the presentation of his paper entitled the *Missionary Form of the Church Today: The Quest for a Form of the Missionary Church in the 21st Century* with a quotation of the well-known scholar Martin Hengel (1926-2009): “Church and theology which forgets or denies the missionary sending of believers as messengers of salvation in a world threatened by disaster surrenders its very foundation and in so doing surrenders itself” (Hengel in Černý 2006a:2). Černý then introduced the concept of *missio Dei* and called for incarnational mission of the church and an adequate ecclesiology which reflects the rapid changes in Western pluralist society. Černý also recalled the document of the Pope John Paul II (1920-2005, in office 1978-2005) *Redemptoris Missio* which he related to the need to re-evangelize the Czech Republic. Moreover, Černý referred to the words of the former Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey (1935, in office 1991-2002) who asserted that ecclesiology should be subordinated to the theology of mission (Černý 2006a:8-9).

The West that had been for many centuries considered the *corpus Christianum* is again a mission field. In the midst of the turbulent changes of contemporary pluralist society, the

church is preoccupied by the pressing question regarding her identity and her role in our time. In the 20th century, ecclesiology has been placed at the center of theological interest. Jaroslav Pelikan (1923-2006) claims:

The doctrine of the church became, as it had never quite been before, the bearer of the whole Christian message for the 20th century, as well as the recapitulation of the entire doctrinal tradition from preceding centuries (Pelikan in Goheen 2002a:354).

According to Michael W. Goheen (1955), the main factor which lies behind this development is the new missionary situation of the churches in the West (ibid). In this situation of crisis where both danger and opportunity meet (cf Bosch 1991:3), the missional nature of the church has been re-discovered and since then missiology is the driving force for the new rethinking of ecclesiology. Jürgen Moltmann (1926) maintains: “Today, one of the strongest impulses towards the renewal of the theological concept of the church comes from the theology of mission” (Moltmann in Goheen 2002a:354). Moltmann is right. Since the re-discovery of the concept of *missio Dei* that “[w]as injected into the bloodstream of mission thinking” at Willingen 1952, the ecclesiological reflection underwent dramatic changes (Goheen 2014:75). New missionary approach to ecclesiology (and to theology in general) springs from the notion that the triune God is by nature a missionary God (Bosch 1991:390). Therefore, also the church might be properly understood only in terms of her apostolic vocation. As Goheen informs us, also “Hendrikus Berkhof believes that what is needed is nothing less than a whole reformulation of our entire ecclesiology from the standpoint of mission” (Goheen 2002a:354).

In the light of the previous statements, we can view Černý’s quest for the “the missionary form of the church today” as an example of the ongoing debate concerning the necessity of the interaction between missiology and ecclesiology. In the conclusion of his paper, Černý suggested to reflect further on the implications of *missio Dei* for Czech churches (Černý 2006a:12). In this thesis, I would like to pick up Černý’s gauntlet and attempt to approach the ecclesiology of the Church of the Brethren (CB) from the perspective of *missio Dei*. While Černý was in his paper preoccupied not only with the foundation of the missional vocation of the church but also with the contextualization of the missiology and ecclesiology (the church should follow the model of the incarnation of Christ and influence the entire contemporary society), I am going to limit myself in my research only to the exploration of the missional nature of the church on the foundational level. My goal is to develop the ecclesiology of CB with the missiology as the starting point. *Missio Dei*—the mission understood as being and the activity of God the Father, The Son, and the Holy Spirit—is the

foundation on which the missional ecclesiology of CB is going to be build. *Missio Dei* provides the theological foundation for the *missio ecclesiae* and the seminal framework for grasping the missional nature of the church which is the necessary presupposition for further contextual elaboration of the missional ecclesiology (Bosch 1991:389-391).

The contemporary situation in the West poses a challenge to the church. She needs to remain faithful to her Lord Jesus Christ but also must address the specific needs of the times and places in which she lives. This cannot be done without reflecting again on the foundation, aim, and the nature of the mission of the church (cf Bosch 1991:4-6) and appropriate ecclesiology.

1.2 Research Material

The aim of this thesis is to lay a foundation for a missional ecclesiology of CB. The primary sources include the official doctrinal documents elaborated by this church. The main focus will be put on these contemporary documents formulated by CB: the *Statement* 2016, the *Commentary* 2017, and the *Principles* 2017.¹ However, I intend to employ also some older documents to illustrate the development in the missiology and ecclesiology of this church, namely, the *Statement* 2013, the *Principles* 1977, and the *Principles* 1997. Only the *Statement* 2013 was translated into English; other documents of CB remain accessible only in Czech.²

As for the secondary sources, the literature that I involve in this research is very diverse. The key for choosing the appropriate literature is its relevance in relation to the topic of missiology and ecclesiology in general, and *missio Dei* and missional church in particular.

Various papers, academic articles, monographies, and other works help me to attain my goal. The theology of Lesslie Newbigin (1909-1998) presented not only in his own books but especially systematized in the work of Michael W. Goheen plays an important role in my research. Newbigin's understanding of *missio Dei* becomes the framework for developing the missional ecclesiology of CB. It is Newbigin, above all, who through the work of Goheen guides me in my endeavor to work out the ecclesiology of CB in missionary terms. Also, I pay close attention to the literary production of GOCN. This movement took up the agenda of the

¹ See the list of the cited documents of CB in 6.3.

² In addition to the doctrinal documents that emerged from the ground of CB herself, this church avows also the Ecumenical creeds, symbols of both Czech and European Reformation, and the documents of the *Lausanne Movement*. Even though these documents exercised great influence on the theology of CB, they could not be labeled as the primary sources for this thesis. Nevertheless, I am going to take these documents into consideration when it is necessary.

IMC and further develops Newbigin's legacy in the context of North America (Goheen 2002b). GOCN's pioneering work the *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Guder et al. 1998) introduced the term *missional*. GOCN with its many publications has largely contributed to the ongoing debate in the field of missional theology (Nikolajsen 2013:257-261).

Additionally, the works of Jürgen Moltmann (1926), David J. Bosch (1929-1992), Daniel Migliore (1935), Tormod Engelsen (1943), Wilhelm Richebächer (1956), John G. Flett (1972), Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen (1978), and many others provide me with valuable insights as I scrutinize the concept of *missio Dei* and appropriate understanding of missional ecclesiology. Among Czech authors, it is especially Pavel Filipi (1936-2015) and Pavel Černý (1949) whose work is very helpful to me.

Beside the works directly related to the topic of my thesis, I am going to embrace also a wide range of articles, monographies, handbooks, and encyclopedias written by both Czech and foreign authors to provide me with necessary background information and help me in my analysis, interpretation, and evaluation.

1.3 Research Method

This is a literature-based study that employs the methodology of systematic theology. It combines the elements of description, analysis, comparison, and evaluation aiming at intertextual constructive synthetic re-interpretation of the ecclesiology of CB from the perspective of the *missio Dei*.

The objective of this thesis is the *re-interpretation* of the ecclesiology of CB from the premises of the fundamental theology of mission (*missio Dei*). The already existent theology of CB has to be taken into account in this quest. It is necessary to include the theology of CB, acknowledge its value and then approach it from the perspective of *missio Dei* to develop it further. Accordingly, the goal of this thesis is specified as *intertextual*, *constructive*, and *synthetic* as it brings together the theology of CB and various theological impulses from the authors rooted in different contexts to interact and enrich the missional re-interpretation of the ecclesiology of CB within the framework of *missio Dei*. In order to achieve this appointed goal, I have developed the method that could be explicated as the following three-step process.

First, in order to substantiate the possibility of the intended missional re-interpretation of the ecclesiology of CB, her missiology and ecclesiology have to be presented. Nevertheless,

it is not possible to isolate them from their proper theological milieu. Therefore, the theology of CB as such should be presented at least in a certain prolegomenal manner.

Second, the plausible missiological foundation for the intended re-interpretation has to be fashioned. The concept of *missio Dei* provides the foundation and framework for grasping the ecclesiology of CB in the missionary terms. Nevertheless, as the concept of *missio Dei* has been understood ambiguously since its introduction in the middle of the 20th century, it will be necessary to explicate the content of this term in a greater detail.

Only after the exposition of the theology of CB and *missio Dei* each in their own right and temporary refraining from any attempt for their interaction, I can proceed to the final step which consists in the intertextual constructive synthetic re-interpretation of the ecclesiology of CB with *missio Dei* as the starting point.³

1.4 Research Structure

This thesis is divided into five parts. Part I presents the outline of this thesis. Parts II, III, and IV strictly follow the three-step methodical process designed above. Part II is dedicated to the introductory presentation of the theology of CB and then it continues with a focus on the exposition of her missiology and ecclesiology. Part III is divided into two sections. The first one deals with the ambivalence of the term *missio Dei*. Here, I offer the diachronic account of the development of this concept. The second section unfolds the synchronic articulation of *missio Dei* based on the theology of Lesslie Newbigin. Newbigin's explication of *missio Dei* in his own works and especially the exposition of his missionary ecclesiology examined in the exquisite publication of Michael W. Goheen (Goheen 2000) is going to play the key role in the part IV. Therefore, only after the expository parts II and III I can proceed to part IV where I can re-interpret the ecclesiology of CB. The ecclesiology of CB is re-interpreted and further

³ It should be mentioned that this is one of those studies that come "from within". The author of this thesis is a member of CB and has been influenced by the local congregation of CB in Hradec Králové, Czech Republic since his childhood. Hermeneutic of suspicion on the part of the reader is, therefore, right and proper. The author of the following lines is well-aware of his bias and the fact that he might be accused of being too biased to do this kind of research. On the other side, it could be argued that an absolutely objective and unbiased researcher is a myth of the Enlightenment, as modern hermeneutics has clearly showed. I am convinced that a genuine study has to be started with the author's admission of his own prejudices. I believe, together with Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) and many others, that prejudices have to be rehabilitated, and that only when we acknowledge them, will we be able to develop new ones—the better ones, hopefully (cf e.g. Gadamer 2013, Jeanrond 2002, Grondin 1997). Additionally, since the author is grounded in the theological tradition that maintains that theology is the function of the church and, therefore, cannot be detached from her (cf Pöhlmann 2002:9), he believes that being influenced by certain theological tradition does not have to be inevitably considered as disadvantage, but rather a precondition for theological work: "*Sola experientia facit theologum*" (Martin Luther in Höschele 2009:1).

developed within the framework of *missio Dei* elaborated by Newbigin and enriched by insights of GOCN and other authors. In part V I briefly summarize the outcome of my work.

1.5 Research Ambition

To some extent, it is still true that missiology is a “Cinderella” of the theological disciplines taught at Czech theological faculties (Fajfr 2007).⁴ When *the Central European Centre for Mission Studies* held their first conference, its theme was posed as this question: *Do we need missiology? And if so, why do we not teach it and develop it systematically?* (Středoevropské centrum misijních studií 2007). There is no doubt that the church needs missiology. The awareness that the lack of missiological reflection had a crippling effect on the church and her theology has been growing for the last several decades. If the church and her theology wants to remain faithful to her Lord, she cannot escape her missionary commission especially when she is facing the cultural and religious development of the West in the last few centuries which resulted in the age of pluralism. The question, then, is not *if* we need mission and missiology, but *what* missiology do we need followed by the question *how*, if at all, is our ecclesiology informed by missiology. If George Carey was right when he stated that ecclesiology should be subordinated to missiology (cf Černý 2006a:8), it follows that the ecclesiology of a church that is not rooted in missiology or is founded on a deficient missiology, is going to be also flawed.

This twofold question could capture what is the guiding concern of this work: How missional ecclesiology of CB should look like and on which foundation should it be built? As the result, two basic perspectives are characteristic for my thesis. First, there is the perspective of the fundamental missional theology where I deal with *missio Dei* as the foundation of the church and her mission anywhere and anytime. Second, there is the perspective of contextual theology that addresses the missiology and ecclesiology of CB—a denomination living in a specific time and place.

At the end of the day, all missiological and ecclesiological debates seem to address this ultimate question: How to be the true church in our time? This thesis attempts to contribute to the ongoing discussion in the Czech Republic regarding the question of how to grasp during these turbulent changes of the modern globalized world the fact that the church is not an end in herself but should be understood from the perspective of her significant role entrusted to

⁴ Nevertheless, I may observe that there are changes for the better. For example, the *Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University in Prague* has started offering courses in missiology regularly since 2016.

her by God to be “the expression and instrument of God’s love in the world” (Filipi 2000:33, my translation).

PART II: Church of the Brethren

CB is an Evangelical church which celebrated her 130th anniversary in 2010.⁵ She is active in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.⁶ She had 76 congregations and approximately 60 filial stations in the Czech Republic in 2010. In Slovakia, she has 17 congregations and approximately the same number of filial stations (Nešpor and Vojtíšek 2015:218-219). Nearly 10,900 people declared affiliation to this church in the Czech Republic in 2011 which makes this denomination, despite the fact that this number does not represent more than 0,01% of Czech population, the fourth biggest Protestant Church in the Czech Republic (Martinek 2012:43-45, Nešpor and Vojtíšek 2015:218-219). In Slovakia, 3396 people claimed their affiliation to CB in 2011 (Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic 2011).

The goal of this part is to present the theology of CB in relation to the topic of this study. Primarily, I am going to examine her missiology and ecclesiology. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to omit a wider theological background of this church that provides the necessary context for her understanding of mission and the church.

2.1 Theology of the Church of the Brethren

The presentation of the theology of CB would be incomplete without acknowledging the strong historical influences exercised by the following theological traditions: Reformed and that of *Unitas Fratrum* (the Moravian Church) combined with the emphases of the Pietist, Revivalist and Evangelical movements.⁷

CB has adopted not only one, but a whole collection of confessions and Reformation catechisms as her theological resources. The preface to the *Statement 2016* states that CB

⁵ Kind reader should be warned in advance not to confuse *the Church of the Brethren (Církev bratrská)* with the so-called “German Baptists” which is the term used to designate a denomination known also under the name *the Church of the Brethren* or *the Brethren Church*, a denomination which arose from German Pietist and Anabaptist movement at the beginning of the 18th century, but currently is active predominantly in the North America (Filipi 2008:68).

⁶ CB in the Czech Republic and Slovakia is administered separately. Nevertheless, the Czech and Slovak branches of CB maintain a close relationship. They share the same doctrinal documents and meet at joint conferences every three years. In this research, I focus on the Czech branch of this denomination. However, because my thesis deals with the doctrinal documents of this church, much of what is going to be written may apply also to CB in Slovakia.

⁷ The acquaintance with the historical contexts which led first to establishing, forming and consolidating of CB is very helpful for understanding some of her distinctive theological emphases. Unfortunately, due to limited space it is not possible to present the history of CB here. Nevertheless, due to the fact that there exists no literature in English that would describe the history of CB, I have decided to provide those who are interested in it with a short overview in the attachment.

avows *Apostolic, Nicene, Chalcedonian, and Athanasian* symbols, Reformation confessions from which the special emphasis is put upon the Reformed confessions and catechisms (*The Second Helvetic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, and Westminster Small Catechism*). Besides these symbols, CB highly values the heritage of *Unitas Fratrum* from which the *Confession of the Czech Brethren* of 1662 is mentioned explicitly (*Statement* 2016:preface). By adoption of these confessions and catechisms, CB expresses her theological continuity with ecumenical creeds and both Bohemian and European Reformation. Additionally, CB formulates her own statements of faith to express her understanding of the Holy Scriptures and to define her theological direction (Církev bratrská 2017:3). The contemporary theology of CB is highly inspired from modern Evangelical theology.⁸ CB herself defines the standpoint from which she does her theology as Evangelical. This adjective, nevertheless, has a broad semantic range posing certain difficulties which need to be clarified.

