

**THE PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENT AS REPRESENTED IN  
BREAKTHROUGH INTERNATIONAL AN EXPRESSION OF  
*MISSIO DEI* ?**

**A CONTRIBUTION TO AN EXPERIENTIAL PNEUMATOLOGY OF  
MISSION**

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## Abstract

This thesis critically evaluates the experiential missionary practice of Breakthrough International (BCI), an African charismatic Church, from a perspective of *Missio Dei*, a modern paradigm of mission conceptualized by ecumenical missiology.

BCI, within its African world view, where the spiritual is tangibly real, has grown out of its experience of the Spirit, the divine principle of origin and normal experience of faith. Theological academic discourse, bound to an enlightenment concept of truth within a modern Cartesian world view, can reasonably access and evaluate BCI's experience of the divine as proper source for theological discourse through BCI's narrative.

*Missio Dei*, a response to the old church centered paradigm of mission, redefines mission as an activity of God, in which the mission centered church participates. God's mission unfolds in (post)modern history transformed through Christ's coming to an eschatological reality. It is realized as such by the local congregation in (post)secular times, acknowledging God's preferential option for the poor and aims to humanize and liberate the world. God's mission is mediated through culture, and through contextualization creates a polycentric cultural identity of the gospel modeled after Christ's incarnation. It is in as much contextual as it is culture critical.

BCI resembles *Missio Dei* in a very limited fashion. The difference in world views, and its focus on personal experience, creates an uncritical paradigm of mission aiming to save the believer not the world. With little regard for the history of mission BCI wants to rewrite personal (hi)story without involving itself in world history imposing a spiritual agenda upon the world from the perspective of those who are victimized by history. Though it represents the poor it doesn't grasp Christ's incarnation and its implications for an understanding of the struggle of the poor as an issue of theology proper. Poverty is spiritualized to a matter of personal piety. BCI does not appreciate the contextuality of the gospel but understands it as above culture. It creates a Christian subculture in limited communion with the church universal, very reluctant to involve itself in the public domain.

Our dialogue with BCI's narrative form of theology acknowledges that modern, ecumenical missiology needs to rediscover the experience of the Spirit as source of mission; yet BCI needs to develop a theology which makes use of scripture, tradition, and reason in order to find a broader and sustainable understanding of its experience of the divine.

As required by university regulations, I hereby state unambiguously that this study, unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, is my own original work.

In accordance with the regulations of the University I request to take note that this thesis exceeds the recommended length for a doctoral dissertation. This has been unavoidable since the central question of this study deals with the experience of the Spirit in an African world view and assesses this experience from a modern Cartesian academic world view with special reference to *Missio Dei*. I have spelled out in detail (cf. pages 11-15 “The plan of the thesis”) how incompatible those two world views are and that this incompatibility requires an intensive discussions with respect to the central issues of this thesis (especially Epistemology and *Missio Dei*).

I therefore request the reader to bear with me as I try to move through the problems posed by the complexity of the main question.

.....  
Lutz Eugen Robert Meyer

30 June 2004

As candidate supervisor I hereby approve this thesis for submission

.....  
Prof. Anthony O. Balcomb

30 June 2004

# Acknowledgement

**All theology is a story told on earth about heaven**  
Philip Toynbee

Sometimes I am tempted to claim that God has a personal story with everyone who walks this earth. But as I pause for a moment I realize that it is not God who journeys with me, but it is me, who walks with God. This walk with God, or rather my spiritual journey with the divine reality, whose stories are narrated in the bible, preceded my awakening to critical theology. Before I learned to think about God I already walked with him.

This thesis is therefore more than the product of theological discourse. In a rather selfish way I feel it is a contribution towards reconciling the theologian and the believer in me. They are both pretty much alive and form parts of the personal story I have with the divine. This thesis adds another chapter to this story. It would not be possible if it would not be for a number of people who helped me to become both, a theologian who believes in God, and believer who thinks about God. I therefore would like to thank the following people for contributing to my story with God. If I would not have known them this thesis would never have been conceived.

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Furthermore I would like to acknowledge those who have contributed to the writing of this thesis. I wish to thank:

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**To Carola**

**Companion on the journey**

**Friend**

**Wonderful Mother**

**Challenge**

**Asiqubheke**

## **Abbreviations of the research material \***

### **A. Interviews about the history of Breakthrough International**

H01 Russell Toohey  
H02 Doreen Ullbricht  
H03 Rose & Chester Rawlins  
H04 Hilton & Rhoda Toohey

### **B. Interviews about the practice of Breakthrough International**

P01 Irvin Howard  
P02 Noleen Howard  
P03 Thandi Dlomo  
P04 Nina Toohey  
P05 Pricilla & Clifford Donelly  
P06 Jacinthia & Anthony Toohey  
P07 Patrick Dlamini  
P08 Russell Toohey I  
P09 Russell Toohey II

### **C. Presentations / Sermons the two senior leaders of BCI**

P/S01 Hilton Toohey  
P/S02 Hilton Toohey  
P/S03 Russell Toohey  
P/S04 Russell Toohey

### **D. Material produced by BCI for training its members**

M01 New Zion International A Brief History  
M02 Year Planer BCI  
M03 Destiny in 2003 statistical form  
M05 Gear 1 First Principles  
M06 First Gear Right Hand of Fellowship (older version)  
M07 First Gear Right Hand of Fellowship (older version)  
M08 New Zion Cell Explosion (Cell Leaders Training)  
M09 BCI 2 Tier Leaders Training January 2003  
M10 BCI 2 Tier Leaders Training May 2003  
M11 Rescue 911 flyer  
M12 Cell Notes January to July 2003  
M13 BCI Annual General Meeting Reports  
M16 BCI 18<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Magazine

**\* Please refer to the Supplementary Volume (Appendices) for a detailed documentation.**

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#### **Bibliography**

#### **Supplementary Volume (Appendices)**

## **Encountering the Spiritual - a personal introduction**

### **1. Mission a liability?**

This thesis has grown out of my work as a missionary in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA). ELCSA is a church dating back to the missionary movement of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is a product of the work of mission societies from Sweden, Norway, Germany and the United States. I have been seconded to work within ELCSA by Hermannsburg Mission, a German mission society operational in South Africa since 1854. I am the kind of church worker of whom David Bosch says;

The missionary is not central to the life and the future of the younger Churches, ... the missionary is not only not central but may in fact be an embarrassment and a liability" (Bosch 1991: 364-365).

He is indeed right. When it comes to the development of the local church I find myself quite often rather to be part of the problem than of the solution. Words like "liability" and "embarrassment" seem a little harsh but they indicate what Walter Freytag saw already as early as 1958. He stated at the conference of the International Missionary Council in Ghana (1958);

While in the past the missions had problems they now have become the problem. In the past it hasn't been a questioned that the Western missions where the leaders proclaiming the gospel in word and deed. Today we don't talk about the leadership of the Western missions but rather their contribution to mission. The forms in which mission is done are not taken for granted any longer. Even the traditional view on the purpose of mission is being questioned (Margull 1961:111).

What has happened is that the missionary movement which started as a Western affair in the 18<sup>th</sup> century has become the object of severe criticism. While in the past missionaries were looked upon as a blessing now they are seen as a burden. Again David Bosch bears witness in this regard. He writes;

Since the first issue of IRM was published in 1912, in the wake of Edinburgh 1910, a fundamental 'paradigm shift' has taken place in mission and missionary thinking. Then Europe and North America were the solid beacons of orientation, the model for the 'non-Christian' world still to be brought into the orbit of Christianity, today we are involved (at least theoretically!) in 'mission in six continents'. Then the missionary was a giver and an initiator, in a position of power (also 'secular' power) in a world of fixed and evident values, today the missionary is regarded as a throwback to a bygone era (Bosch 1991:89).

Bosch's criticism has been echoed in the West. It is increasingly difficult within the Western world to legitimize any missionary endeavor without being accused of being fundamentalist and a danger for the right of the individual to choose his or her path of "Salvation". James A. Scherer has pointed to this crisis saying that the missionary "movement is in crisis because of the larger community of faith being in crisis". He also pointed to the disagreement of Christians on global mission in general because there is no consensus on "what it is and whether it should be done at all" (Scherer 1987:21-22).

This crisis is a crisis within Western theology. The community of faith Scherer is referring to is the community of faith in the Western world. This community finds it difficult to relate to central concepts of Christian faith and subsequently to relate these concepts of faith to its contemporaries. No aspect of the life of the church in the West and its teaching is unaffected and it is impacting quite severely on the ability of the church to be a mission minded church. Suggestions to scrap the term "mission" all together (Günther 1998:17-23) or to declare an end of Western missions in general (Werner 1993:8) indicate that the Christian community in the Western world is not clear any longer on how to justifiably be involved in mission on a global level.

## 2. *Missio Dei* - Mission as God's Mission

One attempt to overcome this "legitimacy crisis" is characterized in Western Missiology by the term "*Missio Dei*". Even though I will go into much detail regarding this concept for a foundation of a theology of mission at a later stage of my thesis, I need to briefly sketch what led to the development of this term. This is necessary since the "*Missio Dei* Concept" is an idea which gave me the theoretical framework to justify my own involvement in global mission. It is because of this concept that I don't just look at myself and the whole missionary movement of the West as "liability and embarrassment" (D.Bosch).

During the "Vasco-Da-Gama-Era" (Panikkar in Günther 1987: 536) mission was understood as being done by "sending-organizations" which aimed to "save souls" and plant churches. So "younger Churches" emerged which to a large extent were dependent on the "older Churches". This period is characterized as "Church centered mission" (Bosch 1991:370) being concerned with church planting done by various mission societies of which most

operated in a more or less loose or even hostile relationship to the churches of their home country.

This "Church centered mission" lost its legitimacy with the growing independence of the so-called "younger Churches". The question arose why the Western based mission societies are still involved in missionary endeavor even though the "mission field" has seen the growth of local churches which should carry the mission of the church in their local context.

In response to that challenge the new paradigm of mission as "*Missio Dei*" has developed which tries to turn away from a "Church centered mission" to a "mission centered Church" (Bosch 1991:370). The Anglo-Euro-centric-perspective of mission began to transform into an understanding of mission which centered around the call of the church to be a missionary church. The old paradigm according to which the mission societies were called to plant churches became at least theoretically obsolete. Terms like "partners in obedience" (Whitby 1947) pointed to a new understanding in the relationship between the Anglo-European churches and the ones which are based in Asia, Latin America and Africa (Günther 1987: 533-539). The justification for doing mission was now to be found in the call of the Triune God on all churches to participate in his one "*Missio*" being initiated by God himself. This has been stated in "A statement on the missionary calling of the Church" at the IMC Conference at Willingen (1952);

The missionary movement of which we are part has its source in the Triune God Himself" (Goodall 1952:189).

The "*Missio*" of the Church is motivated in the "*Missio*" of the Son through the Father as the report on "The Theological Basis of the Missionary Obligation" (Willingen 1952) says;

The missionary obligation of the Church comes from the love of God in His active relationship with men. For God sent forth his Son, Jesus Christ, to seek out, and gather together, and transform, all men who are alienated by sin from God and their fellows. This is and always has been the will of God (Goodall 1952:241).

What can be said about the structure, life and purpose of the church is "that 'mission' is woven into all three aspects and cannot be separated out from any one aspect without destroying it (Goodall 1952:241). Mission is God's "*Missio*" and the church is participating in this *Missio Dei* because its very existence "springs from God's sending forth of His Son". So

churches in six continents' find themselves being united in living out God's call to be mission centered churches realizing the "*Missio Dei*" as being sent like the son has been sent (John 20:21).

### 3. *Missio Dei* and its significance for my service as a missionary

This term "*Missio Dei*" - the concept of a "Mission Centered Church" (Bosch) - has great significance for my own understanding as a missionary in a foreign land. In contrast to the missionaries of the old paradigm I am not taking part in an exercise of planting a dependent church or simply focusing on converting "heathens". But I participate in the "*Missio Dei*" in which every church by virtue of being church participates.

I therefore didn't come to Africa to convert and save souls disregarding the existing religious context, or to plant churches. I came to participate on a local level in the world wide missionary movement which originated in the Triune God "Sending forth his son" (Willigen 1952). By getting involved with African Christian spirituality I indeed acknowledged that God is involved with his creation on a global scale. He has his own story with Africa and I was willing to listen and to see if and how this would relate to my Western story which is as much a part of God's global "*Missio*" as the story of African churches.

Indeed the encounter with African Christian spirituality has been an extremely challenging one. I have come to appreciate the central role religious experience plays in the daily life of the African people. More specifically I have been deeply challenged to come to terms with the immediacy in which African Christians in general and Pentecostal African Christians in particular relate to God and are being moved by the experience of the Holy Spirit.

### 4. Western theology and its difficulty in grasping African spiritual experience

Through my encounter with the African Pentecostal spirituality I have seen the limitations of my own theological background which places great emphasis on the rationality of theology falling short in facilitating the experience of God among the believers. Eugen Drewermann, a German theologian, addresses this shortfall. He writes;

Contemporary theology must be criticized because it is not facilitating the experience of God. Instead theology provides a terminology to explain the experience of the ultimate being without having had this very experience. Theology substitutes original feelings of religious experience for rationalistic theories discussing possible consequences of religious experiences on a theoretical basis. Theology is blocking the way towards the source of religious experience. Instead of opening the way towards the religious experience of the ultimate being theology is being reduced to patterns of intellectual discourse. The danger is obvious. The talking about God becomes godless and the speaking of the Spirit becomes spiritless (Drewermann 1991:16-17).

Drewermann's observation is referring to a problem inherent to the rationalistic theology of the West. Theology and the experience of God don't go together because experience and theology belong to two different logical orders. This has been demonstrated through the work of Immanuel Kant who has shaped the way of (theo)logical thinking to an immeasurable extent. Kant distinguishes between empirical and pure knowledge. He claims that theology, or metaphysics as he calls it, does not belong to empirical knowledge. He writes;

Certain kinds of knowledge leave the field of all possible experience,...it is this very kind of knowledge which transcends the world of the senses, and where experience can neither guide nor correct us (Kant:1929:30).

According to Kant theology belongs to this kind of pure reason where experience can neither guide nor correct us. He writes,

... inevitable problems of pure reason itself are, God, Freedom, and Immortality. The science which with all its apparatus is really intended for the solution of these problems, is called Metaphysics (Kant:1929:30).

Gordon Kaufman has summarized this approach by Kant;

...the importance of Kant was his discovery that the concepts or images of God and the world are imaginative constructs, created by the mind for certain intra-mental functions and, thus, of a different logical order than the concepts and images which we have of the objects of experience (Kaufmann 1981:25).

Theology belongs to the logical order of imaginative constructs, 'pure reason' as Kant would say, and can therefore not really talk about the experience of God. This experience lies beyond the scope of the logic according to which theology operates. As Gordon Kaufman continues;

...the peculiarities of the concept of God have not, , prevented any believers from speaking of what they called their 'experience of God'. Since God was thought of on the model of the perceivable object, it was supposed that he could - at least under



some circumstances - be directly experienced. ... What must be recognized here is that referring to such experience as of 'God' is already to be operating within a theistic conceptual framework.... I am holding, however, that close inspection of the concept of God reveals that, whatever it means, it can not refer in this simple way to an object of direct experience or to anything like such an object, and that to use it in this way leads to serious confusion (Kaufman:1981:40)

##### 5. Experiencing the limit of conventional theological logic

That these different orders of logic are poised to clash in Africa is something which I have experienced personally. It was shortly after my arrival in South Africa when I was made aware of the fact that there might be more to the reality of God than I have been able to grasp within my theological logic, or 'pure reasoning' as one might call it using Kantian terminology.

I was not yet working as minister and was getting myself acquainted with the country. Basically nobody knew of my existence since I had just arrived, coming from Germany. While I was in a shopping center in Durban I was approached by a lady who obviously looked sick and exhausted. She told me that she had just been discharged from hospital and had been wandering the streets for some time since she didn't have the money for the bus-fare to go home. While she was praying to God to show her someone who could help she heard a voice telling her to approach me for help since I was a pastor.

I was quite shaken by this incident since it was impossible for that lady to know me or to even know that I am a pastor. I had just arrived coming from Germany and nobody was really aware of who I was or what I am. Therefore it was virtually impossible for that woman to know me let alone to know that I was a pastor. My logic in regards to God was being severely tested since what I had experienced was an impossibility within my Western world view.

I could try and find some 'logical explanation'. Maybe by some odd twist of fate the woman did know me and used her knowledge rather shrewdly to get some money? Maybe there is some possible explanation for what seems to be impossible. Or may be something had happened that is beyond my understanding?

A second story where the logic I am used to couldn't really be applied is related to the way the "Eastside Christian Leaders", an Eastwood fraternal, came into being. This Eastwood

fraternal is a rather unique fraternal which was formed in 1997 and comprises of Pentecostal as well as "Mainline Churches". They come together under the umbrella of "Eastside Christian Leaders" and cater for the greater Eastwood area. Ever since we started we have organized several outreach programs which were done in conjunction with all the Churches represented in the fraternal. Furthermore we discuss community issues with the local police station, the local councilor and business, mediate in taxi-violence and minister on a regular basis in the schools of Eastwood. Despite many differences among ourselves we have managed to keep together and understand our fraternal as representing "the Church" in our area.

The fraternal started in a way which is not really surprising in African society where "dreams are the language of the beyond" (Ela 1988:50). A man from a Pentecostal church was told in a dream that he should bring together all the pastors of the greater Eastwood area to work towards unity and the up-liftment of the community. He himself is not a pastor so he went and shared his dream with his local minister. This minister in turn took this dream seriously and saw God calling on the churches through that man. So he organized the fraternal which has been in existence ever since.

Needless to say that this is a rather impossible story for Western logic where dreams may have some psychological meaning as messages from the unconscious but wouldn't be understood as real calls from God.

However through experiences like these I came to understand that Africans operate differently in matters of faith than people like myself, who come from the rationalistic West. While people from the West tend to start with the concept of how things ought to be done, Africans seem to operate in an experiential mode putting trust in their experience of God rather than their concept of him.

## 6. A different way of doing mission

This observation refers not only to ways in which African people are religious but also to the way in which they do mission. Here again I need to tell two stories in order to make my point.

When I began to work as a missionary in Eastwood/Pietermaritzburg I came to know the way in which mission was done by my Pentecostal colleagues in the township. I learned about the more spontaneous and spiritually driven way in which the Pentecostal churches of our area have been started.

For instance, one colleague of mine started 20 years ago in Eastwood because he had been told by God to do so. While he was still working in his secular profession God instilled in him the calling to plant a church in Eastwood. According to his own testimony he heard a message from God to that effect and began to minister on a self supporting basis. His beginnings were very humble. Just a few people came together for fellowship in his house. Today he is the pastor of the Eastwood Philadelphia Assembly which is one of the bigger churches in our area.

What struck me in coming to know his church was the very fact that he, according to his claim, by being led through the Holy Spirit and finding guidance in scripture actually had developed a self-governing, self-reliant and self-propagating assembly. In comparing my own story with that of my colleague it occurred to me that while the Lutheran Church in South Africa is still plagued by the baggage left by missionaries who grew a church according to their Anglo-European-Standards the Pentecostal Movement is developing strong and indigenous churches. I saw happening what we had been talking about throughout all my studies. A church being established, run, and developed by local people without any support from overseas.

My own story, in contrast to that of my colleague, is much more orderly and structured. The Lutheran Church in Southern Africa did extend my call to be working in Eastwood for very practical reasons. It is save to say that our Diocesan Council didn't have a vision from God or a prophetic word about prospective mission outreach in the area. My call was rather

motivated by the lack of a suitable local co-worker and the inability of funding a church planting exercise in Eastwood.

In addition the Mission Board of Hermannsburg Mission/Germany in responding to the call of its South African partner did not do so because of any special spiritual experience. The decision to send me as a missionary to work in ELCSA was taken in accordance with administrative and conceptual priorities of the Mission Board. Even though one might argue that the Holy Spirit has had his hand in this structured process of calling a missionary one can't claim that there was any direct experiential intervention which actually superceded the established structures of church and mission. If at all one is left to believe that the Holy Spirit had bound himself to the structures and procedures which are governing the church and mission society.

it would be naive to assume that any decision taken by a governing body of a church or a mission organization would need to be based on a direct intervention of the Holy Spirit. But the point is that the established structures of decision making and of governing the church in the West leaves virtually no room for the Holy Spirit to intervene. The structures of the church and the mission don't reflect that according to the new paradigm of "Missio Dei, - the concept of a mission centered church-" the subject of mission is not the church but God. Instead there is little room for God to actually intervene in an extraordinary way because church and mission are operating in a process which is bound by order and procedure.

This seems to be different compared to the story of my colleague. According to his own claim he was and is relying on the guidance of the Holy Spirit which happened in very practical terms. In divergence I was relying on my mission board and the church to tell me what their plans were. Mission for him was driven by the Spirit in an intimate way which I can't claim to understand. But in examining the result of "his way of mission" in comparison to the "traditional way of mission" I have to admit that he had grown a church which the traditional Western missionary movement had been trying to develop for the past 250 years. But despite the "clear doctrinal stand" and a "correct theory" on mission the traditional missionary movement, at least within the Lutheran context of Southern Africa, has failed so far to deliver the self-governing, self-reliant and self-propagating church it is proposing and aiming for.

## 7. The problem of implementing *Missio Dei* within a Western world view

the question arises “What is it that the Pentecostals have got that we haven’t? Despite (maybe because of?) the involvement of foreign missions in ELCSA and its predecessors over at least the last 200 years it is still not self-reliant, self-propagating and self-sufficient. On the other hand the Pentecostal churches I came to know in Eastwood seem to have realized this. What is the reason for the difference?”

Many answers to this question are possible. I would like to suggest the following: Could it be that Western Missiology has put the term *Missio Dei* - the concept of a “mission centered Church” (Bosch 1991:370) - at the center of its terminology but has fallen short in its practice. The understanding of mission as an attribute of God rather than an activity of the Church has been embraced by basically all Christian Churches (Bosch 1991: 390-391). But this understanding is far from being transformed into new strategies of global mission. The old ways of a “Church centered mission” (Bosch 1991:370) are rather overwhelmingly endorsed on a practical level since they seem to be safe and free of any uncertainties.

This suggestion is confirmed in a statement made at a conference in Bossey/Switzerland dealing with the question “*What is mission today?*”;

We try hard to develop a new, changed concept of mission but the old concept seems to be overwhelming. We white Christians, coming from the West, go into the world to baptize the heathens and to help them in overcoming their underdevelopment so that they will see the truth which we have seen already.

We are unsatisfied with the current concept of mission and try to see new dimensions for mission. But at the same time we are so uncertain about our thinking that we present new ideas very cautiously. We don't dare to be too critical towards the old concepts which are so overwhelming in their simplicity (Kröger 1990:67).

This schizophrenic position is the reality. It proves to be difficult for the Western missionary movement to let the concept of “*Missio Dei*” transform its practice. There is a lack in implementing new concepts because the old concept of a “Church centered mission”(Bosch 1991:370) is overwhelming.

I assume that this lack in implementation is due to the fact that within the Western way of doing or thinking church and theology the *Missio Dei* concept is limited to a world view which is not expecting a direct intervention of God. Western theology, due to its own

presuppositions and understanding on how the world functions, has severe difficulties to incorporate into its world view an understanding of God that sees him act upon this world in a direct fashion, thus driving his *Missio* on a rather experiential level. In short the Holy Spirit as God's force shaping reality and as such driving *Missio Dei* is not being reckoned with in the way it is being done in the Pentecostal movement in South Africa.

#### 8. The plan of the thesis

At this point it might be helpful to recap what our<sup>1</sup> rather personal introductory remarks wanted to convey so far. In essence we made an observation which gave cause for a serious rethink of our own missiological roots. In meeting Pentecostal churches in Africa we noticed that they seemed to be doing what the *Missio Dei* concept was calling for. They seemed to participate in God's Mission because of their experience of the Holy Spirit though not necessarily having the conceptual background of *Missio Dei*. Churches were started on account of the experience of the Spirit, and often those churches developed in a much more authentic and self-reliant way than ELCSA as a product of the modern, Western, missionary movement.

The question we therefore ask is:

**Could it be that, on account of its experience of the Spirit, the Pentecostal Movement in Africa, as represented by Breakthrough International, takes part in God's *Missio*, which is being described on a conceptual level quite convincingly by Western Missiology<sup>2</sup>? To put it in a provocative sentence: Do the Pentecostals, or Breakthrough International for that matter, do what Western Missiology thinks about – that is to participate in God's *Missio*?**

In order to formulate an answer to the main question, if Breakthrough International is an expression of *Missio Dei*, we firstly have to deal with three sub-problems. These sub-problems are in short:

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1 From now on I move beyond the personal side of this thesis and therefore prefer to use the less personal "We" instead of the "I".

2 Please note that at a later point we will define the term "Western Missiology". Following that we will suggest to use the term "Ecumenical Missiology" in order to refer to the more recent developments within this stream of missiology (cf. II.A.2.) However, for the time being it is appropriate to use "Western Missiology" since we deal with a specific Western, modern, and "enlightened" development within theology.

- (1) Academic theology is bound to a modern, if not to say Cartesian, and “enlightened<sup>3</sup>” concept of truth. The epistemological problem of this thesis is therefore to justify how we can use the experience of the Spirit, as it happens within Breakthrough International, as a proper “objective” source for a theological study of Breakthrough International’s way of doing mission.
- (2) This thesis analyses Breakthrough International’s practice of mission using *Missio Dei* as its very specific frame of reference. It therefore needs to establish the context and the content of the *Missio Dei* concept of mission. This will give us a proper point of departure for our subsequent inquiry into Breakthrough International practice and define in detail from which position we analyze Breakthrough International.
- (3) Using *Missio Dei* as guiding analytical tool this thesis will need to describe Breakthrough International’s experiential way of mission through the experience of the Spirit.

The connections between those three sub-problems and their relationship with the answer to the question if Breakthrough International represents *Missio Dei* might not be that obvious during the course of the thesis. But without firstly dealing with these issues the main problem cannot be addressed. We need to justify why we accept experience as source of theological knowledge and how we make this accessible for an “enlightened”, modern theology. Furthermore we need to describe *Missio Dei* in great detail to establish the frame of reference which we use to investigate Breakthrough International’s way of mission. And finally we need to describe Breakthrough International’s way of doing mission exploring it from a perspective of *Missio Dei*. This *modus operandi* works out the ‘How’ (to talk about the experience of Spirit) and the ‘What’ (of *Missio Dei* and Breakthrough International) of the thesis and enables us to answer the main question: Is Breakthrough International an expression of *Missio Dei*? This will be done in chapter IV. After these preliminary remarks with regard to the way in which the main question needs to be approached we put forward the following outline for this thesis:

Chapter I. will deal at length with the epistemological problems of our topic since it is quite problematic to propose that something as subjective as the experience of the Spirit can be a valid source for academic research taking place within the modern, “enlightened” paradigm

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<sup>3</sup> Please note that when I use the word “enlightened” it refers to the epistemological revolution which took place with the arrival of the “Enlightenment”.

of thinking. One of the core assumptions of this thesis is that there is something such as the 'experience of the Holy Spirit' which causes African Pentecostals to take part in God's Missio. Experience as source of revelation is, theologically speaking, very ambiguous. We will therefore have to try to bring together the Western, modern, "enlightened" way of thinking about God with the African, experiential, charismatic way of living with God. The challenge is to find a way in which the African and the Western world view can begin a discourse about their different approaches towards God. Central to chapter I. is therefore to discuss the experience of the Spirit as a methodological problem. This will be done in three steps.

Chapter I.A. introduces the phenomenon of the 'experience of the Spirit' perceived as a tangible reality within the context of the African world view as opposed to a rationalistic, Western world view, based on the Cartesian premise that only what can be grasped by the thinking mind is real. This implies that the two world views produce two kinds of theology. One is rather experiential and expressed in a narrative form, and the other is rather conceptual expressing itself in accordance with the modern paradigm of thinking.

Chapter I.B. looks at the history of the Christian movement and attempts to show that the experience of the Holy Spirit has been an essential part of Christian heritage ever since its beginnings. We attempt to show that the experience of the Spirit is part of the "normality of faith" and the experience of the Spirit is the "divine principle of origin" (Holl) for Christianity.

Chapter I.C. tries to develop a solution to the problem that if indeed the experience of the Spirit is the "divine principle of origin" for Christianity the Western, Cartesian way of thinking has great difficulties to grasp this kind of experience. The challenge is therefore to find a language which enables modern, "enlightened" theology to tap into the reality of the experience of the Spirit and to communicate it within the framework of academic theology. Our proposal is to use the narrative form of thinking, employed abundantly by Breakthrough International, to address this issue and introduce a conversation between the Western thinking mind and the African experience of the divine.

Chapter II. provides our study with the necessary conceptual background from which to embark on our investigation into Breakthrough International experiential way of doing mission. It is important to note right from the outset of this thesis that we do not attempt to



present a general study into a charismatic church, in our case Breakthrough International. We rather attempt to examine Breakthrough International by using a very specific point of reference which is the *Missio Dei* concept. *Missio Dei* is the matrix through which we evaluate Breakthrough International's way of mission. It is therefore crucial that we deal at length with the question: What is the *Missio Dei* concept?

Chapter II. therefore turns to the *Missio Dei* concept and establishes the content and context of this 'new missiological paradigm' (D. Bosch). This is done by an in-depth look into the developments which gave birth to the modern missionary movement which was later to be transformed into the ecumenical missionary movement and has been the main proponent of the *Missio Dei* concept. In doing so we follow a twofold structure.

Firstly we work chronologically and deal with the historical background from which to understand the emergence of the *Missio Dei* concept (chapter II. B.). This chronological approach is more or less adhered to in chapter II.C. where we look at the birth of the *Missio Dei* concept at the World Missionary Conference in Willingen (1952), which marked a Copernican turn around in missiological thinking. Secondly we will complement the chronological approach with a diachronic approach (Jespersen) which means that we will extract four focal points on which the discourse in regard to the *Missio Dei* concept has been concentrated ever since Willingen 1952. Those diachronical focal points describe the main thrust of the *Missio Dei* concept. They are: Chapter II.D. '(Post)modern (his)story as the context of *Missio Dei*'; II.E. 'Poverty as context of Mission Dei'; II.F. 'Culture as medium of *Missio Dei*'; and finally II.G. '*Missio Dei* and the experience of the Spirit'.

Chapter III. deals with Breakthrough International's way of mission through the experience of the Spirit. Even though we hold on to a methodology based on a Western, rationalistic, if not to say Cartesian world view, we acknowledge the phenomenon of the experience of the Spirit as a starting point for theological discourse. We intend to make this experience accessible by listening to the narrative of Breakthrough International. This narrative, or rather the stories of those who have been befallen and overcome by the Spirit, are our primary source. However in exploring this source we develop our argument in relation to the findings of chapter II. This will enable us to arrive at a theological answer in respect of the question whether or not the practice of the people, involved with Breakthrough International, realizes

the *Missio Dei* concept. Consequently we propose an outline for chapter III. which tries to correspond as much as possible with the outline of chapter II.

In the beginning of chapter III. we establish in a more or less chronological order how Breakthrough International came into being and what forces and experiences shaped its development (III.B.). After that we identify main themes emerging from the ministry of Breakthrough International and conveyed in the stories of its members. Those main themes are identified in accordance with the diachronical focal points, which have been described in regards to the *Missio Dei* concept and which guide our investigation into Breakthrough International. This means we will especially look into issues of history (III.C.) and poverty (III.D.) as contexts of Breakthrough International's mission, as well as culture (III.E.) as medium of its mission. The theme of Spirituality and the experience of the Spirit will be woven into all these themes since this is what makes Breakthrough International the focus of my attention.

Chapter IV. is going to summarize the findings of the previous two chapters and develop an answer to the main question if Breakthrough International, in its experiential way of doing mission through and in the experience of the Spirit, represents the *Missio Dei* concept, as it has been developed by Western, "enlightened" missiology.

Chapter V. concludes the thesis and looks at the results of our inquiry into Breakthrough International's practice from a perspective of *Missio Dei* in a less academic way. We attempt to tie the conclusions of chapter VI. to our own narrative and engage the people of Breakthrough International in a theological discourse which is using their narrative and personal way of doing theology<sup>4</sup>. To do that, we choose the form of a letter, addressed to the senior pastor and the leadership of the church, because its personal form enables us to communicate our results to Breakthrough International more effectively.

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<sup>4</sup> Please note that that the writing of this thesis has been welcomed and tremendously supported by the people and the leadership of Breakthrough International. They have seen this project as an opportunity to engage in dialogue with a kind of theological approach they are not usually dialoging with. This thesis is therefore not just a contribution to academic discourse. It is written with the expressed wish by those who have been the "objects" of this study to be involved in it and learn from this project as well. I will therefore take the thesis back to Breakthrough International to continue the dialogue which has started ever since I began to work on it.

## **I. The experience of the Spirit as methodological problem**

### **A. The experience of the Spirit – a theological phenomenon in two world views**

#### **1. The methodological Problem of ‘Weltanschauung’**

Every human being searches in his own way to answer the question of the purpose of human existence, even though he is far away from approaching this as a philosophical problem using philosophical language.... (Klein 1986:1603).

This is how J. Klein describes the term *Weltanschauung*. He points to the fact that human beings are faced with the need to find answers to the mystery of their existence; - to construct their world view. Emmanuel Kant introduced the term *Weltanschauung* or ‘world view’ into philosophical discourse but since his days this term has developed a broad meaning. *Weltanschauung* tends to "describe subjective concepts through which the individual forms the various parts of life into the unity of a meaningful wholeness which he then relates back to himself and his understanding of life" (Klein 1986:1604). It is through *Weltanschauung* that every human being tries to form his or her fragmented life into a meaningful wholeness. He or she searches to incorporate the abundance of often contradictory human experiences into some meaningful system. *Weltanschauung* defines the way people view the world and understand their experiences. People judge between true and false and reach meaningful conclusions according to the way they perceive the world. From a people’s perspective life is never understood objectively but in correlation to people’s *Weltanschauung*.

To somebody who makes sense of the world by applying Western scientific thinking HIV-Aids is caused by a virus entering the bloodstream and harming the immune system. On the other hand to a young black activist during the time of apartheid, who viewed the world according to the experience of the "struggle", Aids is the invention of the white oppressor. It is just another instrument of the white man to subdue the black masses. Finally to a rural African who lives in some remote area in northern Zululand and views the world as playing field of cosmic forces, Aids is brought about through the negative power of "Ubuthakathi"<sup>5</sup>.

This difference in perception of the world is of great significance to the two main points upon which this thesis is built. The first is the fact that *Missio Dei*, as a new paradigm of

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<sup>5</sup> Doke & Vilakazi 1990:781 translate this term: "Witchcraft, wizardry, sorcery" or "skill" which can be rather misleading. But this is not the place to discuss the issue further.

Missiology, has been developed by a theology which prescribes to the Western rationalistic world view. The other point is the observation that the African Pentecostal movement as represented by Breakthrough International, evolved from within an African world view<sup>6</sup>, and seems to participate in *Missio Dei* as it is being described by Western Missiology. This participation happens through the experience of the Spirit and not through the application of a model of mission which has been derived in a rationalistic world view. From a methodological point of view we are dealing with two issues which need to be viewed in correlation with the world views in which they emerge. The one is based on an idea or concept of how mission ought to be done while the other is based on the experience that mission is happening through the 'intervention of the Spirit'.

In short: We are faced with the methodological problem that we try to relate and compare with each other, what belongs to two different world views - the Western and the African. Therefore we will now discuss the two different world views from which the two focal points of this thesis derive. We attempt to come to terms with the challenge of opening up an avenue of discourse between two different ways of doing theology where the one is conceptualizing a rational 'object' of theology while the other is experiencing this concept in the 'Power of the Spirit'.

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6 We make this claim despite the fact that in some aspects Breakthrough International seems to resemble the worldwide charismatic movement rather than a specific African world view. We acknowledge that the church is situated in a multicultural South African society and part of the "global village" where ideas and trends travel fast. We will for example see that the church displays a seemingly non-African dualism and believes in the possibility of miracles like Pentecostals and Charismatics do all over the world.

This might lead to the perception that the church does not display all aspects of a world view which the purist might call "traditional African". But does the fact that the practice of Breakthrough International is not fully complying with a certain traditional concept of the African way of life mean that it is not African? Our assumption is that by virtue of being an African church, located in Africa, and made up of Africans Breakthrough International is generally guided by an African world view. One of the predominant elements of such a world view is for example that the "Spiritual" is tangibly real. If we would not adhere to that presupposition we would face the nearly impossible task of defining which parts of Breakthrough Internationals practice are African and which present a corrupted, westernized, version of the "traditional African" way of life.

The underlying question of that problem is: What is African in an urban, multicultural, multilingual, ever-changing, and modern African context? In the context of our research we accept that as African what the Africans, who make up Breakthrough International, including the so called Coloreds, Indians and Whites, practice and express as their view of reality. These Africans might not display all the elements of what is perceived as a "traditional African world view" but nonetheless the fact that the people of Breakthrough International understand the "Spiritual" as tangibly real is a very specific expression of their Africanness.

## 2. The holistic, immanent, 'this worldly' and spiritual African world view

### 2.1. The spiritual world as tangible reality

On April 26<sup>th</sup> 2000 the local newspaper of Pietermaritzburg 'The Natal Witness' brought a story on its front-page entitled "Child killed in 'exorcism rite'" (Witness 2000:1). According to the article a four year old girl was found dead being a victim of a self proclaimed 'priest' who performed 'cleansing rituals' on her.

The 'priest' had locked the girl and her family in a house for a period of three weeks prior to Easter. He told them to fast and pray performing all kinds of cleansing services in order to drive out evil spirits of that little girl. Finally the girl was found dead in a bath of water under a bed where she according to the 'priest' was awaiting her resurrection.

This horrific story in itself has little value to our topic. It is an outpouring of religious madness which - given the relevant circumstances - might happen all over the world. It would be difficult to draw any conclusions from this incident in respect to an African world view. But the story becomes significant in respect to the African world view when one looks at how the people who were witnesses to this incident tried to make sense of it. In order to understand what had happened they applied their world view; - their perception of how things belong together.

According to the newspaper article one neighbor who accompanied the police when they gained entrance into the house described what he or she saw:

I saw the child lying on her back in the bath which also had water in it. I can't sleep at night, I was shocked to see the baby. I didn't know she was dead. Demons choked me. I went to my house and prayed and asked God to remove the demons (Witness 2000:1).

The article continues:

Police who arrived at the house also claimed they felt 'tangible evil' as they walked in (Witness 2000:1).

The very fact of arriving at a scene of such a murder is traumatic. But it is interesting that both the neighbor as well as the police did refer to what they saw or experienced as being

'choked by demons' or as 'tangible evil'. Seemingly they related what they experienced to a spiritual world which was real to them.