2.1.1 *Evangelical*: A Troubling Adjective

Karl Barth (1886-1968) in his *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction* draws on the etymological meaning of the adjective *evangelical* and its intrinsic relation to Bible. To him, *evangelical* means to be rooted in the gospel; evangelical theology is any theology that is faithful to the God of the gospel. Therefore, even Roman Catholic or Eastern orthodox theology might be considered evangelical. Secondly, he scrutinizes this adjective in connection with the European Reformation (Barth 1963:5-6). Martin Luther (1483-1546) used the German word *evangelisch* derived from *evangelium* (which was translated into English as *evangelical*) to emphasize his program to return to the gospel as opposed to the teaching and practices of the medieval church. Because of this, for many people today *evangelical* means *Protestant*. Later, *Evangelical* happened to denote also the Pietist and Revivalist movements within Anglo-Saxon and German Protestantism. Sometimes, the term *Evangelical* is associated with fundamentalist and post-fundamentalist theologies (Hošek 2006; Olson 2004:3-6; Vojtíšek 2014:25-26).

Pavel Hošek (1973) mentions several reasons why the term *Evangelical* might be quite misleading in Czech context: it does not stem from Czech tradition, it is often mistaken with fundamentalism, it is used in pejorative sense or as a caricature, or it might lead to a dubious

⁸ For example, there are many similarities in the formulations of the recently published *Statement* 2016 and the *Statement of Faith* of the Evangelical Free Church of America (Evangelical Free Church of America 2008). Both CB and EFCA are members of the International Federation of Free Evangelical Churches (IFFEC). CB also embraced the documents of the Lausanne Movement

assumption that those who do not identify themselves as Evangelicals are in fact defective Christians. Besides this, the danger of the word *Evangelical* lies in its association with aspiration for political power and ideological approach to faith. He thinks that it would be probably better to abandon this appellation if we had more appropriate word to replace it (Hošek 2006).

Since there is such variety of connotations to the word *Evangelical* and this adjective plays an important role in the definition of the identity of CB, we cannot escape this question: What does *Evangelical* mean in this case?

2.1.2 Between Liberalism and Fundamentalism

CB sees Evangelical theology as the way to navigate between the Scylla of liberalism and the Charybdis of fundamentalism (*Principles* 2017:§§184-190; Černý 2001a:5). However, it is true that the bulwark that CB builds in her documents against liberalism is much higher than that built against fundamentalism.⁹

Generally, the theology of CB could be characterized as Christocentric. Jesus' death on the cross is primarily interpreted with the imagery of substitutionary atonement. Only in the name of Jesus one can be saved. This rules out the possibility of attaining salvation in other religions, although they still contain "elements of truth and love, because all people were created in God's image and have certain knowledge of their Creator" (*Commentary* 2017:§68).

The Bible is understood as supreme *regula credendi et vivendi* (*Statement* 2016:preface). In fact, the article on the Holy Scripture is the most extensive one in the *Statement* 2016. CB believes that the Bible is "the Word of God expressed in the words of human authors" (:§2). It is also stated that "the Scripture has both human and divine sides. The center of the Scripture is Jesus Christ, incarnated God's word, and verbal expression of the Scripture is fully inspired by the Holy Spirit" (ibid.). The members of CB are encouraged to pray and read their Bible regularly (*Principles* 2017:§§29-33).

CB shows reluctance towards Pentecostal and charismatic movements. Those who believe should not desire personal ecstatic experiences but rather obedience and sanctification, ethical guidance in everyday life, spiritual growth and gifts that are to benefit the whole church. The Holy Spirit is necessary for the right interpretation of the Scripture

⁹ This is evident, for example, when we compare quite lengthy passage on how CB understands liberalism and why she rejects it with only slight specification of fundamentalists as „those who think that everything has been already revealed to them” (*Principles* 2017:§§174-183).

and is also the main force which facilitates the conversion of an individual (*Statement* 2016:§2; *Principles* 2017:§§8-16).

The emphasis on personal conversion is a typical tell-tale sign of Evangelicalism. CB, too, highlights the need for the decision of faith and personal appropriation of Jesus as the Lord and Savior. It is God who “since the [time of] patriarchs of Israel [...] until now has been calling out and maintaining his special people [...]. God also calls everyone in person” (*Principles* 2017:§2). This denomination is not prescriptive about how the conversion should occur. It might happen suddenly or as the result of a longer process. It might be accompanied by intense emotions or accepted in a dispassionate rational manner (*ibid.*). Conversion is God’s gracious gift which results in newness of life. CB holds that only those who were “born again” may become the members of the church (*Commentary* 2017:§59). CB practices paedobaptism but the predominant practice is only just blessing the child. The Holy Communion is celebrated once a month; CB teaches the spiritual presence of Christ in the Eucharist (*Principles* 2017:§§150-167). CB exercises discipline (:§95-96). The local congregations with congregational-presbyterian polity are communities in which laics are highly active. Every local congregation is considered the whole church on a small scale (Černý 2008:36).

The presentation of the theology of CB that I have just offered can by no means be considered exhaustive, but rather elementary. Here, I have tried to capture what is specific to her. I believe that, except some distinctive features presented above, her theology would be mostly in line with the so-called neo-evangelical theology.¹⁰ The contemporary theology of CB is clearly formulated in the *Statement* 2016 that was incorporated into the *Constitution* 2016, and in the publication called the *Commented Statement of Faith and the Spiritual Principles of the Church of the Brethren* (Církev bratrská 2017a) which consist of two documents of CB. The first document is the *Commented Statement of the Faith of the Church of the Brethren* (*Commentary* 2017). The second document is entitled the *Spiritual Principles of the Church of the Brethren* (*Principles* 2017).¹¹ *Principles* 2017 further defines the self-understanding of CB and presents what she thinks is God’s will expressed in the Bible for various aspects of Christian life of both an individual and community. This part is divided into six chapters dealing with the following topics: 1) The decision of faith and the new life

¹⁰ Vojtíšek and Nešpor observe that CB has been oriented towards the Reformed theology since the beginning of her existence. Nevertheless, in the 20th century she put more emphasis on the heritage of the Bohemian Reformation. The contemporary theology of CB is highly influenced by the neo-evangelical theology as represented, for example, by the British theologian John R. W. Stott (1921-2011) (Nešpor and Vojtíšek 2015:211, 213, 217).

¹¹ See the list of the cited documents of CB in 6.3.

in Christ; 2) Christian life of faith, hope, and love; 3) Principles of family life; 4) The church; 5) The theology of CB; 6. CB among other churches in the world.

2.1.3 Church of the Brethren in Ecumenical Dialogue

I would like to conclude this section with a short exposition of the ecumenical relationships of CB. Pavel Černý in his brief article on CB that was published in the *Small Encyclopedia of Protestant Churches* writes:

The Church of the Brethren considers herself to be a part of the family of Evangelical and Reformed churches; she is also the member of the International Federation of Free Evangelical Churches (IFFEC), the Leuenberg Church Fellowship (LCF), the Ecumenical Council of Churches in the Czech Republic (ECCCR), the platform of the Czech Evangelical Alliance (CEA), and takes part in many ecumenical activities in the Czech Republic and also with the churches abroad (Černý 2008:35, my translation).^{12,13}

CB has never become a member of the WCC. She had entered the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) in 1970 which later merged with the Reformed Ecumenical Council to form the World Communion of Reformed Churches, but left in 2003.

2.2 Missiology of the Church of the Brethren

“The church exists by mission, just as a fire exists by burning” (Emil Brunner in *Standpoints* 2009:18; cf *Principles* 2017:§196). For CB, the mission was never reduced to cross-cultural missions. Since her beginning in 1880, this church has been driven by missionary interest. Especially in her later documents, CB offers insightful reflection on missional ecclesiology although she did not always call it that.

The *Statement* 2013 and the *Statement* 2016 are the two last summarizations of what CB believes. In these documents, we find that not only one but two articles deal with the doctrine of the church. The first proclaims what the church *is* (§9 *On the Church*), the second tells us what the church *does* (§10 *On the Mission of the Church*). The being of the church is linked together with her doing that is grasped in terms of mission. Her calling and gathering is

¹² CB belongs to the group of denominations that founded IFFEC in 1948.

¹³ The *Leuenberg Church Fellowship* (LCF) is also known as the *Community of Protestant Churches in Europe* (CPCE).

followed by her commissioning; ecclesiology is immediately followed by missiology. Nevertheless, in my exposition, I am going to reverse this order and start with the missiology.

I would like to divide this next chapter into two parts. Clearly, the new *Statement* 2016, the *Commentary* 2017, and the *Principles* 2017 present a next step in the missiology of CB. In order to see how and in what direction the missiology of CB has developed, it would be suitable to look at the state of missiology which preceded the publication of these key theological documents mentioned above.

2.2.1 Missiology Before 2016: To Be the Salt of the Earth and the Light of the World

The well-known dictum of the Sermon on the Mount that identified those who had listened to Jesus' words as the salt of the earth and the light of the world and the so-called Great Commission are two prominent pronouncements of Jesus Christ as presented in the Gospel of Matthew. They determine the structure of the brief article on mission in the *Statement* 2013:

We believe that the Church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt 5:13). By her service, she helps people in material and moral poverty and announces to them the salvation in our Savior Jesus Christ. Those who receive the Gospel are disciples of Jesus Christ, being baptized and taught to obey all that the Lord Jesus commanded (Matt 28:19-20) (*Statement* 2013:§10).

According to the gospel of Matthew, the words of the salt and light were uttered in the context of Jesus' earthly ministry whereas the Great Commission was addressed to the eleven with the authority of the exalted Lord. These two proclamations are to shine some light on how CB perceived her identity and understood her missional vocation. Having chosen these sayings and further explicated them (especially that of the salt and light), CB tried to depict what the church is and what the church should do in order to fulfill the vocation entrusted to her by her Lord. But just as any other profession of faith, this paragraph cries for interpretation. For how should we know what being salt and light means and what characterizes the life of a disciple? What is the foundation, motive and aim of mission according to CB?

If we want to answer these questions, we have to look at the older *Principles*. This document was published in 1977 for the first time and then, in a modified form, issued again

in 1997. It is typical for the *Principles* 1977 that it almost completely avoids the term *mission*.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the authors of this document found their way to talk about mission in different ways. For example, they assert that CB “wants to be a herald and a foster parent of a spiritual revival” (*Principles* 1977:20). Moreover, the document talks about: witnessing to Christ (:27), proclamation of the word, the ministry of the efficacious love (:37), and express the desire of CB to see their prayer houses not only as “lecture halls, but ‘maternity hospitals’ where we could not only talk about the new life, but see it as coming” (:37).

The most important part of this documents in respect to mission is the chapter entitled *Witnessing Life* (*Principles* 1977:27-30) The motto of this part is the following words of the Lukan Jesus: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses” (Acts 1:9).¹⁵ The document further explains:

The Church of Christ both collectively as the whole and individually in her particular members have to witness to Christ who ‘loves us’ (Rev 1:5) and in whom God’s love reached down to the whole world. Our task is to testify to the world that despite its disruption it did not cease to be the subject of God’s love (*Principles* 1977:27).

From what has been said, we can now identify the foundation and motive for mission. The foundation for mission is the authority of Jesus Christ through whom God’s love has been revealed. Moreover, He is the one who pronounces the Great Commission and identifies his disciples with the salt and light, so both the missional dimension and intention of the church are undergirded Christologically. This is also stressed in the preface to the *Statement 2013*: “The church can realize her mission in the world only when she continues by faith in her Head, Jesus Christ, who is her foundation and who preserves her and leads her through unto the end” (*Statement* 2013:preface). As the motive of mission could be identified the love of God. It is the love of God that sets everything in motion and that is also both a motive for mission and the essence of the gospel. What is still missing is the aim of mission. An easy answer to this question would be to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19). Nevertheless, if we were satisfied with this, we would not make justice to much broader dimension of church’s missionary vocation. Now, we have to pick up the metaphors of salt and light again.

After Jesus had pronounced his disciples as the salt and light, he proceeded to develop his aphorism even further: salt that loses its saltiness “is no longer good for anything, except

¹⁴ My guess is that this term would considered too provocative from the perspective of the ruling communist regime.

¹⁵ All Scripture quotations in this thesis are taken from New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright ©1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Church of Christ in the United States of America.

to be thrown out and trampled underfoot,” and people do not “light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house” (Matt 5:13b; 5:15a). Jesus asserts that his followers are here for the sake of the world and warns them against losing their distinctive identity. These emphases are important for CB. In the middle of the world affected by sin, the church is called to overcome evil, “to give a taste to interpersonal relationships and to shine like the ‘light of the world’ into the darkness of all human misery” (*Principles* 1977:27). Why all this? “Our goal has to be to shine so much that our deeds and the way of our life will drive people to glorify our Father in heaven” (:29). The aim of witnessing is the glory of God. It is hard to imagine an answer which would be more in line with what it means to be Reformed.

In 1997 two additions were made to the original *Principles* from 1977. The first addition addresses the role of CB as a one church among many others. From the missiological perspective, it is important to underscore her positive evaluation of ecumenism and responsibility for social, moral, economic, and ecological issues. The document states that

[d]ivided Christianity is not a good testimony for the world [...]. [T]ogether with other Christian churches we want to serve to deepen justice, social and moral responsibility, and peace in our homeland. Linked to this is also the support of the activities leading to assertion to important ethical values in our society, care for the protection and preservation of nature as God’s creation, increasing of economic justice among nations, elimination of material and moral poverty and preservation of peace. On the basis of the Scripture we believe that proclamation of the gospel has to be accompanied with ministry to the needy at all time” (*Principles* 1997:47-48).

If we include all that has been said under the umbrella of mission, we could conclude that CB seeks to promote life in all its fullness which is a sign of holistic mission. CB does not reduce mission to “winning souls for Christ” or missionary enterprises in foreign countries, but seeks to, like the salt or light, penetrate all reality.

The second addition made in 1997 is the Czech translation of the *Lausanne Covenant* originally published in 1974. This document was adopted among the confessional documents of CB in 1995.

2.2.2 Missiology After 2016: To Worship God and Attest God’s Love to All People

Three documents of critical importance to the theology of mission were published in 2016 and 2017. First, the new *Constitution of the Church of the Brethren* (*Constitution* 2016) that

included the new *Statement of Faith (Statement 2016)* was issued. Second, for the first time in the history of CB the *Commented Statement of the Faith of the Church of the Brethren* was worked out (*Commentary 2016*), third, the new *Principles* were published (*Principles 2017*). Let us start, just as in the previous section, with the article ten on the mission of the church as presented in the *Statement 2016*:

We believe that the mission of the church is to worship God and attest God's love to all people. The church is called to proclaim the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and the salvation in him, to make disciples of Christ, to help the needy, to take a stand against every form of injustice, and to accept co-responsibility for God's creation (*Statement 2016*:§10).

When we compare the article ten on the mission of the church in the *Statement 2016* with that in the *Statement 2013*, we cannot miss the shift from exclusive Christocentrism to theocentrism. When it comes to mission, the *Statement 2016* does not talk about Christ only, but sees the foundation of mission of the church in a wider perspective. It is worth noting that this article does not start with the relation of the church to the world, but with the relation of the church to God. The *Commentary 2017* states: "Worshipping God is the primary mission of the church in relation to God. We are to become *the praise of his glory* (Eph 1:11-14)" (*Commentary 2017*:§66, italics original). In the *Principles 2017* we are told that the church exists for God as his people. This is expressed in the biblical images of kingly priesthood and the temple (*Principles 2017*:§93). According to CB, the missional character of the church is not manifested only in outward activities, but also in the faith and worship of the church as such.

Nevertheless, the mission of the church is not exhausted in her relation to God. *Statement 2016*, *Commentary 2017*, and *Principles 2017* all recognize that the nature of the sending of the church is also attesting God's love to all people. This is done by proclamation of the gospel which is "the joyful message about God's love and salvation in Jesus Christ who died for our sins, rose from the dead, reigns as the Lord, bestows remission of sins, the Holy Spirit, and life eternal to everyone who believes" (*Commentary 2017*:§67). There is a chapter in the *Principles 2017* dedicated to the mission of the church (*Principles 2017*:§§92-98) which clearly centers on the relationship between the church, God, and the world. One important biblical passage mentioned there provides the foundation for mission and specifies the missional vocation of the church in relation to the world: "As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18). The intended aim of this sending is: "[S]o that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21; cf *Principles 2017*:§97;196).

The metaphor of salt and light played an important role in the ecclesiology formulated in the *Statement* 2013. We do not find this metaphorical identification of salt and light with the church in the text of the *Statement* 2016 itself, but in the *Commentary* 2017 where it is mentioned to illustrate that it is not enough to testify to God's love by mere verbal proclamation. Christians should witness to other people with their life. Further, the mission of the church is explicated in terms of *koinonia*, *kerygma*, and *diakonia* (*Principles* 2017:§§92-105). Moreover, it is stressed that "the church is essential for fulfilling God's purposes in the world" (*Commentary* 2017:§67). The struggle for holistic approach to mission which was already evident in the *Principles* from 1977 is embodied in the following formulation: "The whole gospel has to be proclaimed by the whole Church to the whole world" (*Commentary* 2017:§67; cf Lausanne Movement 1974:§6; 2011:preamble).¹⁶

Just as the *Principles* 1977 and the *Principles* 1997, the *Principles* 2017 are to a large extent preoccupied with the witnessing aspects of Christian life. Therefore, I'm not going to repeat what has been already said about it in the previous section. However, what should be stressed is the explicit emphasis on the missional nature of the church. At the end of the *Principles* 2017 there appears again the already-mentioned Brunner's statement accompanied by these words: "The church is the community of Christ's gospel on its way to the world" (*Principles* 2017:§196). This statement is followed by the affirmation that when the church gives up on her mission, it gives up on being the church. Moreover, CB talks about "the holy wordliness of the church" that rests on the fact that "the church is not here for her own sake but for the sake of the world" (:§197).

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize three major missiological features of the new documents. First, it is the explicit formulation of the missional nature of the church. Second, it is the re-affirmation of the holistic approach to mission. Third, it is the dramatic shift from Christocentric to theocentric orientation of the reflection on mission which is articulated, first, as the relationship between the church and God and, second, as the relationship between the church and the world that is predicated on God's relationship to the world.

¹⁶ It is worth noting that originally it was the ecumenical missionary conference held in Mexico City in 1963 that spoke of mission as "the common witness of the whole Church, bringing the whole Gospel to the whole world" (Goheen 2014:26).

2.3 Ecclesiology of the Church of the Brethren

Ecclesiology has to be subordinated to missiology. Therefore, this brief exposition of ecclesiology of CB follows the presentation of her missiology. It is going to be succinct because this topic is going to be approached thoroughly in chapter IV where I am going to engage with the ecclesiological statements of the ninth article of the *Statement* 2016 from the standpoint of *missio Dei*.

2.3.1. Ecclesiology Before 2016

Just as in the previous case, the ecclesiology of CB will be examined diachronically. The *Statement* of 2013 states:

We believe that God already in the history of Israel has called and gathered his people. Jesus Christ has established the people of the New Covenant (1 Cor 11:25) and he is building it up among all nations as his Church (Matt 16:18). Therefore, it is a privilege of all believers to express their membership in Church by entering a bond with one of its branches (Acts 2:41) and thus publicly proclaim their faith (Rom 10:9) and accept the ordinances of baptism and the Holy Communion (Matt 28:19; Mark 16:16) along with the gift of brotherly fellowship in which they encourage as well as rebuke each other (Acts 2:42; Heb 10:24), serve each other (Eph 4:15-16) and submit to the entrusted administrators (Heb 13:17) as well as to each other (Eph 5:21) (*Statement* 2013:§9).

CB affirms that, just like Israel, the church has been elected by God and through Jesus Christ could enter into the covenant with God. The church is universal and it is a privilege to be part of her. The saddening fact of the disunity of the church is echoed in the reference to “the branches” of the one universal church. The second part of the paragraph resembles a variation on the three marks of the church typical for the Reformed ecclesiology as found, for example, in the *Scots Confession* (1560), i.e., true preaching of the Word of God, right administration of the sacraments, and ecclesiastical discipline (*The Scots Confession* in Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.] 1999:41-42). It looks as if these marks were modified, expanded, and presented from the perspective of those who joined the church. To become a member of the church means to proclaim one’s faith, receive the gift of accepting the sacraments, and benefit from the life in *koinonia* which is characterized by mutual care. Two perspectives on the church are intertwined in the article nine of the *Statement* 2013: the perspective of the church as God’s chosen people, and the perspective which views the church as an institution where one may become a member.

2.3.1. Ecclesiology After 2016

The *Statement* 2016 presents a different view of the church. In comparison with §10 on the mission of the church, §9 on the nature of the church might seem as it did not undergo such enormous changes. However, there are modifications there that are worth our attention. In fact, they announce a radical shift in the ecclesiology of CB:

We believe that God has already called and gathered his people in the history of Israel. Jesus Christ establishes the people of the New Covenant from all nations of the world as his church. The church is the community of those who were redeemed in Christ and by the Holy Spirit incorporated into the body of Christ of which he is the head. We believe that the church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. There is the church where God's word is proclaimed, sacraments administered and believers mutually encourage and exhort one another to grow into the likeness of Christ (*Statement* 2016:§9).

It is evident that while the formal structure of this article formulated in the *Statement* 2016 remains very similar to the older one in the *Statement* 2013, there are new emphases that are of great importance. First, all three persons of the Trinity are involved in this attempt to grasp the nature of the church. The church is a community called and gathered by God, redeemed by Christ and by the "Holy Spirit incorporated into the body of Christ of which he is the head" (*ibid.*). The notion about the church as the body of Christ and verbs like *incorporation* introduce the crucial imagery of participation which, as we will see later, is going to be vital for articulating the missional ecclesiology based on the divine mission of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Good news is that this perspective is already present in the *Statement* 2016. The result is that the church is seen less as an institution where one can enjoy certain benefits and more as a participant in the divine life of God. The church is not defined in the terms of membership but of dwelling and participation.

The *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed* (381) captured the essence of the church with four attributes: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. In 2017, CB incorporated these four marks of the church into her creed. Instead of allusion to the disunity of the church unity is now emphasized, and the holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity of the church are affirmed.¹⁷ Also the classical three *notae ecclesiae* of the Reformed faith are approved in a way more resembling the original verbalization.

Much more could have been written about the ecclesiology of CB. However, to unfold this topic requires more exploration than possible here. The established objective of this thesis

¹⁷ It is stated in the *Principles* 1977 that the church is "one, holy, and universal" (*Principles* 1977:19). Only three classical marks of the church are mentioned. The apostolicity of the church was, for some reason, left out.

is to approach the ecclesiology of CB from a missiological perspective. Therefore, I am going to return to the ecclesiology of CB in part IV where I will approach it from the standpoint of *missio Dei*.

PART III: *Missio Dei*

3.1 The Origin and Development of *Missio Dei*

In the course of the long history of the church, the missionary vocation of the church has been understood and justified in many different ways (cf Bosch 1991:181-345). Since the beginning of the second half of the 20th century, *missio Dei* has become a term signifying a radical shift in approaching the issue of mission. Thinking about mission in terms of *missio Dei* has become common heritage adopted not only by Ecumenicals, but also by Roman Catholics and Evangelicals.¹⁸

Missiology in the light of *missio Dei* identifies the mission primarily as God's own activity. This provides us with radically new perspective on the mission of the church which cannot be considered as an independent human enterprise, but only as incorporated into the missionary life of the Trinity. *Missio Dei* challenges the church to acknowledge that

[t]he missionary movement of which we are part has its source in the triune God Himself. Out of the depths of His love for us, the Father has sent forth his beloved Son to reconcile all things to Himself, that we and all men might, through the Spirit, be made one in Him with the Father, in that perfect love which is the very nature of God (Goodall in Engelsviken 2003:482).

In other words, missiology that stems from *missio Dei* tries to do justice to God's outpouring love, the love of the Creator of the world who is fulfilling his purpose of reconciliation with alienated humanity through his Son in the power of the Holy Spirit. The mission of the church cannot be thought of as divorced from God's mission, but finds its true ground only in it. The "Johannine Commission" heard from the mouth of the resurrected Christ illustrates this logic: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21). Jesus Christ in his radical obedience to his Father is the model of mission. Jesus Christ, the Son "sent by the Father and anointed by the Spirit to be bearer of God's kingdom to the nations" (Newbigin 1981:23-26) who is the missionary par excellence (cf Goheen 2014:57), establishes a community of people called out of the world to be his witness for the sake of the world. The gospel of Jesus's incarnation, life, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, and the hope in the final consummation of God's reign (Bosch 1991:512-518) is entrusted to the church, but cannot be

¹⁸ Evangelicals clearly espoused *missio Dei*, for example, in the *Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action* formulated in 2011 by the Lausanne Movement (cf Lausanne Movement 2011:§10).

privatized. The gospel, although being a “mystery” (Eph 6:19), has to remain by its nature “the open secret” (Newbigin 1981:214). Darrell L. Guder (1939) writes, “The gospel is about news that is so urgently good that it must be shared. To receive the gift of faith is to be drawn into the gospel’s commission, to be mobilized as servants of its mandate” (Guder 2015:170). He continues:

That good, acceptable, and perfect will of the triune God is the healing of the nations, the reconciliation of all things, the new creation made possible in Christ, the inauguration and consummation of the kingdom of God. God’s missional purpose is summarized in John: “For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:17). To understand the Trinity rightly is to participate in the enabled action of witness, which carries out the mission of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (:170-171).

According to Paul, God’s mission of reconciliation is directed towards the whole world. Christians are “ambassadors for Christ,” because God is making his appeal through them (2 Cor 5:20). God’s mission is universal and so is the mission of the church that is in the power of the Spirit sent to testify to Christ “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). *Missio Dei* provides the solid foundation for the mission of the church; “the church is missional and mission is ecclesial” (Goheen 2014:79).

3.1.1 *Missio Dei*: From Augustine to Willingen

The term *missio Dei* is linked with the name of the German missiologist Karl Hartenstein (1894-1952). He coined this phrase in 1934 (Flett 2010:131) and then used it in his report to designate the missiological concept formulated at Willingen 1952 that stressed the participatory nature of the mission of the church in the prevenient mission of God (Engelsviken 2003:482). Even though the term *missio Dei* was new, the idea which has been represented by this phrase since 1952 could be traced back as early to Augustine (354-430) who rendered the complex doctrine of the inner life of the Trinity in terms of sending (Poitras 1999). Moreover, James A. Scherer (1926) showed that a theocentric foundation of mission of the church was not a novelty discovered in the 20th century, but can be identified, for example, in the thinking of no less than Martin Luther (1483-1546):

For Luther, mission is always pre-eminently the work of the triune God – *missio Dei* – and its goal and outcome is the coming of the kingdom of God. Luther sees the church, along with God’s word and every baptized believer, as crucial divine instruments for mission. Yet, nowhere does the reformer make the church the starting point or the final goal of mission, as 19th century missiology

tended to do. It is always God's own mission that dominates Luther's thought and the coming of the kingdom of God represents its final culmination (Scherer in Engelsviken 2003:481).

Unfortunately, in the ensuing centuries in which the West engaged in its vast colonial endeavours, the understanding of mission as God's mission had been obscured and more ecclesiocentric and anthropocentric models became prevalent. According to these models the church herself was the initiator of mission which was often understood as a propagation of the kingdom of God by the means of Western superior civilization.

At Willingen 1952 two different interpretations of *missio Dei* were formulated. These two positions differed on the understanding of the relationship between the church and mission. The so-called world-centered approach was represented by the report entitled the *Theological Foundation of the Missionary Obligation*. It put emphasis on God acting directly in the world through the Spirit more or less *independently from* Christ and the church. However, the church was called to recognize the signs of God's presence in the world and participate in his salvific actions. The second position presented in the report *A Statement on the Missionary Calling of the Church* advocated the church-centered approach which emphasized that God acts *through* Christ and the Spirit, and that the church plays significant role in the mission of God. While the first document diminished the importance of the church in God's mission, the second document excluded this idea that was leaning towards "churchless mission" (Laing 2009:96); the church is an important part of God's sovereign plan of reconciling the world to Himself. Now I would like to deal with both competing positions in a more detailed manner.

3.1.2 The World-centered Conception of *Missio Dei*

In the 19th century, Protestant mission often lapsed into triumphalism. The church sent her missionaries via missionary societies to overseas to spread the gospel together with the advantages of the Western culture (cf Bosch 1991:334-339). This culminated in the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910 whose goal was to achieve "the evangelization of the world in this generation" (:336). This conference, besides its importance in the deepening of ecumenical relations, will go down in the textbooks of the history of mission as an example of not only missionary enthusiasm, but also of soteriological horizontalism and excessive confidence in the achievements of progressive human reason: "The mood at Edinburgh was futurist rather than eschatological. The future was primarily seen as an extension of the present; as such it could be inaugurated through human efforts" (:338; cf Ahonen 2000:23; Bevans and Schroeder 2004:220-221). The horrors of two world wars

had shaken the belief in human capacities to establish global well-being and justice. However, many churches in the West did not give up on optimism and confidence in cultural and scientific progress which they thought of as the sign of the fulfilling of the kingdom of God. This tendency fully gained foothold again in the 1960's and 1970's; nevertheless, it was present among certain circles of conciliar Protestants as soon as at Willingen 1952 and, therefore, had an enormous influence on the formation of what will be later known as *missio Dei*. Wilhelm Richebächer maintains:

Strictly speaking, it was already clear before the closing statement at Willingen that the majority of the delegates understood 'God's mission' as something other than the theological basis and salvation history framework of church mission, despite the seal of approval for Hartenstein's formula. Two very influential delegations identified God's mission with the diverse activity of God, independent even of the gospel. They saw God's mission at work wherever there was evident progress in world history" (Richebächer 2003:592).

Hand in hand with emphasizing God's immanence and His direct action in our world, the kingdom of God was understood in a specific way. Engelsviken observes that in this perspective,

[t]he kingdom may be seen as universal, relatively independent of the church, primarily ethical (i.e. the realization of the will of God in the world) an object of faith and hope in the present (though some signs of it may be discerned), and as something to be fully empirically realized in this world only in the future. Its growth includes all of history. Its realization is therefore often seen as taking place primarily in the social and political realm. The church may be a witness to or a participant in the realization of the kingdom, but it is not the primary or sole actor (Engelsviken 2003:483).

When the emphasis is put exclusively on God's mission and the kingdom of God is understood within secular terms, the role of the church is diminished. The Dutch theologian Johannes Hoekendijk (1912-1975), a prominent spokesman of the Social Gospel Movement, called for the desacralizing of the church. He identified the goal of God's mission as *shalom* which he understood in ethical terms as secularized humanization (Bosch 1991:382-383). Hoekendijk asks: "What else can the churches do than recognize and proclaim what God is doing in the world [...]? [I]t is the world that must be allowed to provide the agenda for the churches (WCC in Bosch 1991:383). As a result, the distinction between the world and the church was blurred. Moreover, if we accept the view that "the *world* rather than the church is 'the locus of the continuing encounter between God and humanity'" (Aring in Bosch 1991:384, italics original), the church becomes secondary in God's dealing with the world. Indeed, if we accept the claim made by Harvey Cox (1929), another spokesman of the Social Gospel Movement,

who stated that “it is the world, the political world and not the church, which is the arena of God’s renewing and liberating activity” (Cox in Flett 2010:54), we end up with diminished reasons for the mere existence of the church. We have arrived at the fundamental question concerning the very essence of the church’s being, the basis which substantiate her missional identity and, therefore, her very existence.

We see now that this interpretation of *missio Dei* bypasses the church and leaves us with very limited reasons for the existence of the church. From this point of view, it might be utterly suspicious to refer to *missio Dei* as the basis for missional ecclesiology. Nevertheless, contrary to what it might seem from the exposition of the world-centered interpretation of *missio Dei* as presented above, I am still convinced that *missio Dei* remains an adequate framework for developing a sound ecclesiology, an ecclesiology that has to be profoundly missional if it wants to do justice to missionary God whose “mission is embodied in the church as a distinct community” (Nikolajsen 2015:52).