On page two of the same edition of the 'Natal Witness' another article followed up on the subject and tried to deal with the phenomenon of demon possession in a more rational manner. Ronald Nicholson, a professor from the department of religious studies at the local university, was asked to give his opinion on the topic. Nicholson is quoted as saying:

An exorcism is when prayers are said over the body to cast evil spirits out, perhaps also with ceremonies attached to it...but one has to know the difference between someone who is mentally ill and someone who is possessed (Witness 2000:2).

Nicholson does not dismiss the reality of demon possession from the outset. Judging from the article it seems that Nicholson shares the assumption of the neighbor and the police. They all presuppose a world in which 'demons, tangibly evil and spirits' are imposing themselves upon human beings. There is no indication of doubt questioning the existence of such a thing as "being possessed by demons".

Nicholson does caution and makes the distinction between someone mentally ill and someone who is possessed by demons. But he does not give the impression that the whole notion of being possessed is a purely psychological phenomenon. Somehow the world view in which he and the other witnesses operate allows for a spiritual world in which evil, demons and spirits are 'tangibly' real. They are ready to accept this as a real phenomenon of a 'transcendent world' and even the 'critically trained academic' seems to have no problem in doing so.

## 2.2. The inclusive, immanent African world view

This 'tangible reality' of a 'transcendent world' as it would be called in a Western world view is a very important feature of the African world view. The world is one *Cosmos* entailing heavens and earth, immanence and transcendence, in which the human being is participating. Desmond Tutu has expressed this in respect to the term *ubuntu* describing the humanness of the African: He writes:

In the African *Weltanschauung*, a person is not basically an independent solitary entity. A person is a human precisely in being enveloped in the community of other human beings, in being caught up in the bundle of life. To be is to participate (Battie 1996:100).

This Ubuntu transcends the world as it is seen in a Western world view. It includes and stretches out towards the unseen world. The *Cosmos*, the order of things, is inclusive of the spiritual world. Godwin Sogolo talks about this unique African world view in his book "Foundations of African Philosophy". He writes:

Now, African cosmology does not accept this dual order of the universe. There is a single order and all things in the universe, from the lowest to the highest simply occupy their given places within this single order. It does not seem that the concepts of "natural" and "supernatural" are appropriate in African traditional religious discourse. ... The acts of the African deities are not seen as anything extraordinary. They are normal to the African. ... In short, God in African religion is not transcendental (Sogolo 1993:59-60).

In a world view like this, where "the interrelationship of all being ... includes the transcendence" (Sundermeier 1988: 40) spirits and evil are tangibly and as real as other relationships. The African can say "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (Mbiti 1988:108-109). This statement includes the relationship to the transcendent world. The African world view is therefore in the truest sense of the word immanent since the transcendence bears no significance to it. To be reasonable means for an African to take the world of the 'Spiritual' (to apply a Western concept) as reality.

### 2.3. Every experience is perceived as religious experience

Robin Horton tries to grasp the implications of the inclusive African world view for the realm of religion by comparing traditional African religion and (Western) Christian religion in his '*Traditional Thought and Western Science*' (Horton 1970:130-171). He calls the former "essentially 'this worldly'" while the latter is an "other worldly religion" (Sogolo 1993:63).

This implies that whatever kind of experience African people have in this world it is always seen in interdependence with what Western thought would call the spiritual world. The gods and the spirits are either experienced in this world or not at all. The world is one and since there is no 'other world' out there spiritual phenomena are part of 'tangible reality'. To live as if God would not exist is not an option for an African. Because his or her experience of the 'Spiritual' through daily encounter tells him otherwise.

This is the uniqueness of African experience in an inclusive African world view – ‘God lives in all things’. A.Moyo wrote in his essay "An African Lutheran Theology" about the character of this African experience:

The African experience is first and foremost a religious experience. Religion is seen as an integral part of daily life and inseparable from culture. It expresses itself in the social, economic, and political life of any given community, and determines the individual's and the community's activities and relationships. ... Religion is a communal affair, and being an integral part of culture, there can be no separation of the sacred and the profane, our approach to life is holistic. According to African thought, God is and has always been very real (Moyo 1988: 81).

Moyo stresses that within the African context there can be no experience without the experience of God. A concept of a secular or profane experience having no spiritual bearing whatsoever is alien to the African world view. God is neither reflected in a deistic world view which wants to describe God by looking only at his act of creation nor in a rational world view which tries to work without any relation to a supernatural power. Both views, the one trying to find God in creation or the one trying to do away with God, are not African.

This means for African Christian thinking that African Christian thought is based on African Christian experience. This experience is understood as the very real intervention of God in the life of the believers. The spiritual world is not a concept but it is reality and as such interacting meaningfully with the believers within an African world view.

### 3. The ‘God is unreal’ world view of the Western world

#### 3.1 "Why I don't pray any longer"

On June 15<sup>th</sup> 2000 one could read in the German weekly ‘*Die Zeit*’ an article by Christian Nürnberger entitled “He was always with me”. The article is subtitled:

Prayer has become rare, nearly a taboo. Our author explains why he was able to pray in the past but can't do it any longer (Nürnberger 2000:Nr.25).



Nürnbergger is sharing how difficult it is for the modern, scientific world view of the West to relate to the spiritual world as reality. He writes:

When I was a child my mother, a simple farmers wife, used to tell me three different kinds of stories. Those stories which are true, those which are half-true and those which are not true. Those which are not true were the fairy tales. Legends and myths belonged to those which were half-true. The true stories were the biblical stories. One could trust in these stories because what they reported had really happened.

I did indeed believe that Jesus walked on water. I believed that he calmed the storm, healed the sick, changed water to wine and raised the dead. .... Many years I have been very sure: God knows everyone personally and therefore he knew me.

All this changed later. The questions came by themselves but the answers didn't. More and more unanswered questions were heaped upon each other. In as much as the questions couldn't be answered I prayed less and less. Finally I didn't pray at all. Till today I don't pray and I assume I will not pray in the future. The thought of praying doesn't even cross my mind. Once, when my wife had to undergo a 12 hour operation and everything would have been possible - recovery, being paralyzed or even dying - the thought of prayer flashed my mind, but just to be dismissed right away.

Didn't the theologians themselves demythologize the whole bible and faith as well as the superstition of the people. According to them prayer doesn't help. But it also does no harm. No theologian would say it that simple. But this is what they mean with their explanations if one peels off their theological window dressing, their linguistic stunts and complications....

The pious say God is especially close to us in our suffering. I didn't feel any such thing. ... But finally we were lucky again. The surgery was successful. The doctors didn't make the wrong cuts. I was truly happy. Should I have given thanks to God now? I thanked the doctors and nurses (Nürnbergger 2000: Zeit 25).

This story is one example of what is happening to the mind of modern Western people. In the modern Western world view God is not a force to be reckoned with any longer. This is especially true for the God who is understood as a personal God taking care of the needs of the individual. God has little to no relevance in what the Western world view perceives as reality. It is rather science, e.g. doctors and nurses, who make the difference, who improve life and take care on a personal level. As Adolf Holl put it in his book 'A Biography of the Holy Spirit': "Among Western intellectuals the rumor persists that God died sometime after the French Revolution" (Holl 1999:25).

While for an African the spiritual world is 'tangible' modern Western people have lost their feel for it. God is not really relevant in what is perceived as reality. If at all the spiritual dimension of a human being belongs to the realm of psychology and sociology.

The South African witnesses to the brutal scene of the deadly exorcism refer to what they have seen as a spiritual reality 'touching, even chocking' them. But a Western observer wouldn't share those sentiments. He would just see neurotic religious behavior pushed to the extreme. The former experience a power getting hold of them while the latter would tame those powers by boxing them into objective categories of psychological and sociological discourse.

### 3.2. The rationalistic, dualistic Western world view

There is a reason for Western people to stop praying. God as a personal power, connecting to people, didn't just die by accident but as a result of a world view which is quite different to the African one.

As we have seen before the African can say "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (Mbiti 1988:108-109). This statement includes a whole universe of relationships even the one which extends towards the transcendent world. On the contrary to this interdependent and holistic world view of modern Western man or woman can be characterized by disassociating the real world from any perceived spiritual world. Modern man or woman distinguishes between the natural and the supernatural. He or she is so convinced that this dualistic world view is the only reasonable one, that she has difficulties to value societies which have a different perspective. It is clear from the perspective of the West that the "natural/supernatural dichotomy in the human perception of the universe cuts across all societies" (Sogolo 1993:59).

According to Paul Tillich the roots of this dualistic world view might be traced back to classical philosophical tradition from Parmenides to Hegel (Tillich 1964:81) where reason is established as:

the structure of the mind which enables the mind to grasp and transform reality. It is effective in cognitive, aesthetic practical and technical functions of the human mind (Tillich 1964:80).

In contrast to an African world view of participation and interdependence the modern Western world view emphasizes the "grasping and transforming of reality". This is done by the mind which is the only certain faculty of the human being.

This view has found its classical expression in the works of Rene Descartes. Descartes defines man as a *res cogitans* (self-conscious, thinking) being certain of his or her existence because of the ability to think. While the African says "I am because we are"; Western modern man says with Descartes "*Cogito, ergo sum*" (I think therefore I am) (Descartes 1986:299). Descartes elaborates on this point:

What then am I ? A conscious being (*res cogitans*). What is that? A being that doubts, understands, asserts, denies, is willing, is unwilling; further, that has sense and imagination (Descartes 1986:70).

The Cartesian human being is a 'conscious being' and perceives his or her world through the mind rather than through the senses let alone the emotions. In Descartes view the only thing certain is the human being as a 'thinking being'. He says:

I now know that even bodies are not really perceived by the senses or the imaginative faculty, but only by the intellect; that they are perceived, not by being touched or seen, but by **being understood**; I thus clearly recognize that nothing is more easily or manifestly perceptible to me than my own mind" (Descartes 1986:75, bold is mine).

It is the human being as *res cogitans*, as 'thinking being' which stands in the center of the modern Western world view. This 'thinking being' forms and categorizes the world through the application of the mind thereby rationalizing reality, it rather 'understands reality' than being touched or even overpowered by it. While the African mind finds meaning through participation modern Western man constructs meaning by making intellectual judgments categorizing and understanding reality rationally. As Descartes would say: "I am thinking, therefore I exist" (Descartes 1986:32). The world falls into two parts, which are the thinking mind and the object of that thinking mind. Everything outside of the mind (the *res cogitans*) is the object (*res extensa*) of the thinking mind. The thinking mind objectifies, categorizes and conceptualizes the world of his or her experiences which is viewed through a subject-object-dichotomy. In this process of subject-object dichotomization only one thing is certain: The human mind is in control of the *res extensa*, the objects of human thinking.

Within this rationalistic world view of modern man even God becomes an object of the thinking mind. Religion is a rational matter in the sense that one is thinking about God in concepts and ideas. Rudolf Otto has captured the way in which this world view treats God as an object of our thinking quite clear. He writes:

It is essential to every theistic conception of God, and most of all to the Christian, that it designates and precisely characterizes Deity by the attributes Spirit, Reason, Purpose, Good Will, Supreme Power, Unity, Selfhood.... Now all these attributes constitute clear and definite concepts: they can be grasp by the intellect; they can be analyzed by thought; they even admit of definition. An object that can thus be thought conceptually may be termed rational. The nature of deity described in the attributes above mentioned is, then, a rational nature; and a religion which recognizes and maintains such a view of God is in so far a 'rational' religion. Only on such terms is belief possible in contrast to mere feeling (Otto 1939:1).

In a Cartesian world view God becomes a "transcendence that fits our categories" (Placher 1989:10) and "Western thought is basically seen as being built around a scientific world view, a world of strict and universal laws of nature" (Sogolo 1993:59) where there is a dichotomy of the natural and the supernatural.

Religion is of a rational nature in the sense that it can be conceptualized in objective categories. As such, and only as such, it might have some bearing on reality. The world of the 'Spiritual' fits into the category of the supernatural, it is therefore basically 'irrational'. As such it has no bearing on the reality of the strict and universal laws of the rationalistic mind.

### 3.3. God's (ir)relevance in a modern world

This modern world view has a very distinctive consequence for the way in which modern man is able to experience God. While the African world view integrates the 'Spiritual' into its view of the world the modern world view disassociates the 'Spiritual' from the 'real world' of objective concepts and natural laws. This 'objective world', as it is being perceived by the thinking mind, leaves little or no room for the experience of God. While the 'Spiritual world' is "real and tangible" to the African world view it is an impossibility to the modern Western world view. As Jürgen Moltmann writes:

Is God an object of possible experience? According to the pattern of the modern constitution of experience, this is out of the question: God can be objectively neither known nor experienced (Moltmann 1992:31).

This does not mean that it is impossible to talk about the experience of the 'Spiritual', the experience of God in a Western world view. It just says that in an objective sense it is impossible to talk about the experience of God. According to Moltmann it is:

...still possible to talk about the experience of God. We can do so in the non objective context of human experience itself. ... Even if God is not an object of the general experience of the world and life, the experience of God can still be present as transcendental constitution of the human self-consciousness (Moltmann 1992:32-33).

In other words it is possible for modern man to still feel the relevance of God to his or her life, but this feeling is a purely subjective experience. The Western modern world view would separate this 'world of human self-consciousness' from a 'world of facts and knowledge', from the world of 'objective' truth'. So modern Western man views all possible experience of God through this dichotomy of the truth as being understood in objective terms or in subjective events happening in the human self-consciousness. The objective truth is being verifiable through experiment and reason. While the subjective experience of the spiritual belongs within the realm of psychology and sociology. As Paul Tillich says:

The most popular identification is that of faith with feeling. Moreover, it is not only popular but also readily accepted by scientists and philosophers who reject the religious claim to truth but who cannot deny its tremendous psychological and sociological power (Tillich 1964:140).

since the realm of the 'Spiritual' has been confined to emotions or rather feelings "which are sound and smoke" (Goethe) it is possible for modern man to stop praying when there are too many unanswered questions. It is possible to live as if God doesn't exist or "died some time after the French Revolution" (Holl). Religion becomes basically anthropology (Feuerbach) and the world is conceivable as a secular world having no relation to any spiritual reality at all.

One could say that within the modern Western world view spiritual reality has been confined to the emotional side of our experience. As such it has value for the self-conscious mind. But the spiritual reality has no objective structure. To use Descartes' distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* one could say that the spiritual world has no value as a *res extensa* whatsoever. It has nothing to do with the real world being perceived by the thinking mind (*res cogitans*) and is therefore not real.

The thinking mind is only able to perceive of what Otto calls the "rational religion" of definite and clear concepts. Such concepts are rationally verifiable. They can be objectively judged by the thinking mind. The 'science' being busy doing this is called theology.

#### 4. The problem of spiritual literacy as a theological problem

So far we have seen that African and Western thinking operates in two different world views. The former perceives the spiritual world as real bearing tangible consequences. The latter would rather restrain the spiritual world to the subjective side of the human existence. It does not deny that a spiritual world might exist within the subjective self-consciousness of the human being but this is not real in an objective sense as being understood according to the Cartesian subject-object dichotomy.

This difference in world views leads to a different way in which spiritual experiences are being incorporated into the life of the believer. We would call this a different kind of “spiritual literacy” which can be observed in the African and the Western world view. At the center of this different way of seeing things, of reading the signs of “the Spiritual” is the way in which spiritual experiences are dealt with. The African world view relates a spiritual experience directly to the life of the believer. But the Western world view screens any spiritual experience through its rationalistic understanding of religion (R. Otto). The African world view is rather intimately perceptive to the ‘experience of the Spiritual’ while Western man approaches God through the detour of conceptual discourse.

This difference in dealing with the ‘experience of the Spirit’ - this difference in spiritual literacy - is crucial to understand the reasons for the different way in which mission is being done by the traditional Western Missionary Movement and the Churches emerging out of this process on the one side and the African Pentecostal movement on the other. Therefore we will briefly sketch the two different ways of dealing with the experience of “the Spiritual” within Western as well as African Theology.

#### 4.1. The experience of the power of the Spirit – bound to ecclesiastical theology

In 1992 Jürgen Moltmann wrote his remarkable book “The Spirit of Life”. There he makes reference to the significance of the Holy Spirit within Western theology. He writes:

About twenty years ago ... The Holy Spirit was said to be the Cinderella of Western theology. This criticism of contemporary theology ... initiated a whole flood of writings about the Holy Spirit and its special efficacies. ‘Forgetfulness of the Spirit’ gave way to a positive obsession with the Spirit.

But if we look critically at the actual results, we are bound to conclude that in sober fact, although light has been thrown on a whole number of individual aspects, a new paradigm in pneumatology has not yet emerged. Most studies are no more than prolongations of the traditional doctrines, either pursuing further the Catholic doctrine of grace, or expanding the protestant pattern ‘Word and Spirit’.

It is only hesitantly that the very foundation of the Western church’s pneumatology is even put forward for discussion – by which I mean the doctrine about the Spirit’s origin a *patre filioque*, the doctrine which led to the division of the church in 1054. No less hesitant is the recognition of the new Pentecostal and charismatic movements, and reflections about their special experiences of the Spirit (Moltmann 1992:1-2).

Moltmann points to interest in pneumatology which has tremendously grown within Western theology over the last twenty to thirty years. But despite this increased interest basically nothing new has emerged within Western pneumatology. Especially the whole aspect of the ‘experience of the Spirit’ continues to be a stepchild of academic Western theology. As Moltmann continues:

It was the established churches’ fear of the religious, as well as the irreligious, ‘free thinking’ of the modern world which led to more and more reserve in the doctrine of the “Holy Spirit”.... The only Spirit that was declared holy was the Spirit that is bound to the ecclesiastical institution for mediating grace, and to the preaching of the official ‘spiritual pastors and teachers’. The Spirit which people experience personally in their own decision of faith, in believers baptism, in the inner experience of faith in which ‘they felt their hearts strangely warmed (as John Wesley put it), and in their own charismatic endowment, was declared ‘unholy’ and ‘enthusiastic’....

On the other hand, the continual assertion that God’s Spirit is bound to the church, its words and sacraments, its authority, its institutions and ministries, impoverishes the congregations. It empties the churches, while the Spirit emigrates to the spontaneous groups and personal experience (Moltmann 1992:2).

According to Moltmann Western theology has played and is playing its part in this process of ‘binding of the Spirit’ to ecclesiastical institutions, word and sacrament. Moltmann’s point that despite the increased interest in the “Holy Spirit” Western theology has not yet developed a new paradigm of pneumatology is important. Because according to him the

traditional concepts of pneumatology don't allow adequately for the 'experience of the Spirit' nor do they create this experience or help to read it.

#### 4.1.1. The experience of the power of the Spirit and Western theological training

This becomes obvious when one looks at the way in which religious personnel, priests and pastors, those who are 'officially spiritual', are being trained within Western and here especially Protestant tradition.

Manfred Josuttis, a leading German professor in pastoral theology, writes about the training process through which pastors or rather theologians have to go through, if they want to serve in an average German congregation. The training according to Josuttis is designed to let pastors approach their profession in a rather rationalistic manner. He writes;

Somebody from the outside might be astounded that in our culture someone can start training for a religious profession motivated purely by his own decision. ... A specific calling does not stand at beginning but at the end of the training process which takes the form of the ordination into the ministry.

Seemingly our Church assumes that someone can become an acceptable pastor, if he or she is an average high school student and if he or she has been an average student of theology passing two major exams with average results. Our regulations for theological studies and exam requirements, at least for the first major exam, show, that the student should have gained knowledge about issues regarding history and dogmatic, he or she should have acquired the methodology in regard to the exegesis of texts and theological reasoning.

A comparison with other systems of training for a religious vocation shows that this approach to being a pastor can not be taken for granted. In our system the pastor does not learn to pray or fast. He does not learn to meditate. He does not learn to select the sacrifice, to prepare and to slaughter it. He does not experience rebirth which happens in a series of initiating steps. He can not bring himself into trance and he can not elevate himself into ecstasy (Josuttis 1987: 214-215)

Josuttis points to the fact that the training of religious personnel in the Western world view, compared to other world views, is quite uniquely focusing on intellectual abilities of being able to interpret texts and make rational judgments.

Ernst Henze, a local Bishop in the Lutheran Church of Lower Saxony/Germany, reflects further on the training of pastors and the lack of focusing on the spiritual aspect of this training. He writes from a practical Bishop's perspective:



I don't want to neglect the question if the training of future pastors at our universities and seminaries is appropriate in respect to the burden and the duty of the calling. Particularly in what is the most important but most difficult to learn for the office of a pastor, in living a spiritual life, we leave our candidates alone (Henze 1993:17).

Moltmann, Henze and Josuttis do raise an important point in respect to the question of how Western theology and theologians are being able to incorporate the 'experience of the Spirit' in their theological thinking as well as their pastoral practice. Since there is no new pneumatological paradigm for dealing with the 'experience of the Spirit' it is left to individual experience or some enthusiastic groups with little relevance to mainstream theology. Because of the lack of an adequate pneumatology Western theology finds it extremely difficult to 'read' the 'experience of the Spirit', it seems to be 'illiterate' when it comes to the experiential character of the Spirit of God.

#### 4.1.2. The experience of the power of the Spirit and Western exegesis

A good example of this 'illiteracy' is how Acts chapter 2 is interpreted by Western theologians. They in general acknowledge that something ecstatic happened on the day of Pentecost. But they tend to reject the notion that this can happen in the present coupled with a warning not to be overly spontaneous. A brief look at statements by a few theologians might illustrate that they view Pentecost as it happened in the times of the New Testament is part of the history of the Church and not necessarily an experience of the Spirit to be repeated in the present.

Ludwig Harms for instance, the founder of Hermannsburg Mission made it very clear that the miracle of Pentecost as experienced by the disciples can not be repeated. In a sermon delivered on the day of Pentecost around 1855 he refers to Acts 2 as the account of the act of 'creating the church' saying,

Pentecost is the recreation of humanity through the Holy Spirit. It is the first creation of the Christian church, which had not been in existence but which should come into being through this miracle [of Pentecost] which happens in a miraculous way, accompanied by signs of wonders one could see and hear. Now [today] the Holy Spirit is with us as the father and the church is with us as the mother of spiritual men, now [today] being born again and the renewal of the man happens through holy baptism in water and in spirit. This is an ongoing miracle but nobody sees or hears anything miraculous which could be felt or touched. Therefore we can not and should not expect those miraculous signs [as happened at Pentecost] (Harms 1923:660).

Admittedly this is a testimony dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century but it shows how theology has tried to push aside the 'experience of the Spirit'. Ludwig Harms is just one example. Another one can be found in a commentary on the Book of Acts by Otto Dibelius, a German theologian and church leader. He reduces the miracles of Pentecost to an apostolic calling which the church of today does stand on, but which can not be experienced again. He explains Acts 2:1-4:

Pentecost is the feast of the Apostles. It is not in a direct sense a feast of the ordinary members of the congregation as if every Christian should experience an outpouring of the Holy Spirit and that it would be a sign of his spiritual poverty that indeed we don't experience it like the Apostles did (Dibelius 1951:32).

Dibelius is quite clear that "the outpouring of the Holy Spirit" is not directed towards the ordinary members of the church. This is a privilege belonging to an age of the Apostles who are part of the glorious beginnings of the church.

Another rather recent example is taken from a commentary on the Book of Acts by Rudolf Pesch. His commentary is part of a whole series of commentaries on the Old and New Testament which has been published during the last couple of years with the intention of producing an authoritative, scholarly series adhering to the highest academic standards. This academic project is being facilitated by German theologians from Protestant as well as Catholic faculties of theology and represents the best names German speaking theology has on offer. Therefore one might arguably say that Pesch is presenting a view which is supported by the majority of academic theology in the West. He writes on Acts 2;

Theology has to emphasize the independence of the Holy Spirit as well as his dependence being bound to the church as the room of his presence which is being created through him. The accomplishment of having an "enlightened" Christian spirituality can not be allowed to be compromised by the darkness of spontaneous piety (Pesch 1986:113).

According to Pesch an "enlightened spirituality" deriving from an "enlightened" theology has to be guarded against the "darkness of spontaneous piety". Therefore the 'binding of the Spirit' to the 'ecclesiastical institution' (Moltmann) needs to be emphasized.

Harms, Dibelius and Pesch are dealing with the 'experience of the Spirit' from a perspective of limiting its spontaneous aspect. They are defensive and don't enable theology to create or to 'read' the 'experience of the Spirit'. This rational approach is the result of an 'enlightened

theology' grown out of the Western world view where the supernatural has little relevance for reality.

#### 4.2. The experience of the Spirit – part of an African theology of experience

We have seen already that "According to African thought, God is and has always been very real" (Moyo 1986: 81). This tangible reality of God or the 'Spiritual' leads to a very different approach in dealing with the 'experience of the Spirit' within African theology. Its starting point is the 'experience of the Spirit' as a day to day reality of the believer. According to John Pobee African theology should not be intellectual speculation. He writes:

Theology is not abstruse speculation, an academic game, running the danger of raising and answering questions which no one asks. For example, medieval theologians wrote theses on how many angels could dance on the tip of a needle. Such abstruse speculation is not of the essence of theology (Pobee:1979:27).

Theology according to Pobee should rather be "genuine and authentic theology" taking into account the "process element in all religion". It should not take at its "starting point a corpus of doctrines and practices and studies how that corpus can be communicated in another culture or faith" (Pobee 1979:27-28). In contrast Pobee says,

Christian theology should be concerned with a gospel and not a religion. The starting point should be the 'Christ event', the scientific identification of which is the task of theology. Further theology should reflect on the implications of that Christ event for those who see the world in a particular way. Theology should discover what that Christ event looks like when seen from within that particular world view. Thus to some degree theology is always being written by those to whom the gospel is being communicated. Furthermore, it is the task of theology to keep on reconstructing and repairing a holistic Christocentric world view, a synthesis of knowledge which is being expounded by analytical departmentalized study, to help people to relate their own understanding and interests in a comprehensive whole (Pobee 1979:28).

Pobee calls for a theology which is contextual and looks at the 'Christ event' from a particular world view. This is of significance for the 'experience of the Spirit'. Because the 'experience of the Spirit' is deeply rooted in the African world view. What Pobee calls the 'process element of all religion' is capturing this aspect of religion which we prefer to call in a Christian understanding the 'experience of the Spirit'. This experience is the beginning of theology, as Pobee writes:

We return to the issue of theology and experience. Theology is rooted in, among other things, man's experience or a peoples experience.... Our concern is to show that one's experience to some extent determine one's theology. In our days the most striking example is the emergence of black theology, in America and South Africa (Pobee 1979:33-35).

Pobee's assumption that theology is rooted in experience refers in his context to the experience of oppression and exploitation on the basis of race which gave birth to black theology. But the concept of experience can be understood in a much wider sense. The people's experience, especially in Africa, includes not only poverty and exploitation but also the 'experience of the Spirit'. Therefore African theology can be called spiritually literate because it derives from a religious world view in which the 'experience', and this includes the 'experience of the Spirit', is a legitimate source of revelation. "People's experience determines one's theology" and since African Christians experience God in the 'power of the Spirit' African theology is much more perceptive to this experience.

#### 4.3. The experience of the power of the Spirit and the knowledge of God

James H. Cone has stressed this aspect of Christian theology in his context of black theology. He writes:

What does it mean to speak the truth from a black theological perspective, that is, what are the sources and the content of theology? To explore this question we must begin by exploring the theological function of black experience.... There is no truth for and about black people that does not emerge out of the context of their experience (Cone 1990:17).

It is clear for Cone that experience, and especially black experience, is a source of revelation. In his context he distinguishes between two different kinds of experience which are both "the source out of which truth is given" (Cone 1990:23). There is what he calls the 'secular experience' and there is 'church experience' (Cone 1990: 23). 'Secular experience' refers in his context to the day to day experience of blacks being oppressed and exploited on the basis of their skin color. But for the purpose of my argument we are more concerned with what he calls 'church-experience'.

Cone gives a number of lively accounts of this type of experience, through which the divine communicates itself to the believer. We just want to relate one. Cone writes:

The word and its proclamation in the black Church is more than the conceptualization of theological doctrine. The word is more than *words* about God. God's word is a poetic happening, an evocation of an indescribable reality in the life of the people. This is the meaning behind the occasion when a black preacher "who after reading a rather cryptic passage took off his spectacles, closed the Bible with a bang and by way of preface said, 'Brothers and sisters, this morning – I intend to explain the unexplainable – find out the undefinable – ponder over the imponderable – and unscrew the unscrutable". Here the preacher is affirming not only his freedom in relation to the text; he is also making a sharp distinction between the *words* of the text, and the *Word* disclosed in the text.

When the Word is spoken as truth and the people feel the presence of truth in the midst of their troublesome situation, they respond to the preached word by ratifying it with resounding "Amen". The "Amen" is the congregation's witness to, and participation in, the proclamation.... At this point the word of truth transcends conceptual analysis and becomes a liberating event wherein the people are moved to another level of existence, and they are permitted to experience a foretaste of the New Jerusalem (Cone 1990: 18-19).

This is one of a number of other expressions of the 'Spiritual' which Cone calls 'churchly-expressions'. They include singing, praying, and preaching about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. What is important is that in these expressions the divine discloses himself to the believer. A foretaste of the New Jerusalem is experienced. As Cone says:

In these "churchly expressions", among others, the divine One informs and discloses himself in black reality and is best defined in terms of black people's response in body and spirit to that divine source believed to be greater than themselves. If asked the theological question, 'Who is God?' one black person might say: "I don't know much about him. All I know is that I was weak and he gave me strength. I was lost and he found me. I was crying and he wiped away the tears from my eyes" (Cone1990:23).

For African theology the truth is not something to be acknowledged by the thinking mind - "*res cogitans*"- (Descartes) but an experience, a 'trembling in the presence of the Holy'. Through this experience of 'trembling in the presence of the Holy' African theology relates to the Holy and reads the Holy in way which is hardly communicable to the Western Cartesian mind.

#### 4.4. Summary - Spiritual literacy and *Missio Dei*

The above described difference in dealing with the 'experience of the Spirit' is crucial. It is one reason for the different way in which mission is being done by the traditional Western Missionary Movement and the African Pentecostal Movement. The former operates according to a Cartesian epistemology and is spiritually rather 'illiterate'. The 'experience of the Spirit is bound ecclesiastically' (Moltmann) and not understood as source of revelation. The African Pentecostal movement however operates according to an experimental epistemology taking into account the 'process element of all religion' (Pobee) which views the 'experience of the Spirit' as a source of revelation.

When we apply this difference to the concept of *Missio Dei* we might put forward the hypothesis that the traditional Western Missionary Movement as well as the African

Pentecostal Movement both participate in the *Missio Dei*. But they do so by coming from two different points of departure:

In Africa *Missio Dei* is being realized through the experience of the Spirit which happens in an inclusive African world view where the Spiritual is tangibly real. African theology reads experience and tries to make sense of it as a spiritual experience. In contrast Western rationalistic theology is 'conceptually literate'. It participates rationalistically in the *Missio Dei*. This theology is *per definitionem* not overly concerned with 'experience of the Spirit'. For Western theology *Missio Dei* is a concept developed in the sphere of what R. Otto calls "rational religion" and realized by translating this concept into action.

The Western world view did perceive life without God since no objective argument could credit God with any relevance within the rationalistic Western world view. In the rational world view God has died because the emotional side of man has not been allowed to be a significant source of spiritual knowledge. The African Pentecostal movement on the other side was to a certain extent able to let the experience of the Spirit take the lead in realizing God's mission. It was having some kind of experience in which it was able to 'read' the Spirit' and transform this 'reading into a sustainable participation in the *Missio Dei*.

#### 5. The 'experience of the Spirit' a definition for the purpose of this thesis

As we continue to use the term 'experience of the Spirit' we need to attempt to find a workable definition of this phenomenon. Because the spiritual literacy we are talking about refers to this 'experience of the Spirit' which is being understood and interpret so differently within the African and Western world views.

##### 5.1. The problem of experience as source of religious knowledge

Before one talks about the 'experience of the Spirit' one needs to acknowledge that in general the role of experience in respect to religious knowledge is quite controversial. Karl Barth in truly Neoorthodox fashion held the view that all supernatural experience is just illusion and ecstatic fantasy. He referred to the personal experience of the 'Spiritual' as miracle stories and wrote:

There arises the so-called "miracle story which we have ourselves experienced". Alongside the confession of the Church in which scripture is expounded, there arises the confession of the individual Christian, of which he himself is the object, that is, as he thinks he knows himself. We defiantly dispute the reality of such things. We scornfully interpret whatever we hear from others in this respect as illusion and ecstatic fantasy. It is obviously not impossible that what in the eyes of some is fire from heaven appears to others as triviality and vanity (Barth 1956: 706-707).

Liberal theology on the other hand understood true religion as experience. This is what William Hordern expresses in his book 'Experience and Faith'. There he presents the liberal perspective talking particularly about Friedrich Schleiermacher. He writes:

True religion, said Schleiermacher, is never a matter of believing doctrines; it is experience, in particular the experience of feeling dependent upon the universe.... Liberal theology, following Schleiermacher, emphasized experience as basis of religion and religious knowledge. It opposed all authoritarianism in religion and argued that nothing should be believed simply on the basis of authority. We should accept only those beliefs that are verified by our reason and experience (Hordern1983:25-26).

Schleiermacher and Barth are standing on opposing sides in dealing with the phenomenon of religious experience as source of revelation. Schleiermacher defines the essence of religion as the subjective experience of the individual who is "feeling dependent upon the universe". Barth rejects this as illusion. "When theologians look into themselves for the knowledge of God, Barth believes, they find a god created in their own image" (Hordern1983:26-27). Barth fears that the objective character of the revelation which has presented itself in the appearance of Jesus Christ is being lost when the experience of the believer becomes a source of revelation. He asks: "How is the dissolution and the disappearance of the objective moment [the revelation in Jesus Christ] in the subjective to be prevented?" (Barth 1959:351).

With respect to an understanding of 'the experience of the Spiritual' as it is perceived in an African world view both positions seem to be insufficient. Schleiermacher's understanding would not allow for an experience which goes beyond the subjective self-consciousness of the believer. The 'experience of the Spiritual' would merely be identified as rather personal and subjective emotion. This individualistic understanding of the 'experience of the Spirit' doesn't fit in an African world view where the 'Spiritual' is 'tangibly' real in a communal sense. Barth wouldn't even look at any individual 'experience of the Spirit' as relevant for our knowledge of God. He would dismiss this as 'anthropocentric theology' (Barth 1959:340) which has nothing to do with the true God objectively revealed in Jesus Christ.

This is the dilemma when one claims to have the 'experience of the Spiritual'. It is either understood as 'mere feeling' (Schleiermacher) and valued as a phenomenon of the human self-consciousness'. As such it is beyond the scope of objective concepts. Or it is dismissed as illusion (Barth). Schleiermacher as well as Barth don't allow for a definition of the 'experience of the Spiritual' which would help to understand this phenomenon within an African world view. We would therefore need to define the "experience of the Spirit" in a way that does not limit it to the self-consciousness of the believer or view is as mere illusion. It rather would need to include the holistic African understanding of reality and its sense of communalism.

## 5.2. Religious experience as unusual mystical and personal experience

Another problem of defining religious experience is the difference between the 'impression' such an experience makes upon the believer and the 'expression' through which the believer relates this impression to others.

William Hordern writes about this problem when he tries to find a definition for religious experience. He says:

The first definition that usually comes to mind is that of some special unusually ecstatic feeling, feelings to which the term "mystical" might be applied. In short religious experiences are outside of the ordinary experiences of life... They are "mountaintop experiences", or periods of ecstasy.

A serious problem in defining religious experience in terms of unusual or ecstatic forms of experience is that we have difficulty in distinguishing between an experience and the person's expression of that experience. It is a well-known fact that some people tend to give exuberant expressions to their experiences while other people give little or no outward expression.

... The differences in expression arises from out of personality traits, environmental training and so on. To people with the same inner experience may express their feelings in radically different ways (Hordern 1983:36).

This difference between impression and expression poses a very difficult challenge for a workable definition of the experience of the Spirit. How can one distinguish between the actual religious experience and the story which is built around it by the person who had this experience? It seems pointless even try it, since the very nature of a religious experience is that it will be woven into a story which is being told by the believer.



In addition to this problem of distinguishing between the impression and expression of religious experience another problem arises when one defines religious experience as unusual phenomenon. William Hordern describes this problems as follows:

What distinguishes some unusual experiences as religious over against other unusual experiences which are not so defined. Some drugs do bring about, in some people, a sense of mind expansion, a clearer insight into reality and awareness of things formerly unnoticed. But why should we think of such experiences as religious? Why is the experience arising from taking LSD or mescaline a religious experience....? (Hordern 1983:37).

One can take this argument a little further and draw a comparison between Christian Mystics, Islamic Sufis as well as the mystic traditions in Hinduism and Buddhism. All these mystic movements know of some kind of experience of God. But do they know of an 'experience of the Spirit?' What defines an 'experience of the Spirit?' Is the claim to have some kind of supernatural insight, some kind of encounter with God sufficient to be defined as experience of the Spirit?

Obviously such a definition would be much too imprecise. Surely not every supernatural experience can be called a experience from Spirit. Therefore one needs to ask, what is the experience of the Spirit?

### 5.3. A Definition of the experience of the Spirit

The experience of the Spirit shall now be defined from a Christian point of view. In other words: We will try to present a distinctive theological definition of what we mean with the term 'experience of the Spirit'. We are aware that there are other definitions possible. We have mentioned the very general one of being a "supernatural insight". Or one might also try to find a psychological definition and explain the experience of the Spirit as a personal event for the individual believer.

However, our question is: What is the 'experience of the Spirit' in its distinctive Christian sense? Jürgen Moltmann has given an answer to this question. He wrote:

By experience of the Spirit I mean an awareness of God in, with and beneath the experience of life, which gives us assurance of God's fellowship, friendship and love.

I am also choosing the phrase 'experience of the Spirit' as a way of understanding appropriately the intermediate state of every historical experience between remembered past and expected future. The experience, life and fellowship of God's Spirit come into being when Christ is made present and when the new creation of all things is anticipated. These things are resonance's of Christ, and prelude to the kingdom of God. The experience of the Spirit is never without the remembrance of Christ, and never without the expectation of his future. But in harmony between this expectation and this remembrance, experience of the Spirit acquires a stature and dignity which is so much its own, and so entirely without substitute, that it is rightly called experience of God. In this sense pneumatology presupposes Christology, and prepares the way for eschatology.

But experience of life can also be so intensive that remembrances and expectations are forgotten, and all there is pure present. We then talk about life's ecstasies. Experiences of God can be so intensive that, as Parmenides said, 'the beginnings are obliterated and the endings vanishes' and the eternal presences fills everything. Then we talk about mystical or 'eschatological moments. In this sense Christology leads to pneumatology, and eschatology is its consummation (Moltmann 1992: 17-18).