3.1.3 The Church-centered Conception of *Missio Dei*

In the world-centered interpretation of *God’s mission* the emphasis was put primarily on what could be called *missio Dei generalis*, God’s direct action in the world through the Spirit. *Missio Dei specialis*, God’s mission through Israel, the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, and the church, was sidelined.¹⁹ This had vast implications for the church which was often perceived as a hindrance to the gospel rather than its faithful servant. A prominent British missiologist Lesslie Newbigin (1909-1998) claimed that “an unchurchly mission is as much a monstrosity as an unmissionary Church” (Newbigin in Flett 2010:71). Sadly, this “unchurchly mission” which was the outcome of liberal political theologies of the 1960’s and 1970’s contributed to the fact that many Evangelicals who were part of the IMC left and gathered in their own meetings that laid foundation to the Lausanne Movement (Goheen 2014:168).²⁰

¹⁹ The distinction between *missio Dei generalis et specialis* was introduced by the Norwegian missiologist Jan-Martin Berentsen (1939) (cf Engelsviken 2003:496, note 17).

²⁰ I criticise the so-called “political theologies” because of their tendency to separate the mission from the church and because of their soteriological horizontalism. However, it is necessary to point out their positive contribution as well. For example, they helped us to better recognize that sin is not only a problem of an individual but manifests itself also in the deep structural forms of systemic oppression. Political theologies challenge our often spiritualized, exclusively future-oriented, and individualized understanding of salvation. I do not hold the view that evangelism and social justice are mutually exclusive. Rather, they are complementary and have to remain so if we want to do justice to comprehensive scope of the reign of God heralded and embodied in the incarnation, life, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension and the second coming of Jesus Christ (Bosch 1991:512-518).

However, the secular conception of God's mission is misleading because it presents *missio Dei* mainly in the terms of *missio Dei generalis* and neglects what could be called *missio Dei specialis* according to which the triune God fulfills his purpose of salvation through those who he graciously elects: Israel, Christ, and his church (Engelsviken 2003:484, 489; Goheen 2014:40). *Missio Dei generalis*, God's direct work in the whole creation is integral to God's mission. However, the problem arises when *missio Dei specialis* is omitted. Therefore, it is now time to explore more in depth what could be called the church-centered interpretation of *missio Dei* as fashioned in the work of Lesslie Newbigin who, without neglecting *missio Dei generalis*, makes justice to *missio Dei specialis* and focuses in a greater depth on the role of Israel, Jesus, and the church in God's work of reconciliation.

3.2 *Missio Dei* as the Context for the Church's Missionary Identity²¹

The name of Lesslie Newbigin has been mentioned many times throughout this paper. This British missiologist who spent large part of his life as a missionary in India dedicated his life to mission. As a prolific author, he wrote many books on mission and played an important role in the development of missiology of the WCC. In my exposition of *missio Dei* which will provide the foundation and framework for my re-interpretation of the ecclesiology of CB in missionary terms, I am going to highly rely on the theology of Newbigin as it is presented in the work of Michael W. Goheen and Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen.

Newbigin understood God's mission, and, therefore, also the missionary identity of the church entirely in Christological terms until 1959. Later, he realized that due to his exclusive Christocentrism his theology fell short of acknowledging the crucial work of the Father and the Spirit. In light of this recognition, his missiological thinking shifted from the "unitarianism of the Son" (cf Flett 2010:141) to more trinitarian orientation while maintaining his Christological focus (Nikolajsen 2015:48, 52; Goheen 2000:62-64). Goheen states, "While he [Newbigin] developed a fuller Trinitarian understanding of God's redemptive mission in the world, he never abandoned his Christocentrism; he believed that a Trinitarian context for the church's mission will always be an expansion and elaboration of the work of God centered in Jesus Christ" (Goheen 2000:115). Newbigin approaches the puzzling theology of the Trinity through Christological lenses. This is not accidental but follows the path of the theological struggle of the early church that had to answer the pressing question of Jesus' identity. When

²¹ The headlines that form structure of this subchapter follow the structure of Goheen's exposition of Newbigin's trinitarian missional theology (Goheen 2000:115-164).

asked “Who is Jesus?” the church, according to Newbigin, replied in reference to the Trinity: “He is the Son, sent by the Father and anointed by the Spirit to be the bearer of God’s Kingdom to the nations” (Newbigin 1978:26). The trinitarian theology stems from the quest for the identity of Jesus from Nazareth whom God resurrected from the dead. The doctrine of the Trinity was formulated in the missionary context where Christians witnessing to God’s work through Christ were obliged to provide satisfactory answers to their pagan neighbors. Thus, the Christological and missionary understanding of the Trinity is nothing incidental for Newbigin. Christology is the starting point of Newbigin’s trinitarian theology: “The doctrine of the Trinity is not an alternative to be set over against a Christocentric orientation but rather an elaboration and explication of it” (Goheen 2000:119).

Newbigin’s Christological emphasis went hand in hand with his stress on eschatology. Goheen informs us that

Newbigin’s understanding of the mission of the Triune God is both Christocentric and eschatological. The good news announced by Jesus Christ concerned the reign of God. In Jesus Christ the end-time purpose of God was revealed and accomplished. This set the tone for Newbigin’s formulation of the *missio Dei*. The kingdom of the Father forms the context for the work of the Son. Jesus Christ reveals and accomplishes kingdom. The Spirit witnesses to the presence of the Kingdom in Jesus (:119).

He continues:

Everything must be understood in terms of the *telos* of history. The good news is that in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the end has been revealed in the middle. The Spirit is an end-time gift that witnesses to the kingdom revealed and accomplished in Jesus (:121, italics original).

Newbigin espouses the so-called salvation-historical eschatology. He rejects both realized and futurist eschatology, and claims that since the coming of Jesus Christ to this Earth until his return in glory we will continue living in the passing old age and at the same time proleptically participating in the new age inaugurated by Him. Newbigin affirms strongly that the Christ event is not a mere spiritual reality divorced from what is often considered as worldly, but Christ is the clue to the history of the world as the whole (Goheen 2000:137-141; Nikolajsen, 2015:54-58).

It is now time to engage with Newbigin’s account of *missio Dei* in a more detailed way. I’m going to grasp God’s mission in relation to three persons of the Trinity: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

3.2.1 The Kingdom of the Father

Jesus Christ anointed by the Holy Spirit preached and in his life, death, and resurrection embodied the reign of his Father. Therefore, in our quest for understanding the content of *missio Dei* we should begin with He whom Jesus called Abba and whose kingdom He proclaimed from the very beginning of his public ministry (Mark 1:14-15).

In respect to Newbigin's understanding of mission spouting from the life of God the Father, three things have to be expounded.

First, the Father is the *Creator and Upholder* of all things (Goheen 2000:134). God who created the world and everything that is in it did not abandon his creation. The world is not left to fate but is sustained by God whom it owes its existence. God continues upholding the world as "he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matt 5:45b). The merciful providence of the Father also undergirds the possibility of natural theology: "It is the Father who holds all things in his hand [...] who has never left himself without witness to the heart and conscience and reason of any human being" (Newbigin 1989:118). Newbigin in one breath affirms that only in Jesus "all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Col 1:19); nevertheless, this does not prevent him from acknowledging that the world, although sinful and alienated to his Creator, the world to which the Son was sent, has not ceased to be the subject of God's care and his veiled presence.

Second, the Father is the *Lord of history* (Goheen 2000:135). God the Father is active in world history which he directs toward his purpose. Newbigin strongly opposes the separation of world history from the history of salvation as if there was anything that escapes God's sovereignty. However, while affirming God's work in the history, Newbigin also warns against identification of the secular development with God's work. Goheen aptly captures what is at stake: "Newbigin's dilemma was how to affirm the uniqueness of Christ without denying God's work in the world, to probe the relation between what God has done in Christ and what God is doing in the life of humankind as a whole" (:131). Even though Newbigin did not use the terms *missio Dei generalis* and *missio Dei specialis*, it is apt to describe his wrestling with this topic as an attempt to affirm both as integral to God's mission. It is evident that while Newbigin calls our attention to acknowledge God's lordship over history, this recognition goes hand in hand with the assertion that it is Jesus Christ who is the clue to the history of the world (Newbigin 1989:103-115). Newbigin in his later publications does not seek

to identify God's work in the events of his time but in the Bible itself (Goheen 2000:64).²² The Scriptures narrate the story of God's universal restoration (:133). It is in this context where Newbigin stresses the election as a divine instrument to bring salvation to his creation. Goheen captures this in the following words: "God travels particular road—Israel, Jesus, church—to arrive at his universal destination" (Goheen 2014:40). In the mission of Jesus Christ who was perfectly obedient to his Father, God's self-manifestation culminated. Therefore, "[t]he whole of world history presses an ultimate choice—acceptance or rejection of God's purpose for history revealed in Christ. [...] [I]n Jesus, God's Kingdom has come" (Goheen 2000:131).

Third, the Father is the *source of mission* (Nikolajsen 2015:48). This affirmation only summarizes in the most elementary way what has been said about the Father until this point. Fully rooted in the Scriptural witness, Newbigin affirms that the story of redemption of the alienated creation is only possible thanks to the merciful condescendence of God who first through to election of Israel and then through the church manifests his universal purpose of salvation which was fully accomplished in the sending of Jesus Christ. He is the beloved Son who in submission to His Father fully revealed and accomplished His reign.

3.3.2 The Mission of the Son: Revealing and Accomplishing the Kingdom

The programmatic statement which accompanied the launching of the public ministry of Jesus as recorded in the gospel of Mark reads: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news" (Mark 1:15). In the person of Jesus who was anointed by the Spirit God fulfills his promises given to His people through the lips of the prophets (Luke 4:16-21). The Scripture attests Jesus's awareness of the being the sent one (Luke 4:43; John 17:18; 20:21).

The Father, the source of mission, sent his Son in the power of the Holy Spirit to reveal and accomplish his reign. Because God's reign was revealed and accomplished in Jesus, the gospel is not only *about* Jesus but, essentially, the gospel *is* Jesus Himself (Guder et al. 1998:87-88). Through Him the new eschatological reality entered the old age and points to the ultimate horizon of history. Yet, this reality which was inaugurated in the life, words, and deeds of Jesus remain hidden to many people.

²² Newbigin rejects both the identification of the kingdom with social progress because of the power of sin, and the divorce of the kingdom from historical progress because this view leads to a reduced understanding of salvation as an individualistic personal immortality in the hereafter (Goheen 2000:138).

The centrality of Christ plays the crucial role Newbigin's theology. He affirms that "the death and resurrection of Jesus stand at the centre of redemptive history" (Goheen 2000:147). God revealed his judgment of sin in the death of Jesus, and in His resurrection manifested that it is an abundant life, and not death, that is His will for the entire creation. Nevertheless, the end-time purpose of history was not only revealed but also accomplished in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (:150):

[T]hese events are more than simply a revelation of judgement and renewal; they accomplish what the reveal. Jesus has taken on himself the sin of the world and Gods final judgement of death on that sin at the cross and has actualized and initiated the end in that event. Likewise his resurrection is not simply an individual affair but embodies the renewal of the creation that will take place in the end. It is precisely the fact that Jesus has accomplished the end in his death and resurrection that pave the way for the outpouring of the Spirit as an eschatological gift (ibid.)

In the person of Jesus, the kingdom of God was revealed and accomplished, yet it awaits its full realization in the renewal of all creation. In Jesus, we can already now participate in the coming eschatological reality that He embodied.

Newbigin talks about "the cross as the centre of the Christian faith" (:147). In relation to this I would like to present Newbigin's understanding of the doctrine of atonement which is not easy to articulate because of Newbigin's idiosyncratic understanding of it, but which might be very informative. Goheen explains why this is so:

How does Newbigin formulate his understanding of the atonement? Negatively, the atonement is an historical event that sets the direction of history but cannot be fully captured by any particular theory. We are speaking about a happening, an event that can never be fully grasped by our intellectual powers and translated into a theory or doctrine (:148).

We may try to employ a plethora of symbols or to come up with many sophisticated theories, but none of them can fully express what happened in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Nevertheless, Newbigin does not remain silent about this mystery. For example, he gives an account of how Jesus understood his own death:

[H]is death is necessary; his death is the will of the Father; his death arises from the identification of Himself with sinners; his death is God's judgment of the world; his death is a ransom; his death is a sacrifice; his death is the means of life to the world; his death is not to be isolated event, but others are to follow it and share it (:149).

Acknowledging that it is not possible in any way to fully grasp the meaning of Jesus' death by one concept or metaphor, Newbigin works with several images of His atoning death:

“[T]he death of Jesus is a revelation of God’s love, a judgement, a ransom, a sacrifice, and a victory” (ibid.). Only in the light of the resurrection the meaning of Jesus’ suffering and death is revealed. The Father called his Son back to life and so manifested the victory over the sin and death. Yet, it is a hidden victory (:153).

Three basic features characterize Newbigin’s view of atonement: it is profoundly corporate, missionary, and eschatological (:149).

Newbigin laments that the atonement has been appropriated in inherently individual terms and was stripped of its transformative power. He maintains that the cross and the resurrection create a new humanity: “The fruit of the atonement is not first a justified individual but a transformed community that share in the life of the kingdom” (:149). The church is the community of people who were transformed by the power of the cross and called to bear witness to Christ in the midst of this world. Newbigin writes:

“When we look at the record, what strikes us is that the story of Jesus has reached us through a group of men and women who were so closely bound to Him that their life could almost be spoken of as an extension of His life” (Newbigin in Goheen 2000:149).

The Easter event does not lead to passivity but establishes the community which is a sign and agent of God’s purpose for the world.

In God’s work of redemption through Jesus Christ, the future invaded the present. The evil powers were defeated in the suffering of Jesus who in full solidarity with the world took the burden of sin upon himself. In His resurrection the new age has been ushered but still remains hidden until his return. Christ bears the destiny of new humankind, He is the representative of what is yet to come in fullness. The outpouring of the Spirit affirms the new identity of those who belong to God; the Spirit sends them to fulfill their apostolic vocation: “[T]he meaning and purpose of this present time, between Christ’s coming and His coming again, is that in it the Church is to prosecute its apostolic mission of witness to the world” (:143). In the theology of Newbigin, missiology, ecclesiology and eschatology are mutually intertwined and together fully rooted in Christology.

3.3.3 The Witness of the Holy Spirit to the Presence of the Kingdom in Jesus

Newbigin’s pneumatology is not divorced from Christology. Again, the missiological and eschatological emphases underlay his understanding of the work of the Spirit.

God has not ceased in His mission when Jesus was taken to heaven. The Spirit that was given to Jesus Christ in his baptism and which empowered Jesus for his ministry was endowed to his disciples in the event of the Pentecost. The mission is not primarily the witness of the church, but the work of the Holy Spirit in which the church participates. The Spirit is the driving force of mission and the foretaste of the reign of God which is already here but yet remains to be revealed in fullness. The time between Christ's ascension and his return is the time of the mission of the Spirit whom Jesus Christ promised as the first fruit of the Father's kingdom. In the Holy Spirit the kingdom of the Father is both already present and awaiting its full manifestation.

The work of the Spirit is not confined to the walls of the church but may be recognized also in the world. This activity of the Spirit in the world does not diminish the important role of the church that participates in it: "[B]ecause the Spirit and the Father are one—this work of the Spirit is not in any sense an alternative way to God apart from the Church; it is the preparation for the coming of the Church which means that the Church must be ever ready to follow where the Spirit leads" (Newbigin in Goheen 2000:156). The story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10 illustrates this conviction. This story shows how the Spirit was first working in the life of a Roman centurion who was not related to church in any sense. However, he and those who were in his house with him would not accept the gospel if Peter was not obedient and did not accept his commission to testify to Christ among non-Jews. Newbigin rightly emphasizes that this story is not only "of the conversion of Cornelius, but also of the conversion of Peter and of the church" (Newbigin 1981:64). The Spirit is not the property of the church. Therefore, the mission cannot be considered the self-propagation of the church. The church participates in the mission of the Spirit that is "the active agent of mission, power that rules, guides, and goes before the church" (Newbigin in Goheen 2000:156). The mission is the work of the free and sovereign Spirit who uses the church as his instrument to witness to the presence of the kingdom of the Father in the Son.