Moltmann makes a number of points which are important for our understanding of the term 'experience of the Spirit.: Firstly he draws attention to the fact that within the experience of the Spirit Christ's past and future reality presents itself in the present. The experience of the Spirit has therefore a kind of intermediate character in making Christ present. The new creation is anticipated in this experience. Secondly this experience of the Spirit is never without Christ. It is an experience prompting the confession that "no one can say 'Jesus is Lord', except by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3). Therefore the experience of the Spirit is bound to Jesus Christ. Thirdly this experience can take on such an intensity that it presents itself as an ecstatic moment of the presence of God. These are mystical or eschatological moments. Finally and most importantly 'experience of the Spirit' means an 'awareness of God in, with and beneath the experience of life which gives assurance of God's fellowship, friendship and love'. With this definition Moltmann captures what the experience of the Spirit is about.

It happens within the ordinary life of the believer and affirms God's loving presence. As such it does not depend on ecstatic moments, even though it might happen in those. It can take on all kinds of forms. It might happen during a very traditional high church service or in a modern user-friendly mega-church where the organ is replaced by contemporary music. But it might also happen by the simple study of scripture. It might even happen by listening to Luther's preface to Paul's letter to the Romans as it happened to John Wesley in his famous experience in Aldersgate Street on May 24<sup>th</sup> 1738.

In addition to this definition of the experience of the Spirit as 'an awareness in, with and beneath the experience of life which give assurance of God's fellowship, friendship and love'

one also needs to see in what way this experience presents itself to the believer. Again Moltmann helps in clarifying this point. He writes:

...we have to talk about experience in both the active and the passive. We 'have' and 'acquire' experiences. Experiences 'happen' and 'befall' us. The modern concept of experience is one-sided, because it is purely active. So here we shall stress the passive side of experiences, as every day language does too. For primary experience is something that 'happens to us', something that overpowers us without our intending it, unexpectedly and suddenly. When something like this happens to us, the center of the determining subject is not in us – in our consciousness or our will: it is to be found in the event that 'befalls' us, and in its source. The person who experiences is changed in the process of experiencing. So although in German one talks about 'making' an experience, it is not I who 'make' the experience. It is the experience that 'makes' something of me (Moltmann 1992:22-23).

The experience of the spirit is not something which the believer makes but which 'makes something' with the believer. The believer is perceiving what is happening to him or her externally with his senses. But internally change is being brought about within the self of the believer which becomes self-imposing. This is an important point in respect to our understanding of the experience of the Spirit. It turns our modern concept of experience as something active, something we create around. Instead experience becomes something which happens to us. The Spirit is imposing himself upon the believer.

In conclusion we define 'the experience of the Spirit' for the purpose of this thesis as follows:

**'It is the awareness of God's fellowship, friendship and love in the present imposing itself within the self of the believer as the presence of Christ assuring him or her of the coming of a new creation'.**

This kind of experience is something which is an integral part of Christian faith as we will argue in part B of this chapter. It is not the extraordinary moment of God revealing himself to a chosen few but the normal act of God to reach out to man affirming the new reality which has begun in Jesus Christ.

## **B. The experience of the Spirit – a Christian experience –**

### 1. The normality of the experience of the Spirit as a reality of faith

Christian religion is a religion of the Spirit. The Spirit imposes itself upon the believer involving his or her whole being and creates an awareness of God's fellowship, friendship and love in the present, assuring him or her of the coming of a new creation. This experience constitutes Christian faith on a personal level. In other words, the events described in Acts chapter 2 as "being filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4) are not an extraordinary events of faith but the normality of faith.

This 'normality of faith' is what we will be concerned with in the following. We will try to show that the experience of the Spirit is part of the normal praxis of faith. The problem of acknowledging the 'imposing of the Spirit' as the normality of faith lies with those who are bound to a modern Western world view. They therefore call „supernatural” what in the eyes of people coming from a different world view is perceived as "reality".

Like Ronald A. Knox wrote in his book "Enthusiasm".

There is no question that St. Paul recognizes the existence of the charismatic ministry. For him, as for every other Christian of his age, prophecy and speaking with tongues were a normal (though supernatural) privilege granted to a multitude of the faithful. The *gratia gratis datae*, in that dawn of the new dispensation, were lavished in a profusion scarcely credible to the modern reader; he is bewildered to find Christian worship in the first century so unlike what we mean by Christian worship nowadays (Knox 1987:21-22).

Indeed he 'modern reader' is bewildered by what is reported to him about the way in which the believer experiences the Spirit. It is Knox himself who shows how the 'modern reader' contains this bewilderment so that it does not question his own spirituality. Knox limits, as many have done before him, the activities of the Spirit to the time of the Apostle Paul and his contemporaries. In those early days of the Church the Spirit did manifest itself. But these manifestations "grew rare" (Knox 1987: 22) with the second century and therefore belong to days long gone by.

But the days of the Spirit imposing itself enthusiastically are not gone. Knox is right in pointing to the difficulty of the 'modern mind' to grasp this 'charismatic phenomena'. But

this says more about the people, about ‘modern man, whose concepts of reality and normality are rooted in a modern world view’ than it says about a reality which is perceived in faith.

We would suggest that faith creates a new reality which the modern mind has trouble to comprehend. The assumption we put forward is that the phenomena described by Knox as “Enthusiasm” belong to the reality of faith regardless of whether it may or may not be understandable to the modern Western mind. To substantiate this claim one may for instance look at the history of faith where the Spirit, as the self imposing power of the divine, can be traced in numerous facets and movements. One can even start, as we will do now, with the bible itself and other examples like Montanism, the mystical movement of the late middle ages and the *Schwärmer* or Anabaptist shall follow.

## 2. The experience of the Spirit - a biblical perspective

### 2.1. The Gospels and the Book of Acts

E. Schweizer’s article on πνεῦμα in the “Theological Dictionary of the New Testament” by G.Kittel and G .Friedrichs (ed.) states about the gospel of Mark and Matthew:

The paucity of statements about the Spirit in Mark and Matthew is surprising. Yet it supports the fidelity of the tradition. The temptation to portray Jesus as a pneumatic is resisted (Schweizer 1985: 886).

Schweizer’s statement that Mark and Matthew resist the ‘temptation to portray Jesus as a pneumatic’<sup>7</sup> is a good example that the modern academic and supposedly objective view of things seems sometimes blurred. For him the Jesus movement, at least according to Mark and Matthew, was not a ‘pneumatic occurrence’. But a closer look at the usage of terms like πνεῦμα and ἐν πνεύματι in the New Testament shows that this statement is not supported by biblical evidence which would rather suggest that the movement which started with Christ is a spiritually driven one.

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<sup>7</sup> We quote here from the abridged version of Kittel’s Theological Dictionary of the New Testament by Geoffrey W.Bromiley, because it brings across Schweizer’s intention much clearer than his original German article. The German version of his article is more elaborate but can hardly disguise Schweizer’s intention to make sure that Jesus indeed was not seen as a pneumatic figure. For more see: Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament. Gerhard Kittel & Gerhard Friedrich (eds.). Vol. VI. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart. pp. 389-455 (for an English version see: Schweizer 1960).

Even though Schweizer is right in his observation that Matthew and Mark don't use πνευμα (and εν πνευματι) often it is difficult to follow his conclusion that therefore Jesus is not seen as a pneumatic by Matthew and Mark. Both describe Jesus as the one who will, according to John the Baptist, baptize with the Holy Spirit (Mt.3:11; Mk.1:8) and who is declared the Son of God in a process of being 'filled with the Spirit of God' (Mt. 3:16; Mk.1:10) which descends upon him like a dove. It is the Spirit who leads Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the devil (Mk. 1:12) and who empowers Jesus to drive out evil spirits (Mt. 12:28). Jesus even promises that those who will be persecuted need not worry because the Holy Spirit is going to speak through them (Mk.13:11).

It seems as if the Spirit has a constitutive quality for the ministry of Jesus if one looks into Mark and Matthew. A 'pneumatic reality of faith' is created in the coming of a carpenter's son Jesus of Nazareth, because at the crucial turning points of this coming it is the Spirit who is acting.

This 'pneumatic reality of faith' is taken further in the gospel of John where worshipping God is identified with doing it in truth and in Spirit (John 4:23). This refers to the fact that the world of πνευμα as opposed to the world of σαρξ is the reality of the divine world which is only accessible to those who have been born again in the Spirit (John 3:5-8). This divine world is being present in Jesus (John 6:63) and will continue to be present for the believer through the παράκλητος (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13), who in John is being identified with the Spirit.

Even more striking becomes the experience of the Spirit as a reality of faith when one turns to Luke's Gospel and his 'Acts of the Apostles'. The Gospel depicts the Jesus event as a genuinely pneumatic event. His birth is announced to Mary who is overcome (επερχομαι cf. Acts 1:8) by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). The child is growing strong in Spirit (Luke 1:80). The Spirit of the Lord is upon Jesus as he sums up the essence of his ministry in Luke 4:18 which is to preach the good news to the poor. Luke's 'Acts of the Apostles' understands the development of the Church as a pneumatic development. Mission is driven by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:11; 10:44; 16:6) and to 'have the Spirit' is the normal experience of faith.

It is so normal for the 'New Testament Christianity' to be in the Spirit that Peter uses it as an argument in favor of reaching out to the 'gentiles' (Acts 15:8). He is objecting to some groups in the young Jewish dominated Christian movement who were terrified (εξισταμαι) by the fact that the 'heathens' become part of God's people (Acts 10:45). Contrary to such views Peter argues that God accepted the gentiles who had turned believers as he accepted the Jews who were following the way of Christ. Otherwise, Peter says, he wouldn't have given the Holy Spirit to the gentiles. It was obvious to Peter that the early Christians could not justify remaining a predominantly Jewish movement if the Holy Spirit was reaching out beyond Jewish ethnic boundaries. Remarkably Peter conceded thereby that the reality of the experience of the Spirit did set the pace for the development the young movement.

Therefore one is drawn to disagree with Schweitzer's assessment that the Gospels don't see the Jesus movement as a 'pneumatic movement'. On the contrary it appears that the Jesus event and its transition into a movement which eventually gave birth to the Church is all in all a pneumatic process. The modern reader might therefore be well advised to apply a bit more care when depicting the Jesus event as a non-pneumatic affair. The New Testament shows that the opposite seems to be the case. There it is the Spirit which brings the Jesus movement to life after its founder was taken to heaven. It seems as if it would not have been for the experience of the Spirit, which has imposed itself upon the believer, the Jesus-movement would have been short lived.

As Adolf Holl wrote:

No, Christianity is not a religion of the book, at least not originally. The Nazarene left no writings behind... Apparently Jesus had no time to bother with paper and writing tools. From the start, therefore, the holy scriptures that were written about the Nazarene after his death incurred the suspicion of having distorted his original intentions. And this is why surreptitious traces of a profound self-irony sometimes emerge – perhaps unintentionally – as they do, for example, in the apostle Paul's second epistle to the Corinthians, where he says that written letters kill, but the Spirit gives life. Here, in the middle of Paul's text, the divine principle of origin, under the name of 'Spirit', without whose intervention the Nazarene would have remained a carpenter, balks at the written word's tendency to fix its subject (Holl 1999:7).

## 2.2. The problem of ambiguity of the Spirit is part of the 'normality of faith'

### 2.2.1. The 'experience of the Spirit' as a problem of interpretation

This 'Spirit' whom Holl calls 'the divine principle of origin' is taken for granted in the early Christian movement. But this does not mean that there is no ambiguity associated with this divine force. A brief look into Paul's letters to the Corinthians, "the very first Pentecostal congregation, about which a few fragmentary reports have been preserved" (Holl 1999:48), shows that the experience of the Spirit was never unambiguous and free from misunderstanding and abuse.

Paul's two letters to the Corinthian congregation allow for two very general observations with respect to the experience of the Spirit. On the one hand it seems to be normal for the Corinthians to be part of a Spirit driven movement. That people did speak in tongues, prophesied, had the gift of healing and saw visions was to be expected in the early Christian Church and not viewed as something extraordinary. But on the other side it is clear that this phenomenon of the Spirit is also grossly misunderstood by the Corinthians and leads to a number of problems facing the Church.

Paul objected to the divisions amongst the Corinthians, their incestuous behavior, bringing quarrels amongst the congregants to secular courts, as well as to numerous other problems prevalent in the congregation. At the core of all these problems lay the fact that the Corinthian Christians did not accept anything less than a superior revelation by the Spirit as basis for their decision making. As Ronald Knox writes:

Nobody can fail to be struck by the insistence with which St. Paul, in both his epistles to the Corinthians, dwells on his own personal authority. The reason is not far to seek. He was arguing with men to whom the maxim 'quod semper, quod ubique, quod omnibus' made no appeal. Only a superior revelation would convince them that they were on the wrong track (Knox 1987:13).

Knox's comment points to a problem which goes along with the experience of the Holy Spirit. It is the fact that the experience of the Spirit is open for misunderstandings of which the worst might be the claim to exclusively have the true revelation of God, by those who see themselves touched by the Spirit. To those 'pneumatics' the tradition of the Church has no value whatsoever. Authority in matters of faith lies only within those who experience the



Spirit and who tend to show a certain hostility toward the traditional life of the Church and her mediocrity in the Spirit.

In dealing with the ‘Corinthian pneumatics’ even Paul had to rely on his own personal authority of being a ‘super-pneumatic’ himself rather than on traditions or authoritative dogmatic decisions by the Church. In his quarrel with the Corinthians Paul encountered the ambiguity of the experience of the Spirit and dealt with their ‘boasting’ in referring to his own rather exceptional experience of the Spirit. In his second letter to the Corinthians chapters 11 and 12 we can see him skillfully do so and even apply irony as a rhetorical tool.. He makes clear that he is not the least inferior to the super-apostles’ (των υπερλιαν αποστολων) with regards to experience of the Spirit and boasts,

I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. <sup>2</sup> I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. <sup>3</sup> And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows— <sup>4</sup> was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell (2 Corinthians 12: 1-4:NIV).

This way of responding to one experience of the Spirit with another experience of the Spirit addresses the problem of the ambiguity of the experience of the Holy Spirit. Even though it didn’t solve the problem it was a possibility for Paul to address the problem of the ambiguity of the Spirit. Paul was still close enough to the spiritual beginnings of the Christian movement and himself a huge enough pneumatic figure in his own right to do so. But it did not really offer a permanent solution to the problem of how to interpret the experience of the Spirit and deal with its ambiguous character. This problem remained with the church. It is as present today as it was in the beginning and has been referred to as the conflict between enthusiasm and tradition.

### 2.2.2. The ‘experience of the Spirit’ between enthusiasm and tradition

An “enthusiast”, as the Greek origins of ‘en-thusi-asm’ (from ‘εν-θεος’ = in God) suggest, is someone who claims to be directly filled by God. He or she has therefore no comprehension of any other way of revelation than through direct communication between God and him or herself. Any respect for the tradition of the Church, which has been classical formulated by Vincent of Lérins (died before 450), is alien to the enthusiast.

Vincent of Lérins determined the traditional or orthodox view of the Church as “what has been believed everywhere, always, and by all” (*quod semper, quod ubique, quod omnibus*). But this, as Knox rightly points out, is of no meaning to the enthusiast, because to him or her only that is true what has been directly revealed. So the stage is set for continuing conflict between the Spirit filled individual and the traditional minded orthodox Church.

Another brief look at the relationship of Paul and the Corinthians shows that the conflict between the tradition of the Church and the enthusiast are part of the Church from her very beginnings. Knox writes,

... it is interesting to notice that St. Paul is once again rebuking the Corinthians for preferring their private lights to the authority of tradition. ‘The tradition I have received from the Lord, and handed on to you’ – that is what the Corinthians are treating with disrespect. And, in view of the tendencies we shall be examining in the next two chapters [of the 1<sup>st</sup> letter to the Corinthians], it does not altogether seem rash to attribute this disrespect to a habit of mind common to enthusiasts. Spiritual manifestations – prophesying, speaking with tongues, and so on – may come to dominate the imagination of the devotee to such an extent, as to bring the sacraments into disrepute. The use of any exterior symbols, however high be the authority which sanctions them – is not a kind of idolatry, unworthy of men who are called to worship the Father in spirit and in truth? (Knox 1987:21).

The enthusiast worships God in truth and in Spirit and is therefore very little inclined to accept that the very same Spirit which is working within him or her is also working in the tradition of the Church. This exclusivist attitude of enthusiasm is being reacted to with contempt by the orthodox Church. A pattern is established which continues to pop up again and again throughout the history of the Church. A few examples may be brought up in passing.

As mentioned, St. Paul struggled with the Corinthians on that issue. Later on St. Hippolytus of Rome (170-235), who is arguably called the most important third Century theologian of the Roman Church, denounces Montanism as a heresy. The 12<sup>th</sup> Century sees the ascetic spiritual ‘enthusiastic’ movement of the Cathari rise, even having their own synod (1167 at Toulouse) and openly arguing with the catholic Church (1165 at the synod of Lombers). Their ‘spiritualism’ is later on neutralized by the orthodox Church through the promotion of the equally ascetic but less threatening Francis of Assisi. During the reformation Thomas Müntzer (1490-1525) claimed to be filled by the Holy Spirit who he understood as a revolutionary force and for which Martin Luther called him ‘the outcast Satan’. The 18<sup>th</sup>

Century saw John Wesley, who found his faith in a “heartwarming experience”, preaching before thousands of people but was critically viewed by the established Church.

One could go on and on citing examples of the conflict between tradition or ‘orthodoxy’ as it would see itself and the enthusiastic and sometimes ‘heretic’ spiritual movements which from time to time blew through the established structures of the Church. Martin E. Marty sums it up quite profoundly.

Christians have always believed that the Spirit like the wind blew where it pleased, but orthodoxy always refused to identify the Spirit with the lo here! and lo there! of individual claim. To avoid a free floating concept of inspiration and Spirit-involvement it looked in the revelation of Christ, the witness of the scriptures, and perhaps in certain holy signs, for this Spirit (Marty:1987:60).

This conflict between what enthusiasts claim to be the truth and what the church in general acknowledges to be “believed everywhere, always and by all” is part of the Church ever since its first days. The Church is both a breeding ground for what Marty calls the ‘free floating concept of inspiration’ and the oppressive tendency of orthodox Christianity. One can not help but wonder if there isn’t an intrinsic and ambiguous relationship between ‘orthodoxy’ and ‘heresy. This inbuilt relationship might lie in the ‘pneumatic character’ of the Christian movement on the one side which produces enthusiasts, who (re)experience the revelation of the Christ-event through the imposition of the Spirit , and on the other side the ‘orthodox, traditional character’ of the movement, which brings out those who want to preserve and thereby sustain the Christ-event throughout history.

In conclusion we like to note that the Church is born of the Spirit. The biblical testimony is witness to that. It is therefore ‘normal’ to experience the Spirit in its enthusiastic fashion in the Church. This experience is ambiguous and open for interpretation and even abuse. But it constitutes the Church as a spiritually driven enterprise in which the conflict between the enthusiastic phenomena of the Spirit and the tradition of the Church is part of her reality ever since its first days.

### 3.The Spirit imposing itself despite the rule of orthodoxy and tradition

When Vincent of Lérins defined orthodoxy in the fifth Century as that “what has been believed everywhere, always, and by all” (*quod semper, quod ubique, quod omnibus*) a

milestone in the development of the Church as an organization was reached. The Church, which was founded as a Spirit driven movement, had developed a criterion to deal with the ambiguity of the Spirit. Because from now on tradition defined what was orthodox. The following centuries saw the Church declaring again and again what is “believed everywhere, always and by all”. In this process ‘the true – orthodox- faith’ was formulated while “heresy” was defined, dismissed and, if need be, persecuted .

Vincent of Lérins implies that true faith is a matter of consensus by the majority and not a matter of the experience of the Spirit. This had far reaching consequences for the pneumatic character of the Christian movement. Tradition overtook the enthusiastic tendencies which are inherently part of the Christian movement. The experience of the Spirit as it was known in the early days of the Church diminished. It even became an accepted standard of theology to limit the enthusiastic activities of the Spirit to the golden but bygone era of the apostles.

Adolf Harnack wrote about this in his classic “The Mission and Expansion of Christianity”, firstly published 1902 in German. He writes,

It was in the primitive days of Christianity, during the first sixty years of its course, that their effects [of the gifts of the Holy Spirit] were most conspicuous, but they continued to exist all through the second century; although in diminished volume. Irenaeus confirms this view. ... but after the opening of the third century the phenomena dwindle (sic!) rapidly ... The common life of the Church has now its priests, its altar, its sacraments, its holy book and the rule of faith. But it no longer possesses “the Spirit and power”. Eusebius is not the first (in the third book of his history) to look back upon the age of the Spirit as a bygone heroic age of the Church (Harnack 1961:204-205).

Harnack’s observation is remarkable since it seems to be a given to him, that the ‘age of the Spirit’ is a bygone era. The Church ‘no longer possesses the Spirit and the power’. For him the Spirit, especially in its enthusiastic forms, is part of the “golden beginning of the Church”. From such perspective the Enthusiasts, the Schwärmer, the Spiritualists, the Charismatic's and Pentecostals are just remnants of a bygone era, which have nothing to do with the Church of today. This is the Church of the priests, the altar, the sacraments, the holy book and the rule and order of faith.

It is through people like Harnack who shaped whole generations of church historians and theologians that the pneumatic character of the Christian movement became an object of church history. But while theology declared the Spirit to be part of a bygone era substituting

it for tradition a remarkable thing happened. The Spirit continued to impose itself. The Church did have her moments in the 'Spirit and the power', despite 'its priests, altars, sacraments and holy book'.

In the following we will give a few examples of those 'moments in the Spirit' in the history of the Church. People did claim to have an experience of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes their claims were dismissed by the Church. Mostly for reasons of survival or being able to appeal to a broader audience the Church labeled those people who brought the dimension of the experience of the Spirit into the equation 'Heretics', '*Schwärmer*', 'Anabaptists' or 'Enthusiasts'. Sometimes however the opposite happened and the Church managed to welcome this experience and its proponents as a moment of renewal.

### 3.1 Montanism – the Spirit imposing itself in ecstatic form opposed by orthodoxy

History is usually written by those who win and not those who loose. Christian history is no exception. What is known about the Montanist movement is the little information which is revealed in the apologetic writings of their enemies. Eusebius of Caesarea (c.260-340) mentions the movement in his ecclesiastical history convinced that he deals with a heresy of the worst kind. He writes about Montanus (between AD 135-175), who began seeing visions from God in a remote mountainous region of what is Turkey today:

In Phrygia Mysia there is said to be a village called Ardebav. There they say that a recent convert called Montanus,...in the unbound lust of his soul for leadership gave access to himself to the adversary, became obsessed, and suddenly fell into frenzy and convulsion. He began to be ecstatic and to speak and to talk strangely, prophesizing contrary to the custom which belongs to the tradition and succession of the church from the beginning" (Eusebius 1926:475).

The movement around Montanus which later known as the 'Phrygians' did expand when Montanus was joined by two women called Pricilla and Maximilla. Hippolytus writes about those 'Phrigians' who follow the women in his 'Refutation of all Heresies':

These [the Phrygians] have been rendered victims of error from being previously captivated by [two] wretched women, called Pricilla and Maximilla, whom they supposed [to be] prophetesses. And they assert that into these the Paraclete Spirit had departed (Hultgren 1996:130).

From a church father's perspective Montanus and his two companions Pricilla and Maximilla represent a heresy. But this is history written by the victors. A type of history which has been echoed for centuries. Yet the writers of history in our days are more cautious in passing judgment. They rather try to note the context in which history is been made.

Examples of these are Arland J. Hultgren and Steven A. Haggmark who write about the environment in which Montanus is appearing:

The Montanist movement arose in an environment where a decline in the intensity of Christian charismatic experience corresponded with an increasing turn toward a structured episcopate. It therefore had the character of a reaction to the loss of intense apocalyptic and eschatological hope (Hultgren 1996:127).

Hultgren and Haggmark's view of Montanism as reaction to a loss of the eschatological character of the early Church is quite useful in order to withstand its simplistic condemnation by the Church fathers and understand the movement within a wider context. Montanism was not just a heresy but a symptom of a growing problem within the established Church, which becomes visible in the obvious decline of any charismatic experiences going along with the development of the structured episcopate. While the church was consolidating its position and structures Montanism pointed to the essential spiritual or charismatic origin of the Christian movement.

The Montanists, or 'new prophecy' as they called themselves (Ritter 1977:99), particularly put their finger on the fact that the prophetic gifting, which was part of the church ever since its humble beginnings, seemed to be dying. The conflict which therefore arose centered around the question of true or false prophecy. Montanus and his two female prophetess claimed to be filled with the Spirit in moments of an ecstatic presence of the Spirit. The Spirit according to Montanus plays man like a lyre and renews its heart through moments (which might last for hours) of ecstasy in the Spirit. According to one of the oracles of Montanus the Spirit says:

Behold man is like a lyre and I rush thereon like a plectrum. Man sleeps and I awake. Behold the Lord is he who arouses the hearts of men [throws them into ecstasy] and gives men a new heart (Hultgren 1996:128).

We have already seen that Eusebius did object to this prophecy being “ecstatic and to speak and to talk strangely”. But in quoting Apollinarius, the Bishop of Hierapolis, he explains why this ‘new prophecy’ is a ‘false prophecy’. Eusebius writes:

But the false prophet speaks in ecstasy,... he begins with voluntary ignorance, but turns to involuntary madness of soul. But they [the Montanists] can not show that any prophet, either of those in the Old Testament or of those in the New, was inspired in this way (Eusebius 1926:485).

The revelation of the Spirit could not happen through ecstatic moments which were unintelligible to others. This was held to be the view of the orthodoxy and which was not up for discussion. God’s revelation was not happening in some strange utterances of the Spirit imposing itself upon the believer but through the proper channels of tradition and succession which belonged to the church from the beginning.

Adolf Holl has summed up the orthodox reaction to the Spirit imposing itself upon Montanus, Priscilla and Maximilla quite well. He writes:

...the raptures of the Phrygian prophet and his two helpmeets could only come from demonic possession. ... The defenders of orthodoxy declared that these mountain farmers from the hinterlands of Asia Minor were a fanatical sect that had no legitimate place in the Catholic faith.... In principle, after the Montanist prophecy , virtually every instance whatsoever of possession by the Spirit was stigmatized and rejected for the next thousand years of the Sacrum Imperium that Constantine had molded. The couriers and messengers of God, both man and women, disappeared into the underground, the Holy Spirit became a theological abstraction, and the liturgy in the basilicas proceeded without further interruption (Holl 1999: 160).

### 3.2. The Spirit imposing itself within the history of the “orthodox” Church

There are many movements or individuals which one could think of in showing that the Spirit did indeed impose itself over the centuries. The Montanist movement was deemed to be heretical but examples of “spiritual movements” being tolerated, endured, allowed and sometimes even promoted, for instance in the case of St. Francis of Assisi, within the orthodox and Catholic Church, are manifold.

One might think of the early Christian monastic movement founded by Anthony (251-ca.356) which especially in the East knew a lot about ‘ecstasy in the Spirit’. Joachim of Fiore (1130-1202) who proclaimed the “age of the Spirit” and the Cathari Movement, though heavily

persecuted by the orthodox Church, had a great influence on the ‘Spirit movement’ in the late middle ages. Furthermore Meister Eckhart (ca. 1260-1337) as the so-called founder of the German Mystic movement which stretched all over the Western Europe needs to be noted. Eckhart taught that the aim of the Christian should be to unite with the Spirit of God during an ecstatic experience (Cairns 1996:243). Also saints like John of the Cross (1542-1591) and Theresa of Avila (1515-1582) come to mind, who experienced the Spirit imposing itself on them.

It would go beyond the scope of this thesis if we would go into a detailed study of all the above mentioned people. The point we try to make is just that the Christian movement has been accompanied by the experience of the Spirit throughout its entire history. The Spirit did indeed impose itself. Montanism was such an event dating back to the beginnings of the Catholic Church and many others followed. However we will now take a few examples to elaborate on the point. What we try to show is that “ecstatic encounters” with the spirit are a phenomenon which isn’t new. It has not been invented by the Pentecostal Movement but belongs to the Christian religion from its beginnings.

Our examples will focus on representatives from what has become known as the “German Mystic” and at the time of the Reformation. We choose these two periods of church history because they show that even in Europe, where the modern world view was born, the experience of the Spirit belonged to the reality of the Church. The rationalistic world view is rather new to the European Church and its grip on present day theology can be questioned when approaching it from a historical perspective.

### 3.2.1. German Mysticism (*Deutsche Mystik*)

It is generally said that the mystical movement in Germany in the late middle ages centered around the Dominican order (Cairns1996:243) and it is the Dominican Meister Eckhart (ca.1260-1327) who is credited as being the dominating figure within German mysticism (Cox 1983:96). This is a very general observation with regard to a movement of the Spirit which traces back to social and religious developments which began in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century and changed the whole of Europe.



Even the label 'German Mysticism' should not be understood as if the spiritual movement which swept through the late middle ages was an exclusively German phenomenon (Heussi 1988:243). It is rather part of a much wider movement which traces back to France with "one of the great mystics of the Christian tradition" (Cox 1983:78), St. Bernhard of Clairvaux (1090-1153). It includes theologians like Richard of St. Victor (d.1173) who is the first mystic applying "systematic psychology to mystical experience" (Cox 1983:85) and laymen like St. Francis of Assisi (1181/2-1226) who adds a "remaking of the apostolic model" of Christian spirituality (Cox 1983:86) to the mystic movement.

The German mystic movement was influenced by those developments and grew "amidst extensive popular interest in the experience of the Spirit. This upsurge of interest in the transcendental took place against a chaotic political and social background – political conflict, wars and a host of natural disasters, from famine to pestilence" (Cox 1983:96) were prominent. It is more than a Dominican movement dominated by Meister Eckhart. It drew its inspiration from a number of people amongst whom women played a prominent role. Alois Maria Haas sums up the importance of the female contributions within the mystical movement of the late middle ages;

It falsifies the picture if one considers so-called German mysticism apart from the spiritual interests and efforts of the early female mysticism as developed by Cistercian nuns and by beguines in Flemish and north German areas in the thirteenth century (Haas 1989:140).

Amongst those women the German abbess Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) the "Sibyl of the Rhine, so called because of her vivid apocalyptic visions and prophecies of disaster" (Cox, M.1983:82), stands out prominently. Others followed her in a tradition of visionary intimate relationship with God experiencing the Spirit. Like the Cistercian nuns St. Gertrude the Great (1256-c.1302), Mechthild of Hackeborn (1240-1298) and Mechthild of Magdeburg (c.1210-1280) who had her first spiritual experiences when she was twelve and later claimed to have "revelatory visions inspired directly by God" (Cox 1983:83).

This female mysticism is a remarkable example of the way in which women in the late middle ages gained freedom from a culture of male domination through a spiritual awakening, which has one root in eleventh and twelfth centuries movement to imitate an apostolic life style of poverty and penitence. Caroline Walker Bynum writes about these developments

Especially the period from the late twelfth century to the early fourteenth, witnessed a significant increase in opportunities for women to participate in specialized religious roles... For the first time in Christian history, we can identify a woman's movement (the beguines) and can speak of specifically female influences on the development of piety (Walker Bynum 1989:121).

Walker Bynum goes on describing the movement to imitate an apostolic life style of poverty and penitence,

The proliferation in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries of wandering preachers who drew after them a band of followers determined to "imitate the apostolic life" in poverty and penitence had such a significant impact on women that contemporary chroniclers commented on the phenomenon, as much with trepidation as with admiration. Women flocked after wandering evangelists, such as Norbert of Xanten (d.1134) and Robert of Arbrissel (d. 1116-1117), and these preachers... founded monasteries for them (Walker Bynum 1989:122).

Within this wider picture of a religious awakening throughout the late twelfth and the early fourteenth century, which was in part a woman's movement, Meister Eckhart and "German Mysticism" has to be seen. He himself was the spiritual director to a number of convents which had been created on account of the increased spiritual opportunities for woman and was influenced by this female spiritual movement to a considerable amount (Davies 1991:68-79).

This wider movement of the Spirit which history labeled "German mysticism" is full of extraordinary accounts of the Spirit imposing itself. In the following we focus on two women who shall stand for many more people who have been touched by the Spirit during the spiritually charged late middle ages.

### 3.2.2. Hildegard of Bingen

Barbara Newman writes about Hildegard of Bingen in an introduction to the edition of her writings:

St. Hildegard (1098-1179), founder and first abbess of the Benedictine community at Bingen, is one of the most fascinating spiritual figures of the twelfth century. The bearer of a unique and visionary charism, she was also a prophet in the Old Testament tradition... it remains true that Hildegard unites vision with doctrine, religion with science, charismatic jubilation with prophetic indignation, and the longing for social order with the quest for social justice in ways that continue to challenge and inspire (Newman in Bingen 1990:9-10).

Hildegard was indeed a woman of great achievements. She was the author of a wide range of works covering areas of Christian doctrine and ethics combined with cosmology. She compiled an encyclopedia of medicine and natural science, corresponded with people from every stratum of society, preaching before monks, clergy and laity, and rebuked the emperor Frederick Barbarossa when she saw it fitting. She advised her contemporaries in everything from marital problems to health troubles and the ultimate fate of the soul using her visionary powers. She founded and led a nunnery, received the approval of Pope Eugenius III who blessed her work publicly encouraging her to continue in her “visionary work” (Newman in Bingen 1990: 9-10).

We are concerned with this “visionary aspect” of Hildegard’s life, which made her, even though she was “raised as a child by a recluse, Jutta of Spanheim, essentially unlettered and deprived of formal education” (Tavard 1989:3), such an extraordinary figure. Hildegard’s inner life presents something as a challenge to the modern reader, since she experienced visions which amount to “encounters with the divine presence” (Newman in Bingen 1990:11) for a period of forty years. These visions were part of her life from an early age, but she only became able to understand them as a gift from God at a later age when a prophetic calling enabled her to interpret them as such (Newman in Bingen 1990:11).

This process of interpretation is marked by the writing of the first major work of Hildegard the ‘*Scivias*’ which is short for *Scito vias Domini*, or ‘Know the ways of the Lord’. This book, being “the first fruits of Hildegard’s prophetic labor, ... was ten years in the making (1141-51)” (Newman in Bingen 1990:22). The style resembles a compendium of Christian doctrine not uncommon in the late middle ages. But its visionary inspiration makes it unique. Hildegard is not arguing or trying to engage in theological discussion but asserts and speaks

in *persona Dei*. Hildegard herself traces this visionary inspiration back to “visionary experience” she had in the Spirit. She writes in a declaration at the beginning of the *Scivias*:

It happened that, in the eleven hundred and forty-first year of the incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, when I was forty-two years and seven month old, Heaven was opened and a fiery light of exceeding brilliance came and permeated my whole brain, and inflamed my whole heart and my whole breast, not like a burning but like a warming flame, as the sun warms anything its rays touch. And immediately I knew the meaning of the exposition of the Scriptures, namely the Psalter, the Gospel and the New Testaments, though I did not have the interpretation of the words of their texts or the division of the syllabus or the knowledge of case and tenses. But I had sensed in myself wonderfully the power and mystery of secret and admirable visions from my childhood – that is from the age of five-up to that time, as I do now.... But the visions I saw I did not perceive in dreams, or sleep, or delirium, or by the eyes of the body, or by the ears of the outer self, or in hidden places; but I received them while awake and seeing with a pure mind and the eyes and ears of the inner self, in open places, as God willed it. How this might be is hard for mortal flesh to understand.... And I spoke and wrote these things not by the invention of my heart or that of any other person, but as by the secret mysteries of God I heard and received them in heavenly places (Bingen 1990:59-61).

Hildegard wisely anticipated doubt and disbelief in respect of the accounts of her spiritual encounters with God which happened to her in ‘pure mind’. It seems that to be doubtful in response to such visions is not the preserve only of the modern reader. Her contemporaries could be as skeptical as the “enlightened” modern mind even though they might differ in their reasoning.

Therefore she stresses the genuinely spiritual character of her experience making sure that no influence other than the ‘Spirit imposing itself upon her’ are at work. Her experiences are not caused by special practices of psycho-religious exercise transforming the mind into a stage of special receptiveness for the subconscious. They do not result from the hallucinatory effects of drugs or can be accredited to mental illness but represent a genuine spiritual encounter. An encounter which is compared to a “warming of the heart” (striking parallel to John Wesley!) and includes a certainty of knowledge which is able to claim the full understanding of the “the meaning of the exposition of the Scriptures, namely the Psalter, the Gospel and the New Testaments”.

### 3.2.3. Mechthild of Magdeburg

A further example for the Spirit working throughout the history of the church and especially in the spiritually charged late middle ages is Mechthild of Magdeburg (1210-1297). Mechthild was from an aristocratic family in Saxony an area of what is today Eastern Germany. She lived for many years as a Beguine in Magdeburg, “an idealistic association of

religious women, living communally whose following went into the thousands all over Western Europe (Beer 1992:78-79). Later on in her life she was forced to seek refuge from her critics in the Cistercian convent of Helfta, near Eisleben. There she teamed up with “Gertrude the Great and Mechthild of Hackeborn, two extremely talented colleagues, experienced visionaries whose publications would soon be read all over Europe” (Holl 1999:250).

Mechthild had revelatory experiences inspired directly by God from the age of twelve (Cox 1983:83). But as in the case of Hildegard of Bingen it took her until she was well into her forties to write about these experiences in a book entitled *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit* (The Flowing Light of the Godhead). She would continue to work on this book until her death in her late eighties.

Mechthild referred to the spiritual experiences she had when she was a young girl of 12 years as the “greeting from the Holy Spirit” (Beer 1992:81). But in her early twenties she had her first ecstatic experience of the Holy Spirit which she describes in the *Flowing Light of the Godhead*. Her soul was taken out of her body into a region between ‘heaven and earth’, where she for time communed with God. She writes,

And I saw with the eyes of my soul in heavenly bliss, the beautiful humanity of our lord Jesus Christ and knew him by his shining countenance. I saw the Holy Trinity, the Eternity of the Father, the work of the Son and the sweetness of the Holy Spirit (Beer 1992:80).

It needs to be noted that Mechthild did not write in Latin, the preferred language of the theologian of her times but composed her works in Low German, her native tongue allowing for a more immediate expression of her feelings (Beer 1992:80). The experience of the Spiritual imposing upon her seems to be so intense that her writings are full of very passionate metaphors trying to capture the unspeakable in literary form. The intensity of her unity with Jesus feels like the relationship between a baby and its mother. Mechthild says about Jesus that he “sucked her heart with his tender lips” (Beer 1992:89). She not only identifies with the figures of mother and child when describing her experience of spiritual unity with God but more frequently assumes the role of lover with Christ who is her beloved. “She makes unreserved and explicit use of the language of erotic, human love” in her “language of lovers” (Beer 1992:91). Mechthild writes,

The beloved goes in to the Lover,  
into the secret hiding place of the sinless Godhead ...  
And there, the soul being fashioned in the very nature of God,  
no hindrance can come between it and God ...  
Now comes a blessed stillness  
Welcome to both. He gives himself to her And she

And she to him.  
What shall now befall her, the soul knows:  
Therefore I am comforted.  
Where two lovers come secretly together  
They must often part, without parting.  
(Beer 1992:91)

The unity felt by Mechthild is captured in a short passage of the second book of the *Flowing Light of the Godhead* where she describes a vision in which she encounters the three saints John the Baptist, John the Evangelist and St. Peter. She sees herself confidently united with God.

His eyes in my eyes,  
His heart in my heart,  
His soul in my soul  
Embraced and unwearied.  
(And her face [that of Mechthild] seemed the face of an angel).  
(Beer 1992:86)

These words capture the way in which the Spirit moved Mechthild. Her “mystical experience was of an intensely personal sort, involving immediate, intimate union with God” (Beer 1992:93). Mechthild employs conventional literary forms of her days like images and language of courtly love and *minnesingers*’ poetry and is influenced by an Neoplatonic thinking which sees God as a light emitting source, which flows into the creation. But despite being bound to the literary forms of her time and the prominent Neoplatonic thinking of her day one can feel that this women had an extraordinary insight into the world of the Spiritual (Beer 1992:95-99). Like Frances Beer has written,

Her extravagant language probably seemed painfully dull to her as she endeavoured to express what had happened to her and where she had been, and to communicate to her readers, for the sake of their spiritual advancement, those divine revelations she had been charged to pass on; figurative language, however insufficient, had to be used if her ecstatic experiences were to be shared with others (Beer 1992:93).

### 3.2.4 The mystic movement of the late middle ages - the Spirit at work

The late middle ages was an extraordinary period of spiritual activities in the church. This was in part triggered by a millenarian expectation of the arrival of a new ‘spiritual era’. One man who is especially associated with this kind of speculation is Joachim of Fiore, a Cistercian monk, “the most important theologian of history since Aurelius Augustinus” (Holl

1999:186), who established the new order of St. John in the town of Fiore (Calabria). Ronald A Knox wrote about him,

Joachim's reputation was such, both for holiness and learning. That he seems to have infected the age with an eschatological atmosphere which it would be difficult to account for on any other ground (Knox 1987:110).

Joachim's spiritual experiences were not as intense as they were for Mechthild or Hildegard. But he is very relevant in the exploration of the activities of the Spirit throughout the history of the church. Joachim presents a theological approach towards the subject which has influenced many generations of theologians and mystics alike. His significance especially lies in his exegetical work which was focused on John's Apocalypse and which he applied to a concept of human history corresponding with the three persons of the Trinity. Adolf Holl describes this concept,

Organizing according to Abbot Joachim's decisive idea, the development of human history from the time of Adam and Eve onward passed through three states of conditions (*status*), which correspond to the three divine persons of the Christian Trinity. God the Father had determined the course of things from Adam and Eve until the birth of Christ. From that point on, God the Son had been occupied with the government of the world. God the Holy Spirit, who had operated rather in the background till now, would have his turn during mankind's last days, which would begin around 1200 (Holl 1999:192).

The idea of three dispensations is not really new. Montanism already had made the claim that there were three separate dispensations corresponding with the Trinity and Montanus marked the beginning of the age of the Spirit (Knox 1987: 37). For Joachim this age of the Spirit would be marked as the "age of the monks (the state of perfection and the Holy Spirit)" (Tavard 1989:5), in which the Holy Spirit would set up a spiritual order of things.

Joachim set the tone for a spirituality of expectation, nourished by the Apocalypse, waiting for, and perhaps imagining, visions of the times to come. In these times, the institutional church, structured on the clergy, would cease and be replaced by a purely spiritual church on a monastic model, centered on the perceived presence and action of the Holy Spirit (Tavard 1989:5-6).

Joachim was primarily a biblical commentator who focused on the Holy Spirit which gave him the right insight into the study of the scripture. He emphasized a spiritual "guided understanding (*intelligentia spiritalis*) of the Bible, in contrast to a reading that took the text literally (*sensus litteralis*, and also *historica interpretatio*)" (Holl 1999:191). This spiritually based exegesis left plenty of room for 'spiritual speculation' which appealed to his contemporaries and made him astonishingly successful.

Joachim represent the spiritual turbulences of the late middle ages in a more theological confined way than Hildegard and Mechthild. He gives a theological explanation on what the Spirit has been doing during the eleventh to the fourteenth century. In his view a new, a spiritual dispensation had started in which people like St. Bernhard of Clairvaux, Richard of St. Victor, Joachim of Fiore, Francis of Assisi, Hildegard of Bingen, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Meister Eckhart were major players driven by the Spirit imposing itself upon a unique epoch in the history of the church.

What happened in the late middle ages is in its symptoms to a certain degree similar to the Pentecostal Movement of modern times. The people who were affected claimed that the Spirit had intervened and given them a new direction and perspective on life. In their mind, they undoubtedly experienced the Spirit at work and Joachim, in his “dispensationalism”, provided a theological framework for these very subjective developments.

“Modern minds” have not taken this route of “dispensationalism”, but have applied other concepts in order to explain what happened during the late middle ages. Barbara J. Newman for example, who writes a very sympathetic introduction into the writings of Hildegard of Bingen, attributes her visions at least in part to mental illness. She writes,

The early genesis of these visions, their connection with the 'aerial fires' and other illnesses that plagued Hildegard, strongly suggest a physiological basis. Charles Singer and, more recently, Oliver Sacks have concluded that the abbess suffered from “scintillating scotoma”, a form of migraine (Newman in Bingen 1990:11)

Other explanations of the supernatural imposing itself upon the believer point to the disastrous circumstances of the times which ‘reflexed the spiritually minded away from their sad reality’ to a friendlier spiritual world. As we have partly heard already from Michael Cox,

All the German mystics of the fourteenth century ... developed their teachings amidst extensive popular interest in mysticism. This upsurge of interest in the transcendental took place against a chaotic background – political conflict, wars and a host of natural disasters, from famine to pestilence. It is not surprising that the deep-seated insecurities of such a troubled age should encourage apocalyptic tempers of the most lurid kind;... Dogmatism, weakness and corruption in the Church also, perhaps, produced a reflex in the spirituality minded, turning away from the temporal (Cox 1983:96).

Others have suggested that the rise of mystical experiences during the late middle ages can be seen as a reaction against rationalistic tendencies in Scholasticism, the increasingly dominant



intellectual and academic movement of the times, which emphasized reason at the expense of man's emotional nature (Cairns 1996:242).

all these arguments have a certain value. But we suggest to view these developments by taking into account that the Christian religion is essentially a Spirit driven movement. As said before, the point we try to make is that the Christian movement has been accompanied by the experience of the Spirit throughout its entire history. St. Bernhard of Clairvaux, Joachim of Fiore, Francis of Assisi, Hildegard of Bingen, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Meister Eckhart are just instruments of this Spirit used in a particular historical situation to move the Church. Explanations based on historical, social, gender or class analysis might point to important aspects of the phenomenon. But the obvious needs to be brought back into the equation. That what has happened in those days of the late middle ages is indeed a result of the "Spirit of God imposing itself" upon a real people with a genuine spiritual insight into reality. The time we refer to was breathing spiritual experience. People had visions and fell in ecstatic moments of an immediate apprehension of God in an super-rational way. The whole movement is an important example of the Spirit imposing itself throughout the history of the church. Especially the women's wing of the movement is testimony of a very immediate interaction of God with human kind through the Spirit.

### 3.3. The Reformation, a socio-economic, political, religious and spiritual movement

As pointed out before, we work with the assumption that Christianity is an essentially spiritual movement. The works of the Spirit run through the history of the church working amongst so different people like the Apostle Paul, Montanus and the mystics of the late middle ages. We now briefly look at the Reformation to trace the works of the Spirit in that rather turbulent period of the Church.

The times of the Reformation were times of great changes in all spheres of life. The geographical knowledge expanded through people like Columbus (1451-1506) and Magellan (c.1480-1521) who finished his journey around the world while Luther was translating the bible into German in 1522. The medieval concept of the universal state was replaced by the rise of the territorial, nation-state. Socially the old order of classes began to crumble and a new urban middle class appeared. Renaissance and Humanism brought about a new

intellectual climate, searching to find truth by returning to the sources of the past. A number of religious movements returned to the study of the scriptures in original languages hoping to find a better understanding of the true message of Christ. Other movements, as we have seen already, sprung up all over Europe following an apostolic life style remodeling Christianity according to the days of its beginning.

All these were contributing factors leading to or running concurrently with what became known as 'Reformation'. According to preference, this reformation is viewed in different ways by modern historians. It is seen as a 'revolt against the Catholic Church', a 'revolution against a medieval social order' or 'the reformation of faith'. As Earle E. Cairns writes,

Both the name and the definition given to the reformation are somewhat conditioned by the outlook of the historian. Some Roman Catholic historians look on it as a revolt by Protestants against the universal church. The Protestant historian considers it a reformation that brought religious life nearer to the pattern of the New Testament. The secular historian thinks of it more as a revolutionary movement (Cairns 1996: 270)

All these views have certain merit considering the tremendous change of religious, social and political life in the days of the Reformation. The Reformation was a socio-political movement changing the political and social order of the day. It might even be seen as a revolt of the Teutonic form of Christianity north of the Alps against the Romanic Catholic form of Christianity south of the Alps (Bainton). But very seldom one finds people taking into consideration the spiritually charged atmosphere of the sixteenth century in which the Reformation unfolded. In the context of our study we therefore suggest that the Reformation is a genuinely spiritual movement. Without losing sight of the social, economic and political factors which led to the Reformation one also should take note of the genuine spiritual intentions of those who were the major proponents of the developments unfolding during the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

### 3.3.1. The scriptural and existential spirituality of the Reformers

The spirituality of people like Luther, Zwingli and Calvin was of a different kind than the one of mystics like Hildegard of Bingen and Mechthild of Magdeburg. They didn't appeal to a unique experience of the Spirit which would enlighten them. They knew of the importance of experience in spiritual life and were influenced by mysticism, as we will see in Luther's case. But the Reformers found the basis of their spirituality somewhere else. Their spirituality was

closely linked to the rediscovery of the bible as the revelatory source of any knowledge of God. Like Ronald A. Knox writes about the reformers who rather turned to the bible than to experience in pursuit of divine insight,

They appealed, instead, to the Bible – the Bible interpreted by scholarship; that is, by their own scholarship. To the enthusiasts, the Bible is infallible when interpreted by an inspired person. To the Reformers, it possessed an inherent infallibility, which was a matter for the learned (Knox 1987: 133-134).

Knox makes a mistake in giving the impression as if the interpretation of scripture by the reformers was a matter of scholarship only. Luther for instance was very clear on the fact that the interpretation of the scriptures depends on the Holy Spirit. He writes,

It is bad that everybody tries to understand the Holy Scripture with his head, ponders and searches it, as he pleases. Nobody should attempt to understand the Holy Scriptures unless he has the Holy Spirit (Aland 1989:289).

Nonetheless Knox is right in pointing to the fact the spirituality of the Reformers was much less based on ecstatic, mystic experiences and rather subdued to more scholarly expressions of faith which were based on the study of the scriptures. They shared the same sense of earnestness in spiritual matters with the mystics of the late middle ages but their spirituality was less experiential and more scriptural based and intellectually focused. The Reformers put less emphasis on the experience of a personal union with God. Instead people like Luther dealt with the “fears experienced by numerous at the end of the middle ages with regard to God as a judge” (Lienhard 1989:269). In addition to the uncertainties of the changing times people had another problem of a spiritual nature. They were not sure of God who seemed to be “a severe and terrible judge” (Luther: WA 45,482,9-17) and they were longing for a gracious God.

In the spiritual search for certainty and grace in the relationship to God people looked to the virgin Mary or the saints as mediators, they opted for an ascetic, monastic life style or followed the rules of penitence, as laid down by the church. But all these spiritual exercises did not seem to satisfy the need for certainty in the relationship with God. Especially to self-conscious people like Luther, who could not see himself, the sinner he was, approaching the holy God, this monastic kind of spirituality didn’t give any certainty of the grace of God.

The feeling of uncertainty in respect to God’s judgment wasn’t just an intellectual problem and as such an object of scholarly discussions. It was felt on a deeply existential level. So

much so, that Luther could describe his famous discovery of a gracious God in terms of being born again. He writes,

I have begun to understand that the justice of God is that by which the just person lives by the gift of God, that is to say by faith. This means that the gospel reveals to us the justice of God, that is to say that passive justice by which God, in his mercy, justifies us by faith, as it is written: the one lives by faith. I felt then reborn and I entered into a wide-open gates of paradise itself (WA 54, 186,5-9).

Luther was being 'born again' by discovering a gracious God. This was an existential experience as he dealt with one of the "basic questions of Christian existence" (Moeller 1983: 228). In his spiritual journey he turned to the word of God and especially to Paul's letter to the Romans. In doing so he represents a different type of spirituality compared to the mystics of the late middle ages, which was less ecstatic and more scriptural focused. He stands for the Reformers who shared his focus on scripture. But not as a purely scholarly, academic focus. It was driven by a very sincere spirituality expecting God to speak in and through the Holy Scriptures by the testimony of the Spirit.

### 3.3.2. The scriptural spirituality of the Reformers as experience of the Spirit

Reformers like Luther, Zwingli and Calvin did focus on the Holy Scriptures as the source of their teachings and spirituality. In doing so they were affected on an existential level. They combined scriptural studies and devotion in search for a deeper understanding of God. Even though the Reformers discovered their new understanding of 'justification by faith' through scriptural studies they didn't just view these studies as intellectual exercise. Their exegetical approach, according to Calvin, is imbedded in a spirituality devoted to be united with God in a secure knowledge of his grace. To be certain of the grace of God is a gift of the Spirit, an act of self-revelation of God. Calvin calls this the "inner testimony of the Holy Spirit".

William C. Placher wrote about Calvin's understanding of this "inner testimony of the Holy Spirit":

The Holy Spirit, Calvin said, is "the inner teacher by whose efforts the promise of salvation penetrates into our minds, a promise that would otherwise only strike the air or beat upon our ears." ... "The word itself is not quite certain for us unless it is confirmed by the testimony of the Spirit." ... This aspect of the Spirit's work involves two parts. First, it "enlightens" the mind; it produces "knowledge" and enables us to understand what the Bible means. Second it "establishes the mind"; it brings our minds (and our hearts) into "a firm and steady conviction" regarding the claims embodied in the text. Amid feelings of humility and gratitude, in a life

lived in obedience, Christians find that the stories the Bible tells of Christ as the revelation of God's identity have a compelling force. They sense that that force does not result from their own efforts, and Calvin, again on scriptural grounds, attributed it to the work of the Holy Spirit. "To sum up, the Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself." (Placher 1996:66-67; Calvin's quotes are in quotation marks).

This "inner testimony of the Holy Spirit" might come along in a less ecstatic form when it comes to its outward manifestations. One might not claim visions and wonders, but it is an experience as overpowering and existential as the visions of Mechthild of Magdeburg and Montanus. It is to a lesser extent based on the direct experience of the Holy but is realized through the mediation of the scripture. This type of spirituality is focused on scripture calling for the Spirit to "enlighten" and thereby "creating knowledge and understanding of the bible". But it is more than a matter of knowledge in an objective Cartesian understanding. In the study of the Word God is revealing himself and this self-revelation done by the Spirit is imposing itself upon the believer. This involves not just the mind but the whole human being inclusive of his or her emotions.

Huldreich Zwingli (1484-1531), the Swiss theologian and leader of the Reformation in Switzerland describes this 'scriptural spirituality' which involves the whole being, inclusive of his or her emotions and feelings, in the following way,

Do you feel that the Word of God is renewing you, that God begins to be dearer to you than before when you harkened to human teachings? Then be sure that God has brought this about in you. Do you feel that it makes you certain of the Grace of God and of eternal salvation? Then that comes from God. Do you feel that it makes you small and insignificant, whereas God is great in you? Then that is a work of God. Do you feel that the fear of God begins to make you more happy than sad? Then that is a certain work of the Word and the Spirit of God. May God give us these feelings. Amen (Z I 384; Büsser 1989:301).

Yes, the spirituality of the Reformers centered around the Word of God. But the *Sola Scriptura* principle of the Reformation depends on the Spirit to bring it to life. Like Roland H. Bainton wrote about Luther's view on the word of God,

The Word [of God] is not the bible as a written book because "the gospel is really not that which is contained and composed in letters, but rather an oral preaching and living word, a voice which resounds throughout the whole world and is publicly proclaimed." ... "Not through thought, wisdom, and will does the faith of Christ arise in us, but through an incomprehensible and hidden operation of the Spirit" (Bainton 1969:224; Luther's quotes are in quotation marks).

In conclusion one can say that the Reformers understood Christian faith as depending on the Spirit imposing itself. This happened in the encounter with the word of God as revealed in scripture. This was to the believer an existential encounter facilitated through scripture and realized as the work of the Spirit. Or as Luther has said it to the point: "The Holy Spirit speaks to everyone who reads the Word of God" (Aland:1989:125).

### 3.3.3 "Schwärmer" - the Spirit filled, charismatic left wing of the Reformation

The Reformers saw the Spirit working and enlightening the believer through the scriptures but this view was not shared by all their contemporaries. Especially to that section of the Reformation which is labelled with terms such as 'left wing of the Reformation', the 'Schwärmer', 'Radical Reformers' and 'Anabaptist', it must have seem awfully inadequate and dull. These radical Reformers, as we will call them for the time being, differed considerably with the Reformers in their approach to renew the Church. The Reformers initially "sought to reform an existing institutional church"; the radical Reformers on the other side went further and aimed to "reinststate an apostolic church" (Baylor:1991:xiv).

This apostolic church was the common feature of the left wing of the Reformation. But it does not mean that the movement had a cohesive outlook. There were fundamental internal differences and tensions within this radical section of the reformation to whom Luther, in an imprecise condemnation, referred to as *Schwärmer*.

There were for instance the so-called 'Spiritualist', such as Müntzer and Andreas Karlstadt in Saxony, who held that the believer might receive divine revelation independent of Scripture. But on the other side there were also those 'Anabaptists', such as Conrad Grebel and Felix Many in Zurich, who were committed to biblical literalism and combined their spirituality with a strong political and social concern eventually leading to the peasants revolt (Baylor 1991:xiv). Michael G. Baylor cautions therefore not use categories like 'radical Reformers', 'left wing Reformation', 'Schwärmer', 'Anabaptists' and 'Spiritualists' because,

...such categories fail to do justice to an early reformation theological context that was as fluid as the social context. Anabaptism, formerly regarded as the most unified strand of the Radical Reformation, is now seen as emerging from diverse origins... In short, distinctions between Spiritualists and Anabaptists are of doubtful value... and the possibility of constructing a distinctive theology for the Radical Reformation as a whole seems remote (Baylor 1991:xiv).

Like the late middle ages the time of the so-called radical Reformation was a spirituality highly charged time. But, as Baylor says, because of its lively theological context it seems difficult to pinpoint a precise theology of the movement. We therefore do not focus on defining the theology of the so-called radical Reformers. We rather focus on the spiritual activity which went along with the movement, because the radical side of the Reformation was a time of particular spiritual activities. The Holy Spirit was working amongst those “radicals” in an extraordinary manner which needs to be noted next to the political and social aspects of the radical Reformers which is widely recognized by modern church history. For the purpose of this thesis, and without neglecting the political and social importance of the radical reformation, we would therefore like to make the point that the radical Reformation represents a movement grown out of an intense activity of the Spirit.

In making this point we focus on two examples of the movement who represent its spiritual character. This will be Thomas Muentzer and the so called Zwickau Prophets. Their spirituality differed profoundly from people like Luther and Calvin because they claimed to have divine revelations independently from Scripture. Luther labelled them *Schwärmer*, thereby successfully discrediting their and any other future position which would subscribe to a direct relationship between the Spirit and the believer. As Carter Lindberg writes,

Beginning with Luther, the term *Schwärmer* has been a pejorative label for those whom Luther believed to have turned the Gospel inside out, replacing the external Word of promise and forgiveness with the internal Word of religious experience and deification or self-fulfillment. Since the Reformation those persons and movements whose theology and practice have emphasized or gravitated towards an emphasis upon religious experience have been dubbed *Schwärmer* (Lindberg 1983:108).

But in the context of this thesis the so-called *Schwärmer* stand yet for another group of people moved by the Spirit and rejected by the dominant theology of their days. Furthermore it is noteworthy that the radical Reformers represent a group of people who to a certain extent resemble the charismatic movement which started in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The similarities between the two groups caused Carter Lindberg to ask “Was there a charismatic movement in the Reformation?” In his answer he turns to the sources of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and writes,

If we look to the sources themselves with the hope of finding the designation “charismatic” we will be disappointed as this was not a term used in the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, realities are not eliminated nor created by the lack of or application of a label. We are concerned with a thought pattern not just a term (Lindberg 1983:110).

Those thought patterns of the radical Reformers are similar to the charismatic movement as Lindberg writes quoting from Kenneth Davis's book "Anabaptism as a charismatic movement":

"Clearly sixteenth-century Anabaptism was a charismatic movement"... He [K.Davies] argues that as a charismatic movement Anabaptism "arose not as a challenge to the sole authority of Scripture but as a challenge to institutionalized, politicized, rigorously structured ecclesiastical authority in advocacy of the freedom of the Spirit and the spiritual nature of the Church" (Lindberg 1983:112; quotes from Davis in quotation marks).

Lindberg continues,

It now seems fair to say that the persons with whom Luther had his most intense disagreements over the Spirit and Word,... he called Schwärmer, we may refer to as charismatic (Lindberg 1983:112).

That a correspondence between the two movements in matters of spirituality, not necessarily in matters of politics and social concern (!), exists seems to derive from Lindberg's argument. Their seemingly corresponding spirituality even had implications for the way in which the early charismatic movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was viewed by its opponents. Luther's label "Schwärmer" was applied to the charismatic movement and this recourse to history exempted mainline theology from any obligation to enter into a serious dialog with the movement.

Therefore it is of great interest to deal with the Radical Reformation since it provides us with two important aspects of the works of the Spirit. On the one hand one can study the Spirit in action, a seemingly charismatic movement unfolding. On the other hand one can examine the pattern in which this movement was treated by its opponents, particularly by Luther. This treatment is to a certain extent exemplary of the way in which enthusiastic spiritual movements were being treated for centuries to come.

#### 3.3.4. The Zwickau Prophets – the Reformers confused by the Spirit

It is often believed that the main battle of the Reformation was fought between Reformers like Luther, Melanchthon and Zwingli on the one hand and the Catholic Church on the other. This tends to neglect the seriousness of the challenge which originated from the Radical Reformers and questioned the direction of the whole Reformation.



Their position that “true Christianity was *ipso facto* personal, experiential, individual and based on an immediate spiritual relationship with God” (George 1989:337) found a considerable following during the time of the Reformation. They assumed that the true believer is the one who is filled by the Holy Spirit and as such forms the body of the true Church. They even reached the town of Wittenberg, Luther’s city, which led to a serious crisis right within the center of the Reformation.

In December 1521, while Luther was hiding at Wartburg Castle, the radical reformers took over the city. Students and town-folk invaded the parish church and drove out the priests. Carlstadt celebrated Holy Communion for the first time in German and giving out bread as well as wine to the communicants in the presence of the “the whole town” (Bainton 1969:20), about 2000 people. thereby defied the orders of elector Frederick the Wise. To add to this spiritual turmoil, the “well known iconoclastic outburst” (Knox 1983:127), a group of ‘heavenly prophets’ arrived from Zwickau, a town about 150 km south of Wittenberg. They confused matters further. Philip Melancthon, who was standing in for Luther as leader was so overwhelmed by their appearance that he wrote to elector Frederick asking for help. He writes,

I am sure that your majesty is not ignorant in regards to the dangerous disagreements about the Word of God which have occurred in your majesty’s city of Zwickau. Of those who have caused these disagreements three men have come here, two uneducated weavers and one man well-read. I listened to them. What they say sounds quite strange. They say; they have been called to teach by a clear call of God; they converse with God in an intimate manner; they foresee the future; in short: they are Prophets and Apostles. I can hardly describe how deeply impressed I am by what they are saying. But who shall judge them, other than Martin, I do not know. Since the gospel is at stake arrangements should be made for them to meet with him (Oberman 1981:81).

These ‘Zwickau Prophets’ who made it to Wittenberg were small group of a wider movement which temporarily took over the town of Zwickau during the early years of the Reformation. Their leader was the weaver Nicholas Storch, a spirit filled man to whom according to Thomas Muentzer the most secret meaning of scripture was revealed (Friesen 1990:82-83).

It was Luther himself who added to the development of their and other enthusiastic movements by editing the mystical treatise *Theologia Deutsch*, falsely ascribed to John Tauler (1300-1361). This treatise was widely read by the radical Reformers (often using Luther’s edition). Luther called it a “wholesome theology” in “conformity with the gospel” and full of “divine wisdom” (Friesen 1990:10.13). The author of the treatise emphasized the

experience of conversion through the power of the Holy Spirit which was the only way to a true Christian life (Friesen1990:32).

The Zwickau Prophets, amongst other writing influenced by the *Theologia Deutsch*, claimed to be prophets of the Lord and having intimate conversations with the Almighty and relied solely on the experience of the Spirit (Bainton 1969:208). The movement imitated an apostolic life-style, implemented a community of goods in their midst. Some of their members experienced visions and claimed that God spoke to them in their dreams. Initially they would meet as conventiclers allowing spirit filled lay-men to teach the word of God. But as they grew they choose 12 apostles and 72 other disciples to lead and spread the movement (Friesen 1990:82-83).

It seems as if this was a genuine movement of the Spirit which even could impress a Reformer like Melanchthon who doubtfully asked if these people may have been from God. Luther had less scruples. In a letter dated January 13<sup>th</sup> 1522 he advised his younger colleague:

Thus far I hear of nothing said or done by them that Satan could not also do or imitate.... I definitely do not want the "prophets" to be accepted if they state that they were called by mere revelation, since God did not even wish to speak to Samuel except through the authority and knowledge of Eli (Oberman 1981:366).

What Luther means here relates back in general to what we have said in regards to the spirituality of the Reformers. They, especially Luther, couldn't conceive of a spirituality relating immediately to God. For them the Spirit works through the revelation in scripture. As God used Eli to reveal himself to Samuel he used scripture to reveal himself to the believer. Luther's judgment on the Zwickau Prophets was therefore clear-cut . Because of his *sola scriptura* approach in respect to any revelatory act of God he didn't have room for a personal and direct encounter with the Spiritual as claimed by the Zwickau prophets.

But for others things were not that clear. Even Luther's closest associate, Melanchthon, wasn't sure of the way in which one should deal with the charismatic movement which found its way to Wittenberg, one of the centers of the Reformation, in the form of the Zwickau Prophets.

### 3.3.5 Thomas Muentzer – a companion of the Holy Spirit

The Spirit continued his disturbing activities using Thomas Muentzer, who saw himself as an instrument of the Holy Spirit. Like Luther Muentzer as well held the mystical treatise *Theologia Deutsch*, in high esteem. He even used Luther's edition from 1516 or 1518 for his personal studies. But he drew much more radical conclusions from this mystical masterpiece than Luther. He saw the Holy Spirit as the primary force of a spiritual revolution which would change the whole society in bringing about the new Jerusalem.

Later on in history this revolutionary understanding of the Spirit has made Muentzer a favorite amongst Marxists historians who see in him a champion of the needs of the masses. Especially Ernst Bloch (1855-1977), a Marxist philosopher who fled the communist ruled German Democratic Republic after being sanctioned for his unorthodox views about the world revolution and religion, contributed to this perception through his book "Thomas Muentzer, the theologian of the revolution" (Thomas Müntzer, Theologe der Revolution) published in 1921.

But the Marxists view of Muentzer as a forerunner to Lenin does not do justice to his spiritual focus from which his political involvement stemmed. His interest was not primarily with the plight of the lower classes but with the establishment of the true Church of the elect. "He was obsessed with the reestablishing of the Apostolic Church" (Friesen 1990:112); a Church which was inseparable from the Holy Spirit. From his studies of Eusebius, the second century Church historian, he concluded that the true church, a product of the Holy Spirit had been lost ever since the days of Eusebius. In Muentzer's view,

The Holy Spirit, absolutely essential to the Church, had been forced out in the second century because of the scribes and the Pharisees and false prophets. As a consequence, the elect were scattered so greatly that nowhere any longer can one discern the face of the Church. Since very few possessed the Holy Spirit, there was no understanding of what is pestilential and what is healthy (Friesen 1990:111).

According to Muentzer the Pharisees and the Scribes are synonymous with the priests of the Catholic Church. They had deceived the people by claiming that they had the word of God even though God never spoke to them. They usurped the external word of God – the bible – and denied God's Spirit to speak internally with the people (Friesen 1990:112). But this internal testimony of the Spirit was the central theme of Muentzer's thinking. It was the Spirit

which moved people and he accused the visible church of lacking the experience of the Spirit which would endorse the truth. This is even applied to content of the Holy Scripture which needed to be confirmed by experience in order to be believed (Friesen 1990: 117).

For Muentzer faith was caused by the experience of the Spirit and it was this personal and individual experience of the Holy Spirit which stood at the center of faith. The movement of the Spirit was not bound to the bible. It was not even confined to the boundaries of the Christian faith. Muentzer, who had read the Qur'an, was convinced that even the Muslims could "experience a genuine moving of the Holy Spirit and the beginning of true faith" (George 1989:360).

In a letter to Melancthon, the close associate of Luther, dated 27<sup>th</sup> of March 1522, Muentzer refers to this experience as the "intimate companionship with God" (Obermann 1983:91). And Muentzer saw himself as the one who was called into such an intimate companionship. As Friesen writes,

Thomas Muentzer knew for a fact that he [Muentzer] possessed the Holy Spirit. He had encountered the Holy Spirit ... while studying Tauler [using Luthers edition!] (Friesen 1990:83).

for such a 'companionship spirituality' Luther's scripturally based spirituality was a provocation. To bind God to the scripture was unacceptable to Muentzer because it limited the free moving Spirit which wanted to be experienced rather than studied. Initial hopes that Luther would follow his views on the Apostolic Church and the Spirit were therefore shattered when Luther published an open letter against Muentzer calling him an 'Outcast Satan'. Muentzer in return wrote a pamphlet aiming at Luther entitled "A highly provoked Defense and Answer against the spiritless soft living Flesh in Wittenberg, that with Perversion and Robbery of Holy Writ hath so grievously besmirched our piteous Christendom".

The details of conflict between Luther and Muentzer don't need to concern us that much. It is rather the polemical attitude which set the tone for centuries to come. People who, like Muentzer, called for an experience of the Spirit were sure to be labelled *Schwärmer* and henceforth not to be taken seriously. It indicates again that the neglecting of those who are in search of an experience in faith has allong standing tradition within mainline theology and

church practice.

But when removing the polemical attitude one might see that Muentzer presents us with another example of the Spirit wanting to impose itself upon man. his positions are not at all agreeable to a church which tries to accommodate in its theology all and not just the chosen elect. If one understands the word *schwirmig* in its original German meaning which derives from the word for 'swarm' as in bees, Muentzer was indeed "a *schwirmig geyst*, a fantast or zealot"<sup>8</sup> (Holl 1999:279). He was ready to sting. Compromise and moderation was not his trait but he was consumed by the experience of the Spirit imposing itself upon him. And this experience is, as we have tried to show, part of the Church ever since its inception for example in Baptism and Holy Communion.

#### 4. The reality of the Spirit imposing itself as a methodological problem

After this more or less lengthy walk through the history of the Church one might look at Harnack's point that the Spirit ceased to act upon the believer with a certain amount of skepticism. The Spirit did not cease to act upon the believer after the glorious days of early Christians were over but instead continued to impose itself.

The examples we have presented are just a few. We could go on and present more. One might think of George Fox (1624-1691), the founder of the Society of Friends, or Quakers who heard the voice of God speaking to him. Or John Wesley (1703-1791) who's experience of God was a more inwardly one being referred to as the 'warming of the heart'.

Even when getting closer to modernity theologians did not lose a sense for the fact that faith is a matter of experience and feeling as one can see in the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). He tried to make religion accessible to the "enlightened" mind in his "Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers". His definition of religion as the 'feeling of absolute dependence' marks an important milestone in the history of theology because it attempts to translate the spiritual and experiential character of faith into the awakening of modernity.

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<sup>8</sup> Holl uses contemporary German spoken in Muetzer's days. Losely translated one might say "A Schwärmer or enthusiastic spirit, a imaginative person and a zealot".

The evidence we have gathered seems to suggest that the history of the Christian faith and the experience of the Spirit go hand in hand. To experience the Spirit is indeed a normal Christian experience. In other words there appears to be an experiential side of the Christian religion which is an essential component of Christianity and seems to impose itself even despite a world view that goes against the experiential character of the Christian faith. This experiential quality of Christianity can be called the experience of the Spirit and has been its distinguishing mark from its inception.

But the mere fact of accepting that the experience of the Spirit in its ambiguous character is the “divine principle of origin” (Holl) for Christianity leaves us with at least two problems with respect to the context of this thesis.

Firstly one might ask if the experience of the Spirit, which befell people like Hildegard of Bingen, Thomas Muentzer and others, can really be equated with the experience of the Holy Spirit as it supposedly imposes itself upon Breakthrough International? People like Carter Lindberg seem to suggest that. But even though the similarities are striking we would stress that this is not the main issue at stake here. What we rather wanted to show is that in general terms the Christian movement can be understood as experiential movement which is based on the experience of the Spirit, its divine principle of origin. This experience might vary in outlook, depending on social, economic and cultural circumstances. For example, Muentzer’s experience of the Spirit did take place in a very different socio-economic and political context than that of Breakthrough International. Consequently this experience had different social and political implications. But what remains important is the fact that it is the experience of the Spirit, this constitutive aspect of the Christian movement, which became real within Muentzer’s as well as Breakthrough International’s context respectively.

Secondly, and much more importantly, the question is how this constitutive experience of the Spirit can be qualified from an academic perspective which operates according to standards which are part of a modern world view? How can we theologically, meaning “intellectually sound”, talk about the experience of the Spirit? This is a problem we will concern ourselves with in the next section.

## **C. The experience of the Spirit and its methodological problems**

### **1. The problem**

#### **1.1. The scope of the epistemological problem in dealing with the experience of God**

It is now time to look at the argument we have tried to put forward so far. This will indicate the extent of the epistemological problem which the “experience of the Spirit” as an essential Christian experience poses to modern theology.

By modern theology we refer to the kind of theology which operates in the framework of a modern, Western world view. Even though a number of contextual theologies have emerged in the last couple of decades we would argue that this modern theology has become the universally predominant framework of theological discourse. The main characteristic of modern theology is that it understands itself as a science in dialogue with other sciences based on reason and dialectic. This dialogue is taking place as an academic exercise within a modern world view based on Cartesian notion that the only certainty in our quest for knowledge is the thinking mind (*res cogitans*). This thinking mind perceives an ‘objective reality’ in which God can neither be known nor experienced (Moltmann). Knowledge is created by this ‘thinking mind’ in the realm of a scientific world view. Scientist, academics, don’t talk about knowledge but create it (Feyerabend 1991:5). Modern theology prescribing to a ‘modern, “enlightened” methodology’ contributes to this creation of knowledge. Which in the case of theology means it contributes to the creation of knowledge about God who is the object of its discourse.

#### **1.2. Understanding God in a modern world view - a construct of the *res cogitans***

The task of theology can be defined as the constructing and understanding of humanity, the world and God in formulating “regulative ideas” as Gordon Kaufman has called it. He is one of the proponents of a constructive theology which, in the tradition of Descartes’ “thinking mind” and Kant’s “Critique of pure reason” eliminates claims to supernatural knowledge of God. They argue that men’s knowledge of God can not be based on the experience of the supernatural. On the contrary it is rather the “enlightened” human mind which constructs this knowledge of God. Kaufman writes;

If theology is understood as deliberate construction of a viable contemporary understanding of humanity, the world, and God, as I am arguing it must be, we ourselves must take full responsibility for every element we build into our theological perspective (Kaufman 1981: 242).

Kaufman's view applies the notion of knowledge as being created by the thinking mind, the only certainty in a Cartesian world view, for theology. This makes knowledge of God a construct of the 'thinking mind'. Kaufman continues referring to Kant;

Kant saw that the central ideas with which metaphysics works – ideas like 'God' and 'World' and 'self' – function differently in our thinking from concepts dealing with objects of direct experience, concepts like 'tree' or 'man'. While the latter are used to organize and classify elements of experience directly, thus helping to make experience itself possible and serving as a vehicle through which experience is cognized, the former "metaphysical" notions function at a remove from direct perception or experience: they are used for ordering and organizing our conceptions or knowledge (rather than what is directly experienced) and function, thus, principally as "regulative ideas" (Kaufman 1981: 242).

This modern understanding of 'knowing God' as 'ordering and organizing regulative ideas' marks a severe change in the history of theology. Ever since the days of Anselm (1033/34-1109), the father of scholasticism, faith was the acknowledged preposition of theology. His famous *credo ut intelligam* (I believe in order to understand) stresses faith which is caused through a revelation of God as the premise of theology as well as any science. This has changed in a theology operating within the modern world view. Knowledge of God has become a construct, a creation of the thinking mind. Rephrasing Anselm one might say *quaero intellegere ut credam* (I seek to understand in order to believe). In the past God was the given, the certainty, the point of departure for theology. Now the thinking mind is as doubtful of God as it is of anything else except of itself being able to doubt.

Wolfhart Pannenberg sums up what this change has done with modern theology, what it even has done with God. He writes,

In earlier cultures the word "God" and "gods" had a more or less clearly defined place in the cultural world and human vocabulary. They were used in relation to the final foundations of social and cosmic order and to the courts which guarantee them, to which due honor, attention, and address are to be paid. In modern secular cultures the word "God" has increasingly lost its function, at any rate in the public mind. The reality denoted by the term has thus become uncertain. In the context of a public consciousness that is emancipated from religion, statements about God that presuppose his reality no longer count as factual statements. Individuals may accept it by a subjective decision, but the public mind in a secular culture will accede to the truth of such assertions only when they are secular in content and can appeal to academic authority (Pannenberg 1991:63-64).



one might argue that we present a very limited view of theology. There is plenty of evidence that theology has in modern times attempted to get around the problem that, philosophically speaking, all what we might be able to know about God, is a matter of our own constructive imagination.