Newbigin's account of *missio Dei*, in Goheen's words, "[m]anifests both Christocentric focus and a Trinitarian basis" (Goheen 2000:164). With Christology as the starting point, Newbigin develops the trinitarian understanding of God's mission. God's mission aims at the restoration of the broken fellowship with alienated creation. God wills to incorporate it into the eschatological reality of His reign. This reign, however, is not a worldly ethical order which was the view promoted by the nineteenth-century liberalism. God's reign is the eschatological reality inaugurated in Jesus Christ. Jesus is not only the Messenger but also the

Message; He is not only the King but also the kingdom (Guder 2000:44-48). Jesus Christ who was empowered by the Holy Spirit became the embodiment of His Father's reign that He proclaimed in life, word, and deed (ibid.). Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection revealed and accomplished the kingdom; nevertheless, the victory remains hidden to many. The Holy Spirit bears witness to the veiled kingdom in Jesus. The decisive disclosure of God's work of salvation, now concealed *sub contrario specie* in Christ's suffering, is yet to be fully consummated. The people who were graciously incorporated through election into the covenant with God, the people whose broken relationship with God was restored, are called to participate in God's mission which aims at establishing the fellowship of love – God's rule over all creation. The church, the body of Christ and the messianic community, is the prototype and model of a new humanity. As such she participates in the divine life of God and, therefore, also in God's mission of reconciliation. Grounded within the framework of *missio Dei*, it is now time to explore more its missiological and ecclesiological implications and relate them to the theology of CB.

PART IV: Participating in the Mission of the Triune God

We had to walk a long way to get to this point where we can finally commence shaping up the missional ecclesiology of CB. In the part II, I briefly presented the theology of CB with special stress on her missiology and ecclesiology which is going to be now further examined and developed in the interaction with *missio Dei* as presented in part III. Two main emphases are going to determine my reformulation of the ecclesiology of CB as presented in the first part of the ninth article in the *Statement* 2016.²³ First, because the triune God is a missionary God, the existence of the church has to be fully rooted in *missio Dei*. Second, the existence of the church is thoroughly eschatological. The church as “the sign, foretaste and instrument of the Kingdom of God” (Nikolajsen 2015:58-61; Goheen 2000:172-175) participates in and witnesses to the reality which is already present but yet awaits its consummation. Most famous are the words of the Roman-Catholic theologian Alfred Loisy (1857-1940) who noted that “Jesus came proclaiming the Kingdom, and what arrived was the Church” (Filipi 2000:28) This dictum, however, is not meant to be “ironic or sarcastic [...]”. Loisy merely pointed out that Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom of God set into motion a process which resulted in the emergence of the church” (:28-29). Therefore, a missional ecclesiology that would not be preoccupied with the eschatological reality of the kingdom of God would be a distorted ecclesiology.

4.1 Identifying the Missionary God in the Theology of the Church of the Brethren

Neither trinitarian foundation of ecclesiology nor the strong affirmation of the indissoluble bond between ecclesiology and missiology are foreign to CB. In my brief exposition of her ecclesiology, I highlighted the trinitarian and participatory basis of it. Similarly, in the section dedicated to the missiology of CB, I showed how the missional nature of the church is affirmed in the new documents of this church. However, nowhere in the official documents of CB is the word *mission* linked *directly* with God. It is always the church or an individual

²³ Only the first half of the article nine will be examined in part IV. Unfortunately, I could not include the second part (that was already partly written) that deals with the marks of the because of the limited space. Nevertheless, also the *notae ecclesiae* listed in the second half of the article should be read from the perspective of *missio Dei* (cf Guder et al. 1998:102-109; 254-264; Schattauer 2011:322-326; Guder 2015:78-89; Nikolajsen 2015:172-184; etc.). I hope to address this issue in the future.

Christian who engages in mission. On the other side, relying on the frequency of certain collocation of words is often misleading. One cannot make conclusions based only on whether or not the terms like *God's mission* or *missio Dei* are present in the documents of the church; it is the content of this phrase, i.e., the trinitarian basis of mission which institutes the mission of the church that is important. For example, the *Commentary 2017* in §22 depicts the relationship between the persons of the Trinity in terms of sending. Moreover, Jesus' words uttered in his prayer for his disciples, "As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world," (John 17:18) are mentioned several times in the *Principles 2017* (*Principles 2017*:§§88, 97). This Johannine "double sending" plays an important role in the theology of CB.

In accordance with classical theology, CB confesses one God "eternally existing in a loving unity of three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (*Statement 2016*:§3). Because of God's relational nature and the fulness of love that is inherent to the perichoretic relationship of the persons of the Trinity, God is a social God. God is also portrayed in the terms of sending:

The order of salvation is a joint work of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The persons of the Trinity share the same attributes, but have different roles in the order of salvation. It belongs to the role of the Father in creation to plan, guide, and send the Son and the Holy Spirit [...]. The Son obeys and goes wherever the Father sends him [...]. The Holy Spirit is obedient to the Father and the Son, and carries out what he was sent to carry out by them (*Commentary 2017*:§22).

God is a missionary God and the nature of the triune God is love. Despite the fact that this by no means exhausts the theology of CB which is much more comprehensive, it is enough to allow us to interpret not only who God is but also what God does in terms of the loving mission of the Trinity. The work of creation, redemption, and sanctification that aims at establishing the kingdom of God might be grasped as God's mission of love which is also the basis for the mission of the church.

These examples clearly demonstrate that although the phrase *missio Dei* is not present in the documents of CB, the content of this phrase is possible to identify in them. It is nothing alien to the theology of CB to think about the Trinity using missionary imagery. It is my task to uncover and acknowledge the perception of the mission of the Trinity in the theology of CB in greater detail. Within the framework of Newbigin's conception of *missio Dei* I would like to develop it further, if possible, and use my findings to re-interpret the ecclesiology of CB with *missio Dei* as the starting point. The following text of part IV is divided into three chapters reflecting the mission of each person of the Trinity. Even though I distinguish

between the mission of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, their mission cannot be separated: *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa* (cf Schwöbel 1998:316).

4.2 Participation in and Witnessing to the Kingdom of the Father²⁴

Three cardinal statements have been made about the Father: God the Father is the Creator and Upholder of all things, the Lord of History, and the source of mission.

4.2.1 Witnessing to God the Creator, Upholder and Redeemer of all Things

In the process of shaping the missional ecclesiology of CB in the light of the mission of God, it would be apt to start with the missional vocation of the church that stems from her relation to God the Creator and Upholder of the world. However, already here I would like to also add the perspective of God the Redeemer. Calvin recognizes *duplex cognitio Dei*. We may know God as the Creator and Redeemer. This two-fold knowledge of God is inseparable (Calvin 2011:40). In accordance with the Reformed teaching, CB confesses that God through his Word created everything and his work was very good (*Statement* 2016:§4). In His providence, He “preserves and governs the whole world toward fulfilling his purposes” (*Commentary* 2017:§28). To fulfill them, he employs “natural laws, miracles, free acts of human beings, and especially the salvific work of Jesus Christ” (ibid.). CB knows the Father as the Creator and Redeemer. Even though she does not use the terms *missio Dei generalis* and *missio Dei specialis* in her documents, it can still be said that her testimony to *missio Dei generalis* (God’s unmediated mission that encompasses the whole creation) goes hand in hand with witnessing to and participation in *missio Dei specialis* (God’s mission through the sending of the Israel, Jesus, and the church).

The mission of the church is to witness to God the Creator, Upholder, and Redeemer of the whole creation not only in words, but also by the way of life that is benevolent and considerate to nature. The church witnesses and participates in the mission of God when she cares for his creation. CB bases her appeal to live environmentally friendly protologically as she predicates the call of the church to care for nature on the doctrine of creation (cf *Commentary* 2017:§17). However, I believe that the care for God’s creation should be also undergirded eschatologically. On the one hand, CB affirms that “the whole creation waits

²⁴ In this section, I rely on Goheen’s exposition of Newibigin’s theology as presented in Goheen 2000:165-176.

with eager longing for being set free from its bondage to decay” (:§73; cf Romans 8:18-25) and that “we and all creation will visibly and tangibly receive participation in Jesus’ immortality” (*Principles* 2017:§7). On the other hand, this eschatological perspective is nowhere explicitly linked with the “ecological vocation” of the church.

Jürgen Moltmann states that it is not enough to testify only to God’s work of *creatio originalis* and *creatio continua*. *Creatio nova* has to be included in the range of vision of the church (cf Moltmann 1997:51):

The New Testament testimony about creation is to be found in *the resurrection kerygma* and in the *experience of the Holy Spirit*, who is the energy of the new creation. Eschatological christology and pneumatology does in fact involve a fundamentally new interpretation of the divine creative activity. It is not the protological creation of the world that is presented here. It is the eschatological creation, as might be expected of testimonies belonging to the messianic era (:65, italics original).

Therefore, the vocation of the church to witness to and participate in the mission of the Father that is realized in His care for entire creation cannot be founded only protologically, but, as Moltmann shows, after the resurrection of Christ pre-eminently eschatologically. God’s work of creation and redemption, to recall Calvin again, cannot be separated.

4.2.2 Witnessing to the Lord of History

World history is not exempt from God’s reign. Therefore, World history cannot be divorced from redemptive history:

God reigns over history and guides it to its appointed end. The meaning of history has been revealed in the mighty acts of God narrated in Scripture in Israel, culminating in Jesus Christ, and continuing in the church’s mission. God’s rule cannot be imprisoned within the church, however. His rule extends over the whole earth and overall of history. History is a unity and so all events can be interpreted in light of the Biblical story. The gospel gives us a clue to the understanding of the events of world history (Goheen 2000:130).

The reign of the Father was the *conditio sine qua non* of the mission of the Son, so it has to be the same for the church:

The Father sent the Son to make visible the kingdom. This kingdom mission of Jesus was unfolded in communion with the Father. His life was that of an obedient and loving Son. The work of the Father was the pervasive atmosphere for the mission of the Son. If the church is to continue the mission of Jesus, it must also be in the dynamic of the Father’s work (:134).

The church is, then, called to participate in and witness to God's kingdom that "has already come, is coming, and come in fullness" (Bosch 1991:508). The church cannot build the kingdom nor is she called to control history; she is, however, called to follow the ways of Jesus, bear witness to what God has done, is doing and will do, and through Father's redemptive work in Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit enter into the fellowship with God and become the expression and instrument of the coming age (cf Filipi 2000:33).

CB has both Pietist and Revivalist roots. While there are many emphases that have to be considered valuable in these movements, there is also the danger of certain one-sidedness which lies in the fact that both movements, each in its own way, might have exaggerated their reaction to certain historical developments in theology. It is always a problem when the pendulum swings too far the other way. Both Pietism and Revivalism as opposed to Protestant Orthodoxy and Liberal Protestantism are in danger of escapist and ahistorical reduction of soteriology (Goheen 2000:137-138; Guder 2000:120-141). Pietism is often criticized for its "holy egoism" (cf Flett 2010:175-176) which reduces the gospel to the message of individual salvation and "focuses on personal morality, and the church as the privileged enclave of the saved" (Guder 2015:30). The prominent evangelist Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899) once said, "I look upon this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a lifeboat and said, 'Moody, save all you can'" (Moody in Dittmer and Sturm 2010:187). The problem is that when the world becomes "a wrecked vessel" destined to perish and the gospel is identified with the "lifeboat" of salvation in the hereafter, the fulness of the message about the inbreaking reign of God in Jesus Christ is compromised. The ahistorical teaching of revivalism hinders the church to grasp the full meaning of the gospel. This privatized soteriology and eschatology "that looks to a life of personal blessedness after death [...] fits well with the mood of a society which has lost faith in a meaningful future for the public life of the world" (Goheen 2000:285). The ahistorical teaching of revivalism fails to do justice to the „Biblical vision of the future realization of the kingdom of God as the consummation of history" (:284), and seriously distorts both missiology and ecclesiology. CB as the child of Pietism and Revivalism must be on the constant look-out for these unintended consequences of Pietism and Revivalism. She has always been a minority in Czech society which might have enhanced her self-understanding as the „righteous remnant." Under the communist rule, CB (just as other churches in the Soviet bloc) was forced to leave public domain. The mission of the church was completely stripped of its diaconal dimension and her kerygmatic proclamation of the good news to those outside of the church was considered as an anti-state activity. Under such

conditions, the church was at risk to accept the defensive mentality of a religious ghetto. The problem of escapism, the pursuit of self-centered inward piety at the expense of the involvement in society, could have been strengthened.

In spite of this, it is a fact that CB did not fail to acknowledge the vocation of the church to serve the whole society not only in words but also in deeds. She holds the view that the world is God's and that "the mission that is narrowed only to evangelization [...] neglects its social dimension" (*Principles* 2017:§§199-205). In the *Principles* 2017, CB also builds a massive bulwark against the privatization of faith when she states that she is called for "the holy worldliness":

The church is not here for her own sake, but for the sake of the world [...]. We are called for the holy worldliness. Our world is divided between the holy realm of religion and a profane sphere. Religion focuses on God and ignores the needs of the world. On the contrary, the secular realm focuses on the world and excludes God. But the Spirit of Christ links faith and the world together. Faith is devoted to God, and therefore also to the world. The Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of the dedication to God: "Not my will but yours be done" (Luke 22:42b). The Spirit of Christ is also the Spirit dedicated to the world: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16a) (§197-198).

The gospel does not address only a person alienated to God, but also alienated civilization. Additionally, CB states that "God's sovereignty is manifested in his providential governance of history" (*Commentary* 2017:§3). Despite the corrupted human will, it is possible "to recognize God's activity in the historical judgments and acts of mercy on people and nations that is oriented towards the fulfillment of his purposes" (*ibid.*). Besides the "salvific grace" that God in his sovereignty bestows to sinful humans through Jesus Christ, CB also recognizes "general grace that God grants to all people" (*Commentary* 2017:§50).

Proper missiology and ecclesiology is possible only when God is acknowledged as the Lord of history. The kingdom of God challenges the ahistorical teaching of revivalism and the one-sidedness of the self-centered inwardly oriented faith of Pietism. The all-encompassing reality of the kingdom of God revealed and accomplished in Jesus Christ might help CB to grasp even more clearly God's purpose for the whole creation, the history of the world, and face the latent danger of soteriological reductionism that might come to light as "holy egoism" and escapism: "The mentality of Noah's ark, the self-confidence of the islands of those few who have been saved from the all-encompassing flood, has no place in the universal vision of the kingdom of God" (Filipi 2000:35, my translation).

4.2.3 The Missionary God is the God who Elects: A Community Called and Gathered to Participate in and Witness to the Kingdom of God

The Father is the source of mission. He sends the Son and together with the Son they send the Holy Spirit. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit send the church to the world to participate and witness to the coming reign of the Father (Nikolajsen 2015:49).

4.2.3.1 God who Elects: A Community Called and Gathered...

It has been said that “God travels particular road—Israel, Jesus, church—to arrive at his universal destination” (Goheen 2014:40). God has chosen people so that they could become the bearers of his universal purposes.

Let us now turn to the ninth article of the *Statement* 2016 whose missiological re-interpretation within the framework of the mission of the Trinity is the primary goal of this thesis.

CB states:

God has already called and gathered his people in the history of Israel. Jesus Christ establishes the people of the New Covenant from all nations of the world as his church. The church is the community of those who were redeemed in Christ and by the Holy Spirit incorporated into the body of Christ of which he is the head (*Statement* 2016:§9).²⁵

God who calls and gathers people to witness to and participate in his mission of salvation is the missionary God who elects. The doctrine of election is the essential tenet of Reformed soteriology and ecclesiology. God elected Israel, Christ, and finally the church “to be his witnesses and the agents of his purpose for the world” (Newbigin in Nikolajsen 2015:33). The entire Biblical story might be seen a story of election.²⁶ Therefore, the interpretation of election shapes also the understanding of the essence of the church.

The doctrine of election stresses the sovereignty of God; we are not saved by our deeds, but by grace alone (cf *Commentary* 2017:§51). However, Newbigin warns against a certain understanding of election that neglects its corporate dimension, views election only as an eternal decree of God without relation to the event of Christ, and does not acknowledge the

²⁵ Due to the limited space, I am going to deal only with the first half of the ninth article in part IV of this thesis.

²⁶ For example, the Old Testament scholar Horst Dietrich Preuss (1927-1993) considers election to be the central theme of the Old Testament. Consequently, election provides the framework for his *Old Testament Theology* (cf Preuss 1995).

aspect of missional responsibility of those who have been elected (Goheen 2000:167-170). Four Newbigin's emphases might be mentioned in relation to his understanding of election.

First, election is primarily corporate and not individual: "It is people chosen to bear witness to God's purposes" (:167).²⁷

Second, the election is "an historical act in Christ rather than an eternal decree" (ibid.). Rather than to begin with a decree and then move to the work of Christ and the Spirit (cf *Westminster Confession* in Presbyterian Church [U.S.A] 1999:177-178), it is necessary to understand election from the standpoint of the work of Christ:

[T]here is a way in which the doctrine of election has been distorted by separating it from the doctrine of Christ. We surely go far astray if we begin from a doctrine of divine decrees based on an abstract concept of divine omnipotence [...]. We have to take as our starting point and as the controlling reality for all our thinking on this as on every theological topic, what God has actually done in Jesus Christ (Newbigin in Goheen 2000:168).

God's love was manifested and the salvation of the world was accomplished at the cross. This happened in a specific time in history, so "it is made known to the world not in a universal spiritual illumination but by being communicated to a certain community who have been chosen beforehand for that role" (Goheen 2000:168). Newbigin does not exclude the conviction that God out of his love "chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:4; cf *Commentary* 2017:§51), but opposes the view that fails to link the election with the work of God in history.

Third, for Newbigin the "election is for responsibility, not privilege" (Goheen 2000:168). This needs to be explained:

Newbigin believes that the doctrine of election has become unacceptable to many Christians because it views this doctrine as election to a privileged status before God. He refers to this as a "false belief" and, after quoting Amos 3:2 ("You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins"), says that in Scripture "it becomes clear that to be God's chosen people means not privilege but suffering, reproach, humiliation" [...]. When the church begins to think of "election in terms of spiritual privilege rather than missionary responsibility, then she comes under His merciful judgment as Israel did" (ibid.).

Newbigin's claim is very provocative. It might seem that he "creates a false dilemma" (ibid.). After all, it is a privilege to be a recipient of God's unmerited grace. Those elected by God

²⁷ Similarly, Preuss demonstrates that the corporate election is primary and the election of individuals is secondary in the Old Testament: "Indeed, the tradition of the chosen status of Israel gives life to the later understanding of the election of individuals" (Preuss 1995:30).

already enjoy the firstfruits of the coming age. However, the dilemma disappears when we understand these two terms—privilege and responsibility—as referring to “the attitudes of God’s people, not their experience of his grace” (ibid.). What Newbigin does is that he criticizes the understanding of election that leads to self-centered satisfaction with one’s privileged status that excludes the obligation of the recipients of God’s grace to selflessly participate in God’s kenotic work for the sake of the world.

The fourth emphasis is closely related to the third one: “[E]lection must be understood in terms of missional responsibility” (:169). For Newbigin, “the doctrine of election is a good example in traditional theology of a Biblical doctrine that has been taken out of its missionary context (as found in Scripture)” (ibid). Newbigin states:

To be elect in Christ Jesus, and there is no other election, means to be incorporated into his mission to the world, to be the bearer of God’s saving purpose for his whole world, to be the sign and agent and the firstfruits of his blessed kingdom for all [...]. We can only understand the biblical teaching about election if we see it as part of the whole way of understanding the human situation which is characteristic of the Bible (Newbigin in Goheen 2000:169).

Newbigin’s understanding of the doctrine of election is firmly tied with the mission of God. His starting point is God’s work in Jesus Christ and the eschatological goal of establishing the reign of God. He is not preoccupied primarily with *madua*, but rather with *lama* of election (cf Matt 27:46), not with the reason but with the purpose (cf Hunsberger 1998:87-89). The purpose of election should be what shapes our ecclesiology, guides our theological reflection and action. Nikolajsen concludes:

The essential aspect of election is that God, through this process of election, carries out his mission so that all may be saved. This particularistic strategy is meant to serve universal purposes, that is, salvation of all [...]. God’s intent with election is not to choose individuals here and there to recreate at least a small group of what God purposed in the first creation. Election has a broader perspective, that is, that all may be what God originally intended by the creation of the world (Nikolajsen 2015:34).

Newbigin’s interpretation of election is a much needed correction to the traditional understanding of this doctrine in Reformed circles. At the same time, his understanding of election resonates at many points with the perception of election in CB. Therefore, the affirmation that God calls, gathers, and “in Jesus Christ establishes the people of the New Covenant” (*Statement* 2016:§9) has to be interpreted from the perspective of *missio Dei*—God’s mission that aims at the inclusion of the alienated creation into God’s loving reign.

4.2.3.2 ...to Participate in and Witness to the Kingdom of God

The Gospel of Mark and Matthew describe the beginning of Jesus' public ministry as that of the proclamation of the arrival of the kingdom of God accompanied by the urgent call for repentance (Mark 1:14-15; Matt 4:17; cf *Commentary* 2017:§35). The audience of Jesus' message is called to conversion. Through their conversion they return to God and become a part of the community where God's reign is manifested. The conversion to the kingdom of God was the goal of Jesus' mission and as such it has to be the goal of the mission of the church as well:

The mission of the church aims at conversion to the kingdom of God. This involves the conversion of individuals to God and to each other; the formation of a visible community that embodies the life of the kingdom; the struggle of that community as an agent of the kingdom to bring its life under the just and peaceable rule of God; all so that God may be glorified (Goheen 2000:278).

All distinctive emphases of the missiology and ecclesiology of CB find their right place within the goal of mission which is identified as the conversion to the kingdom of God. For example, the theology of conversion that is strongly rooted in the theology of CB (cf *Statement* 2016:§§7, 8; *Commentary* 2017:§§45, 52-53, 55; *Principles* 2017:§§2-4, 112-113) and which also became a topic under the scrutiny of many papers written by the members of CB (Černý 2001b, Valeš 2004, Ber 2010, Cimala 2010, Černý 2010, Hájek 2010, Taschner 2010, Beňa 2011, Macák 2011, Pavlíček 2011), the distinctive identity of the church that is called to be "the salt of the earth and light of the world (cf 2.2.1 above), the church as a worshipping community that attests God's love to all people (cf 2.2.2 above), all these emphases might be included under the overarching reality of the kingdom of God.

The church is called to witness to the kingdom not only as a sign that points to something that is absolutely external to her. She is also called to witness to the new eschatological reality inaugurated in Christ by her participation in it. The church is "an eschatological community" (Newbiggin in Nikolajsen 2015:61) called to participate in the kingdom of God in the act of continual conversion (cf Guder 2000).

The church cannot be identified with the kingdom. Nevertheless, despite the fact that as the *ecclesia militans* she often obscures the gospel by her unfaithful life, the church cannot also be separated from the kingdom. She is called to be a foretaste of the coming kingdom, a self-denying community of love following the way of Christ's cross in which the victory of God is temporarily hidden *sub contrario specie*.

The witness of the church in the form of *kerygma* (cf *Principles 2017*:§§99-104) and *diakonia* (:§§105) is distorted if the church does not represent what she proclaims in word and deed as *koinonia*. Therefore, CB is right when she starts with *koinonia* (:§§92-98) and recognizes that „the church is called to be *the model of a new society* that is characterized by unity in diversity, fellowship of love, peace, justice, and reciprocal service” (*Commentary 2017*:§70, italics mine). Goheen’s words are instructive:

The basic reality is common life (*koinonia*) of the Spirit that is shared in the church. From this foundational new reality of life in the Spirit springs both service (*diakonia*) and proclamation (*kerygma*) or witness (*martyria*) [...]. Both *diakonia* (deeds of service) and *martyria* (verbal witness) must be seen to arise out of *koinonia* (the gathered fellowship of God’s people who share the new reality of the Spirit) (Goheen 2000:286, italics original).

The church is called to be the church. All that she is and does has to be marked by costly grace (cf Bonhoeffer 1979:45-60) and the communal “lifestyle of continual conversion” (Guder et al. 1998:86; cf Guder 2000) to the Kingdom of God inaugurated in Jesus Christ and present in the power of the Holy Spirit. The church is not only a sign or an instrument, it is also a foretaste of the coming kingdom of God: “[T]he church is both a mean and an end, because it is a foretaste [...]. People must be able to get some idea of what it means to be saved by looking at the life of the Church” (Newbigin in Goheen 2000:174). Therefore, the church is not called to be a mere instrument, but also an expression of the new eschatological reality.

4.3 Continuing the Mission of the Son²⁸

The mission of the Son was to reveal and accomplish the Kingdom of God. In his death and resurrection, the future invaded the present. Until the *Parousia* of Christ in his glory, the church is called to continue the mission of the Son.

4.3.1 Jesus and the Kingdom of God

The theology of the kingdom of God penetrates the whole structure of my thesis. It stems from the conviction that the reign of God is “the substance and goal of mission” (Bosch 1991:506). This allows me to understand *missio Dei* and, therefore, also the mission of the church in thoroughly eschatological terms. However, the kingdom of God is approached only

²⁸ In this section, I employ Goheen’s account of Newbigin’s theology as presented in Goheen 2000:176-181.

with a great caution in the Evangelical circles. This is the result of a certain historical development which needs to be uncovered. Only clear diagnosis of the problem will help us to overcome it.

The root of the problem was the separation of the kingdom of God from Christology. The liberal Protestantism tended to de-eschatologize the kingdom, identify it with the progress of humanity, and view it as a worldly ethical order. Bosch illustrates this case in the following words:

Here not the *person* of Jesus was at the center but the *cause* of Jesus; the ideal, not the One who embodied the ideal; the *teaching* (particularly the Sermon on the Mount), not the Teacher; the *kingdom of God*, but without the King” (:395, italics original)

This tendency reached its peak in the 1960’s and 1970’s in the Social Gospel Movement where the kingdom of God became “simply a Christianized version of the secular idea of progress” (Goheen 2000:137). This trend was accompanied by the reaction of Evangelicals who opposed this soteriological horizontalism. On the other side, they often tended to emphasize exclusively a horizontalist soteriology. They reduced salvation to individual future redemption of the soul, and neglected its universal and historical dimension. However, it is important to stress that both politicization and spiritualization of salvation flatten the fulness of the gospel. In order to avoid these serious distortions, the kingdom of God cannot be divorced from Christ: “The kingdom of God is Christ [...]. Salvation and entering the kingdom of God are synonyms” (Černý 2006b:226, my translation).

Therefore, rightly understood, the call for the re-discovery of the importance of the kingdom of God cannot be viewed as an attempt to place the horizontalist cuckoo of secular humanism into the nest of verticalist Evangelicalism. Rather, it is an invitation to overcome the vertical and horizontal dimension of salvation as mutually exclusive categories. It is necessary to grasp again “the breadth and length and height and depth” of the gospel (cf Eph 3:18): “The kingdom is both [...] social and individual, present and future, this-worldly and otherworldly, does justice to the power of sin and yet trusts in the redemptive power of God, is related to history and yet not identified with it” (Goheen 2000:138). Just as the kingdom cannot be proclaimed without Christ, so Christ cannot be proclaimed without the kingdom: “God’s reign [is] historically present in the person of Jesus” (:141; cf Goheen 2014:237-241).

CB in her documents does not avoid the term kingdom of God and almost in all cases she ties it together with the person of Jesus Christ. She affirms that the kingdom of God was an essential feature of Jesus’ proclamation; Jesus himself has a unique status in the kingdom and

it is the relationship to his person that decides who enters to it (*Commentary* 2017:§§35, 55). In another place CB states that „Jesus urgently challenges his hearers not to believe only in the gospel of the kingdom of God [...] but also in himself and his healing power” (§53). Even though the kingdom of God is nowhere fully identified with Jesus Christ, it remains inseparably linked with his person.

The Kingdom of God is not only defined Christologically, it is also eschatological through and through. In the center of the theology of CB, there is Jesus Christ who

[i]n his coming to this earth, his death on the cross, the resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit fulfilled the promises [given to] the prophets of the Old Testament and the fundamental hope of the whole Old Testament [...] that is the coming of the kingdom of God [...]. In the person of Jesus, God's salvific power is present and in his coming the last day have begun in which the kingdom of God grants forgiveness and the new life to all those who set their hope on him. The presence of the kingdom of God is manifested in the experience of God's mighty redemptive work but also in pain and suffering. God's reign still remains hidden and suffers violence [...]. Suffering is not only the destiny of the Messiah, but also of his followers [...]. The whole creation awaits with eager longing for being set free from its bondage to decay. When Christ returns, God's sovereign reign will be definitively consummated in power and glory, and manifested to all people and whole creation” (§73).

It is apparent in the light of these statements, that the kingdom of God has a firm place in the theology of CB. To think about the mission of the Son and, therefore, also about the mission of the church in the categories of the kingdom of God is nothing alien to CB.

4.3.2 As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending you

It has been demonstrated that the “Johannine Commission” is important for the understanding of the missional vocation of CB (cf 4.1 above). By referring to “Johannine commission” CB affirms that ecclesiology cannot be divorced from missiology and that both are deeply rooted in Christology. The goal of the “double sending” is “[S]o that the world may believe” (John 17:21b; *Principles* 2017:§97). Karl Barth further explicates the missionary relationship between the Father, the Son, and the church:

Jesus Christ is sent in order *to precede* His community on the way into the world. She is sent in order *to follow* Him on the same way. That is, and remains, two different aspects. The origin of His and her sending, however, is—and this makes them comparable—*one: the same* God, who as the Father sends Him, and also sends her through Him, His Son. Also, the goal of His and her sending is—this again makes them comparable—*one: He and she are both sent into the world.* This, very generally, means

that they are directed to the world and exist for the world (Karl Barth in Flett 2010:221, italics original).

The mandate of the “Johannine Commission” undergirds the missional vocation of the church. The church is called to *imitatio Christi*.²⁹ Nevertheless, as Newbigin maintains, Jesus’ life is not a mere scheme to reproduce (Goheen 2000:171). The language of imitation must be embedded into the language of participation. Norman Goodall (1896-1985) stated: “There is no participation in Christ without participation in His mission in the world” (Goodall in Flett 2009:14). However, Goodall’s claim works also when it is reversed: “There is no participation in the mission in the world without participation in Christ.” The church is a community ontologically connected with Jesus (cf Flett 2009:13). CB expresses this intimate connection by referring to the church as the body of Christ. I would like to develop this participatory understanding of the ecclesiology of CB further in the missionary and eschatological terms with the help from Newbigin.

4.3.3 Provisional Incorporation of Humankind in Jesus Christ

CB confesses that “Jesus Christ establishes the people of the New Covenant from all nations of the world as his church. The church is the community of those who were redeemed in Christ and by the Holy Spirit incorporated into the body of Christ of which he is the head” (*Statement* 2016:§9).

The special relationship between God and his people is expressed in terms of the covenant that, as a consequence of God’s gracious election, runs as the red thread through biblical narrative. As God’s people, the church is the heir of God’s promises given to Israel that were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. However, this privilege is accompanied by great responsibility: “God [...] has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant” (2 Cor 3:6b). Seen from the perspective of God’s mission, to be God’s covenant people means to be committed to his plan of salvation.

CB affirms that “the church is the community of those who were redeemed in Christ” (*Statement* 2016:§9). For CB, just as for Newbigin, the climax of God’s plan of salvation is

²⁹ Unfortunately, it is not possible to portray in detail how the “mission in Christ’s way” (cf Goheen 2000:178-181) calls for the multidimensional mission of the church because this important topic requires more exploration than possible here. However, if I was to further develop how the mission of Christ poses a model for the mission of the church, I would approach it in David J. Bosch’s way. He argues that the credible and faithful mission of the church has to entail “six major ‘salvific events’ portrayed in the New Testament: the incarnation of Christ, his death on the cross, his resurrection on the third day, his ascension, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the Parousia” (Bosch 1991:512).

located in the Cross where God's love was manifested and the sin of humanity was fully revealed and overcome. Jesus' atoning death sealed by his resurrection is the point of departure of Christian faith and, therefore, also Christian theology. It should also be the starting point of our missional ecclesiology.