Karl Barth is perhaps the clearest example of a theologian who seems to contradict the modern constructive approach of someone like Kaufman. Barth would favor a deconstructionist theology as it has been called by William C. Placher. He stresses the radical “otherness” of God which can only be known by revelation (Placher 1996:183) and is not a product of the thinking mind. But Barth would not identify what he calls the revelation of God as the “radical other” with a subjective experience of God. As pointed out previously Barth would call subjective experience illusion and ecstatic fantasy. While stressing the “radical otherness of God” Barth shies away from any subjective approach of revelation. For him “Jesus Christ is the objective reality of revelation” (Barth 1956:1) revealing himself in the Word of God. For Barth revelation is not a subjective but rather objective area of investigation ultimately and decisively given by the “Holy Scriptures as the source and norm of all our present answers” (Barth 1956:204).

Therefore Barth, though affirming the otherness of God, is modern in the sense that he constructs objective theology based in scripture as the objective norm of truth. His approach might seem to be different to Kaufman’s but both turn out to be truly modern theologians concerned with the rationality of faith. They are both involved in a dialogue with modernity acknowledging the primacy of the thinking mind.

Schleiermacher on the other side of the theological spectrum is modern in focusing on faith as a subjective emotion. He tries to get around the philosophical problem that in a modern world view one can not talk about God in objective certainty by stressing the “experience of feeling dependent upon the universe”. But even though he addresses his famous speeches to the “Cultured Despisers of Religion” he does not really appeal to their intellect but rather leaves faith to the realm of subjective and individual emotions. He is modern, to use Pannenberg's terminology, by leaving the public mind out of the equation and privatizes faith.

Even when one turns to more recent attempts of doing theology in particular contexts like liberation theology, black theology or feminist theology it seems as if we can’t escape the

epistemological problem posed to theology by modernity. While contextual theologies make the experience of the people their point of departure they remain in the realm of academics dominated by the rules of the "critical principle of Enlightenment". It is the dominant theological paradigm which is even acknowledged by Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, one of the leading Feminist theologians. She writes:

The ideal of the Euro-American Enlightenment was critically accomplished knowledge in the interest of human freedom, equality, and justice under the guidance of pure reason.... Knowledge is not a given but culturally and historically embodied language and therefore always open to probing inquiry and relentless criticism. This critical principle of the Enlightenment was, however, institutionalized as the empiricist paradigms of knowledge that give primacy to experienced data and empirical inquiry (Schüssler Fiorenza 1995:271).

And continues:

Women who enter theological education have three choices: either we embrace the languages, traditions, theories, or world views of theology which have silenced, marginalized, and objectified us as *women* and risk muting our own theological voice and creativity, or we reject the theological inquiry as white male scholarship, because we recognize its destructiveness for women's self-definition and self-affirmation. However, this second choice deprives us of the intellectual skills and tools for finding our own theological voice and for changing theology in the interest of women and all other non persons. A third option compels us to articulate critically the experiences and contradictions between our own cultural, political, and religious ethos and that of the discipline, and to keep them in creative tension. For, to paraphrase Audre Lorde's dictum, the master's tools will dismantle the master's house as long as we use them for building our own house and not executing the masters mindset and discursive blueprints (Schüssler Fiorenza 1995:269).

Schüssler Fiorenza proposes a new model of 'critical collaboration' for theological discourse in order to overcome the old "enlightened" paradigm which excludes the experience of women, who suffer from multiple oppression. She suggests "to collaborate with women from different cultural and religious subjects locations in articulating a 'different' theological discourse" (Schüssler Fiorenza 1995:268). There the 'master's house' is dismantled 'using the master's tools'.

Unfortunately Schüssler Fiorenza does not mention in what way this new model of 'critical collaboration' is influenced by Tillich's 'method of correlation' which, through an existential analysis, unfolds humanity's ultimate concern and proceeds to show that the New Being in Jesus Christ is the answer to human predicament (Tavard 1962: 22). As Tillich describes it:

The method of correlation explains the contents of the Christian faith through existential questions and theological answers in mutual interdependence....In using the method of

correlation, systematic theology proceeds in the following way: it makes an analysis of the human situation out of which the existential questions arise, and it demonstrates that the symbols used in the Christian message are the answers to these questions (Tillich 1951:60–62).

Tillich's method seems to focus more explicitly around the issue of communicating the biblical message of the "New Being in Christ" by correlating it to humanity on an existential level. Schüssler Fiorenza on the other side centers less around the issue of how to communicate the "New Being in Christ" as the answer to the human predicament of the oppressed. She rather concerns herself with the methodological challenge to formulate a way of relating to those who suffer from multiple oppression which enables them to find their own theological voice<sup>9</sup>.

But however these theological differences might be viewed it becomes clear, even when looking at a rather critical position like the one Schüssler Fiorenza puts forward, whether we embrace the "enlightened" paradigm as Kaufman does or try to overcome it as Schüssler Fiorenza intends to do – theology done in modern times does not get away from using 'the masters tools'. One might acknowledge that theology should be a 'critical collaboration' with the experience of the 'non-people' aiming to change theology in their interests. But still the tools and the skills of this collaboration are shaped by the modern Cartesian world view and the philosophical consequences which come with it.

one might argue with John W. De Gruchy that this gives a universal and paradigmatic status to a kind of theology very specifically a product of Western modern pattern of thought. He writes,

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9 This is not the place to elaborate on the difference between these two positions. What seems to be obvious though is that Tillich works with the premise that the biblical message needs to be communicated by way of correlating the "questions implied in the situation [of human existence] with the answers implied in the message [of Christ the New Being]" (Tillich 1951:8). In contrast we see Schüssler Fiorenza calling for critical collaboration with the oppressed in order to dismantle the "Masters House" which has little to do with giving an answer to the human predicament but rather sees a new paradigm of theology emerge which is solely in the service of the liberation of the oppressed. While Tillich still expects the biblical message to be of relevance to humanity which finds itself in "bondage to existential estrangement" (Tillich 1951:179) Schüssler Fiorenza does expect those who are oppressed to define for themselves what of the biblical message, if anything at all, is helpful within their existence or oppressive reality. Critical collaboration does not give answers by way of correlating the "message" with the "existence", as Tillich would, but by working together with the oppressed in critical solidarity. Critical collaboration would therefore be unwilling to provide answers to the existential questions raised by the oppressed but sees itself in a rather facilitating role, helping the oppressed to define their own answers and solution.

One of the dangers of the notion of theology as a science is the implicit assumption that the theological systems which have evolved in Western European theology are universal, and therefore paradigmatic for all Christian theology. But this way of doing theology is only one of several, and it is very much the product of the particular way in which scientific thought has developed in the West (De Gruchy 1994:9).

De Gruchy's point is well taken. Modern "enlightened" Western theology is derived from a certain historical context and is not the only way of doing theology. It is one of different 'publics' of theology, to use a term coined by David Tracy (Tracy 1981:6-46). According to Tracy theology "addresses issues within different arenas, each of which has its own purpose and particular form of discourse" (De Gruchy 1994:8). But as soon as the discourse takes place within the sphere of academic study, the "enlightened" paradigm, like it or not, becomes the predominant one. As De Gruchy concedes, referring to Tracy's different publics of theology,

From what we have said thus far, then, theology clearly has what David Tracy has called different 'publics'. Theology as 'spirituality' clearly serves the worship, proclamation and witness of the Christian community in a direct and meaningful way; theology as 'science' is especially appropriate within a university or academic context where theology seeks to engage other disciplines in search for and articulation of truth (De Gruchy 1994:8-9).

'To find and articulate truth' in an academic context cannot happen without the acknowledgement of the "enlightened" paradigm as its guiding principle. Because theology as academic discipline cannot compromise the need "for agreement with reason" which remains a permanent valid principle (Pannenberg 1991:20). The 'enlightened paradigm' in turn leaves one with the dilemma that 'the experience of the Spirit' does not fit into an academic approach of theology. It is a phenomenon with which "enlightened" theology has difficulty dealing with as a source of revelation on account of its own presuppositions.

### 1.3. "The experience of the Spirit" an imposition upon modern theology

As said before Gordon Kaufman has rejected the possibility of a direct experience of God on the grounds that this presupposes a theistic concept of reality. On account of his "enlightened" philosophical epistemology he cannot accept that God is real. God can not be more than a human construct created by the thinking mind (*res cogitans*), and is created around a symbol which is called "God" (Kaufman 1995:15). We are not suggesting that this is a false presupposition of academic discourse. If we would do that we could as well give up on the idea of theology as an academic exercise in dialogue with other modern, scientific

disciplines. This dialogue must be bound to the modern critical, “enlightened” paradigm of truth with the the Cartesian thinking mind at its center. As John Polkinghorne has put it “our scientific and theological insights have to fit together” (Polkinghorne 1995:27).

But one also needs to see that the experience of the Spirit imposing upon the believer has been with the Christian movement from its inception. The experience of the Spirit is as essential to Christian faith as Baptism and Holy Communion. It seems, even if looked upon from a modern world view, that the Spirit has imposed itself throughout the history of Christianity. Whether it be in New Testament times as recorded in the book of Acts and Paul’s letters to the Corinthians, or in rather unorthodox forms such as the Montanist movement. The Spirit was experienced and continues to be experienced. Hildegard of Bingen, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Joachim of Fiore, Reformers like Calvin, Luther and Zwingli, Muentzer and the *Schwärmer*s are some examples of a movement in which they were ‘befallen by the experience’ of the Spirit (Moltmann) . As Adolf Holl says,

It was [the Holy Spirit] who seized the man Jesus and opened his mouth to announce the good news of the Gospel to the Jews. It was owing to the Holy Spirit that a few Galilean fisherman found the courage, after the Nazarene’s death, to preach a world religion. Moreover the Holy Spirit granted Christians sensational experiences, ecstasies and inspirations, which were then talked about and helped bring the evangel to the people.... [the Holy Spirits] traces are quite visible, however, in the history of heresies and wrongheadedness: among Syrian hermits, French *perfecti*, German mystics, English freethinkers, American Negro slaves, ... Again and again in such realms of experience, the spark of an effusive joy flashes out, momentary and fleeting. These are the moments when the divine in man makes itself manifest (Holl 1999:x-xi).

the assumption that the divine makes itself manifest presupposes a theistic world view which Kaufman would reject and which doesn’t necessarily concur with the modern way of thinking where according to Moltmann “God can objectively neither be known nor experienced”. But nonetheless the history of the Christian movement is full of those experiences which for modern patterns of thought have no objective reality. Historical evidence indicates that the Spirit created a kind of reality which is of a different logical order than the logic of the modern “enlightened” paradigm. The experience of the Spirit seems to be essential to Christian faith. But it becomes problematic if one tries to make sense of it operating according to the modern paradigm of truth. In that sense we might even talk about the experience of the Spirit more as an imposition upon the believer. It is an experience which constitutes a serious imposition upon the modern, “enlightened” way of theology. Because

the 'masters tools', to use Schüssler Fiorenza's language, don't seem to be the right tools to get a grip on the experience of the Spirit.

#### 1.4. The experience of the Spirit in collaboration with the modern paradigm of truth

We are faced with an epistemological dilemma: By choosing the academic discourse we accept its "enlightened" presuppositions. One of these presuppositions is that the experience of the Spirit, due to its subjective character, cannot contribute to the kind of knowledge academic discourse is aimed to create. The question is, therefore, how can we try to describe the experience of the Spirit and its implications for the *Missio Dei* concept in an academic thesis which applies *per definitionem* the "enlightened" academic paradigm?

Kaufman would say that modern theology is not applicable to such an experience. Barth would dismiss it as fantasies. Schleiermacher and others would restrict it to subjective emotions with little bearing for the real issues of theology. So there seems to be no way of understanding the experience of the Spirit within a modern paradigm of truth. To make the case for the experience of the Spirit as a source of revelation and therefore knowledge of God seems to be impossible.

The problem is that if the thinking mind, to use the Cartesian term, looks at the evidence presented in scripture and in history one is drawn to a different conclusion. As we have shown, examples from history and biblical testimony indicate that the experience of the Spirit seemingly creates its own reality within biblical and non-modern world views. Since the evidence coming from scripture and history as well as the African Christian experience suggest that there is something one could call the 'experience of the Spirit' one needs to ask: How can the experience that the Spirit is imposing itself upon the believer contribute to the very task of modern theology? A task which is the 'search and articulation of truth' (De Gruchy) within the context of modern human sciences. How can modern theology's discourse be inclusive of the imposition of the divine which seems to be happening and presents itself as an unproblematic source of divine knowledge within a biblical as well as African world view? Can modern theology find a language to identify and engage in a dialogue with a reality which seemingly does not fit its categories? Furthermore can this be done without compromising the "enlightened" concept of truth?

To answer these kinds of questions one needs to find more than simply ways and means of translating 'experience' from one world view to the other. It needs a process of "critical collaboration", to use again the metaphor from Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. She refers to the task of the feminist theologian as being 'critical collaboration',

The feminist scholar in religion not only seeks to deconstruct oppressive religious and theological practices but also to reconstruct a religious heritage and theological voice for women. To that end she must not only reconstruct the discourse of her own discipline but also collaborate in articulating a different paradigm of religious scholarship and theological knowledge. Theology in a different key would no longer constitute itself by excluding or silencing the religious experience and theological voice of the subordinate Others. Rather, by constituting itself as a heterogeneous, polyphonic public, theology would be able to develop a critical collaboration and discursive practices (Schüssler Fiorenza 1995:270).

The collaboration Schüssler Fiorenza has in mind does theology "from different subject locations and standpoints" (Schüssler Fiorenza 1995:270) allowing previously unheard voices to be heard in theology. This is primarily a rhetorical process which involves a plurality of previously unheard voices and disciplines keeping their differences in a creative tension (Schüssler Fiorenza 1995:274).

This paradigm of theology as critical collaboration invites study and assessment of religious and cultural practices as rhetorical practice. By rhetorical I do not mean mere rhetorics as linguistic manipulation, technical skill, or stylistic ornament, but communicative practice that links knowledge with action and passion and does not deny others or is set at a distance. Theology understood as rhetorical or communicative praxis unmask the value-detached, scientific posture of religious studies as well as the doctrinal certainty of theology narrowly conceived. At the same time, it reconstitutes theology as a religious and ethical practice of critical inquiry and particular commitments (Schüssler Fiorenza 1995:270-271).

The inclusion of the 'previously excluded' as theological subjects calls, according to Schüssler Fiorenza, for a paradigm shift from a "scientific to a rhetorical genre" (Schüssler Fiorenza 1995:274). The experience of the Spirit, as 'real' as it has been to those who have experienced it, can be accessed by modern theology in a hermeneutical way. Theology as 'science' might not be able to integrate the experience of the supernatural into its discourse. But theology as interpretation, as rhetorical exercise of defining and redefining truth might be able to collaborate with those who claim to have had the experience of the Spirit.

This involves a shift in our understanding of truth. Our concept of theological truth needs to shift more towards the realm of art than of science. In doing theology we need to acknowledge that theological truth is not compatible with true statements of sciences and even philosophy. There is an irreconcilable divide between our scientific and philosophical

language on the one hand and our religious language on the other which is based on the fact that faith presupposes revelation. Eberhard Jüngel captures this:

The language of faith presupposes revelation. So not the least demonstration of the truth of what faith has to say is the fact that the language of faith does not simply accord with actuality. Because Christian faith has to talk about God if it wishes to speak the truth, it has to say more than the actuality of the world is able to say. This means, however, that faith is inevitably involved in a dispute about truth, for in the Western intellectual tradition, truth is conceived as the correspondence of the judgments of the mind (*intellectus*) with actuality (*res*), as *adaequatio intellectus et rei* (correspondence of mind and thing) in the sense of *adaequatio intellectus [humani] ad rem* (correspondence of the human mind to the thing). Seen from the standpoint of this understanding of truth, religious language seems to be the exact opposite of true language; it seems to be a kind of error, if not a lie. If in order to be true according to the criteria of religion and faith, a text has to say more than what is actual, it does not correspond to actuality (Jüngel 1989: 17).

Jüngel's point about the "disputable truth of faith" can be applied to the experience of the Spirit. In this revelatory experience something more is happening than what is understood as 'actual' in a Western view of truth. God is indeed speaking through the experience of the Spirit and this is more than human thinking can grasp as 'actuality'. A modern, theological, "enlightened" and religious, language of 'theology as science' would not be able to adequately grasp this self-revelation of God since it is bound to its modern understanding of truth.

Religious language therefore must go beyond the modern paradigm of the enlightenment and try to capture religious truth which per definition exceeds the modern understanding of reality. Or, to use Jüngel's terminology, our religious language must try to describe what, from a modern point of view, is not seen as actuality and could even be perceived as a lie. It must do so because of the character of the revelation which is per definition non-actual, meaning not real in a modern sense of the word.

Coming from Jüngel's point the following methodological question is posed to us now: What kind of language is needed to capture the 'non-actuality or unreal-reality' of the experience of the Spirit? A question to which one should add from Schüssler Fiorenza' point of view: How can this language, as a rhetorical endeavor, move away from the scientific towards the hermeneutic genre and still collaborate with modern theology which is prescribed by the "enlightened" paradigm?



## 2. Theology as metaphor and narrative focusing on the internal story

### 2.1. Metaphorical language as the task of 'rhetorical theology'

It should be clear by now that the focus of our methodological deliberations needs to be on the question of finding a language to describe the experience of the Spirit adequately as an experience of God's self-revelation to the believer. In addition this language should be found within the realm of theology as an academic exercise.

From Schüssler Fiorenza we learn that we need to advance into a rhetorical genre, when trying to come to grips with the experience of the Spirit. This, as has been admitted, can be problematic because of the negative connotations carried by the term 'rhetorical'. As Jüngel puts it; "today we are prone to devalue something as merely rhetorical" (Jüngel 1989:25) which implies that the rhetorical genre has little to do with the hard facts of truth.

But Jüngel also notes that this understanding of the term 'rhetorical' was not shared by the proponents of the classic rhetoric era. He observes; "in the ancient world rhetoric was intrinsic to the proper discharge of truth" (Jüngel 1989:25). Jüngel points here to the classic understanding of rhetoric as theory and especially practice of eloquence expressing the truth. This is important in order to understand the character of religious language and its attempt to express the unspeakable, the divine truth, in language. Because if we want to talk about God, saying the truth, we have to say more 'than the actuality of the world is able to say' (Jüngel). Therefore language becomes an art, a rhetorical process in which the divine truth is defined, redefined and defined again without its core, which is the experience of the divine by the believer, ever being exhausted in its totality. This process of 'naming God in a rhetorical exercise, and getting closer to the truth, is not 'merely rhetorical' but the appropriate and truthful way of talking about the reality or, as Jüngel would call it, the actuality of the divine. Because this divine actuality does not avail itself to be grasped by the ordinary language of Western intellectual tradition which conceives truth in terms of Jüngel's definition as correspondence of "the judgement of the mind (intellectus) with actuality (res)" (Jüngel 1989:17).

In short and a little simplified: Speaking the truth in respect to the reality of the divine is something which might not necessarily make sense in terms of conventional logic. It is rather a rhetorical process which tries to express what is the inexpressible actuality of God's reality. In this rhetorical and rather inadequate process of striving to speak the truth about the divine an element of speech becomes relevant, which is usually neglected as a mere decoration of speech. This element is the 'metaphor', which is the "fundamental characteristic of religious language" (Jüngel 1989:19).

The writer of Psalm 119:105 for instance can refer to the law of God as 'a light to his feet and a lamp to his path'. Or it is Jesus himself who calls us to "enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Matthew 7:13-14). there is no road which leads to life and another which leads to destruction, but behind this metaphorical speech lies a truth which if not expressed in this kind of language could not be expressed at all. Because if it would not be for metaphors we would be at a loss of words to describe the truth of the divine. The writer of Psalm 119 as well as Jesus used metaphors in bringing across a truth which is beyond 'actuality' in a modern sense, but which has a truth to it which transcends the modern "enlightened" paradigm.

Jesus like any spiritual teacher captured the divine truth by employing metaphorical speech. By so doing he used the metaphorical character of language in a much wider sense than does classical rhetoric. Because traditionally metaphorical speech is seen as a figurative mode of speech helping to make a point and not being the point itself. Jüngel writes:

Traditional theory of language regards metaphor as a figurative mode of speech, since it is understood as *brevior similitude*. As an abbreviated parable it falls under the definition of all parables as figurative modes of speech. The older theory of parables understood the parable proper as the 'figurative part' in which the 'factual part' had to be recognized (Jüngel 1989:20).

In general metaphorical speech is just a rhetorical ornament employed for the sake of eloquently bringing a point across to the listener who in turn would need to translate the merely rhetorical metaphor into the factual language. But in finding language to speak divine truth we need to go beyond this understanding of metaphorical speech as merely ornamental. Jüngel says:

A revision of the conventional understanding of metaphor is necessary. Such a revision would no longer view metaphor as a peripheral linguistic phenomenon but rather as a process fundamental to language (Jüngel 1989:22-23).

this is not the place to trace this process of revising the understanding of the term metaphor to which, from a philosophical point of view, people like Karl Bühler, Bruno Snell, Karl Löwith, Beda Allemann, Hans Blumenberg and Paul Ricoeur (Jüngel 1989:22) have contributed significantly. We are concerned with the theological aspect of this process within the theory of language.

Theologically speaking, when one looks, for instance, at the language of the Psalms and Jesus one can say that religious language seems to be constituted by metaphor, since it tries to express the 'un-expressible', to capture the divine within this earthly context. Once again it is Jüngel who makes this important observation. He writes,

Furthermore, a theological theory of language has to accord to metaphorical speech a dogmatically fundamental and therefore hermeneutically decisive function which is not congruous with an understanding of metaphor as a merely rhetorical figure. This is because linguistic expressions often have to assume a new meaning in order to signify theological states of affairs. For Luther it was both necessary and certain that 'all names receive a new meaning in Christ'. This theological principle expresses the general hermeneutical experience that words take their meaning from the context in which they are used. For theology, however, a special problem arises. For *in Christo* (in Christ) there is given an eschatologically new context, which stands over against all other contexts in which words have hitherto been used. In this eschatologically new context, set over against all worldly contexts, words have to function as metaphors (Jüngel 1989:23-24).

Theologically speaking Jüngel brings the discussion forward to a remarkable acknowledgement. While within the "enlightened" scientific paradigm truth is understood as the assembly of facts being systematized by the thinking mind we now realize that theology deals with something which can not as easily be systematized and objectified by the thinking mind as a Cartesian world view would want us to believe.

On the contrary, the experience of the divine impinges upon the thinking mind which becomes the object of an experience exceeding its cognitive abilities. Therefore the language of faith is through and through metaphorical, because the context of it transcends the worldly reality in which the thinking mind can operate. In short: If theology wants to speak the truth, it needs to speak in metaphors.

To acknowledge that theology needs to talk in metaphorical language to be truthful to the object of its thinking is not a new revelation. Origen (185-254) with his threefold interpretation of scripture has already pointed to the fact that a pure logical or literal understanding of the divine is insufficient (cf. Ritter 1977:77). But it is rather important to note within our context that the argument which we have developed by following Jüngel is not just merely a statement about how to speak truthfully about the reality of the divine. It also is a philosophically based criticism of the “enlightened” paradigm of truth. Because by speaking about the experience of the Spirit in form of metaphor theology accomplishes what science, confined to a Cartesian world view, is neither able nor interested to achieve. Theology, utilizing rhetorical language and the metaphor, dares to go where science can not tread which is the encounter with the divine. That this encounter is preferably put in language by means of the metaphor might at worst be viewed by a die hard Cartesian scientist as not being truthful or even lying and at best it might be seen as having no relevance in the “real world” of the *res cogitans*. But it is actually the appropriate human, intellectual, and philosophical response to a revelation transcending the “enlightened” paradigm of truth.

So Schüssler Fiorenza’s call for a rhetorical approach to theology can be qualified further. It values the language of metaphor as the adequate way to capture the truth of the divine revelation which is exceeding worldly realities (‘actuality’ as Jüngel calls it) and therefore fundamentally critiques the modern understanding of truth as insufficient in matters of the divine.

## 2.2. Metaphorical language as an anthropological process of defining the truth

Theological language understood as a rhetorical exercise using metaphorical modes of speech does even more than appropriately capture the divine revelation which is exceeding the intellectual abilities of the thinking mind. It is more than a function of language but rather an anthropological process of orientation.

If it would only be a function of language it could be viewed as a language game still being merely rhetorical. The Cartesian thinking mind could argue that what can not be expressed within its own “enlightened” paradigm of thinking is irrelevant to the truth. Theology might find a rhetorical way of expressing the experience of the divine but it would remain a

“playing with words” which might or might not be relevant to the truth as understood and defined by the “enlightened” paradigm.

A rhetorical theological approach which takes its lead from Schüssler Fiorenza and Jüngel could have the same fate as Schleiermacher’s theology. Schleiermacher attempted to deal with the problem of truth in religion and found a niche for religious truth within the individual feeling of dependency. This allowed him to reclaim some ground for religion from its ‘cultured despisers’. While the world of science and modernity out there was functioning according to the “enlightened” paradigm, religion could remain something personal, belonging to the realm of feeling. This preserved religion and contributed to its survival in a modern day and age but it also rendered it effectively irrelevant to the bigger picture or the reality as it is perceived by the modern world view. In the same manner rhetorical theology understood only as a function of language could be irrelevant to what the modern paradigm calls truth. Because it would just be playing with words, a game which has no real implications for hard facts of reality determined by science and technology. Through the work of Schleiermacher subjective feeling became the preserve for religious truth and similarly it would now be the ‘art of language’ – rhetoric- which would provide a playground for religious truth to be expressed. But the relevance of this truth for what the modern paradigm perceives as reality would again be minimal.

But theological language understood as a rhetorical exercise using metaphorical modes of speech is more than skillfully playing with words, a function of language. It is an ‘anthropological process of orientation’ or to use Cartesian terminology; it is the most elementary way in which the thinking mind is making sense of the objects which it perceives.

Eberhard Jüngel captures this anthropological function of metaphorical language by referring to it as a physiological occurrence within the human nervous system. He writes:

Μεταφορά is not a (rhetorical) process within language, but rather an anthropological process of orientation – conceived by analogy to the former – used by the human subject to master the world which impinges upon that subject’s nerves. The world makes an impression upon us. The concrete physiological form of this is a nerve-stimulus. This nerve-stimulus pushes the subjects to assimilate the impression received; impressions have to be assimilated. But this cannot be done unless the subjects in his or her turn expresses the impression received. As receivers we are already active: we lay hold of the world’s impression upon us in order to make something of it. Mastering this impression of the world entails expression of the impression. In the first step of this process, the subject assimilates the sensation received through affected nerves by using the power of imagination. In this anthropological process of

orientation, a physiological quantity is made into a mental quality. We form a picture to represent what affects us. The ego makes a picture of the world, the ego's picture (Jüngel 1989: 31-32).

At first glance Jüngel's argument might seem a little far fetched but he makes a strong case in favor of metaphorical speech as the first step of the thinking mind to bring order and meaning into the variety of its experiences. To again turn to Cartesian terminology one could say that the first step in the process of thinking is to form a language of metaphor or analogy. While Descartes remains right in saying *Cogito ergo sum* (I am thinking, therefore I am) one can specify his statement saying *Comparo ergo sum* (I compare, therefore I am).

The first step in the human endeavor of creating meaning to its own existence is to compare the known with the unknown, to find analogies which explain the new impression by relating it to similar old ones. In other words; the thinking mind is initially operating on a metaphorical level. Truth is being found in an anthropological process comparing the known with the unknown finding pictures of analogy. It is therefore appropriate to deal with an occurrence like the experience of the Spirit on a metaphorical level. Because on this elementary level of the human quest for knowledge the thinking mind tries to describe and understand what has happened to him or her. It does so by way of comparing and relating the known to the unknown experience. So if for instance someone describes the experience of the Spirit as the "warming of the heart" (Wesley) he is actually taking the first step of speaking the truth. He is not just using a picture to talk about some dream but forms an analogy to describe the truth as good as words can do on this elementary level.

Since we assume that the experience of the Spirit is indeed an impression of the divine made upon the believer it is legitimate for the thinking mind to make sense of this experience by using metaphorical language. Consequently one can argue that even from an "enlightened" paradigm the experience of the divine, which is per definition a revelation transcending the "enlightened" paradigm of truth, can only be accessed by the thinking mind through metaphor.

### 2.3. The Narrative as the act of the thinking mind in a 'secondary order'

We have established so far that theology has to operate in the genre of rhetorics specifically using a language of metaphors and analogies in order to express the truth which is conferred upon the believer through the experience of the Spirit appropriately. This is a theological claim motivated by the understanding that analogies and metaphors are the first step of the thinking mind in making sense of his or her world.

When, as we intend to do, one endeavors to speak theologically about the experience of the Spirit one needs to devise a language which operates on a metaphorical level. Because this kind of 'rhetorical theology', even from a philosophical point of view, is able to capture the truth within the experience of the Spirit. Furthermore it takes recognizance of the anthropological process within the believer of defining the truth by means of finding words and metaphors which express what the divine experience has impressed upon him or her.

However, any believer who is overwhelmed by the experience of the Spirit will do more than just finding metaphors and analogies for what has happened to him. Wesley did not just compare the experience of the Spirit with the 'warming of the heart'. He embedded it in a whole story of conversion which is well known and widely told. This leads us to the issue of narrative which is the vehicle through which the believer accomplishes two tasks. Firstly he or she relates to what has happened to him and makes sense of the experience of the Spirit. Furthermore he relates what has happened to him or her to others conveying a complex truth. Within this narrative, which relates the believer to the experience and through which the believer relates the experience to an audience of listeners metaphors and analogies are employed. But they are not isolated, they are part of a story which needs to be told in order to clarify personal or even communal identity.

Stephen Crites has made this point and argued that personal identity assumes the form of narrative to express itself in different dimensions. One dimension is made up of what Crites calls 'mundane stories', which are directly seen or heard. Another dimension is made up of 'sacred stories' which are the fundamental narratives through which men's sense of self and world is created (Crites 1989:70).

It is through stories, those told by people (mundane stories) and those being told to people (sacred stories) that he or she finds its own sense of meaning and internal coherence (Stroup 1981:112). In his or her quest for meaning one turns to the narrative, to storytelling explaining where one has been, why things are as they are and so on (Crites 1989:71). According to Crites this is necessarily so because the “formal quality of experience through time is inherently narrative” (Crites 1989:66) and “stories give qualitative substance to the form of experience because it is in itself an incipient story” (Crites 1989:72). A third dimension which creates identity is closely linked to the first two ‘narrative dimensions’. This is the ‘temporal form of experience’ itself which is short lived and could have no lasting impression if it wouldn’t be remembered in story-telling. Or as he says,

Only narrative form can contain the tensions, the surprises, the disappointments and reversals and achievements of actual, temporal experience (Crites 1989:82).

Crites, in his rather complex theory of the function of the narrative, refers to St. Augustine’s paradoxical observation that the future, which does not yet exist, should pass into the past which no longer exists, through a present that is difficult to conceptualize as more than a vanishing quasi mathematical point. The paradox is resolved when past, present and future are considered to be not necessarily independent metaphysical modalities, but unavoidably modalities of experience in the mind or experiencing consciousness (*anima*) (Crites1989:73).

Crites argues that experience constitutes a dramatic event within the passing of the past into the future happening in the present. The consciousness is the place through where experience is being felt and formed into a coherent narrative. The present moment of experience, which to define is so impossible, contains therefore the whole tension of the future anticipated and the past recollected. The experience is a dramatic event for the human consciousness, which would be incoherent if not formed into the narrative by the thinking mind and hence contributing to the human identity. Crites writes,

In principle, we can distinguish between the inner drama of experience and the stories through which it achieves coherence. But in any actual case the two so interpenetrate that they form a virtual identity, which if we may pun a little, is in fact a man’s very sense of his own personal identity (Crites 1989:81).

Considering Crites’ line of argument one can say that to tell stories is actually a rather appropriate way of telling the truth. Because it allows for holding on to the experience which has happened to men and relating to it in the form of the narrative. If it wouldn’t be for the



narrative the experience would be lost on account of its momentary character like the present is lost in the passing of the past into the future.

Stories are therefore not just fiction but have an important anthropological function in formulating the truth. In the modern paradigm we might be used to a “strategy of abstraction, in which images and qualities are detached from experience to become data for the formation of generalized principles and techniques. Such abstraction enables us to give experience a new, non-narrative and atemporal coherence” (Crites 1989:85). But at the core of these abstractions stands experience captured in its narrative form. The form of the narrative is conveying experience and makes it accessible to the thinking mind in its most elementary form of what one could call ‘narrative truth’.

Narrative truth is not like the modern paradigm concerned with abstractions which might add to our “knowledge of objects” as Paul Ricoeur puts it (Ricoeur 1995:222). It rather emphasizes the poetic character of life captured in the narrative which does not fulfill the descriptive function of a scientific language which understands truth as “adequation, regulated by the criteria of verification and falsification“ (Ricoeur 1995:223 *Naming God*). Ricoeur writes about the poetic narrative form of language as opposed to a rather descriptive ‘scientific’ form of language;

It is true that poetry is a suspension of the descriptive function [of language]. It does not add to our knowledge of objects. But this suspension is the wholly negative condition for the liberation of a more originary referential function [of language], may be called second-order only because discourse that has descriptive function has usurped the first rank in daily life, assisted in this respect by science. Poetic language is also about the world, but not about the manipulative objects of everyday environment. It refers to the many ways of belonging to the world before we oppose ourselves to things understood as “objects” that stand before a “subject” (Ricoeur 1995:222).

Ricoeur reiterates what has been said by Crites before. The function of the narrative might be called secondary from within a Cartesian world view which is used to favor descriptive language, but nonetheless it speaks the truth.

We acknowledge, with some reservations, that narrative is secondary in a world ‘usurped’ by the subject-object dichotomy. But in the context of the task of this thesis, which is to capture the experience of the Holy Spirit as a driving force of God’s *Missio*, we propose that this so called ‘secondary form’ of language –the narrative- is the appropriate form. Pannenberg is

indeed right, 'to find and articulate truth' in an academic context cannot happen without the acknowledgement of the "enlightened" paradigm as its guiding principle. Because theology as academic discipline cannot compromise the need "for agreement with reason" which remains a permanently valid principle (Pannenberg 1991:20). But, taking our cue from Crites and Ricoeur we would add to this argument that the most reasonable way to speak the truth in a modern "enlightened" paradigm when trying to capture the experience of the Spirit is narrative. How could we apply our "thinking mind" (to personalize Cartesian terminology) to the experience of the Spirit if not in the form of narrative?

### 3. The implications of the narrative approach for the topic of this thesis

If indeed it is true that the narrative approach is appropriate in understanding the experience of the Spirit, we are drawn to propose a narrative methodology when dealing with the experience of the Spirit within the Pentecostal Movement as represented by Breakthrough International. This means that intellectually the most authentic and truthful way of engaging in a discussion on the experience of the Spirit which befell the believers of Breakthrough International is to let the believers tell their stories, because it is within their stories, which are subjective, that the truth is to be revealed.

By telling how the Holy Spirit has intervened in their life, by allowing them to find the metaphors and analogies which for them truthfully capture the content of their experience and letting it be told, the experience of the Spirit is being accessed. Through the vehicle of personal narratives we will engage in a study of the Spirit which has moved people to be incorporated into God's *Missio* and actively participate in it. By doing so we will not depart from the modern paradigm of truth but rather try to understand the issues which otherwise could not be understood.

Since the focus of this thesis is to compare the concept of *Missio Dei* as developed within Western Missiology and the realization of *Missio Dei* within the African Pentecostal Movement not all stories being told by the believers will be relevant. It will only be those stories which will show how the Spirit has moved people to establish Breakthrough International and continues to intervene in order to make Breakthrough International an instrument of God's *Missio* which will need to be looked at.

But before embarking on a study of these stories we will now have to turn our attention to the 'concept of *Missio Dei*' which is a construct of modern Western Missiology and provides our inquiry into Breakthrough International with the matrix from which we assess the church's experiential way of mission.

## II. *Missio Dei* - a new paradigm of mission theology<sup>10</sup>

### A. Introduction to the methodology of the research

#### 1. The Main thesis and its methodological implications

As pointed out previously the main question addressed in this thesis is. Is the Pentecostal Movement as expressed in Breakthrough International is an authentic expression of the *Missio Dei* concept? In our attempt to answer this question we will now turn to the *Missio Dei* concept and establish its context as well as its content. In order to do so we will have to describe the paradigm shift within ecumenical missiology which is marked by the emergence of the *Missio Dei* concept. The term originates from Catholic dogmatic theology and is used there to describe the intra-trinitarian *Missio* between Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Vicedom 1975: 352). Despite these origins the trinitarian dimension of *Missio Dei* was overshadowed by a christological focus. It is only recently that the term *Missio Dei* has again been associated more explicitly with the *Missio* of the Triune God, rather than exclusively with the *Missio* of the Son. The reemergence of its trinitarian dimension has brought the pneumatological aspect of *Missio Dei* back into the focus of discussion.

But before we go into a detailed study of the paradigm shift which happened within modern missiology through the birth of the *Missio Dei* concept and its christological as well as pneumatological implications we will have to look at some methodological questions.

#### 2. Ecumenical missiology as source for the research into the *Missio Dei* concept

##### 2.1. From Western missiology to ecumenical missiology

So far our claim has been that the *Missio Dei* concept is a construct of modern Western Missiology. this claim needs to be qualified further to receive validity. We will need to show

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<sup>10</sup> We have argued in our “Encountering the Spiritual – a personal introduction” (see point 8) that this chapter is crucial for the proper positioning of the answer to our main question. It therefore warrants a rather lengthy and detailed analysis of the *Missio Dei* concept which the reader might find a bit too elaborate at times. Nonetheless, having stated our reasons we need to ask the reader to bear with us.

how this 'constructing of the *Missio Dei*' concept was done and furthermore we need to define more precisely what the term 'modern Western Missiology' refers to. The former will be dealt with later in this chapter while the latter shall be attempted now.

To speak of Western Missiology is a contradiction in terms. Because the term mission itself aims at the whole "inhabited world or *oikoumene*" (see Matthew 24:14). Mission is therefore an exercise happening within the *oikoumene*, the whole world, and not just the Western hemisphere. Accordingly we would like from now on to fine-tune our terminology and speak of 'ecumenical' rather than 'Western' missiology.