The church which was adopted by grace through faith in the family of God is called to become the sign, instrument and foretaste of God's reign manifested in Jesus Christ whom she follows and in whom she dwells. Newbigin put emphasis on the corporate, missionary, and eschatological aspect of atonement. Through the power of the cross, God creates a new humanity—the community of justified sinners that in the power of the Holy Spirit bear witness to the uniqueness of Christ in the midst of the world and live in the hope of the future fulfillment of God's reign.

The New Testament uses over 90 images to talk about the church (McKim 2001:228, note 4; Filipi 2000:50). In her documents, CB employs many of them to illuminate the nature of the church. However, as Filipi warns us, we have to be very careful not to “take them out of the context in which they were originally found and uncritically juxtapose them [...]. Ecclesiological documents of the later period often succumbed to the temptation to level out particular metaphors, take them out of their context and pull them like beads on a string” (Filipi 2000:50, my translation).³⁰ It would be also a mistake to choose just one biblical model of the church and use it as the sole basis to define the nature of the church; the fact that the New Testament contains the plurality of ecclesiologies would be neglected (cf :42-49). A question arises: How, then, are we to talk about the church? I believe that Newbigin offers a viable “working definition” of the church: the church is “the provisional incorporation of humankind into Jesus Christ” (Goheen 2000:171). Goheen unfolds this Newbigin's definition in four steps.

He starts with the meaning of the words *into Jesus Christ*: “Since Jesus is the representative man who has revealed and accomplished the end-time kingdom, participation in that kingdom means one must be incorporated into Jesus Christ” (ibid.). Further, he develops the reality of the church in reference to a “threefold reality” of Christ. First, the church has to be understood in relation to the historical Jesus who walked on the dusty roads of Palestine, died and rose again at a certain point in the history: “This historical person revealed and accomplished the end. The church exists in order that men may be related to that historical Jesus—continuing His life in the world and conforming itself to His death”

³⁰ According to Filipi, *the Second Helvetic Confession* and the constitution *Lumen Gentium*, for example, are guilty of this shortcoming.

(*ibid.*). Second, the church is related to Jesus who is the resurrected Lord. He is alive and present in his church. Therefore, “the church cannot simply be explained by sociological factors because it is defined by the presence of the living Lord at work in its midst. The life of Jesus is not simply a pattern to be reproduced but the continuing presence of that life active and working in the midst of the community” (*ibid.*). Finally, the church is incorporated into Jesus Christ the Coming One: “The church does not develop as any other institution—that is, responding to forces by reference to its past. Rather it is called forward to the future—a future in which it already participates and which is the true future of the human race and cosmos” (*ibid.*).

Second, there is the noun *humankind* in our definition. The self-chosen name of the early Christian communities was the *ecclesia tou theou*. By choosing this self-designation, she underlined that the church is not a private cult but the “public assembly of God” (cf Goheen 2000:166; Filipi 2000:9). The church belongs to God who is “drawing people by the power of the Spirit into the allegiance of Christ” (Newbigin in Goheen 2000:166). Therefore, “the church is concerned with *humankind*. It is not a private organization for the benefit of those who adhere to the particular brand of religion. The church is not a *privatus cultus* but the first fruits of a harvest of the new humankind. She is *pars pro toto*, the part for the whole” (:171, italics original).

Third, the church is *provisional*. This predicate has to be interpreted in two ways: “First, the church’s members only make up a small part of humankind and exist, not for themselves, but for the sake of all humankind. Second, the visible form of the church is provisional. It does not yet reflect the variety and richness of the life of all humankind” (*ibid.*).

Finally, there is *incorporation* in our definition: “The church is that community that has been incorporated into the life of the kingdom as deposit, first fruit and sign. It enjoys communion with Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit” (*ibid.*). The church already enjoys the first fruit of salvation. At the same time, she, as the body of Christ, is sent to continue in the mission of the Son through whom God reconciled the world to Himself.

The strength of this proposed definition of the church as the provisional incorporation of humankind into Jesus Christ resides in the fact that it is deeply missionary and eschatological. It rules out the possibility to think about the church as detached from Jesus in whom the eschatological reign of God is inaugurated. Being incorporated in the Son, the church “is constituted as a community called to continue that same kingdom mission” (*ibid.*).

4.4 Bearing the Witness of the Holy Spirit³¹

Jesus Christ revealed and inaugurated the Kingdom of his Father, the Creator and Upholder of all things, and the Lord of history. The Holy Spirit bears witness to the presence of the kingdom that is hidden *sub contrario specie* in Jesus. He is the Spirit of mission that precedes the mission of the church. Mission is not primarily the witness of the church, but the work of the Spirit in which the church participates.

4.4.2 The Mission of the Spirit

Michael W. Goheen states, “If we are to have a sound pneumatology, we must locate the Spirit first in the context of eschatology and mission” (Goheen 2014:101). Similarly, if we are to have a sound ecclesiology, we must locate the church in the context of the work of the Holy Spirit. Here I will approach ecclesiology from the perspective of the mission of the Spirit.

It has been shown that the Spirit is the primary agent of mission. If we accept the premise that the mission is God’s mission, it is not the case anymore that the mission belongs to the church and that the role of the Spirit is only to equip the church so she could fulfill her task in the world. Rather, the mission of the Spirit who bears witness to Jesus and to the kingdom of God that is present in Him, lays the foundation for the mission of the church. The mission of the church is derivative. Newbigin clarifies this point:

It is not that the church bears witness and that the Spirit helps the Church to do so. This kind of language completely misses the point. The point is that the Church is the place where the Spirit is present as witness. The witness is thus not an accomplishment of the Church but a promise to the Church” (Newbigin in Goheen 2000:182-183).

The Pentecost was the birthday of the church. She was the fruit of the outpouring of the Spirit and has to remain open to the transforming power of the Spirit:

The Spirit continues to be present in the community in power, producing a corporate life and deeds that bring about a missionary encounter. The powers of the kingdom are present and people begin to ask questions. The missionary encounter between the early church and its pagan Roman environment did not come about as the unilateral initiative of the apostles but “in response to questions asked by others, questions prompted by the presence of something which calls for

³¹ This section draws on Goheen’s exposition of Newbigin’s theology in Goheen 2000:182-185.

explanation [...]” It is for this reason that Paul’s letters contain many exhortations to faithfulness but none to be engaged in mission (ibid.).

These words are not to be understood as undermining the missionary activities of the church (the so-called missionary *intention* of the church). Rather, they challenge the possible reduction of mission only to something that the church does: “the whole life of the Church [...] has a missionary dimension, though not all of it has mission as its primary *intention*” (Newbigin in Goheen 2000:276).³² Both missionary dimension and missionary intention is the fruit of the presence of the Spirit.

If we understand the church as a community where the Spirit is present, this will keep the church from legalistic distortion of mission. The mission of the church would be flawed if it was understood solely as an obedience to a command:

If mission is first of all of work of the Holy Spirit, then mission is an overflow of the gospel and not obedience to a law [...]. Mission is a “spin-off from Pentecost. He [Newbigin] speaks in other places of mission as the “overspill” [...], or the “fallout” [...] from Pentecost. All of these images point to mission as a “logical,” spontaneous, and joyful response to the outpouring of the Spirit. The church is then delivered from an atmosphere of anxiety and guilt regarding its mission” (Goheen 2000:183-184).

CB is right when she insists that the work of salvation, sanctification, and mission of the Holy Spirit cannot be separated (*Principles* 2017:§106). What needs to be stressed is that the common denominator of all these activities of the Spirit is to bear witness to the presence of the kingdom of God revealed and accomplished in Jesus. The church, then, is “the outward form of the continuous work of the Spirit in re-enacting Christ’s coming among men” (Newbigin in Goheen 2000:189). This is how we have to interpret the ecclesiological statement that “[t]he church is the community of those who were redeemed in Christ and *by the Holy Spirit incorporated into the body of Christ* of which he is the head” (*Statement* 2016:§8, italics mine). The church as the new eschatological fellowship incorporated by the Holy Spirit into Christ is properly understood only in missionary terms.

³² Both missionary dimension and missionary intention were very important for Newbigin. He stressed this point when he said that “unless there is in the life of the Church a point of concentration or the missionary intention, the missionary dimension which is proper to the whole life of the Church will be lost” (Newbigin in Goheen:276). This excludes the reduction of mission only to the so-called “greenhouse mission” (cf Mrázek 2011:85). It is not enough to be only an exemplary community of love that attracts outsiders, although this is beyond all doubt a dimension integral to mission. Both centripetal and centrifugal aspects of mission need to be present, both missionary dimension and missionary intention have to fully determine what it means to be the church.

4.4.3 Church as the Foretaste of the Kingdom of God

David J. Bosch characterizes the church portrayed in the letters of the apostle Paul as the interim eschatological community that exists for the sake of the world (Bosch 1991:165-170). In the previous section, the relationship between the Spirit and the church was presented in the context of mission. Now, the justice has to be done to the eschatological nature of the mission of the Spirit, and therefore also that of the church.

The church finds herself in an overlap of two ages. In the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus the kingdom of God has broken into the current age. Yet, although already inaugurated, it awaits its fulfillment. The period between Pentecost and the *Parousia* of Christ is the period of the Spirit: “He [the Spirit] spans, as it were, the gulf that yet yawns between the consummation for which we long and our actual life here” (Newbigin in Goheen 2000:185). Unfortunately, Goheen observes:

The eschatological nature of the Spirit has been obscured for much of church history. In Christendom ecclesiologies, the Spirit is related primarily to either the institutional church in the Catholic tradition or the individual in the Protestant tradition [...]. [T]he reason for the eschatological neglect of the Spirit is that His work has been elaborated in terms of the application of the work of Christ to the individual (Goheen 2000:185).

It cannot be said that the pneumatology of CB has been entirely individualized (cf *Principles* 2017:§§106-122). Nevertheless, it is true that her pneumatology was not immune to the process of de-eschatologization. However, the eschatological dimension of pneumatology has to be restored if we want to have a sound ecclesiology. Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949) observed that “[t]he Spirit’s proper sphere is [...] the world to come; from there he projects himself into the present, and becomes a prophecy of himself in his eschatological operation” (Vos in Goheen 2000:185). The Spirit is the foretaste of the future, “the gift for the last days” (Berkhof in Goheen 2000:186), and “the aperitif for the messianic banquet” (Newbigin in *ibid.*). Newbigin draws our attention to the fact that in Acts 1 the disciples asked Jesus about the restoration of the kingdom but received an answer about the Spirit in return: “The question is about the Kingdom; the promise is about that which is the foretaste, the first-fruit, the *arrabon* of the Kingdom—namely the gift of the Spirit” (Newbigin in Goheen 2000:186, cf Acts 1:6-8). The church received the promise that she will be granted the gift of the Holy Spirit and will witness to Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God present in Him. So, according to Newbigin, the relationship between the church and the witness of the Spirit may be described as threefold:

First, the church is the place or locus of the Spirit's witness [...]. Second, the church is the place where the powers of the kingdom are available to enable the church to serve human beings in all their needs [...]. Third, the church is the community called to witness to the good news of Jesus Christ with words that point to the source of its new life" (Goheen 2000:187)

In Newbigin's understanding of the relation of the church to the witness of the Spirit, privilege and responsibility of the community incorporated by the Spirit in the body of Christ are integrated. In the power of the Spirit, the church is not a mere instrument or an agent, but also the foretaste of the new life of the kingdom.

PART V: Conclusion

Pavel Černý challenged his listeners at the meeting of CPCE in Prague in 2006 to reflect again on the implications of *missio Dei* for the churches in the Czech Republic (Černý 2006a:12). This thesis in which I attempted to place the ecclesiology of CB on the theological bedrock of *missio Dei* might be considered only as a partial answer to Černý. I barely touched upon the problem of a “missionary *form* of the church today.” Much more work remains to be done in our quest for relevant ecclesiological models and new forms of the church ministry to society. Nevertheless, the quest for the contextual missionary *form* of the church has to be accompanied by a profound missiological revision of our understanding of the *essence* of the church as well.

The premise of this thesis was that the mission belongs to the essence of the church. This conviction is based on the recognition that God is a missionary God. The triune God is a missionary God in his being and his activity towards the world (cf Flett 2009, 2010). God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit live in the perichoretic relationship of reciprocal love that encompasses the whole creation. God loves the world and in his mission of reconciliation reaches to his creation so it could participate in the divine life of God (cf Migliore in Guder 2015:28).

The goal of God’s mission is to establish his reign over all creation: “The reign of God most certainly arises as God’s mission to reconcile the creation accomplished in the death and resurrection of Jesus” (Guder et al. 1998:92). Therefore, the church that was by grace alone incorporated into Christ and the kingdom of God present in Him, is to bear witness to God’s purposes for the world. “Thinking globally, God acted locally” (Snyder in Dodds 2010:80) and called the church to participate in his kingdom mission in the world. John G. Flett writes:

The church fails to understand herself if she does not understand herself in term of this fundamental relationship between the kingdom of God and the world [...]. The world loved by God is the object of this mission, and its final reconciliation is coincidental with the final revelation of the kingdom of God” (Flett 2010:51).

Therefore, the church has to understand herself in terms of God’s loving relationship to the world. Wilhelm Andersen (1911-1980) adds: “[T]he final and real goal of the *missio Dei* [...] is not the Church, but the establishment of God’s kingdom, to which the Church as *ecclesia viatorum* is on its way” (Andersen in Flett 2010:51). Hence, missional ecclesiology has to be eschatological through and through.

The goal of this thesis was to lay a foundation for a missional ecclesiology of CB. In order to achieve this goal, I approached the already existing theology of CB from the perspective of the theology of mission. As a part of this process, I engaged in the constructive interaction between the theology of CB and the theologies of many authors of different theological backgrounds. This provided me with valuable impulses for the further development of the ecclesiology of CB in the missionary direction. The overarching framework of this endeavor was Newbigin's concept of *missio Dei*. The outcome of my missional re-interpretation and further development of the ecclesiology of CB could be recapitulated in this proposed re-formulation of the first half of the ninth article of the *Statement 2016*:

We believe that God has already called and gathered his people in the history of Israel. The church is the community elected by God. She was called and gathered to participate in and witness to the kingdom of the Father, Creator, Upholder, Redeemer of all things, and the Lord of history.

Jesus Christ establishes the people of the New Covenant from all nations of the world as his church. The church as the provisional incorporation of humankind in Christ participates in the mission of the Son who was sent to reveal and accomplish the reign of his Father in the world.

The church is the worshipping community of those who were redeemed in Christ and by the Holy Spirit incorporated into the body of Christ of which He is the head. She is called to be the first fruit, sign, and the instrument of the kingdom of God that was inaugurated in Christ. The church bears the witness of the Holy Spirit to the Kingdom of the Father that was revealed and accomplished in the Son, so God may be glorified and His love attested to all people.

APPENDICES

6.1 History of the Church of the Brethren

CB did not emerge in a vacuum but was established under certain historical circumstances that influenced her contemporary form and theological orientation. It might be confusing that I am going to employ three different names for the same ecclesiological entity: The Free Reformed Church (FRC), the Unity of Czech Brethren (UCB), and the Church of the Brethren (CB). Using all three designations is the only way how to avoid anachronisms. Moreover, changing of the name of the church has always been led by reasons that are worthy of our attention.

It is by no means possible to present a comprehensive history of this church. Therefore, I will limit myself to touching upon what I consider the most significant milestones in the history of CB, and will do so in the framework of four different geopolitical contexts (Austrian-Hungarian Empire, Czechoslovakia, Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, and the Czech Republic).

6.1.1 The Free Reformed Church in Austrian-Hungarian Empire (1880-1918)

The history of CB starts with the birth of the FRC that stemmed from three sources (Nešpor and Vojtíšek 2015:209; 215-217). The first source was the awakening, a spiritual renewal in Bohemia situated in the northwest of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The second source were the activities of the congregationalist missionary society from Boston. The third source were the activities of the Reformed missionaries from Scotland cooperating with some Reformed pastors in the Eastern Bohemia and in Prussia. These pastors were dissatisfied with the dependence of their church on the state and with the spiritual situation in their congregations. They were, therefore, open to the impulses of the Evangelical and Revivalist piety (ibid.). Pavel Černý briefly summarizes the very beginning of the history of CB with the following words:

The Church of the Brethren had been forming between 1860-80 in two Czech regions. In the district of Náchod, a spiritual movement arose for which a strong desire for an intensive life with God and service to people were characteristic. In 1868, the first congregation of the Independent Czech Protestant Church was established in a town Bystré situated in the Eastern Bohemia. This was achieved with the support from the Independent Church of Scotland which was active in neighboring

Prussia. In 1880, the second center emerged in Prague which embraced the name of the Free Reformed Church. The forming of this independent group was significantly influenced by the activities of the American congregational missionaries from Boston. Both spiritual movements then merged into one Free Reformed Church which, then, has been continually growing and founding new congregations (Černý 2008:35, my translation).

The religious milieu of that time was still marked by the unfortunate development after the Peace of Westphalia (1648). In 1648, the devastating religious wars on the European continent (the so-called Thirty Years' War) ended. Nevertheless, the principle *cuius regio eius religio* was established which reserved the right to determine the confession of the state to the ruling monarch (the Habsburg emperor, in this case). Forced Counter-Reformation and re-Catholization dealt a heavy blow to Protestants living under the sovereign power of the Habsburg monarchy. Many Protestants were expelled, some chose exile and those who remained had to accept the Roman-Catholic faith of the Emperor (Říčan 1958:171-183). However, some of them, while joining formally the Roman-Catholic Church, were able to preserve their protestant identity. *The Patent of Toleration* which marked the end of re-Catholization was issued in 1781 and granted religious freedom to the adherents of Augsburg and Helvetic confession, and also to the Eastern Orthodox Church (:265). Nevertheless, it was not possible for the Protestants to enjoy the same rights as the Catholics did until 1861 when the *Protestant patent* was issued (:315-317), which also made possible to establish relations with Protestant Churches and associations beyond the borders of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, and allowed to import Bibles and Christian Protestant literature (Franz Joseph I of Austria 1861).

It was in this historical context when, in the second half of the 19th century, the Eastern part of Bohemia experienced a spiritual revival which gave rise to the first independent church in the Lands of the Bohemian Crown—the Free Czech Evangelical Church. This denomination that was formed in 1868 later unified with another free denomination which was officially established in Prague in 1880—the Free Reformed Church (FRC) (Košťál et al. 1981:9-39).

Unlike the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession and the Evangelical Church of the Helvetic Confession, the Free Reformed Church was not recognized by the Austro-Hungarian authorities. This was the reason for the adversity on the part the of the state towards the activities of this newly established church.³³ Moreover, the first decades of her

³³ For example, the denominations on which the *Protestant patent* did not apply were not allowed to own any pieces of real estate and their activities were under the watchful surveillance of the state. Therefore, the activities

existence were marked with constant tension between the Free Reformed Church and the state-recognized denominations from which those who were “born again” were leaving to join the Free Reformed Church (Košťál et al. 1981:9-39; Nešpor and Vojtíšek 2015:212). Nevertheless, it is important to stress that in spite of the fact that almost everybody was a member of the church at that time, the relationships between the state-recognized churches and many of their members were very loose.

Strong missionary fervor was typical for the members of FRC. Both ordinary lay members of this church and also those who were entrusted with a leading role, engaged in missionary activities. They stressed the importance of personal conversion and maintained that Christian piety must be practiced in everyday life of every believer. The associations affiliated to this church published magazines, organized diaconal work and engaged in the ministry to the youth. The passion to spread the gospel was also manifested in the work of colporteurs who were providing access to Bible and Christian tractates to everyone who showed interest.

The process of institutionalization and consolidation of FRC which started in 1880 continued in the 1890's and culminated in 1904. From the beginning, FRC adopted congregational polity. The only exception was the congregation of the former Free Czech Evangelical Church which merged with FRC in 1892 and preserved the presbyterian governance adopted as early as in 1868 (Košťál et al. 1981:29). The supreme governing organ of FRC was slowly becoming a conference comprising of missionaries, pastors and lay delegates from all congregations of this church. These conferences have been held annually since 1889 (Košťál et al. 1981:33; Štěpán 2015:192).³⁴ The key role in the leadership and administration of FRC was played by the missionaries from the *American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions* from Boston since the beginning of the FRC. Nevertheless, the missionaries were to slowly delegate responsibility also to the local leaders. At the conference in 1898, a small committee of two native leaders was chosen to cooperate with the missionaries who were still in charge of the main decisions concerning the church. The significant milestone in the administrative structure of the church was the establishment of the church committee of five (two foreign missionaries and three local preachers) which was to become the highest administrative organ accountable to the conference itself. This happened in 1904. In the following years, FRC was consolidating herself and pursuing her

of this church were administered through many para-church societies because these strict rules did not apply to them.

³⁴ This tradition of annual conferences of FRC was broken only during the Second World War when Czechoslovakia was occupied by Germany.

evangelizing and diaconal activities until the outbreak of the First World War. When USA declared war on the Austria-Hungary in 1917, all American missionaries, now as the enemies of the Empire, had to leave. By then, FRC numbered 26 congregations.

6.1.2 The Unity of Czech Brethren in Czechoslovakia (1918-1948)

One of the outcomes of the First World War was the collapse of the powerful multinational Empires in Europe. The successor states were formed on the basis of the idea of a nation state and Czechoslovakia was no exception. The birth of this new state was accompanied with significant social and political changes. The establishment of democracy as the form of government also brought unrestricted freedom of religion.

Due to the privileged position of the Roman Catholic Church in the past centuries, the religious movement “Away from Rome” resulted in mass numbers of members leaving the Roman-Catholic Church. Some of them joined the already established Protestant churches or found their spiritual home in newly-founded Czechoslovak Hussite Church which owed her existence to the modernist tendencies inside the Roman Catholic Church (Salajka 2007:28). The motivations for leaving the Roman Catholic Church were not only religious, but also cultural, political, and national. Because of this, many of those who left did not adhere to any other confession.

In 1918, two biggest Protestant churches (Lutheran and Reformed) merged to form the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren. Despite the fact that FRC longed for the unity of Czech Protestants, she did not merge with ECCB. In the eyes of the FRC, the stumbling block in the way towards establishing a closer bond between these two churches was predominant liberalism on the part of ECCB (Košťál et al., 1981:47-49). FRC was not willing to give up what she considered as four articuli supported by the authority of the Holy Scripture: “1. Only those who accepted salvation in Christ might become members of the church, 2. the church which consists from such people is administered by the Holy Scripture alone, 3. and in accordance with this she also exercises discipline. 4. [The Church] is independent from the state” (*Světlo* in Košťál et al. 1981:48, my translation). Because of this, FRC could not accept, just as other small evangelical denominations, what they thought to be “a vague liberal program” which was meant to provide the basis for unification (ibid.). The effort to integrate some of the other free Evangelical denominations together with the “awakened” Christians from both Protestant and Catholic circles under the name of the intended new ecclesiastical body named the Unity of Czech Brethren was also unsuccessful. Therefore, in 1919, FRC alone adopted the

name of the Unity of Czech Brethren (UCB). She did so “to express her affiliation to the spiritual heritage of the Unity of the Brethren and the Bohemian Reformation” (Černý 2008:35, my translation). At that time, UCB commenced her work in Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia.

Since the beginning of her existence in 1880, FRC has been pursuing the principle of independence from the state. However, the awareness that the church as God’s people should be distinct from the world did not lead this church to withdrawal from society and did not hinder the cooperation with the state in certain areas. FRC, and later UCB and CB, did not give up on her ministry to society which comprised not only from evangelism but also from diakonia.

It is important to note that the American Board supported the activities of FRC not only personally and spiritually, but also financially. It was not until 1932 that this denomination become independent from the financial support of the American Board. After 60 long years (the first missionaries from American Board came to Prague in 1872), UCB unbound the bond with the American Board.

In 1934, UCB established contact with Swedish Missionary Association which opened the possibility for her pastoral candidates to study theology in Lidingö. Besides this, most of those who had theological education, acquired it usually in biblical schools in Neukirchen, Chrischon, or Glasgow.

In September 1945, after the horrific events of the Second World War, UCB held conference which was attended by 108 delegates from 35 congregations (Košťál et al. 1981:65). The vision of UCB in the context of post-war Czechoslovakia was formulated as follows: “[T]he Unity of Czech Brethren wants to strive for: 1. faithfulness to biblical truth, 2. enhancement of faith through love, 3. development of missionary activities, 4. and new workers and active youth” (:66).

6.1.3 The Unity of Czech Brethren Becomes the Church of the Brethren in the Socialist Czechoslovakia (1948-1989)

In 1948, the Communist party took power and Czechoslovakia became a satellite country of the Eastern Soviet bloc for the next 41 years. Marx’s dictum that religion is “the opium of the people” is well known and communist totalitarian regime acted accordingly. In Czechoslovakia, the Roman Catholic Church was the main target of communist restrictions,

but there was not a single denomination in Czechoslovakia which was not affected by the promotion of the state atheist ideology.

In 1949, exactly one year after the Communist coup, new laws were adopted to establish a new position of churches in the socialist society. Denominations that were not recognized by the state ceased to exist, others were put under the control of the state. The property of all denominations was nationalized and it was the state now that carried the burden of paying wage to all priests and pastors—to all of those whom the state authorities had given permission to perform religious services. The church in Czechoslovakia was closely controlled and forced to withdraw from the public sphere. All religious activities had to take place behind the walls of the churches; all associations affiliated to churches had to be dismissed and the state took over the church's services in the field of social care (Košťál et al., 1981:68-69).

As the result of this new state religious policy, many Christians from non-recognized denominations and religious organizations applied for membership in UCB. Because of the growth in the number of Slovak and Polish-speaking members, UCB decided to change her name once again; since 1967 her name has been the Church of the Brethren (CB). In 1969, Czechoslovakia became a federation of two sovereign national states. Because of this, the Slovak part of CB became more autonomous (Košťál et al. 1981:71-73).

Just like other denominations in Czechoslovakia that were recognized by the state, since 1949 CB became dependent on the state and systematically pushed to live in her own “religious ghetto.” The era of the totalitarian communist regime was marked with persecution not only of those who represented the church officially, but also of lay Christians. Jan Štěpán (1932-2017) in his recent publication presents various materials that give us a glimpse of the struggle of CB in the communist totality. Štěpán likens the destiny of the church in the socialist Czechoslovakia to the “Babylonian captivity” (Štěpán 2015). The tendency to consider religion only as a private matter separated from the public life that was characteristic for the era of the Enlightenment was reinforced by the Communist regime.

6.1.4 The Church of the Brethren in the Czech Republic (1989-present)

The long 41 years of oppression ended in 1989 when the so-called Velvet revolution resulted in the collapse of Communism in Czechoslovakia and the establishment of the parliamentary democracy. The well-known former dissident Václav Havel became the president. The society of the Czechoslovak federation as the whole, the church included, could

take a deep breath of fresh air of freedom. The federation has been dissolved since 1993 and what used to be called Czechoslovakia now exists only as the Czech and the Slovak Republic. Accordingly, the Czech and Slovak branches of CB are administered independently but they meet regularly at joint conferences to discuss the issues of CB as a whole.

In the new social, political and economic climate, CB could step again into the public sphere and resume her work in the field of diakonia, evangelism, education, and children and youth ministry. The Diacony of the Church of the Brethren administers three facilities: a senior house, a sheltered housing, and a center providing care to people with physical and combined handicap. In 1990, CB founded her own theological seminary which was transformed into interdenominational Evangelical Theological Seminary in 1993. CB appoints her ministers as military chaplains.

CB also established several departments to coordinate the supra-congregational work with children, youth, married couples, and families, and to help coordinate planting of new congregations and filial stations. She also auspices one foreign missionary agency. The activities of CB are very diverse. In fact, each congregation serves God and society in a unique way; some even founded Christian elementary school, family center or kindergarten.

In 2013, the Act no. 428/2012 Coll. came into effect and the process of the separation of all Czech churches from the state has begun. This process is going to last for 30 years. The property of Czech churches that was confiscated between 1948-1990 has been partially given back. Czech churches should also receive financial compensation for the property that cannot be for restituted. The financial support from the state is also going to be gradually reduced. In 2043, the state will stop subsidizing Czech churches and the process of the separation of the church from the state is going to be completed (Czech Constitutional Court 2013).

In 2010, CB had 76 congregations and 60 filial stations in the Czech Republic. (Nešpor and Vojtíšek 2015:219). Nearly 10,900 people declared affiliation to CB in the Czech Republic in 2011 (*ibid.*).³⁵

³⁵ The church, in general, is a minority in the secularized Czech society. In comparison with 25 countries in Euro-Atlantic Region, the population of the Czech Republic evinces the highest level of mistrust towards churches that represent institutionalized Christian religion. Large denominations registered a great loss of members in the last two decades. (Despite this loss of members which affected especially the Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren and the Czechoslovak Hussite Church, it has been shown that the number of service participants in these churches has not been largely altered. This implies that, in the most cases, only formal members without a closer relationship with their church were leaving [Hamplová, 2013:41-49.]) On the other side, many small Evangelical denominations have been growing slowly. This, however, changes nothing of the fact that, generally speaking, only 10% of the inhabitants of the Czech Republic attend church services on a regular basis (i.e., at least once in a month) which is certainly not much, but still more than in France, Denmark, Russia, Finland, Norway and Sweden. This means that Czechs are not, as it is often stated, the most atheist country, but that Czechs trust church least of all 25 Euro-Atlantic countries included in Hamplová's sociological survey (:39-57). Nevertheless, Czechs are not disinterested in spirituality;

6.2 Abbreviations

CB	Church of the Brethren
CPCE	Community of the Protestant Churches in Europe
FRC	Free Reformed Church
GOCN	Gospel and Our Culture Network
IMC	International Missionary Council
UCB	Unity of Czech Brethren
WCC	World Council of Churches
Willingen 1952	International Missionary Council conference held in Willingen, Germany, 1952

the opposite is true. Aversion to institutionalized religion (and institutions in general) is accompanied by a burning interest in alternative religious phenomena (:58-81). The situation of the church in the Czech Republic is complicated as she does not, unlike the church in Scandinavian countries, for example, get much sympathy from the majority of society.

6.3 Cited Documents of the Church of the Brethren³⁶

<i>Commentary</i> 2017	<i>Commented Statement of the Faith of the Church of the Brethren</i> 2017 (Církev bratrská 2017b)
<i>Constitution</i> 2013	<i>Constitution of the Church of the Brethren</i> 2013 (Církev bratrská 2013a)
<i>Constitution</i> 2016	<i>Constitution of the Church of the Brethren</i> 2016 (Církev bratrská 2016a)
<i>Principles</i> 1977	<i>Principles of the Church of the Brethren</i> 1977 (Církev bratrská 1977)
<i>Principles</i> 1997	<i>Principles of the Church of the Brethren</i> 1997 (Církev bratrská 1997)
<i>Principles</i> 2017	<i>Spiritual Principles of the Church of the Brethren</i> 2017 (Církev bratrská 2017c)
<i>Standpoints</i> 2009	<i>Theological Standpoints and the Recommendations of the Council of the Church of the Brethren and the Department for Education</i> 2009 (Církev bratrská 2009)
<i>Statement</i> 2013	<i>Statement of the Faith of the Church of the Brethren</i> 2013 (Církev bratrská 2013b)
<i>Statement</i> 2016	<i>Statement of the Faith of the Church of the Brethren</i> 2016 (Církev bratrská 2016b)

³⁶ Except the *Constitution 2013* and the *Statement 2013* that are available in English, all quotations from the listed documents are translated by the author of this thesis.

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