But this change in terminology is by no means to be construed as if the Western influence within ecumenical theology is not of great significance. Even though it seems to be well accepted today that mission is an ecumenical affair involving the church in six continents one should be careful not to be misled into believing that this has always been the case. Because historically speaking ecumenical missiology has had its epicenter in Western theology and is to a certain extent still held captive by the Western way of doing theology. As L. Newbigin says:

I must also speak of the limitation of the contemporary ecumenical movement. And here I am not speaking of the limitations that beset any movement because of the weakness and sinfulness of those who participate. I am referring to a very specific defect that has far-reaching implications for the present discussion of church and culture. The contemporary ecumenical movement was born among the churches that share the culture that has developed in Western Europe and North America in the past centuries..... All its work is conducted in the languages of Western Europe. Only those who have had long training in the methods of thinking, of study and research, and of argument that have been developed in Western Europe can share its work (Newbigin 1994:151).

The modern missionary movement has been an affair driven by Western Christianity expanding itself in the shadow of colonialism. It has exported its faith as well as its theology. What is even more questionable, it has imposed its way of doing theology upon the 'converts'. Something which for example becomes evident by the fact that the Western missionary movement even succeeded to impress their respective denominational conflicts upon believers who had little to no relation to those conflicts. However, since the middle of the last century, the modern Western missionary movement is in decline sharing the fate of its 'bigger brother', colonialism. But just as colonialism has left many challenges and unfinished problems for its former colonies Western missiology has left a number of problems for those who do theology within the context of the former 'mission fields'. to talk about the theology

done in the former 'mission fields' is an outdated way of talking. Because theology done within the *oikoumene* is now a global exercise. It is driven by a church and theology which understands itself as operating in six continents and done within the one *oikoumene*. A Western based missiology has changed to a theology being done within the *oikoumene* as, what David Bosch calls, the 'ecumenical missionary paradigm' (Bosch 1991:368-510).

The emergence of this 'ecumenical missionary paradigm' marks a shift in terminology to which terms like 'ecumenical theology' or even 'ecumenical missiology' have been added. These terms might imply an equal playing field for theologians from the west and the south, who participate in theology as an exercise pursued within the *oikoumene*. But even though we use this terminology, we do so cautiously, because the equality suggested does not exist. Ecumenical theology needs to be seen as having the specific defect to which Newbegin refers. It is born in a Western context and uses European languages, methods of thinking and research.

## 2.2. What is 'ecumenical missiology'?

One needs to note that the term 'ecumenical missiology' is a very broad concept. David Bosch alone lists thirteen different elements which he identifies as belonging to this 'emerging ecumenical missionary paradigm' or the 'new postmodern paradigm of missiology' (Bosch 1991: 349), as he sees it. Bosch talks about mission as 'the church with others', as 'quest for justice', as 'Evangelism', as 'Contextualization', as 'Liberation', as inculturation, as action in hope and as '*Missio Dei*', to name just a few (Bosch 1991:368-510).

These various issues are identified with 'ecumenical missiology' and might suffice to indicate how broadly the term can be understood. Furthermore the term 'ecumenical missiology' might be misleading as well. As Dietrich Werner, a German missiologist who has produced a remarkable study on the *Missio Dei* concept by analyzing the discussion within the ecumenical movement from 1961 until 1991, has suggested:

The term "ecumenical missiology" is misleading hence it can be understood as if there is something like a 'school of ecumenical theology', which has emerged within the international missiological discussion as a homogenous school of thought. The opposite is the case. Very few theological discussion processes are made up in such heterogenous manner and

represent such diverse points of view like the spectrum of theology which is termed here "ecumenical missiology" (Werner 1993:47).

In order to bring some structure into this wide spectrum of ecumenical missiological thinking Werner argues rather formalistically, according to structures and bodies involved in the discussion process when defining ecumenical theology. He suggests we identify three main streams of discussion within the heterogeneous ecumenical flow of missiological debate (Werner 1991: 49-50). One stream is the evangelical discussion about a theology of missions represented since 1974 by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. This evangelical wing of missiology has defined its position in the course of a number of congresses on world evangelization in Lausanne (1974), Pattaya (1980) and Manila (1989). The other main stream focuses around theological discussion process in the Roman Catholic church. This discussion process is represented by publications such as *Ad Gentes* produced by the second Vatican Council and by papal encyclicals such as *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1974) and *Redemptoris Missio* (1991). It has furthermore received important momentum through regional conferences of bishops in Latin America, especially those in Medellin and Puebla.

Alongside the Evangelical and the Catholic missiological discussion Werner identifies what he calls, in a slightly confusing application of terminology, the "ecumenical missiological discussion".

The ecumenical discussion about the theology of mission has its organizational roots in the International Missionary Council which was formed in 1921 and expresses itself since 1961 within the context of the Commission for World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) of the World Council of Churches. The most important public places of discourse for ecumenical missiology has been, next to the assemblies of the World Council, which take place every seven years, the World Conferences on Mission and Evangelism (Mexico City 1963, Bangkok 1973, Melbourne 1980, San Antonio 1989), which usually take place once in-between the assemblies of the World Council of Churches.

...Ecumenical Missiology might therefore be understood as located in the spectrum of those Churches and organizations which were initially connected in the International Missionary Council and later, as of 1961, came together in the World Council of Churches, to discuss theological, practical and structural questions concerning them in their respective missionary activities but which should be addressed from a point of common ecumenical responsibility (Werner 1991:48).

Werner's choice of terminology is a little unfortunate since he discusses all three mainstreams of missiological thinking, the Evangelical, the Roman Catholic and the Ecumenical under the heading of 'ecumenical missiology'. This is confusing since the term 'ecumenical' is used in two ways. On the one hand it is as an overall term incorporating all

streams of discussion and on the other it describes the very specific discourse which has evolved in today's World Council of Churches.

Werner's distinctions, however, are quite helpful in order to define from which point of view this thesis will discuss the *Missio Dei* concept. The focus will not be on the Evangelical or Catholic discussion. Because, as we will see, *Missio Dei* has mainly emerged within the ecumenical discussions on missions centering around the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches. Therefore we will locate the core of the research within this third stream of 'ecumenical missiology' which is deeply rooted in the ecumenical 'paradigm or leitmotif of missiology', to use again the words of David Bosch (Bosch 1991:457). It is here that we will find the *Missio Dei* concept most clearly articulated and developed.

Coming from Werner we therefore understand 'ecumenical missiology' as the theological discourse of those churches and bodies which were drawn into the ecumenical movement starting in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and, as Werner points out, found its platform in the International Missionary Council and later on in the World Council of Churches and its Commission for World Mission and Evangelism.

Admittedly this definition is still rather broad and needs to be narrowed down, but for the time being it will provide us with the necessary framework to engage in a discussion on the concept of *Missio Dei*.

### 2.3. Ecumenical Missiology as major source for the concept of *Missio Dei*

William Temple (1881-1944), archbishop of Canterbury (1942-1944) and a leading figure in the ecumenical movement, is reported to have said that "the ecumenical movement is the great new fact in our era" (Hogg 1952:1). As mentioned before, the beginnings of this 'great new fact of our era' date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century when a number of European and American based mission organizations began to co-operate in the so called mission fields. Furthermore they convened a series of local missionary conferences culminating in the well known at Edinburgh conference, of 1910. It was to a certain extent for practical matters, like bible translation, production of hymnbooks and other issues of common concern to the missions, that they were drawn together. But this initial and rather accidental and informal movement



developed an overall vision which was brought back from the 'mission fields' to the 'mother churches'. The vision was to overcome or at least challenge the denominational divides, which were created in Europe and North America, but impacted negatively on the missionary task (Hogg 1952:1-97).

Another impulse towards the ecumenical movement, which later was to center around the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches, originated from youth movements like the YMCA, which began in England and spread rapidly through the United States, as well as the Student Christian Movement, leading to the birth of the World's Students Christian Federation in 1895 (Goodall 1961:7-8).

It is from these roots that the ecumenical movement arose, and in which what we call ecumenical missiology was developed. Ecumenical missiology can therefore be seen as embedded in a movement which has emerged from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It got a boost through the first International Missionary Conference at Edinburgh 1910 and was taken forward through the International Missionary Council until its incorporation with the World Council of Churches and the forming of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism in 1961. It can be characterized as "a modern Christian movement concerned with the unity and renewal of the church and its relationship to God's reconciling and renewing mission throughout creation" (Kinnamon 1997:1) .

It is within this movement 'concerning itself with the unity and renewal of the church as well as God's *Missio*' that any study of the *Missio Dei* concept ought to start. This is not the place to give a comprehensive overview of this ecumenical movement and its proponents. But nonetheless we will have to look briefly at its historical roots and overall agenda trying to identify its missiological focal points throughout the decades.

Kinnamon and Cope, for example, give a good overview of the main themes of the ecumenical movement. They divide the movement into three periods:

The first period runs from Edinburgh mission conference in 1910 to the inaugural assembly of the WCC in Amsterdam in 1948, from the time when the ecumenical movement depended on the visionary drive of charismatic individuals (e.g. Mott, Germanos, Söderblom and Temple) to the moment when it became, at least in principle, a movement of the churches. This era is dominated by several obvious historical events: the final years of colonial expansion, the first world war, the German church struggle of the 1930s and the second world war. *The central*

*motif of these years, as we see it, is this: the rediscovery of the church, the whole church, as an essential component of the gospel.*

The second period runs from the Amsterdam Assembly (1948) to the World Council's fourth assembly twenty years later in Uppsala. This period is marked by the cold war, but also by the end of colonialism and the rise of self-consciousness on the part of newly independent nations and their churches. *Its central motif: the rediscovery of the church as in and for the world. If the first period in the ecumenical movement asked "What is the church?" then the second asked "What is the church for?"*

The third period, from 1968 to the present, has been decisively shaped by the experience of pluralism (i.e., by the dialogue of cultures and ideologies within the now-global church) and by growing disparities within the human family (e.g., between rich and poor). Whereas the essential dialectic of the previous era was east-west, in the third period it has been north-south – with the northern agenda no longer predominant in international ecumenical circles. *If there is a central motive, it is the rediscovery of the church's relationship to God's creative and redemptive work throughout creation* (Kinnamon 1997:3-4).

One could go into much more detail but for the time being Kinnamon and Cope shall give us a general picture about the ecumenical movement and its main ideas which they, theologically speaking, specify as follows.

At a more theological level, the first two periods of the movement were strongly Christocentric, as indicated by the WCC Basis as a "fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures". The focus was on the church as the universal body of Christ and on the proclamation of Christ throughout the *oikoumene*. Statements from these periods generally emphasize the divinity of Christ, which was crucial at a time when human society seemed disordered by global conflict. By the late 1960s, however, increasing emphasis was placed on (1) the trinitarian nature of God, including the Spirit's sustaining presence throughout creation, and (2) the humanity of Christ, including his suffering and solidarity with those who live in the margins of history (Kinnamon 1997:4).

Kinnamon and Cope indicate the change from a christological emphasis to a trinitarian focus within the ecumenical movement which led to a rediscovery of the Holy Spirit during the third period starting around 1968. This discovery came to a climax in 1991 with the seventh assembly of the World Council of Churches, which for the first time in its history chose a pneumatological theme. All the assemblies before had christological themes but 1991 met under the theme "Come Holy Spirit – Renew the Whole Creation".

In our view this Canberra meeting marks something of the beginning of a fourth period in the development of the ecumenical movement since the focus is on the Spirit and its sustaining activities for the church as well as the world. Canberra, as we will see, lacked to a certain extent theological input and depth. But it was there that the ecumenical theology acknowledged the essential role which the Spirit played in the formation of the ecumenical movement well as in the sustenance of the world as a whole. As Parthenios, Patriarch of

Alexandria and All Africa, has said in his opening presentation before the assembly in Canberra.

The church, his people, all who truly believe, also lives in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit dwells in us, encompasses us, embraces all things. We call upon the Holy Spirit to renew creation, the world and the earth. With him we would strive for the salvation and redemption of all. We are in fact "in a realistic way" spiritual, because we belong to the Holy Spirit. Just as we are Christians because we belong to Christ's church. Therefore the church is the great event and not something static. It moves, surpasses all things and is the life of the world and of humanity. On its journey the church takes on its eschatological identity. It lives out its history in the mystery of the Holy Spirit and is moving towards the last things (Kinnamon 1991: 29).

After this brief look at the hundred odd years of the development of the ecumenical movement one can not claim to have done any justice to the depth and diversity of the theological discussion which took place during this time. But this rather superficial overview indicates the source from which we will draw in order to trace the evolution of the *Missio Dei* concept. It will be located within the diverse theological discussion process which encompasses the ecumenical movement.

The marking points of this discussion process are the respective conferences of the International Missionary Council and as from 1961 the conferences of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the WCC. Therefore we will have to take a close look at the conferences in Edinburgh (1910), Jerusalem (1928), Tambaram/Madras (1938) Whitby/Toronto (1947), Willingen (1952), Achimota/Accra (1957/58), Mexico City (1963), Bangkok (1973), Melbourne (1980), (San Antonio 1989) and Salvador (1996). Furthermore the regular assemblies of the World Council of Churches need to be seen as important primary sources for our study of the *Missio Dei* concept. Especially the seventh assembly at Canberra 1991 will be of importance, since its focus is on the Holy Spirit.

### 3. Other sources for the concept of *Missio Dei*

The above mentioned conferences will give us the primary sources and limit the field of our research into the concept of *Missio Dei* to a certain extent. But there are numerous other sources which give account of the ideas, discussions and processes which have impacted on ecumenical missiology and its understanding of *Missio Dei*. For the sake of order we are going to call these sources 'secondary sources'. This does not mean the downgrading of other sources but it shall rather indicate that any look at the conferences referred to previously

would be incomplete without at least glancing over these 'secondary sources'. The words of Norman Goodall written in 1961 are as valid today as they were then.

The Ecumenical Movement of today is a movement, not a single organization. Many different agencies give expression to the movement or contribute to it. No one organization is its exclusive instrument or holds monopoly rights in it (Goodall 1961:4).

Therefore it would be questionable to only rely on the official statements made by the landmark conferences of the IMC, WCC and the CWME. The ecumenical movement is not monopolized but represents a wide spectrum of thought. This spectrum of thought will, for the purpose of this thesis, be accessed through the study of the following 'secondary sources'.

Firstly all those publications come to mind which are written on behalf or authorized by the IMC, the WCC and its Commission on World Mission and Evangelism. This would include conference papers which were published between the major conferences of the IMC and the WCC. Here, amongst others, studies such as that done by the WCC on the "Missionary Structure of the Congregation" (1968) will have to be looked at. Furthermore the "Ecumenical Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism" (1982) will provide a valuable source in our quest to describe the *Missio Dei* concept.

But this is not all. Ecumenical missiology is not made up of 'reports and affirmations' as Leslie Newbigin has pointed out in his famous Riverside sermon, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May 1960, commemorating the first World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh 1910.

"I have been speaking of the ecumenical movement, of churches, of councils. But in the end it is not to these that the word of God is addressed: it is to men and women" (Newbigin 1994:5).

Indeed the ecumenical movement would not have been possible without men and women committed to it and driven by a common vision. After all, initially the movement has been a grassroots movement, and it is only later that the churches understood its implication for God's *oikoumene* and got involved on an institutional level. Hence one needs to talk also about the men and women who have been closely involved in the development of this movement when trying to conceptualize an important aspect of its theology. The voices of John R. Mott, Nathan Söderblom, William Temple, Suzanne de Dietrich, J.C. Hoekendiejk, Lesslie Newbigin, William Visser't Hooft, Philip Potter, Emilio Castro, Kosuke Koyama and

many more, who have contributed to the understanding of God's *Missio* within ecumenical missiology, come to mind. We will draw upon them as supplementary 'secondary sources' to clarify the understanding of the *Missio Dei* concept within the ecumenical movement.

Thirdly another 'secondary source' will be used which are usually overlooked within the English speaking field of missiology. W.R. Hogg noted as far back as 1952 that the contribution made towards the beginnings of the ecumenical movement by the "Continental Mission Conference, which has meet regularly since 1866, and the German *Ausschuss*, begun in 1885, which stands as a prototype for all missionary councils" (Hogg 1952:16), is little known to the Anglo-American discourse. Similarly the understanding and reception of the *Missio Dei* concept within the German speaking theology of missions, which impacted missiological thinking all over Europe, needs to be acknowledged. Because for European theologians, who were doing theology on the 'mother-continent of colonialism', the emergence of the *Missio Dei* concept marked nothing less than a revolution in their missiological thinking, as it was so imbedded in colonialism.

To pursue this issue further we will have to look at the works of people such as Karl Barth, Walter Freytag, Georg F. Vicedom, Johannes C. Hoekendijk and the reports on the IMC conference at Willingen (1952) by the European participants.

#### 4. Presenting *Missio Dei* – chronology and main themes

As pointed out before, the ecumenical movement dates back more than a hundred years. When others believed it would be a 'pleasing dream' William Carey (1761-1834) envisioned it as Norman Goodall writes:

The father of modern missions, William Carey, proposed in 1806 that there should be convened a meeting of all denominations of Christians at The Cape of Good Hope somewhere about 1810, to be followed by a similar gathering once every ten years. Carey made this suggestion in a letter to his friend Andrew Fuller, secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society, but Fuller was not enthusiastic. 'I consider this as one of bro' Carey's pleasing dreams' he wrote (Goodall 1961:5).

The challenge before us now is to structure this long-standing and multifaceted 'pleasing dream' in a way that its theological thinking becomes accessible for our study of the *Missio Dei* concept. Several approaches would be possible.

One could use a purely conceptual approach. The question asked would be just when and where the idea of *Missio Dei* developed within ecumenical missiology for the first time and how the concept could be clearly defined. This would mean one would start with the IMC conference at Willingen 1952 and try to develop an understanding of *Missio Dei* from this landmark conference. The task ahead of us would be made relatively easy since the field of research is rather limited. However it would also do little justice to the whole idea of *Missio Dei* which arguably is part of the ecumenical movement ever since its inception and has therefore a much wider context than just the one referring to the Willingen conference in 1952. We would limit the focus of this thesis without taking into account how the idea of *Missio Dei* has been developed before and after Willingen and has changed the understanding of the missionary endeavor ever since. Furthermore such a 'purely conceptual' approach would fail to do justice to the decades of theological discourse which led to the famous conference at Willingen and gave birth to the a great new idea in the realm of the theology of mission.

David Bosch correctly noted that *Missio Dei* is not a concept in the sense of a clear cut idea which could be defined once and for all in order to be applied and utilized. It is rather "a new theological paradigm" (Bosch 1991:390) which has unfolded in many different directions ever since its emergence in the 1930s.

In other words: *Missio Dei* has a rather dynamic character because "the term *Missio Dei* contains the historical dimension [*Geschichtlichkeit* or incarnate character] of the Christian message. This stipulates the nature of mission as a process opposing all statutory thinking" (Bürkle 1979:12). The term 'historical dimension' refers to the sending of the son through which God joint our human existence. This *Missio* continues to progress and theologically speaking is redefined throughout the missiological discourse ever since the emergence of the *Missio Dei* as both an idea and a concept.

We would therefore contradict the very essence of what the term *Missio Dei* stands for if we would choose a purely conceptual approach, asking only for definitions and timeframes, in order to define the *Missio Dei* concept. *Missio Dei*, this new paradigm of missionary thinking, needs to be understood in a much wider context taking into account the theological discourse of ecumenical missiology as broadly as possible. A conceptual as well as descriptive language is needed to do justice to the depths of the *Missio Dei* concept.

Therefore we suggest a two-fold approach to our primary and secondary sources: Firstly we will work chronologically in our search for the concept of *Missio Dei*. The history of the missionary as well as the ecumenical movement will provide us with the signposts needed to find our way within the vast terrain to be covered. Secondly we will complement the chronological approach with a diachronic approach, to use a concept from the Danish linguist Otto Harry Jespersen (1860-1943). This means we will extract four focal points on which the discourse in regards to the *Missio Dei* has concentrated after its introduction through the IMC conference at Willingen 1952.

In the chronological approach we will firstly deal with the historical background from which to understand the emergence of the *Missio Dei* concept (chapter II. B.). This chronological approach is more or less adhered to in chapter II. C. when we will have a look at the birth of the *Missio Dei* concept at Willingen 1952 and the theological discussions which led up to the Copernican turn around in missiological thinking. Chapter II. D.; E.; F; and G; will use a diachronical approach and flesh out the *Missio Dei* concept from a perspective less bound to a 'timeline methodology'. It will rather show how the concept, which emerged at Willingen 1952, continued to be shaped and developed through the context in which it was applied during the subsequent years. These different contexts overlap in their chronology and remain to one degree or the other important to contemporary missiology. It would therefore be impossible to force a chronological order on them.

The study of Dietrich Werner "Mission for life – Mission in context" (1993), which has proven to be an invaluable contribution to my own study of the *Missio Dei* concept, has identified three such diachronical areas in which *Missio Dei* unfolded. We acknowledge hereby that we structurally built on his study. Part D. of this chapter will therefore deal with "Modern and postmodern (his)story as the context of *Missio Dei*". Part E. with "Poverty as context of Mission Dei" and part F. with "Culture as medium of *Missio Dei*". In a further diachronical approach describing the *Missio Dei* concept, this chapter will show how, in more recent years, the understanding of *Missio Dei* has developed to a greater pneumatological inclusiveness and tried to overcome a certain 'christological imbalance'. This becomes visible at Uppsala 1968 and Canberra 1991. Part G is therefore entitled "*Missio Dei and the experience of the Spirit*".

In conclusion this chapter will have to attempt a summary (part H.) of the *Missio Dei* concept trying to identify its main ideas and its relationship to the experience of the Holy Spirit.



## **B. *Missio Dei* – understanding its background**

### 1. The Churches *Missio* to the nations (*ad Gentes*) forgotten

One of the assumptions about the Christian religion is that it is essentially missionary. It is therefore not surprising that Theo Sundermeier starts an article about the theology of missions claiming that:

Christianity is in its essence a missionary religion. Mission constitutes the nature of Christianity, or the churches, like burning constitutes fire (E. Brunner). The church is a missionary church in her nature being the 'City on the Hill' (Matthew 5) as well as in its commission being sent into the world (Sundermeier 1995:15).

But to reach out and 'save the nations' is not something which has always been on top of the Christian agenda (Schmidt 1954:84). Even though the last couple of centuries, which saw a tremendous missionary expansion, suggest this.

A brief look at the interpretation of Matthew 28:16-20 might illustrate this. At first glance Matthew 28:16-20 seems to suggest nothing less than that the church is called by its master to go to the nations and make disciples. But Matthew 28:16-18, the classic text of mission *ad gentes*, was not always the key reference for a justification to go out to the nations. It was only during the 16<sup>th</sup> Century that the text from Matthew 28:16-20 itself was used to refer to the missionary task in the sense of going to the nations and converting the 'heathen'. Diego Laynez (1512-1565), a close co-worker of Ignatius of Loyola and his successor as leader of the Jesuits, introduced this interpretation of Matthew 28 calling for a *missio ad gentes* (to the nations). Before Diego Laynez the text was usually applied to the theme of baptism, its interpretation had no inclination towards the issue of world mission (Frankemölle 1982:99).

Before Laynez, and even after him, the assumption was that the Great Commission had been fulfilled by the 12 Apostles . They, according to legend, had gone out to the ends of the earth and preached the gospel to all nations (Nicolai in Thomas 1996:43-46). The reformers of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, for example, held on to this view. Therefore the *missio ad gentes* was seen as something fulfilled in the past (Geldbach 1989:12). To maintain that the great commission calls for a mission *ad gentes* was 'absurd', as the Lutheran faculty of theology at the Wittenberg university declared in a 'theological opinion' given in 1651 (Scherer 1969:14).

It is in this kind of indifferent climate with respect to mission *ad gentes* that William Carey (1761-1834) wrote a book entitled “*An Enquiry into the obligation of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen* (1792)”. Steven Neill writes about the book:

The title indicates one of the difficulties with which Carey and those like-minded with him had to contend; the hyper-Calvinism of the day had convinced many that the conversion of the heathens would be the Lord's own work in his own time, and that nothing could be done by men to hasten it (Neill 1979:261).

From today's perspective the missionary drive seems to be an essentially Christian trait. But this view was something which had to be rediscovered because the church didn't see herself called to be an agent of a *missio ad gentes*. The Lord's command might have been to bring the gospel to the nations, but at best the church has attended to this command in an intermittent fashion. The church's passion on dogmatic issues between the denominations could be aroused much easier than its missionary zeal. Mission was thought to be fulfilled through the apostles (Sundermeier 1995:15) and therefore, for centuries, was not a central issue for the church.

To discuss this lack of interest in the missionary endeavor might seem a little off the point in our search for the *Missio Dei* concept. But it is important to note the prevalence of a 'church centered mission paradigm' calling for a mission *ad gentes*, which preceded the *Missio Dei* paradigm. A missionary endeavor which set out to convert the 'heathen' and plant churches was not the given. It was especially difficult within Protestant circles to convince mainstream theology that the church was an agent of a *missio ad gentes* due to the call of her Lord. If it were not for people like Francis Xavier (1506-52), Matthew Ricci (1552-1610), Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760), William Carey and many others, the church would not have had a missionary movement which later gave birth to the ecumenical movement. Even though her expansion took place in the shadow of colonialism, with all its horrors, one might wonder what would have become of Christianity if the lack of passion for *a missio ad gentes* had prevailed in the church.

The achievements of the past are the problems of today. This is a characteristic of historical developments. Therefore it might be easy today to level criticism at a 'church centered mission' endeavor. In the following pages we will do this at length, because the *Missio Dei* concept marks a groundbreaking step away from the *missio ad gentes* paradigm of missions.

But it would not do justice to the achievements of the missionary movement prior to *Missio Dei*, if we do not at least note that the often criticized 'church centered mission paradigm' did not come easy to those who initiated the missionary movement.

## 2. *Missio ad gentes* born within colonialism and the *Corpus Christianum* idea

*Missio ad gentes* is an important first step which marks the background from which the development of the *Missio Dei* concept took place, and needs to be understood. Therefore we will now briefly look at this *missio ad gentes* paradigm. Because in order to understand what the *Missio Dei* concept stands for, we need firstly to indicate what it walked away from.

Vasco da Gama (1469-1524) made his famous voyage around Africa between 1497 and 1499 and therefore, at least symbolically, sets the date for the beginning of colonialism marking the expansions of European powers around the globe. The beginning of the missionary movement coincides with the birth of colonialism at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century and both movements would become thoroughly intertwined over the centuries to come.

Pope Alexander VI might be seen as another symbolic figure to indicate how colonialism and the modern missionary movement are intertwined. He is the pope who, in the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), divided the world, newly discovered or not yet touched by the explorers, into Portuguese and Spanish sections. In doing so the Pope did not lack the spirit of future colonizers, like those who divided Africa at the infamous Berlin Conference (1884/85). It was in May 1493 that Alexander VI decreed in a Bull that the Spanish had "to bring to Christian faith the peoples who inhabit these islands and the mainland ... and to send to the said islands and to the mainland, wise, upright, god-fearing, and virtuous men who will be capable of instructing the indigenous peoples in good morals and the Catholic faith" (Neill 1979:141).

The tone is set for the centuries to come. Colonialism became a major force in shaping the earth and with it came the church. Either promoted by the pope, as in the Roman Catholic version, or driven by individuals and mission societies, as in the Protestant version, of the missionary movement. Colonialism provided the shadow in which the missionaries could plant their churches thereby adding spiritual to geographical expansion. As Gustav Warneck wrote in his 'Theology of Missions' (Evangelische Missionslehre) in 1897, which was of

great significance for continental missiology and highly influential for the early missionary movement;

This plantation [of the church] can not happen accidentally and from time to time through the preaching of the Christian truth to single souls, but it requires an orderly process, which leads to the creation, maintenance and organization of a national Christian society, which is the church (Warneck 1897:4).

This thinking derived from the *corpus christianum* idea which was the dominant paradigm of church organization in Europe. With the colonial power expanding their empires around the world, the church needed to follow suit.

The implications of the above mentioned developments for the understanding of *Missio Dei* can be summarized as follows: The beginning of colonialism marked the beginning of the modern missionary movement which rediscovered the *missio ad gentes* but led to a movement deeply entangled with colonialism (Sundermeier 1995:15). This movement aimed to christianize the nations thus enlarging the *corpus christianum* through planting churches (Warneck). It therefore focused around a 'church centered mission paradigm' which provides the conditions, the framework of missiological thinking, within which and against which the *Missio Dei* concept would emerge. The church centered mission paradigm is both the breeding ground or back drop from which *Missio Dei* emerges as well as the antagonist against which *Missio Dei* and its main ideas would be formed.

### 3. Edinburgh 1910 church centered mission at its peak

From Vasco Da Gama and Pope Alexander VI and the forming of a church centered mission paradigm we will now jump centuries ahead in the history of mission towards the first International Missionary Conference at Edinburgh (1910). Edinburgh marks something of a high and turning point of the developments ever since the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It will give us some more clarity about what is called the church centered mission paradigm, which was so dominant throughout centuries of Euro-Christian-expansion.

But before going directly to the Edinburgh conference let's briefly describe the attitudes of missions which set the stage for the conference.

As we have seen, Pope Alexander VI's instructed the conquistadors to make sure that the indigenous people would be taught in the 'good morals and the Catholic faith' thereby setting the tone for centuries to come. It was to become the 'white men's burden'<sup>11</sup> to civilize and christianize the world. A task in which missionary activity played a prominent role since "the fear of the whip and the gun does not suffice to form good servants and citizens" as Alexander Merensky, the German missionary to South Africa, put it. He was convinced that the "indigenous people" had to be "turned into Christian people" because only than "they would become governable for the colonial powers" (Paczensky 1991: 245).

People like Merensky and other involved with the 'christianization and civilization of the heathens' didn't lack in self-confidence. We might be accused of sweeping historical generalizations, but those who pursued the expansion of European hegemony throughout the centuries shared a strong feeling of self-confidence and supremacy. Even though the attitude of supremacy has taken on many different faces, the feeling of superiority continued to remain one of most striking traits of the colonial as well as missionary movement. The outlook and methods changed during the centuries but the attitude of being the 'ones who civilize the heathens' remained. Gerd v. Paczensky, who wrote a chilling book about the atrocities of the missionary movement, fittingly entitled 'Costly Blessing' (Teurer Segen), sums up this mind-set of superiority.

The expansion of Europe was the work of merchants, soldiers and missionaries. The role of the missionaries in this triad was to foster an attitude which whites did tend to have anyhow: The feeling of superiority. To be so tremendously superior, like the merchants due to their economic power, and like the military due to their technology could have made the third part of this triad feel similar superior. But it didn't need this kind of impetus: The Christian confessions don't suffer from inferiority complex, and its missionaries felt superior to all other people (Paczensky 1991:15-16).

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<sup>11</sup> We are using the well known phrase coined by Rudyard Kipling, Britain's imperial poet, in his "The White Man's Burden" (1899). It responded to the American take over of the Philippines after the Spanish-American War. Here in an excerpt of this colonialist poetry (cf. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/Kipling.html>).

Take up the White Man's burden--  
Send forth the best ye breed--  
Go bind your sons to exile  
To serve your captives' need;  
To wait in heavy harness,  
On fluttered folk and wild--  
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,  
Half-devil and half-child.

Take up the White Man's burden--  
In patience to abide,  
To veil the threat of terror  
And check the show of pride;  
By open speech and simple,  
An hundred times made plain  
To seek another's profit,  
And work another's gain.

Take up the White Man's burden--  
The savage wars of peace--  
Fill full the mouth of Famine  
And bid the sickness cease;  
And when your goal is nearest  
The end for others sought,  
Watch sloth and heathen Folly  
Bring all your hopes to nought.

This attitude of cultural, economic, military and religious supremacy was the predominant one, when, for the first time in the history of the missionary movement, a new global pattern of missionary thought arose, which led to the International Missionary Conference at Edinburgh (1910). This Edinburgh conference “was already thinking in truly global terms and was aware of the deeply evil elements in the impact of Western power on the peoples of Asia, Africa, and the Pacific. But the younger churches were only marginally acknowledged, and there was still unshaken confidence in the future of Western civilization as the bearer of the gospel to the “backward peoples” (Newbiggin 1995: 8).

John Mott expressed this attitude of ‘unshaken confidence’ in his closing address to the conference when he said: “The end of the conference is the beginning of the conquest”. (Kinnamon 1997:11). John Mott does have the ‘spiritual conquest of the world’ in mind and does not necessarily want to lend a hand to colonialism. But it is clear to him that this conquest is driven by the Anglo-European nations, the ‘Christian-nations’ as opposed to the ‘non-Christian nations’. It is God himself who has enabled the Anglo-European missionaries to be the subjects of the missionary task, as the conference report of Commission I. dealing with the issue of carrying the gospel to a non-Christian world indicates:

Everything vital to the success of the movement to carry the gospel to all the non-Christian world depends upon the power of God himself. In his hands is the government of the world. He has entrusted enormous powers to Christian nations [read Anglo-European]. His providence has opened the approach to the non-Christian countries, determined the order of their occupation, developed the agencies and influences which facilitate the spread of Christianity (Werner 1993:270).

The 1365 delegates of various Anglo-European missions (Günther 1987:534) who had gathered in Edinburgh, had no doubt about their objective. The ‘weaker nations’, to employ the terminology used in the conference papers, needed to be fully christianized by the ‘stronger nations’ (Werner 1993:270). The delegates were to prepare the “evangelization of the world in one generation” (Thomas 1996:75), to use the well known phrase of John Mott, which simultaneously would also include the civilization of the world. Lesslie Newbiggin sums up the prevailing attitude at Edinburgh and its preparatory conferences held in London and New York:

The early world missionary conferences had no problem of “lost directness.” The conferences held in London in 1888, and in New York in 1900, and in Edinburgh in 1910 did not think it necessary to write a message. Everyone knew what the message was. Edinburgh devoted splendid scholarly resources to exploring the best ways of communicating the message to

people of each of the world's religions. No sharp line was drawn between the Christian message and the civilizing work of missions. It was still possible to speak of Christianity and civilization in one breath (Newbiggin 1994:133).

Edinburgh, for good reasons, has been hailed as the “greatest missionary conference ever held” because it “symbolizes and hastens” (Hogg 1952:139) the beginning of the ecumenical movement. It was “a conference on expansion and extension” (Yates 1996:32) and the participants were convinced to be the promoters of God’s mission, called upon during a decisive moment in history (Günther 1987:334). Again it is John Mott who describes the way in which this mission would be accomplished. He writes on the task of evangelizing:

The evangelization of the world in this generation should not be regarded as an end in itself. The Church will not have fulfilled her task when the Gospel has been preached to all men [and women]. Such evangelization must be followed by the baptism of converts, by their organization into churches, by building them up in knowledge, faith, character (sic!) and by enlisting and training them for service... to this end, of planting and developing in all non-Christian lands self-supporting, self-directing and self-propagating churches (Thomas 1996:75).

It is at this point where Edinburgh becomes important for our topic. The idea expressed in Edinburgh is in essence that mission is church as well as Anglo-European centric. It is the task of the Anglo-European missions to plant churches in the “land of the heathens” in order to expand the *corpus christianum*. The subject of the *missio* is the Western missionary movement, which God has entrusted with the enormous historical task of reaching the nations. Its a movement which originates from an Anglo-European base and its missionaries are the masters of the exercise. The missions carry the burden and bring the gospel to enlighten the converts from Africa, Asia and Latin America. The center of attention, the focus of the endeavor is placed upon the building and forming of churches which would be called the ‘younger churches’. The model or paradigm of mission behind this is not the *Misso Dei* – mission, as the mission of God - concept. The underlying idea behind this way of doing mission is a rather a *missio ecclesiae* – mission, as the mission of the church – concept. Within this paradigm of mission it is the church who is the owner, agent and subject of the *missio* and who is called to that duty by God.

The younger churches, which were represented by only seventeen delegates in Edinburgh (Hogg 1952:135; Latourette 1954:359), were to play their part in the expansion of the church or the *missio ecclesiae*. As the conference documents state while addressing the members of the younger churches.

It is you alone who can ultimately finish this work: the word that under God convinces your own people must be your word; and the life which will win them for Christ must be the life of holiness and moral power, as set forth by you who are men of their own race. But we rejoice to be fellow-helpers with you in the work (Günther 2002:6).

But despite the term 'fellow helpers' the missionary movement at that time is rather bound by the feeling of cultural superiority and displays a self-conscious Anglo-Euro-centric understanding of mission combined with an agenda to civilize the world by planting churches throughout the non-Christian countries. David Bosch has given a harsh assessment of this 'church-centric-understanding' of the missionary task. He writes:

The church had, in a sense, ceased to point to God or to the future; instead, it was pointing to itself. Mission was the road from the institutional church to the church that still had to be instituted. It was an activity of professional agents of organized societies operating on the "horizontal" plane. The relationship of these churches to society and to wider ecumenical and eschatological horizons was largely ignored (Bosch 1991:333).

It is essential for the understanding of the groundbreaking character of the *Missio Dei* concept to acknowledge the origins and the implications of the 'church centered mission' paradigm which was at work ever since Pope Alexander and reached its pinnacle in Edinburgh 1910. To look at Edinburgh's Anglo-European and Church-centric missiological perspective, which was determined to expand the *corpus christianum*, is a prerequisite for the understanding of the background from which the *Missio Dei* concept has emerged.

While the story continues we will see that self-confident attitude displayed at Edinburgh is being shattered eventually leading to the development of the new *Missio Dei* paradigm of mission. But to grasp the depths of this development it is important to appreciate the self-absorbed confidence of the missionary movement being so prevalent throughout an era in which Christianity expanded to a previously unknown extent.

#### 4. From the church to the world – missiological changes

##### 4.1. The end of church centered mission or *missio ecclesiae* (1910-1947)

The thrust of Edinburgh to form an international body representing the missionary movement was hampered through the divisions within the movement itself and through the first world war. However in October 1921 the International Missionary Council was constituted at a meeting held in Lake Mohonk. The beginning of the council was marred by a number of



problems indicating that the post-war reality of the world had caught up with the movement so full of self-confident idealism in 1910. The sixty one representatives who came together to embody the international movement came from only fourteen countries. The Germans didn't attend at all because of ongoing problems deriving from the First World War. "Only seven members of the younger churches were present" (Latourette 1954:367). To unite the Christians for the evangelization of the world proved to be a much more difficult process than anticipated in Edinburgh.

The three major conference of the IMC which followed Edinburgh (1910), are a further indication of this. The IMC organized the conferences at Jerusalem (1928), Tambaram (1938) and Whitby (1947). But due to changing times they don't focus that much on the organization of Christianity for the evangelization the world (Edinburgh's theme and objective). Instead these conferences tried to come to terms with the "end of an era". This is how Walter Freytag has called it in a report about the IMC conference at Whitby 1947. He looks back over the past decades and writes under the heading "The end of an era":

But we haven't understood what really is going on in the world of today. It is a changing world. We are clearly standing on the border line of two eras. In the tremendous shocks of the war the greatest empires have been defeated at times or being thrown to the ground. The political map of the world is changed. A number of countries have gained their independence or they are on the road towards it. But even more important is the collapse of old patterns of thought and tradition. Many ask in the West, if the idea of a 'Christian Western World' [*corpus christianum*] is viable any longer (Freytag 1961:83-85).

The self-confident missionary ethos of the past was to be replaced in an 'orgy of self-criticism' (Warren in Günther 1987:536) and searching scrutiny. As Yates has said:

It should come to no surprise that, in the two decades which followed the First World War, missionary work, along with many other aspects of Western life and culture, should have been subjected to extreme and searching scrutiny" (Yates 1996:57).

It is difficult to describe this "searching scrutiny" of the period in detail but for us it should be sufficient to focus on our main issue, the gradual transformation of an understanding of the missionary task from a church centered mission to a mission centered church participating in the *Missio Dei*.

#### 4.2. Towards a global understanding of a 'church centered mission'

The IMC conference at Jerusalem 1928 was an important step to overcome the self-confident and exclusive attitude of the West. Issues such as religious education, missions and race conflict, mission and industrialism, mission and rural problems (Latourette 1954:368) as well as missions and non-Christian systems (Yates 1996: 67) were among the focal points of the conference, which called for a “comprehensive approach” to missions (Bosch 1991:356). For the developments we are trying to trace it is important to note that “one of the prominent issues at Jerusalem was the relationship of younger and older Churches” (Latourette 1954:369). Even though “the subdivision of the world into two large geographical areas – the one Christian, the other “non-Christian” – remained unchallenged (Bosch 1991:369) it was an important step for the development of the *Missio Dei* idea that the whole volume III of the conference report, 342 pages long, is dedicated to the relationship between the ‘older and younger churches’.

One of the reasons for this prominence was that 50 of the 250 delegates in Jerusalem came from ‘younger churches’ (Yates 1996:66, contrary to Günther 1987:534 who mentions 231 delegates of which 70 come from younger churches). They were determined to drive home their understanding of a new relationship between the ‘older churches’ and the ‘younger ones’. S.C Leung, a leading figure in the Church of Christ in China, emphasized this point. His suggestions are published in the preliminary papers of the Jerusalem conference and included in volume III of the conference report. He wrote:

It seems to me that the time has now come when the missions and the missionaries might well consider the question of reorganizing themselves...so that the missions and the Chinese Church will hereafter not appear as two parallel organizations and that all activities, initiated, maintained and financed by the missions should be expressed only through the Chinese Church (Jerusalem 1928, Vol. 3:12).

Leung’s statement indicated progress on the road toward a truly ecumenical understanding of mission. It was acknowledged by the statement of the IMC at Jerusalem who thankfully recognized that “the missionary movement of the older churches has resulted in the development throughout the world of bodies of believers in Christ” (Jerusalem 1928, Vol.3:207).

What happen is that the old missionary paradigm of mission as church centered mission, did not remain within the realm of Anglo-European churches and mission organizations which had been its strongest proponents. Even the so called younger churches, which were the

results of the early missionary movement, adopted a church centered mission paradigm. Despite the fact that missiology began to understand the missionary task within a more inclusive ecumenical perspective which involved the so called younger churches the overall missiological thinking remained bound to a church centric concept. Except for the fact that the missions as the subject of missionary activity were now to be replaced by the indigenous churches little changed. As the Jerusalem statement on “The relations between the younger and the older Churches” stresses.

There is possible now a true partnership enabling the older churches in an ever-increasing degree to work with, through or in the younger. This 'church-centric' conception of foreign mission makes it necessary to revise the functions of the 'missions'... so that the indigenous church will become the center from which the whole missionary enterprise of the area will be directed (Jerusalem 1928, Vol.3:209).

Still, the missionary task is located within the church who is its driving force. It is the church who is expanding Christianity, even though it is now being understood that this church is of a world-wide, global character. As John Mott said in his opening address “the time has come” that “the older and the younger churches come increasingly to recognize and realize their essential unity and interdependence” (Jerusalem 1928, Vol.8:27). The *missio ad gentes* slowly became a *missio in gentes*, but the role of church remains the same. Mission is a *missio ecclesiae* not *Missio Dei* centering around the church's *missio* not around God's *missio*.

the “central fact” that “the world mission of Christianity has become church-centric” (Jerusalem 1928, Vol.3:165) was viewed in Jerusalem as a major breakthrough. Because it internationalized, if not to say globalized, the missionary endeavor, and made a foreign based mission increasingly insignificant, because the ‘indigenous church’, as it was called than, was to become the bearer of the missionary task.

There were a few voices who looked beyond this church centric view. Such as Dr. Cheng Ching-Yi who stressed that the indigenous church was not an end in itself. “The church’ he said in Jerusalem, “does not exist for the sake of being indigenous. When you have solved the problem of making the Christian Church indigenous... you have not solved the main problem of the Church, which exists for the worshipping of God, for Christian fellowship, for training its members in spiritual and daily life, for active service, for the good of their fellow-man and for the propagation of the Christian message of love” (Jerusalem 1928, Vol.3:165).

Dr. Cheng Ching-Yi was ahead of his time. It was too early to address this “main problem of the church” in Jerusalem. The issue at hand was to realize that younger and older churches belonged together as ‘partners in obedience’, to use the term coined in Whitby 1947. Jerusalem’s achievement was to note that the relationship between the ‘younger and the older churches’ was to be a question of vital importance for the missionary movement, if not a question of survival (Günther 1987:535).

#### 4.3. The global Church as carrier of the missionary task

As pointed out, the fact that the relationship between the younger and the older churches was becoming more clearly defined did little to overcome the overall ‘church centric’ approach to a theology of missions. The next IMC conference held after Jerusalem (1928) in Tamparam (1938), shows that even after acknowledging the “interdependence of younger and older churches” (Mott), progress in respect to a mission centered church was minimal. The titles of the volumes of conference reports indicate that Tamparam concentrated on the church, its growth (II), its life (III), its economic basis (V), its relationship to the state (VI) (Yeats 1996:120). As John Mott said in his opening address:

Surely we recognize no limitation as we think of our central objective.... That we, trusted representatives of the older and younger churches of the world, should arrive at a common mind, as to God’s will concerning the next steps in the realm of attainment and achievement which should be taken by us and our constituencies in the years right before us for the building up of the Church and for spreading the Christian religion. Notice it is the Church which is to be at the center of our thinking and resolving these creative days – the Divine Society founded by Christ and His apostles to accomplish his will in the world (IMC 1939, vol.1:4).

Tamparam clearly used the church as the starting point for its theology of missions. It therefore “missed the way”, as E.Stanley Jones remarked, because it did not start from the kingdom of God (Bosch 1991: 370). But nonetheless Tamparam was of great importance to the missionary movement. “During the dark days of war, [Tamparam] was the beacon light that gave Christians everywhere the assurance that Christendom is now a family that truly encircles the globe” (Newbigin 1994:134). For the first time the conference truly represented the global church, with delegates from the ‘younger churches’ exceeding in number those from the ‘older’ (Latourette:369).

Furthermore the relationships of church and mission as well as older and younger churches were addressed in a more theological manner” than in Jerusalem (1928). The distinction between Christian and non-Christian countries was abandoned. North America and especially Europe, with fascism and communism on the rise, were not any longer regarded as Christian countries but looked upon as ‘mission fields’ (Bosch 1991:370). Finally the debate on the relationship between Christianity and non Christian religions received unprecedented theological attention through Hendrik Kraemer’s book “*The Christian Message in a non Christian world*” which was quite controversial but opened up a discussion which would continue for decades.

However in respect to the emergent *Missio Dei* concept Tamaram continued to remain in a church centered frame of mind. If Tamaram meant any progress for the development of the *Missio Dei* concept than it would be the acknowledgement that the century old era of a *missio ad gentes*, where mission is an enterprise of the Anglo-European church to save the non-Christian nations, had come to an end. Instead an understanding of mission as *missio in gentes*, at least on a theoretical conference level, was born. The church was now one global, ecumenical family. But as such it was still bound by expansionary thinking equating the missionary task with the extension of the church. The “main objective” was to work for the “building up of the Church” and for the “spreading the Christian religion” (John Mott).

#### 4.4. Evangelism redefined as witness to Christ’s Lordship in a broken world

It was just after Tamaram that the church, this global family as it had begun to see herself, was thrown into the challenges associated with the Second World War. It was a time which should prove how strong the ties, which held the family together, were.

The first post-war meeting of the the enlarged IMC at Whitby 1947 showed that the unity, found prior to the war, had indeed endured the trials of the years past. Wolfgang Günther, a German missiologist, who within German speaking missiology, wrote the authoritative book about the history of the conferences of the IMC and CWME from Edinburgh to Mexico City, compared the conference to the experience of Pentecost. He writes that the Whitby conference claimed:

...that the spiritual unity, which bonds us in the Body of Christ, never has been broken during the wars. The repeated experience of this unity, in a Pentecostal like atmosphere, and in contrast to a world in upheaval, led to a historical declaration on the supra-national task of mission. It is in particular the experience of the Holy Spirit and the assumption that the next ten years will be the most decisive for the mission of the world, summed up in the term 'expectant evangelism', which makes the conference similar in sentiment to the one in Edinburgh 1910. But its call for evangelism is also a call for a truly missionary church (Günther 1987:536).

This 'Pentecostal like conference experience' mentioned by Günther renews the hope that God will continue his miracles (Günther 1970:69; Günter 2002:13) and recalls the church to its primary task – evangelism. "In a world broken by one war and threatened by another Whitby declared that under God the task was one of 'expectant evangelism'" (Hogg 1952:339).

In respect to the embryonic *Missio Dei* concept we can note that the significance of placing the focus on evangelism as the heart and core of the missionary movement was an important step forward. Evangelization was a focus ever since Edinburgh but there it was understood as a mere expansion of the church or *corpus christianum*. In a remarkable way Whitby moved beyond the expansionary concept of a *missio ad gentes* by intensifying the call for a *missio in gentes* and defining more clearly what this mission, focusing on evangelization, would entail.

Firstly Whitby cemented the unity between older and younger churches by coining the phrase of 'partnership in obedience'. This partnership was defined as the obedience of the younger and older churches to the evangelistic task of the church. , this definition of partnership rendered the distinction between older and younger churches practically obsolete (Günther 1970:70).

Secondly important progress was made in widening the scope of the traditional understanding of evangelism. Evangelism was to include more than calling people to Christ and preparing them for the heavenly reality to come. Evangelism was rather the proclamation of the kingship of Christ over all the earth. Guided by a strong christological focus the conference discovered the realm of history, of real life as the realm of the kingdom. As the declaration of the conference says: "The Bible testifies that God does not reveal himself in ideas and postulates, but in history, in events, in a person. 'The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us'" (quoted in Werner 1993:62).

William Richey Hogg has captured this new understanding of evangelism focused on building the kingdom and driven by a strongly Christocentric awareness. He writes:

Whitby emphasized the Lordship of Christ over all life. Likewise, it insisted, the real work of evangelism in the world must be done by laymen convinced that with the aid of the Holy Spirit such a task is one they can fulfill. It further asserted that the renewal of the church's life could only come by a return to the Bible's message and to the Lord of the Bible, with the local congregation the "dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, and the spearhead of evangelism." One dare not interpret this as retreat from the world, for Whitby saw that the church had to revive concern for and give leadership in the "true social revolution." Moreover, unless the church could make clear in its own life that *the kingdom of God made real in Christ is far more satisfying than the kingdom of man devoutly believed in and proclaimed by the Communists*" (Hogg1952:340; italics mine to indicate a quote taken from the official Whitby report).

"Suffused with postwar optimism and spoke of great evangelistic advance" (Newbigin 1994:134) Whitby realized that its theme "Christian Witness in a Revolutionary World" (Hogg1952:336) called the church for a revolutionary new approach to evangelism. This new approach towards the missionary task should become clearer in the years which followed Whitby. But for now the task ahead was sketched out as follows:

The church had to re-discover the relevance of the gospel for a broken world and become evangelistic in a holistic sense - being a witness of the gospel in a broken world - (Hogg 1952:337). The emphasize was no longer on the expansion and winning over of the world but on the;

total evangelistic task which in our days includes the proclamation of the Gospel to those who have never heard it, the conversion of nominal church members, the recovery of those vast areas in the lands of the older churches which have fallen away from the Church, and the Christianization of those parts of man's life which have not yet acknowledged the lordship of Christ (Scherer 1987:95; quoting from the Whitby report).

With statements like this Whitby pointed to a totally new understanding of the missionary task as evangelizing the whole world and proclaiming the Lordship of Christ. Still the new concept of mission, which in Whitby was primarily seen as a new understanding of the evangelistic task, needed a lot of theological fine-tuning which would happen in the years to come. But a fundamental change in missiological thinking had begun. A change was initiated which would eventually give birth to a new paradigm in the theology of missions, called *Missio Dei*. How this birth took place will be our concern in the following part of this chapter.

## C. *Missio Dei* – the birth of a new paradigm of missionary thinking

### 1. Karl Barth or the beginning of the end of church centred mission

It would be rather hard to trace the birth of the *Missio Dei* concept as a new paradigm of missionary activity without acknowledging that it is part of a general paradigm shift within theology. This shift was marked by the end of liberal theology, which had itself discredited during the developments surrounding the First World war. Karl Barth (1886-1968) stands out as the theologian who brought about the change from the liberal to the dialectical theological paradigm, to which Anglophone theology rather imprecisely refers to as 'neoorthodoxy'. Hans Küng writes about the paradigm shift:

It was the Swiss theologian, and future German professor, Karl Barth, who, during the broad political, economical, cultural and intellectual crisis in the aftermath of the devastation of the First World War ... helped to bring about a new paradigm of theology. Barth's 'theology of crisis' later called 'dialectic theology'; called, in view of the collapse of society and culture for a paradigm shift: away from subjective experience and religious feelings, to the bible; away from history, to the revelation of God; away from religious speeches about concepts of God, to the proclamation of the word of God (Küng 1987:229).

Even though it is tempting to go into details of this paradigm shift within the realm of theology it must suffice to focus here on the question how Barth's proposed paradigm shift affected the understanding of mission and especially contributed to the emergence of *Missio Dei*.

In a paper read at the Brandenburg Missionary Conference in 1932, Karl Barth became one of the first theologians to describe mission as an activity of God himself (Bosch 1991:389).

There Barth said in his rather elaborate style:

Whereas the church in general cannot and does not exist as the true Church, whereby pious, honest, and eager human beings have a church and want to be the Church, but always and everywhere God in his own free omnipotence and mercy wants to have a Church, so is this not a matter of human goodwill and reparations, but a matter of divine purpose and confirmation, when mission and theology are what they intend to be. If they are what they intend to be, namely the works of faith, then they are built upon the solid rock of God's election, who speaks his word in his time, and whose spirit blows, wherever he wills. What they are in by themselves cannot keep the best mission, the best theology, from the possibility that they are in reality forsaken by God. ... The honor of their success is not their own, but always God's (Thomas 1996: 104-105).

In this rather lengthy statement Barth points to a new justification of the missionary endeavor. In the past the justification for mission was 'church centered', since God had given



the task of the spiritual conquest of the world to the church (cf. John Mott's "the conference ends, the conquest begins", at Edinburgh 1910). But what emerged now was that mission was actually God's task. The missionary task needed to be seen as initiated in God's *missio* of the sending of the Son, sent for the 'reconciliation of the world'. As Barth told the Brandenburg Missionary Conference:

Must not even the most faithful missionary, the most convinced friend of missions, have reason to reflect that the term *missio* was in the ancient Church an expression of the doctrine of the Trinity – namely the expression of the divine sending forth of the self, the sending of the Son and the Holy spirit to the world? Can we indeed claim that we can do it any other way (Thomas 1996:105-106).

Barth locates the justification of the missionary task neither in the need of the 'heathens' to be "enlightened" with the gospel nor with the need of the Christian to share their message with the world. He rather locates the missionary task within the *missio* of the Son himself. He says:

Are not all motivations of mission, as they have been stated in the past and as they are presented today, mere representations of a motive which one can neither describe nor assume, because it is identical with the current will and order of one person, namely the divine person, the Lord of the Church – a will and an order that does not conform to any system made up of human understanding, points of view, or reasons, even if these were made by the most "enlightened" Christians (Thomas 1996:105).

In other words, the missionary task is no longer the initiative of the church but originates from the will of God the Father. It is an attribute of the saving character of God who in his Son's *missio* did reconcile the world to himself (cf. Barth's Church Dogmatic vol.IV,2).

The subject of mission is God himself, not pious Christians driving the expansion of the church. Mission is not devout propaganda. Karl Hartenstein a "considerable figure in German missionary circles" (Yates 1996:105) has made this clear in his lecture 'What has the Theology of Karl Barth to Say to Mission? (1928). Mission according to Hartenstein is:

proclamation of the gospel that God became flesh. ... It is a personal address directed to the human ear. Which implies that not human beings, not even born again, devout missionaries, but only God can start the dialogue (Hartenstein 1928:9).

Hartenstein understood that Barth located mission right at the center of the Christian message. Until then the missionary task was a matter at the theological periphery, something a few devout Christians might or might not do. But Barth essentially associated mission with the reconciling sending of the Son through the Father - the core theme of Christian theology.

This repositioning of mission within the sending of the Son through the Father makes mission “inseparable from theology at all cost” as Barth would say (Thomas 1996:105). Because both, theology as well as mission listen to the “Word of God; which God has, or still will say in midst of the people, whether it may be understood or not” (Barth 1980:21). Mission and theology therefore share the same task. They both attempt to respond to the Word of God which became flesh in the *missio* of the Son to reconcile the world with the Father.

The classical missionary movement, the mission societies, and the missionaries, find themselves in a new role. The *missio in gentes* is no longer a mission of the church (*missio ecclesiae*) but it is God’s mission (*Missio Dei*). Mission originated in and from the Father who has sent the Son. The missionary movement now participates in God’s *missio*, which is constituted in the will of the Father. Within this *missio* the missionary movement is commissioned to be a witness of the word of God to the world, a pointer to God, who is the subject of his *missio*. As Barth says about the missionary task of the church which is “to go with, explain and enlighten“ (Church Dogmatic IV,435) the nations about the sending of the Son through the Father. Mission is going with, if not to say, keeping up with, God’s pace, in reconciling the world with himself.

## 2. Johannes C. Hoekendijk - the total critic of church centered mission

Barth’s theology marks the beginning of the end to a church centric missionary paradigm, which had been implicitly or explicitly the dominant *leitmotiv* of the missionary movement for centuries. But it was Johannes Christian Hoekendijk (1912-1975) who supplied a detailed criticism which would eventually tear down the church centric mission paradigm.

“Hoekendijk was one of the first to combine the analysis of the traditional understanding of mission with a strong awareness of the secular context [of mission] and a new approach towards the missionary task” (Werner:1993:63). As a protégé of Hendrik Kraemer and secretary for evangelism of the WCC (1949-1952) he was perfectly positioned to influence the missiological discussion and promote his views on ecclesiology and evangelization (Thomas 1996:124).

Hoekendijk contributed three major themes towards the new understanding of mission. Firstly he emphasized that evangelization should not be understood in the expansionist attitude of the past aiming to extended the *corpus christianum*. Secondly he opposed the idea of *Volkschristianisierung*, which at least in continental missiology, influenced by Warneck's missiology of church planting, was predominant. And thirdly he lined out an eschatological-messianic understanding of mission with God's shalom as the central concept (Werner:1993:63).

Traditional missiological thinking still believed that there is a cultural relationship between the world and Christianity, which could be utilized to evangelize the *Volk* (nation). Because, as Hoekendijk says, "the assumption of nearly all existing evangelistic work is, that people assume it takes place in a Christian world" (Hoekendijk 1953:391). But Hoekendijk called for a new understanding of evangelization through which the post-Christian church realizes the radical, secular context in which it operates. The church had to realize that the emergence of a secular world called for an end to the idea of a Christian world and culture (Hoekendijk1953:137). Within this new, secular context evangelization does not mean calling on people to remember the Christianity which, even latent, is prevalent in society. It also does not refer to a revivalist awakening to Christ. The knowledge of Christ, which one might claim to find within secular society, according to Hoekendijk, has the quality of a caricature, it is misrepresenting the true reality of Christ. Therefore evangelization in a secular, post-Christian context "will lose all similarities with a revivalist awakening but will take on the form of missionary work" (Hoekendijk 1953:137).

Closely related to the call for an end to the understanding of evangelization within the *corpus christianum* frame of mind is the call for an end of an ethnocentric concept of mission (*Volkschristianisierung*). He writes:

If the Church remains in the unfruitful and self-deceiving attitude of still addressing the *Volk* (nation) with its message, than she is just speaking to nobody else but the middle class, for which the term *Volk* (nation) still defines a specific social arena. But the Church will miss other groups, since the peasants, the working class or the intellectuals live in a totally different social arena than that arena of the *Volk* (nation). The concept of *Volkschristianisierung* necessarily must remain middle class (quoted in Werner 1993:64).

Hoekendijk argues that the nation or the '*Volk*' is not the 'mission field', but "the world as history is God's 'mission field'" (Thomas 1996:125). Therefore the challenge is not to plant

national churches (*Volkskirche*) but to be church for the world. Because a mission which concentrates on *Volkschristianisierung* is basically provincial, and not church for the world (Werner 1993:65).

For Hoekendijk the world is the horizon of mission and the church does not carry on mission but it is mission, as long as it is used by God, and allows itself to be used by him, to serve through the proclamation of the kingdom within the *oikoumene* (Thomas 1996:125). Passionately he laments the church centric view of mission and writes in 1951:

The missionary does not get out of the sphere of the church. For him can be said: '*extra ecclesiam nulla vita*' (there is no life outside the church). The world has ceased to be world and has become the doorway for the church. The kingdom is either detained in ecclesiological terminology or remains a light at the eschatological horizon with peripheral relevance (Werner 1993:65).

In contrast he formulates what is called a 'theology of the apostolate'. This apostolate derives from God who calls the Church to be a missionary Church. This church:

...can be authenticated only as the church of this "sending" God, when she really lets herself be used in the *Missio Dei*. Her apostolicity (in teaching and in church order) must prove itself in the apostolate. *Missio Dei* is the compelling summary of the good news, that God... wills to be a God-for-others. The Church, which is agreeable to this God, takes place where she becomes the church-for-others (Thomas 1996:125-126).

Hoekendijk's theology of the apostolate sees the church participate in the missionary activity of God. It is God who realizes the eschatological sending of Christ incarnate in relation to the world by using the church, which needs to be church for others. The term apostolate describes the realization of the God-for-others in the world. This means for the church that she participates in the apostolate by being witness of the kingdom in the world. It is not only the church who participates in this apostolate. If she participates in the apostolate she is, by the very nature of her participation, an "ec-centric and centrifugal" (Hoedemaker 1978 in Bevans 2002:1) church - a Church-for-others.

The apostolate unfolds in the world, not in the church. The apostolate brings with it the signs of the kingdom the shalom - . Those signs are realized in *kerygma* (proclamation of shalom), *koinonia* (corporate participation in shalom)" (Hoekendijk 1951:10; Werner 1993:65) and *diakonia* (acts of love in shalom) (Bosch 1991:511). The churches apostolate is defined in those terms. Which means if the church lives out what God's apostolate calls for, she

participates in God's *missio*. In other words, the church's apostolate is defined as participation in the *Missio Dei*. Hoekendijk describes it as follows:

In my opinion, the *Missio Dei* is about what I shall call "Shalom-ization" of the whole life; that is, about a judging and hope-bringing intervention in the course of things, through which it becomes possible that people may again be people (without "persona," that is, mask; "God does not look at this persona") and things may again be things (and no longer idols or material objects). In the horizon of creation, shalom is the promise of life; in the horizon of history, a new creation of justice is announced (in all the spectrum of variations of Ps. 85:8-13); and where this happens, a messianic horizon is opened around us, which frees to us the view of the kingdom of God. To shalom-atize means then to be busy with life and to be engaged with life in such a manner that, with dirty hands ... three horizons of hope (life, justice and the kingdom of God) will be established. I would like to call it the "messianic way of life," with the characteristics of the interwovenness of impatience ("he cannot delay too much longer") and patience ("but he will come"). When we look for a model, we must heed to the servant of God of Deutero-Isaiah and of Philipians 2:5-11. For years this model of life and also of mission has been summarized in five key words: Chosen (for) – Service – Witness – Self-identification – Suffering. And all of this stands in the hopeful perspective of Shalom.

Seen in this way, *Missio Dei* can now be described, in accordance to its content, as the entirety of God's action which is focused upon the sharing of the messianic way of life with people, so that, in the perspective of Shalom, the horizons of hope are opened up for all (Thomas 1996:126-127).

This condensed text gives most of the key-words, which would dominate the discussion on the "What" and "How" of the missionary movement for decades after the Second World War. Hoekendijk anticipates the unfolding of the *Missio Dei* concept within a messianic prospect where people are people, where creation is creation, where justice reigns and the kingdom of God becomes visible to the people.

Within our context we need to note that there is no mention of the experience of the Spirit within this messianic concept of God bringing about his Shalom. Hoekendijk understanding of *Missio Dei* seems to center around God's actions, who, through the sending of the Son initiated the coming of the kingdom and allows a foretaste of God messianic reign. It seems to be rather a Christocentric understanding of *Missio Dei*. Hoekendijk does not really note that, according to biblical testimony, the Spirit is closely related to that messianic reign he talks about. Therefore the 'Shalom-ization' of the world has a pneumatological dimension. The *mashiyach* or messiah for example, who bring about the eschatological reign of God, is anointed with the *ruwach* of God (Isaiah 11:1). Even the *ebed Jahwe*, the servant of God, who for Hoekendijk represents the model of a 'messianic life', is anointed with the *ruwach* of God (Isaiah 42:1).

Despite this lack of interest in pneumatology we need to acknowledge that, after Barth's initial criticism, it is Hoekendijk who put forward a strong case against the old church centric paradigm of mission. His understanding of *Missio Dei* as 'Shalom-ization' did influence the development of the of *Missio Dei* concept to an extent which can not be underestimated. Many of his thoughts will reemerge as we now turn to the land mark conference of the IMC at Willingen Germany in 1952.

### 3. Willingen 1952 – the preparatory process for the birth of '*Missio Dei*'

David Bosch wrote about the significance of the Willingen conference (1952) of the IMC:

Since Willingen, the understanding of mission as *Missio Dei* has been embraced by virtually all Christian persuasions – first by conciliar Protestantism, but subsequently also by other ecclesial groupings, such as the Eastern Orthodox and many evangelicals. It was also endorsed in Catholic mission theology, notably in some of the documents of the second Vatican council (Bosch 1991:391).

Indeed for our search of the *Missio Dei* concept Willingen will prove to be of major importance. It is here that a body like the IMC, for the first time, spells out, how *Missio Dei* is supposed to be understood. While Barth and Hoekendijk as individuals, even though of great standing, did put their ideas forward, it is now the voice of the ecumenical/missionary movement which reformulates the foundations for a new missiological paradigm.

The purpose of our study of Willingen cannot be to give an account of the whole conference which has been presented by others already (Goodall 1953; Günther 1970:77-114). We want to do justice to the Willingen conference with respect to our search for a *Missio Dei* concept. Therefore we will deal with the preparations which preceded the proceedings at Willingen and the dealings at the conference itself as far as they are relevant for the understanding of *Missio Dei*. We will also see, that even though questions of Christology and Ecclesiology dominated Willingen, the question of the Spirit as the experiential side of God's missio, presents itself in an embryonic form at the conference.

### 3.1. Willingen – a theological response to the new context of mission

Max Warren (1904-1977), the general secretary of the Church Missionary Society (1942-1963), and leading figure in ecumenical missiology after John Mott's generation (Yates 1996:137-43), told the Willingen conference:

We have to be ready to see the day of missions, as we have known them, as having already come to an end (Newbigin 1970:178).

His statement is reminiscent of the central line of questioning which had led to the calling of the conference. Initially, at the Whitby conference 1947, the task of a future conference was described as "to restate the universal missionary obligation of the Church as grounded in the gospel, and in relation to the present historical situation" (Günther 1970:76). But within the five years running up to Willingen the question became much more fundamental. A profound rethinking of the missionary obligations of the Church and new theology of missions was urgently needed (Newbigin 1970:178). The reason for this more fundamental inquiry into the missionary obligation of the church lays in the total shake up of the world wide context of missionary work in the aftermath of the Second World War.

With respect to the political world order nothing had remained the same. The age of colonialism had definitely come to an end (Freitag 1952:31). The partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 pointed to a new sense of independence in the former colonies which even saw the "Indian Muslims to follow through with the theocratic logic of their faith in creation of a separate Islamic state in Pakistan" (Yates 1996:135). In "Russia communism had established itself with one third of the world population under the influence of Moscow and China had been closed for missionary work by the new communist rulers" (Freitag 1952:32). Furthermore the war in Japan was brought to an end by wiping out the two Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki through the first ever use of nuclear bombs in a military confrontation. This had, for the first time in history, put the possibility of self-annihilation before humanity.

Within this historical context, never seen before, the missionary movement was challenged to theologically answer the question "Why mission?" (Günther 1970:76). And indeed, the

process which led up to the conference was dominated by a sincere theological discourse. The missionary movement had accepted the theological challenge of modernity. It had begun to question its own revivalist roots and work on the questions modern theology had put before it. This endangered its common heritage of being a movement born through the revivalist awakening (Günther 1970:105).

Karl Barth's dictum that "mission and theology will have to be inseparable" (Thomas 1996:105) became reality. Willingen understood the need for the inseparability of theology and mission if it wanted to be a relevant voice in the modern context of the world. Therefore the conference tried to formulate nothing less than a theology of missions (Newbigin 1970:178). This theology of missions is influenced by six different theological streams of discussion. They were all formulated during the preparatory process which led up to the Willingen conference and became a genuine part of section I of the conference charged to formulate a theological statement on the 'missionary obligation of the church'. All these streams of theological thought, even though sometimes opposing each other, had significant influence in the run up to the conference and dominated the conference itself (Günther 1970:77-105).

### 3.2. Different theological streams in the preparation for Willingen

In order to indicate the wide spectrum of the discussion which had to be accommodated within the *Missio Dei* concept we need now to sketch the six above mentioned theological streams of thought which emerged in preparation to Willingen 1952. They are the theological background from which to understand the *Missio Dei* concept. Furthermore it will make the understanding of Willingen itself much easier if we note what kind of ideas guided those who eventually helped to let the idea of *Missio Dei* surface (Bosch 1996:390).

The first theological stream is represented by John A Mackay (1889-1983). Mackay, born in Scotland, and missionary to Latin America (1916-1932), was president of the Princeton Theological Seminary when he took over as the head of the IMC in Whitby 1947 (Yates 1996:134). As chairperson he personifies the thematic continuity between Tambaram, Whitby and Willingen and stressed the theme of 'mission as obligation of the church'. Influenced by Barth Mackay held that it is never enough if the church brings forth missions but needs to become mission herself. The task of Willingen was to define a theology which would draw the church into being mission (Günther 1970:77-79). However he did not go



beyond a church centric view of mission. His call to the church was to be mission minded, because for Mackay the true Church must be “a missionary as well as worshipping Church” (Günther 1970:77).

The second stream was much more radical in its view of the church and highly influenced by Karl Barth. It is especially Hoekendijk’s ‘theology of the apostolate’ which represents this stream and which we have discussed in detail already. Hoekendijk does not understand the church as the proponent of the apostolate but sees church integrated into the apostolate which originates from, and goes forth through the will of the triune God.

A third stream is represented by the Dutch delegation dominated by the question: How does the kingdom of God and history belong together? In the kingdom theology of the Dutch delegation (later called ‘*Verheißungsgeschichtliches*’ model of mission; see Sundermeier 1987:476-477) history is understood as the space in time where the presence of Christ, the kingdom, is realized. Mission is therefore not preaching an eschatological kingdom for a time to come, but the realization of God’s kingdom which begins in the here and now (Günther 1970:84-88).

The fourth group of missiological thought, influential for the Willingen conference, is the continental, if not to say German, one. The Germans didn’t focus on a kingdom theology like the Dutch but stressed the eschatological quality of mission, later on called ‘*Heilsgeschichtliches*’ model of mission, (see Sundermeier 1987:476-478). Karl Hartenstein, for instance, inspired by the theology of Oskar Cullmann, holds that history, the time in which we live, is the ‘interim-time’, between the ascension of Christ and his return. This ‘interim’, between Christ leaving the church on earth and his eschatological return, is characterized by two things. Firstly the fact that Christ has, through his death and resurrection, established his Lordship over the earth. But it is a Lordship which is still hidden ‘until he comes’. Secondly it is the duty of the church to be the witness of Christ’s hidden Lordship in her time, which is the time of the ‘interim’ (Günther 1970:88-96). Within this ‘interim’ the church plays a central role, since Christ’s lordship becomes truly visible in and through the church. Like Hartenstein said already in 1928: “the purpose of the church is to give God honor and glory in this world” (Hartenstein 1928:24). It is, in and through the Church that ‘honor and glory’ can and must be given, because the world does not know about

God. The Church is the representative of the hidden Christ in a secular world, waiting for the kingdom to come as an eschatological reality.

Fth(59)

Next to the 'continental -German- group' the Anglican group, a "very considerable minority" (Günther 1970:96), contributed to the Willingen conference. Here we especially need to mention F.W.Dillistone's contribution "*The dispensation of the Spirit*". Dillistone speaks of the "work of the Holy Spirit in communicating and in creating community" (Philip1999)<sup>12</sup>. He called for a new concentration on the Spirit as the life giving power of God and asked the conference to rediscover "its full Trinitarian heritage in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit" (Goodall 1953:82). According to him:

The gospel cannot be preserved in amber; it must be communicated in the power of the Holy Spirit. Again through the Spirit the community is being built up. The church is the community of the Spirit and the Spirit enables the church to become increasingly conformed to the pattern of the Son whose Body the Church is and whose representative it is in the world (Philip1999)<sup>13</sup>.

This brief statement can only touch on Dillistone's understanding of church as the 'community of the Spirit'. But as we go on we will see to what extent his position was integrated in the conference results and became fruitful for the *Missio Dei* concept.

For now we note that Dillistone's understanding of the Spirit gives a new identity to the church and its mission. "The Spirit marks the church as a new humanity in which, through the integrating and transcending power of the spirit, God's perfect love becomes the integrating principle of the church" (Goodall 1953:85-91). "The church demonstrates, in a broken world, the incarnated Christ and the truth of the gospel, driven by the innate principle that she lives out the love of God through the power of the Spirit" (Günther 1970:97).

Sivth(6°)

Now we turn to what Günther labels the 'American contribution to the conference' (Günther 1970:99-105). The part played by the Americans becomes evident in a 35 page long preparatory document, prepared by the respective American "National Council of Churches of Christ", entitled "Why Mission?" The report stresses three areas of concern, which all found their way into the final documents of Willingness defining *Missio Dei* (Günther 1970:100).

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<sup>12</sup> Internet Reference [www.religiononline.org/cgi-bin/researchd.dll/showchapter?chapter\\_id=1520](http://www.religiononline.org/cgi-bin/researchd.dll/showchapter?chapter_id=1520).

<sup>13</sup> Internet Reference [www.religiononline.org/cgi-bin/researchd.dll/showchapter?chapter\\_id=1520](http://www.religiononline.org/cgi-bin/researchd.dll/showchapter?chapter_id=1520)

Firstly, mission is clearly located in the saving works of the Trinity, or “the outgoing activity of God, whereby, as Creator, Redeemer, Governor, and Guide, God establishes and includes the world and men within his fulfilling purposes and fellowship” (ThT 1952:20).

Secondly the report understands mission as a response to God’s act of salvation. “The missionary motive, therefore, is not obligation to something (Bible, Gospel, Church or present situation) but response to someone... not a deduction but a reflex of faith” (Günther 1970:103).

Thirdly, this definition of mission, as ‘response to someone’, is realized in the corporate witness of the congregation. The American report uses the early Christian congregations as a model to illustrate this point. Because it is there that

...the total corporate life of the congregation became a sign of the transformation of the world. Furthermore each witness and each congregation becomes a part of the Gospel, an event linked into that chain of events through which a gracious Lord is reconciling the world to himself (ThT 1952:28).

### 3.3. The role of the ‘younger churches’ in the preparation of Willingen

Finally we have to note that the representatives of the ‘younger churches’ did not present any official preparatory material for the Willingen conference (Günther 1970:104). This does not mean that their influence was not of significance (cf. Freytag 1952:73-100). They repeatedly demanded a full integration of mission and church (Goodall 1953:233-35) or as Freytag calls it “the younger churches explicitly declared that they wanted to do the missionary task jointly with the missionaries of the older churches” (Freytag 1952: 76). This call for “partnership in decision making” (Goodall 1953:219-220) speeded up the process towards a mission centered ecclesiology (Goodall 1953:93), which would become the characteristic of *Missio Dei*.

Gerhard Brennecke, a German delegate, says quite clearly that, the “younger churches did give important input at the conference, but certainly not in the way that the theological leadership was coming from the brother’s of the younger Churches” (Freytag 1952:73). The specific “defect of the ecumenical movement,” using Newbigin’s terminology, “to be born among the churches that share the culture that has developed in Western Europe and North

America” (Newbigin 1994:151) is quite visible at Willingen. This impression is confirmed by Günther’s study on the Willingen conference. We have used it extensively, since, to date, it is the best analysis of the ecclesiological reflections of the missionary conferences from Edinburgh 1910 to Mexico City 1963. Günther “traces the shift in Protestant thinking regarding the relationship between church and mission” (Bosch 1991:369) in a far-reaching manner. Yet it only takes him two pages to mention the two major contributions of the ‘younger churches’ towards the preparations of the conference. There are the demand for an integration of church and mission and secondly the call “for a simpler more biblical proclamation of the word”, which Günther interprets as “desire to simplify and unwillingness to pursue dogmatic questions” (Günther 1970:105).

Günther gives the impression that the serious theological debate running up to the conference is held in Western theological circles while the theologians of the ‘younger churches’ don’t want to get involved in detailed dogmatic reflections. Even though he might give too little credit to the theological work of the younger churches in the run up to the conference, he certainly captures the dominant trend. The preparations of the Willingen conference was dominated by an Anglo-European theology of mission solving its theological problems related to mission and ecclesiology.

The fact that not much more can be said about the contribution of the ‘mission fields’ towards a “rethinking of missions” might support our thesis that in many respect the *Missio Dei* concept, at least in its inception, is driven by Western theological conceptualism with little influence of the ‘younger churches’, and their way of doing theology.

#### 4. *Missio Dei* being born

##### 4.1. Theological compromise as a foundation of a new theology of missions

Given the diverse and not easily reconcilable positions which came together at Willingen it is no surprise that initially the results of Willingen were seen as disappointing (Günther 1970:111). Norman Goodall, who had been responsible for the organization of the conference, said that Willingen failed in its purpose to clarify the nature of the missionary calling of the church. Instead of theologically clarifying the missionary obligation of the

church the conference had complicated the issue and “made it a matter of acute perplexity” (Newbigin 1994:135). Even the conference report itself reflects this feeling of dissatisfaction and laments its own phraseology which is used to cover up obvious differences. The report states:

Some phrases in our report, though they represent what we can with good conscience say together, cover up persistent differences among us which require further prayerful thought and study if we are to grow together in mutual understanding, and gain from God through each other, the full riches of fervour for the missionary task within our different traditions (Goodall 1953:244).

The 181 delegates (Günther 1987:536) strong conference was divided into five major theme groups (Goodall 1953:187). The first one on “the missionary obligation of the church”, which concerned itself with the *Missio Dei* concept, ended in deadlock. It was the achievement of an especially elected committee (Freytag 1952:58-59; Margull 1959:37), chaired by L. Newbigin, with P.L. Lehmann (American delegation), J.R. Chandran (‘younger churches’), and Karl Hartenstein (continental delegation), to produce a document which was at last received, though not adopted, by the conference (Goodall 1953:187). This statement did not mention the ‘missionary obligation of the church’ as does the original charge given to the group working on section I. Instead the compromise talks about the “missionary calling of the Church” (Goodall 1953:188) and has subsequently been criticized for its “phraseology” and inability to come to grips with the diverse theological issues.

But nonetheless it gave a “clear affirmation of the basis of the missionary calling of the Church in the being of the triune God himself” (Newbigin 1970:179). In this sense it did indeed leave behind a church centric missiology which was implicitly or explicitly the predominant justification for the missionary endeavor ever since Pope Alexander VI instructed the conquistadors to ‘teach the indigenous people in good morals and the Catholic faith’ (Neill 1979:141). This change from a church centric mission paradigm to an understanding of mission as originating from the triune God marks the birth of the *Missio Dei* concept. Even though the exact term was introduced a few months later by Karl Hartenstein (Freytag 1952:54), it is in Willingen’s theological compromise that the concept was born.

More questions were asked than answered, but the missionary obligation of the church was “made a matter of fresh theological inquiry” (Goodall 1953:19). The continuous disagreements on the theological issues raised by the different groups were noted for further

study and discussion (Goodall 1953:244-245) and the foundation for the integration of church and mission was laid. The question of the “Why” and “What” of mission was answered in a fundamentally new theological fashion. Missiology had risen to the challenge of the new historical context where the *corpus christianum* was replaced by a modern, global and secular world in which the gospel was not taken for granted.

#### 4.2. Four theological decisions about the “Why and What” of mission

What precisely did Willingen define as the “Why and What” of mission - what is the concept of *Missio Dei* emerging there? To answer this question we will now focus on the “*A Statement on the Missionary Calling of the Church*” (Goodall 1953:188-192) as presented by section I. at the Willingen conference. Where necessary we will also draw on the reports of the other four sections of the conference which dealt with the following themes: “the indigenous church; the role of the missionary society in the present situation, vocation and training; reviewing the pattern on missionary activity” (Goodall 1953:187).

However, the statement on the ‘missionary calling of the church’ has five parts: I. *The missionary situation and the rule of God*; II. *The mission obligation of the Church*; III. *The total missionary task*; IV. *Solidarity with the world*; and, V. *Discerning the signs of the times*. Those five parts point to a number of fundamentally new contributions for a theology of mission which have been summarized by Dietrich Werner (Werner 1993:67) in a remarkably comprehensive way. We will follow his lead and flesh out the *Missio Dei* concept accordingly. He identified four theology decisions which describe the contributions which are of essential importance for the *Missio Dei* concept.

##### 4.2.1. Missionary nature of the church - service and witness to all people

The most important theological decision taken refers to the ecclesiological issue of how church and mission belong together. The answer given;

...takes up Barth's and Hoekendijk's emphasis on the church's nature as a body for service and her function as a witness. The church loses therefore her central role in the understanding of mission, which is comparable to a Copernican turn around. The church is not any longer the subject and only aim of mission, but it is God himself, who's will it is, to reconcile the whole world with himself. The *missio ecclesiae* is therefore anchored to the *Missio Dei* and placed within its wider framework (Werner 1993:67).

What Werner calls a “Copernican turn around” cannot be emphasized enough. Anna Marie Aagaard has captured the understanding of mission quite well and notes; “There is church because there is mission, not vice versa” (Bosch 1991:390). The mission depends on the Triune God who send the Son like the conference statement says:

The 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 send forth His own 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 1953:189).

The church participates in this sending, or *missio*, of God only in so far as it realizes its character of being Christ’s body built by the Spirit and communicating herself through the Spirit (Dillistone). Christ’s *missio* aims to reconcile the world with God, and this is the church’s *missio*:

There is no participation in Christ without participation in his mission to the world. That by which the Church receives its existence is that by which it is also given its world-mission. ‘As the father hath sent Me, even so send I You (Goodall 1953:190).

In other words: the church is only church by being a missionary church. By its very nature the church is “committed to full participation in His redeeming mission” (Goodall 1953:190) or ceases to be church. The function of this body called church is to be a witness of the kingdom in service to the world. The Willingen statement says:

The church’s words and works, its whole life and mission, are to be witness to what God has done, is doing, and will do in Christ. But this word witness can not possibly mean that the church stands over and against the world, detached from it and regarding it from a position of superior righteousness or security (Goodall 1953:191).

This remarkable new perspective on the ‘missionary calling of the church’ is derived from a new understanding of the term *missio*, which is defined by referring to its original usage within the doctrine of the Trinity. “It is impossible to justify the mission of the church in a deeper and more comprehensive way” (Günther 1970:112). The church participates in the movement initiated by the love of the Father embodied in the Son and continued through the Spirit. The Spirit builds on the foundation of the redeeming works of the Son for:

God has sent forth His Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, to gather us together in one Body in Him, to guide us into all truth, to enable us to worship the Father in spirit and in truth, to empower us for the continuance of his mission as his witnesses and ambassadors ... By the Spirit we are enabled both to press forward as ambassadors of Christ, beseeching all men to be reconciled

to God, and also to wait with sure confidence for the final victory of His love, of which he has given us most sure promises (Goodall 1953:189-190).

The “Why” of mission finds its answer in the will of the father who through the sending of the Son and the gathering of the body of Christ in the Spirit makes church by its very nature missionary in character. Ecclesiologically speaking, the participation of the church in the *Missio Dei* becomes the *nota ecclesiae* by which the church stands or fails.

#### 4.2.2. (World)history the location for a contextual, missionary Church

Willingen’s second groundbreaking theological decision deals with the issue of where to locate the missionary endeavor within God’s history of salvation or *Heilsgeschichte*. This issue required firstly to clarify the relationship between mission and history. What Willigen came up with was that, mission

... does not have the task of saving souls in an interim period within God’s *Heilsgeschichte*, before Christ returns. But it takes part in God’s action to reconcile the world, a process which has started once and for all. Mission therefore participates in the kingdom of God. The kingdom becomes reality in history which is theologically understood, as embedded in the context of *Heilsgeschichte*. The realization of the kingdom happens within history, through the signs of the kingdom. Mission is the proclamation of the this kingdom, witness of the Lordship of Christ until his return ... (World)history is therefore qualified in theological terms as the location for the participation in God’s mission (Werner 1993:67).

The “Where?” of mission is to be found in history, in the ‘here and now’. As the Willigen statement says:

The Church is sent to proclaim Christ’s reign in every moment and every situation. This means that the mission of the Church forbids it to drift or to flee before the events of our time (Goodall 1953:190).

God is concerned with the entire world, all people and their whole existence, which therefore should be the scope of the *Missio Dei*. This insight is a fruit of the Willigen conference and not a later development like Bosch and Rosin claim (Bosch 1991:391; Rosin:1972). The conference states clearly:

The church is in the world; and as the Lord of the Church identified himself wholly with mankind, so must the Church also do. The nearer the Church draws to its Lord the nearer it draws to the world. Christians do not live in an enclave separated from the world; they are God’s people in the world Therefore the Church is required to identify itself with the world (Goodall 1953:190).



This identification with the world is not accidental but in essence part of the missionary nature of the church based on her participation in the *Missio Dei*. In other words: The church is by its very character a contextual church. Like Karl Hartenstein, member of the German delegation summarizes in his account of the Willingen conference:

The Church's witness of God's deeds can not be proclaimed in a way as if the witness stands above the recipient or against the world. The church lives in the world. The theological contribution of Willingen battles with genuine earnestness against separation, and any attempt to turn the Church into an institution with closed walls. Solidarity with the world, and priestly sacrifice in the world through the love of Christ, is indispensably related to the prophetic and apostolic duty of the witnessing church (Freitag 1952:65).

#### 4.2.3. *Missio Dei* - proclamation of the kingdom as the task of the Church

Closely related to the issue of the "Where" of mission is the issue of the "What?" of mission. Willingen defines the "What", or the content, of mission as the proclamation of the reality of the kingdom in the context of history. The conference says:

When all things are shaken, when familiar landmarks are blotted out, when war and tumult engulf us, when all human pride and pretension are humbled, we proclaim anew the hidden reign of our crucified and ascended Lord (Goodall 1953:192).

The Church is a contextual body, as such body it is a witness of God's reconciling will in the world. But this contextual character, which makes it act in solidarity with the world does not make the church compliant to the world. The content of its calling is not defined by the world. The duty to proclaim the hidden reign of its crucified Lord until he comes is setting the church's agenda. Like the statement says:

We preach not ourselves but Christ crucified – to humans seemingly a message of defeat, but to those who know its secret, the very power of God. We who take our stand here can never be cast down by any disaster, for we know that God rules the revolutionary forces of history and work out His purpose by the hidden power of the cross. The cross does not answer the world's questions, because they are not the real questions. It confronts the world with the real questions, which are God's questions – casting down all that exalts itself in defiance of him, bringing to nothing the idolatries by which men are deceived, and raising up those who are sunk in disillusionment and despair (Goodall 1953:188).

Reminiscent of Barth's terminology Willingen calls the church to 'confront the world with the real questions, which are God's questions'. One such real question, to be placed before the world, deals with the issue of power which Willingen views as a central concern for the mission of the church. The Lordship of the crucified Christ is reaffirmed in view of the fact

that the modern age is full of powers which claim the reign over the world. Willingen has fascisms, communism, nationalism, and secularism as the 'deceiving idolatries' in mind, and views (world)history as the arena of a power struggle between those forces of history and the power of God.

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The Willingen statement does not lack clarity on this matter:

The battle is set between His hidden Kingdom and those evil spirit forces which lure men on towards false hopes, or bind them down to apathy, indifference and despair. There is no room for neutrality in this conflict. Every man must choose this day whom he will serve (Goodall 1953:189).

Even decades after Willingen, in a globalized world, this call for an affirmation of the Lordship of Christ still has great relevance. But this is not the place to elaborate further on the deceiving idols which reign the post-modern world. For now we note that from Willingen's perspective *Missio Dei* is more than just dealing with the common religious issues of guilt and forgiveness. But *Missio Dei* puts the issue of power in the very center of the theological discourse. Hartenstein has expressed this thinking in his report:

The cross, the real salvation, which has happened, does not only solve the question of guilt but also the question of power. It does so not then and there but here and now. The cross is the key to understand the situation of the world. God is Lord, but still hidden. The kingdom is at hand, but still tectum sub cruce (hidden under the cross). The cross of Christ is both; sign of grace and might, it is God's act of forgiveness and conquest of the powers and spirits. The crucified is the victor. The congregation is thrown into his victory, and charged with the proclamations of his victory (Freitag 1952:60-62).

#### 4.2.4. *Missio Dei* - understood within a trinitarian frame of reference

The final theological decision of groundbreaking character taken by the Willingen conference relates to the doctrine of the Trinity. Wilhelm Andersen formulates the issue in his book "Towards a Theology of Mission":

If we wish to sum up, with systematic precision, Willingen's approach to a theology of the missionary enterprise, we must say that it is trinitarian in character. In the Willingen statements, the triune God Himself is declared to be the sole source of every missionary enterprise (Andersen 1954:47).

Considering that Willingen had set out to solve ecclesiological issues concerning the relationship between church and mission, one is surprised that it ended up defining mission

within the framework of the Trinity. But the statement on the missionary calling of the Church affirms:

God has created all things and all men that in them the glory of His love might be reflected; nothing therefore is excluded from the reach of his redeeming love.... God has sent forth one Saviour, one Shepherd to seek and save the lost... one Redeemer who by His death, resurrection and ascension has broken down the barrier between God and men ... and created himself a new humanity, the Body of which Christ is the exalted and regnant Head. On the foundation of this accomplished work God has sent forth His Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, to gather us together in one Body in Him, to guide us into all truth, to enable us to worship the father in spirit and in truth, to empower us for the continuance of His mission (Goodall 1953:189).

The trinitarian frame of thinking is obvious. The Father created the world and his will initiates the reconciliation with creation. The Son achieves this reconciliation and the Spirit gathers and enables the body of Christ for worship and mission.

But it is also obvious that the accent is on the redeeming work of the Son. While *Missio Dei* is based on a trinitarian frame of thinking it tends to see everything through a Christocentric perspective (Werner 1993:69). The mission of God is actually a mission of the Son. That *Missio Dei* includes a *missio* of the Spirit seems to be of lesser importance. Karl Hartenstein's résumé of the Willingen conference shows this Christocentric imbalance within the trinitarian thinking of the conference: Hartenstein writes:

The theme of Willingen has become clear. Mission is not just the salvation of an individual, it is not just obedience to a command of the Lord, ... it is participation in the sending of the Son, the *Missio Dei*, with the overall objective to raise the lordship over the whole redeemed creation (Freytag 1952:54)

Willingen derived the mission of the church from the triune God as its source. This is indeed a groundbreaking theological contribution towards a theology of mission. But it failed to unfold a trinitarian based theology of mission. Because the conference does not really understand how the *missio* of the Spirit can be equally important as the *missio* of the Son. The prevailing view of the Trinity in Willingen is that it is the *missio* of the Son which makes the *missio* of the Spirit possible and realizes it. That the *missio* of the Spirit can be a value in itself and participate in the *Missio Dei* like the *missio* of the Son does, is something which the conference cannot comprehend due to its Christocentric understanding of the Trinity.

Willingen does not unfold a comprehensive understanding of the Spirit within the Trinity and its contribution to the *Missio Dei*. It restrains the Spirit to a subordinate role within the

Trinity. This restricted understanding of the Trinity was to be the dominant characteristic of the missiological discussion which followed during the decades after Willingen. *Missio Dei* remained confined to a Christocentric understanding of the Trinity which saw the Spirit playing a supportive role within Heilsgeschichte (Werner 1993:69). This limited understanding of the Spirit has significance for the basic argument brought forward in this thesis. In short our basic argument is that the Pentecostal churches experience the *missio* of the Spirit in a way which lets them participate in the *Missio Dei* without the conceptual underpinning so exhaustively at work in Willingen. We will, in the course of this thesis, relate the experience of the Spirit within Breakthrough International with the understanding of the role of Spirit within the *Missio Dei* concept. It is therefore fitting to note that Willingen addressed the issue of the Spirit in a twofold way. Firstly, by locating the missionary calling of the church within the Triune God Willingen put the issue of the Spirit on the map of missiological discourse. The Spirit, being part of the Trinity, is introduced into any further missiological discourse. But, secondly, it does not present a comprehensive pneumatological approach to a theology of mission. The *missio* of the Spirit remains bound to the *missio* of the Son.

## **D. (Post)modern (his)story as the context of *Missio Dei***

### 1. Christocentric Universalism transforming (world)history

As we begin our diachronical survey of the *Missio Dei* concept, we will turn again to the issue of history and mission. This might seem repetitive, since we have just discussed the fact that one of Willingens's theological decisions was to acknowledge that (world)history is the place in which the mission centered church is called to participate in the *Missio Dei*. Indeed, according to Willingen, the church is not allowed to "drift or flee before the events of our time" (Goodall 1953:190). But the question before us is how Willingen's call for the church to identify itself with the world(history) has been qualified further, as the theological discussion developed ever since the conference took place in 1952.

The first issue which comes to mind when pondering this question is the "clumsy and uninspiring" (Verghese 1962:12) theological term "Christocentric Universalism", a term which marks a significant development in the understanding of history ever since Willingen. It surfaced at the third assembly of the World Council of Churches in New Delhi 1961.

Willingen (1952) saw history as the space in which the *Missio Dei* unfolds through the sending of the Son. The sending of the Son is an act of contextualization which makes the church a contextual entity, and interlinked with the world, or as Willingen says it: "The nearer the Church draws to its Lord the nearer it draws to the world" (Goodall 1953:190). Willingen therefore is marked by something which could be called 'Christocentric contextualism'. This means that Christ is sent into history and it is this (world)history which provides the context in which God's mission unfolds.

New Delhi 1961 elevates this Christocentric contextualism (Christ in history) to a universal understanding of history. The theme of New Delhi "*Jesus Christ, the Light of the World*" indicates a universal claim which is put forward at the conference. According to New Delhi *Missio Dei* does not only mean that God, in his desire to reconcile the world, has sent his Son into the history of the world, but that with the sending of the Son something absolutely new has begun, and history as known before isn't any more.

Bishop Gottfried Noth has described the universal quality of history which has arrived through Christ in a paper delivered at the assembly in New Delhi. He addressed the conference on the theme “*Christ, the light of the world*”. From Noth’s perspective the reality of the world is a reality of suffering and darkness. But he acknowledges that within this pessimistic view of history;

There are lights in the world; that we can say without hesitation. And people who do anything to battle against the darkness of the world deserve our respect. Jesus sees the plight of the world: that this whole world is separated from God and stands under his judgment. In this situation it does not help to light one more light similar to those which already exist; the only thing which will help is the light of the world, the mercy of God (Noth 1962:144-145).

In Noth’s view the *missio* of the Son has transcended the ‘lighting a light against the darkness’ approach towards the suffering of the world which can be found in people of all kinds of persuasions. Jesus is not just another light in the darkness, he is the ‘light of the world’. The coming of the Son does not simply mark another date in history, but draws history, as dark as it is experienced by mankind, to a close. The coming of Jesus has a final character in respect to the darkness which has ruled the world until his arrival. It has brought about the reality of the New Creation in the Risen Christ as the one and new determining factor in world history. The coming of Christ gives significance and meaning to world history despite the confusion and disorder produced by men’s endeavour to divert its destiny towards ends of his own devising (cf.Devanandan 1962:154).

This new understanding of history gives the *missio* of the Son universal significance. The history known to mankind began with the first creation. But in Jesus Christ the “act of a new creation has been done, and it is final. The new creation began, in a very real sense, within history” (Marsh 1962:5). The world is therefore more than just the context in which the *Missio Dei* unfolds. It is the addressee of the *missio* of the Son in whom the true *humanum* is being revealed to the world.

As the report of section I at New Delhi says: “In Jesus Christ God has shown to men its true nature and calling. It is through faith that men was empowered to become God’s child” (Visser’t Hooft 1962:88). Or, to quote John Marsh who puts it in a rather provocative form:

We become Christians in order to become men; we are not made men in order that we may become Christians. Christianity is but the rehabilitation of manhood on this earth, even at the

same d time that it is man's fei ication in the li e o the worlf to come (Marsh 1962:8).

Admittedly all this seems “clumsy and uninspiring”. But it marks an important progress with respect to the *Missio Dei* concept. Because, based on a Christocentric foundation it makes a universal claim towards history. Nothing in the history of the world is to be excluded from the reality of the new creation. The rest of mankind, those who are not yet reached by the gospel, are not just “objects of evangelization and service” (Verghese 1962:14) but belong to the new creation and are part of the universal dimension of salvation. A universal dimension which, according to Willem Visser’t Hooft was lacking in the church. He wrote,

Post-Re ormaton Christianity has lackef the universal fimension. It has not fevelopef a theology *de humanitate* anf le t it to the philosophers to think in terms o\_ mankinf.... We neef to work out a Christocentric universalism (Visser’t Hoo t in Verghese 1962:14).

Willingen was speaking of “Christ in history”, but New Delhi now expands the *Missio Dei* concept and speaks of “Christ transforming history”. In an “age of universal history” (Marsh 1962:3), where the history of the world is no longer an affair of national concern but is a global matter affecting all nations. *Missio Dei* claims that God has descendend upon earth through his Son and the new creation has indeed begun. The progress in the understanding of the *Missio Dei* concept since Willigen is marked by the universal dimension of Christianity Visser’t Hooft was calling for.

This expanded and universal view of history has implications in two direction. Firstly based on its Christocentric Universalism *Missio Dei* claims to be of relevance for history, because its witness to the world bears testimony to God’s Lordship, who through the sending of the Son established the new creation. Secondly it elevates the status of history to be the location for God’s action aimed to save the world. History is not just the interim time to save individual souls but to work for the “Shalom-ization” of the World (Werner 1993:146).

## 2. The eschatological reality of history anticipated in the local congregation

New Delhi and the subsequent discussion clarified the relationship between mission and history by understanding history through the perspective of “God’s history” or *Heilsgeschichte*. The Christ event was an event transforming the human understanding of

history and marking a new quality of history where the darkness of the world had come to its end.

The problem is that this 'Christocentric universalism' can be construed as nothing less than a bold theological claim which has little factual evidence to show for it. Even if the darkness of the world had been illuminated through 'Christ, the light of the world', as Christian theology claims, history continues to be ruled by pain, suffering and death. To claim "Christ, as the light of the world, New Delhi's theme, can therefore be rather an academic exercise with little relevance, if it cannot be shown, how this claim about a new quality of history relates to the life which unfolds within the 'old history' bound by destiny to suffering, pain and death. If, as Moltmann once said: "the whole being of the church is marked by participation in the history of God's dealings with the world" (Moltmann 1977:65), the question is; in what way does the church participate in the history of God's dealings with the world where the "power of darkness is still at work" (Newbigin 1989:114)? How can the church, as agent of *Missio Dei*, on the one hand be truthful to the 'new history', marked by the new creation, which has been established through the *missio* of the Son, and on the other hand be honest about the often cruel reality of the world? In short: How can the *Missio Dei* concept be contextual in (world)history and truthful to God's coming kingdom? How can the *Missio Dei* concept be hopeful and realistic?

A theological answer to this question has been given by the assembly of the WCC in Evanston 1954. Evanston described the *Missio Dei* concept within an eschatological understanding of history. The assembly theme "Christ, Hope for the world" summarizes this eschatological understanding of history, because participation in the *Missio Dei* happens in the sure knowledge, that the future is God's future (cf. Werner 1993:69). According to Evanston 'faith and hope' in the coming of the kingdom is essential for the mission of the church. Mission is therefore defined as

Participation in the work of God, which happens between the coming of Christ, the beginning of the kingdom of God on earth, and his return in glory and fulfillment of his kingdom (Werner 1993:70).

History is seen in view of the eschaton. This eschaton is not just a matter for the future but it has begun in the here and now. As the conference declares:



The power of the coming kingdom is already at work in this world ... In Jesus Christ God himself stepped into the confusion of earthly history, encountered evil in all its forms and conquered its power (Werner 1993:70).

Lesslie Newbigin has described this eschatological understanding of history deploying the formula 'in the time between the times'. He writes:

I have said that it is clear from the New Testament that the early Church saw itself as living in the time between the times, the time when Jesus having exposed and disarmed the powers of darkness (Col.2:15), is seated at the right hand of God until the time when his reign shall be unveiled in all its glory among all nations. The character of this time is given to it by the character of the earthly ministry of Jesus. It is marked by suffering and by the presence of the signs of the kingdom (Newbigin 1989:107).

This understanding of living 'in the time between the time' does not make the church, who participates in the *Missio Dei*, indifferent to the 'darkness of the world'. But calls the church to be witness of the kingdom-reality which is hidden in the present and assured for the future. It is the promise of the future-kingdom which enables the church to be relevant in the present like Newbigin continues:

Meaningful action in history is possible only when there is some vision of the future goal. But the future is hidden from us – our own personal future and the future of the world. The curtain of death lies across the path. The good news is that Jesus has opened a way through the curtain and has come to lead us on the way which he has opened. Our life is lived as his incarnate life was lived, in a world in which the power of darkness is still at work. But, because Jesus, the one who was rejected, crucified, dead, buried, has risen from the dead and now lives and reigns, we know that what appears to be lost but is safely kept against the day of resurrection (Newbigin 1989:114).

The World Conference on Mission and Evangelism of the WCC in Melbourne (1980) has expressed this eschatological understanding of history in its report on 'The kingdom of God and human struggles'.

In their witness to the kingdom of God in word and deeds the churches must dare to be present at the bleeding points of humanity... Without losing sight of the ultimate hope of the kingdom of God or giving up their critical attitude, the churches must dare to be present in the midst of human struggles for penultimate solutions (Melbourne 1980:180).

History is qualified from an eschatological perspective in the knowledge of the kingdom which is visible at the horizon of time. *Missio Dei* calls the church to be the witness of this eschatological quality of the present time based on faith in the Lord, who has come and whose kingdom will come. "This faith enables us to be at the same time realistic and hopeful. We can be realistic, knowing that no human project can eliminate the powers of darkness as

they operate in human life. We can be hopeful, acting hopefully in apparently hopeless situations” (Newbigin 1989:114).

This eschatological understanding of history creates realism and hopefulness in and for the world. It is translated into life by a church who acts on a local level where the bleeding points of humanity are tangible. Because it is the local congregation which is able to witness in the local human situation. Melbourne (1980) says it like this:

It is in this world that the lifestyle of the kingdom has to be lived in anticipation of its arrival. That lifestyle cannot be lived in a religious enclave constructed to provide favourable conditions. Christians live the life of the kingdom not as members of a sect, but as parents, neighbours, as workers, as citizens, as people of a particular race, as members of privileged or deprived groups. This is the strength of the genuine parish church, the congregation of which is drawn from the neighbourhood, and knows it is sent to serve and to witness in the whole life of that community (WCC 1980:138).

The task of the church is to “search for an authentic community in Christ at local level“ (WCC 1980:196) if it has understood the kingdom reality, which has arrived in the sending of the Son and will be fulfilled in his return. Most influential in respect to the search for an authentic community in Christ on a local level has been the WCC study on the “Missionary Structure of the Congregation”. It was commissioned at the third assembly of the WCC at New Delhi 1962 and completed in 1967 (Newbigin 1970:170:406, Bosch 1991:382-383). The study, according to Philip Potter, was extremely fruitful in reaching agreement on the fact that “the Church exists for mission and that the base of mission is the local church” (WCC 1980:16).

The contribution of the Western European task force to the study emphasized the fact that the church is living amidst the world in a pluralistic context which causes it to require flexible structures and at times even overcome the traditional parish structure. The study says:

The message and the structures of the churches can only be formulated with respect to the immense variety of actual realities amidst which we live Hence it is the world that must be allowed to provide the agenda for the churches. ... Since the world today is in constant and rapid change ... the only way in which the churches can respond rightly to given situations by being flexible in their structures. The traditional type of local parish congregation generally fails to offer an effective point of encounter with men involved in the life of the world. New ad hoc kinds of Christian groups emerge (WCC 1968:20-23).

We might be accused of stretching the issue but it is quite remarkable to note what kind of direction our deliberations on *Missio Dei* and history haven taken so far. We started our

discussion by pointing to the rather complex theological issue of understanding history within an eschatological perspective. Coming from there we are now at a point where ecumenical missiology talks about being present at the 'bleeding points of humanity' on a concrete local level either through the local congregation or even through 'ad hoc Christian groups'. What needs to be noted is that *Missio Dei* is two things at the same time, which are so often separated from each other in traditional Christian thinking about the world. It is truthful to the kingdom reality and points to the kingdom as the destination of history. By having this eschatological understanding of history *Missio Dei* is contextual and turns to world(history) on local level. The kingdom is anticipated in the here and now and being a witness of the kingdom is realized in word and deed through the encounter with the world.

### 3. *Missio Dei* unfolding in secular and post-secular times

So far we have established that *Missio Dei*<sup>14</sup> identified two important issues in its understanding of history which are Christocentric universalism and eschatology. Through Christocentric universalism *Missio Dei* sees history known to humankind transformed to the new creation in Christ. This leads to an eschatological view of history allowing the church to bear witness to the kingdom in realism and hope.

From a theological point of view one can arguably say that *Missio Dei* had effectively formulated a way of dealing with the world without conforming to it. But one also might critically remark that the above issues do not take seriously history as it presents itself to those who don't look at it through the Christian perspective. It seems as if *Missio Dei* forces its own view of history upon the reality experienced by humanity in an intellectual game concerned with a "speculative theology of history" (Werner 1993:91). Theologically speaking *Missio Dei* might be right to define history in its own terms. But the question arises: Does *Missio Dei* take the world(history) seriously or just imposes its own religious categories? One of the first theologians who warned against this kind of 'spiritual colonialism', in which the church dominates the world by subduing it to her religious interpretations of reality, was Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945). He called for a non-religious interpretation of faith. Even though his influence on the development of *Missio Dei* concept

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14 Even though we personalize *Missio Dei* once in a while it goes without saying that it is not actually the *Missio Dei* concept itself but the theologians who have developed and contributed to it we are talking about. We merely opt once in while for a personalization of the *Missio Dei* concept for reasons of readability.

is for obvious reasons rather indirect, it is worthwhile to note the contribution of his theology towards the *Missio Dei* concept.

Bonhoeffer's statement that "the church is the church only when it exists for others" (Bonhoeffer 1971:382) has been a "powerful and extremely attractive phrase" (Bosch 1991:375). It has rightly been criticized for its typical Western liberal-humanist attitude of knowing what is best for others (Sundermeier 1986:62-65). Its critics are correct in saying that the church should not act 'for others' but 'with others' (Bosch 1991:375). But despite this criticism Bonhoeffer's suggestion that the "world has come of age and should be taken seriously" (Bonhoeffer 1971:200) was an important contribution towards acknowledging the secular character of the times in which *Missio Dei* unfolds. From his prison cell Bonhoeffer claimed that the church should embrace the secular times in which it was operating and wrote:

The church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell [persons] of every calling what it means to live in Christ, to exist for others (Bonhoeffer 1971:382-383).

Bonhoeffer's call did not fall on deaf ears and *Missio Dei*, as we will see just now, came to accept in the secular context of the world as the environment and context in which its mission unfolds. This is a remarkable change in ecumenical theology since Jerusalem (1928). There, in Jerusalem, under the influence of John Mott and Rufus Jonas', secularism was seen as the 'real opponent of Christianity' (Hogg 1952:241) and

Rufus Jonas gave an extremely able paper, '*Secular Civilization and the Christian task*' (Jerusalem 1928, Vol.1:284ff), which recognized 'extra church values' as often strong. He compared the sacrificial consecration of the scientist to that of saints. Nevertheless, the 'greatest rival of Christianity in the world to-day was not Islam, Buddhism or Hinduism but a world wide secular way of life and interpretation of the nature of things' (Yates 1994:101).

While in Jerusalem (1928) secularism was seen as opponent section II of the CWME conference in Mexico City could talk about "The Christian witness to Men in secular times" and embrace the challenge that the world had come of age without losing its critical distance. The section reports says:

We are neither optimistic nor pessimistic about this process of secularization as such. We mean it when we say that secularization opens up possibilities of new freedom and of new enslavement for men. We have no doubt that it is creating a world in which it is easy to forget God, to give up all traditional religious practices and at the same time to lose all sense of

meaning and purpose in life. Yet we are overwhelmingly convinced that it is not the mission of the Church to look for the dark side and to offer the gospel as an antidote to disillusionment. ... Christian witness participates in the common agony and hope which men experience in the process of secularization. It should articulate questions and answers from within the modern world and take up the points of decision which God himself has provided through secularization. Thus we can come to a deeper understanding of the presence of Jesus Christ in the world, and communicate the gospel (CWME 1964:311-315).

This was indeed taking the idea of *Missio Dei* much further. If God is a missionary God who sends his Son (Bosch 1991:390) into the world secularism was to become a place to encounter God, rather than opposing it and lamenting that the church was losing influence over men. Instead of imposing its own religious or theological categories upon humanity *Missio Dei* is to identify itself with the reality of the world as it is, and not as Christian language makes it out to be. The pattern of mission in a secular world is one “of constant encounter with the real need of the our ages” (CWME 1964:314), or, to use a highly contested phrase from the study on the “*Missionary Structure of the Congregation*”, “it is the world that must be allowed to provide the agenda for the churches” (WCC 1968:20-23, compare Bosch 1991:382-383).

In summarizing what has been said we recognize *Missio Dei's* understanding of history as it is based on the Christocentric premise that Christ's sending has changed history in a universals sense. Christ's *Missio* turns the present time into an eschatological reality. But this does not at all mean mission is to flee from the world. On the contrary it means that this new understanding of history is made known to the world through deep involvement in the new secular times and a deep concern for the “real needs of our ages”.

The development did not stop here. Because as ecumenical missiology embraced secularism - the time in which God is unfolding his *Missio* - it eventually also understood the limitations of secularism. This is not the place to go into a deeper discussion on this issue of mission and secularism but we briefly need to refer to the complex development of the debate.

While, as we have seen, Jerusalem was very critical, the sixties saw tremendous openness towards secularism, to the extent that the technological progress of the modern world was called the “secular Christ” (Werner 1991:24). People like Harvey Cox and his “*The secular City*” (Cox:1965), Arend van Leeuwen with his “*Christentum in der Weltgeschichte*” (Leeuwen:1966), and Paul van Buren's “*The Secular Meaning of the Gospel*” described secularism as a historical consequence of Christianity and called to embrace it. But the

enthusiasm died down as the modern technological age progressed. The CWME conference at San Antonio (1989) talked about a 'post-secular era'. Its report states:

Many would see "secularization" as partly a fruit of the gospel, releasing humankind from ancient powers and emancipating people to make mature choices and take responsibility for their destiny. Today, many who have experienced secularization in recent decades have however given up faith in its value: a post-secular era announces itself (Wilson 1990:29-30).

San Antonio realized that the notion of 'secular times', which seem to be controlled and destined by technology and progress, is in itself a mythological idea. Lesslie Newbigin sums it up thus:

The belief is that modern society is on a steady and irreversible course toward increasing secularization, and that this is to be welcomed. The secular society is a myth, and has the power of a myth to blind people to reality. Christian affirmation in this context requires the unmasking of the powers. It calls for a new kind of enlightenment, namely the opening up of the underlying assumptions of a secular society (Newbigin 1989:211-220).

Ecumenical theology realized that God's *Missio* unfolds in 'real times', which are both secular and post-secular. The Church cannot retreat to a ghetto and impose its own categories on the world. But she is called to be an authentic witness in secular societies. As such she takes the secular society, coming of age (Bonhoeffer), seriously and understands the 'secular' as her context. Furthermore she also identifies with the crisis of a secular world as her crisis. Since the church is part of the 'real needs of our ages' she knows of the limitation which the myth of secularization has created. It was accepted that the world had come of age. But this did not imply an uncritical embrace of the secular. It rather made ecumenical missiology to be aware, that true contextualism means to be aware of the times in which the gospel is to be proclaimed through word and deed.

To foster this awareness San Antonio was clear that;

For the sake of the gospel itself and of the cause of Christ – the Christian churches will have to conduct ongoing and penetrating studies of the issues of secularization and secularism and of way ways of responding to this challenge faithfully, sensitively, and with integrity (Wilson 1990:31).

#### 4. *Missio Dei* as solidarity and dialogue with the (his)story of others

Arguably we have dealt with the issue of history and *Missio Dei* so far as if there is only one history. The underlying assumption of our presentation has been the understanding of history as 'one world-history' which provides the context of *Missio Dei*. This assumption was indeed the governing idea underpinning the understanding of history in the early days of the *Missio Dei* concept. When *Missio Dei* emerged as a new paradigm of missiology it was bound to the rather modern notion of history as 'one world-history'. Moltmann has pointed out that "history in singular, with capital letters and without an indication of its subject, was and is a fascinating concept of the 'experiment of modernity... it became the paradigm of modern theology during the era when the anthropocentric world view established itself" (Moltmann 1985:149 cf. Werner 1993:152). Dietrich Werner writes about this 'paradigm of modern theology':

History was understood like an evolutionary process involving the whole of humanity. All its parts were moving inescapably towards integration and standardization in a global society (Werner 1993:152).

There is little doubt, that *Missio Dei* was sharing the fascination about history as a global development which saw humanity "caught up in a common destiny" (Verghese 1962:13) during its emerging stages.

But, Werner continues,

It is only through the crisis of this modern paradigm of history that missiology was liberated from an understanding of history which saw the growth of the kingdom of God in analogy to a linear model of development. When missiology reflected upon the acts of God in history it made the experience that life was increasingly rejected or even destroyed. Therefore the idea of 'one world-history' needed to be replaced by the acknowledgement that history is made up of a multitude of histories. These histories are the (his)stories of the people marked by suffering (Werner 1993:152).

While developing the *Missio Dei* concept ecumenical missiology had to learn that the premise of "one world-history", the dream of a unified world in which all would enjoy peace, liberty and justice, has turned into a "nightmare of conflict, bondage and injustice" (Bosch 1991:361). The notion of 'one world-history' was an idea out of touch with the suffering of the people who lived in 'concrete history'. It represented an "academic game raising and

answering questions which no one asks” (Pobee 1979:27). David Tracy has put it quite drastically. He writes:

Any purely academic understanding of history as the history of ideas unites a curious intellectual arrogance with an ethical obtuseness to the massive suffering in concrete history. There are times when even the best breakthrough ideas are, by refusal at ethical-political seriousness, in danger of becoming merely academic and ethically both obtuse and finally vulgar (Tracy 1995:228).

*Missio Dei* would have been lost in this kind of academic game if it would not have gone beyond its merely academic understanding of history and corrected its perspective on history in view of a world torn apart by ‘conflict, bondage and injustice’ (Bosch). *Missio Dei* discovered that what Werner calls the ‘history of others’ which challenges the modern (Western) idea of history (Werner 1993:154). ‘History of others’ means to realize that in a post-modern age history is made up of the stories of those who are normally not heard.

Emilio Castro has described the challenge in his presentation at the conference of the CCME in Melbourne 1980. He writes:

In Latin America, we celebrate, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October, “Discovery Day”. That has traditionally been considered the beginning of history. We are learning now to look at history from other perspectives, to see it through the eyes of those who in the European view were being discovered, but who, from their own perspective, were being invaded, massacred, subjected (WCC 1980:28).

This new ‘look at history’, from the perspective of the ‘others’, who are not the winners but the victims involves a new process of learning. Castro continues:

We hope, especially, that we will learn from the experience of those who are working with the poor of the earth. Generally speaking history has been written by the winners. The history of Christian thought has not escaped this rule; it has been written by those who have been winners of wars and are winners in the economic structures of the world. We hope that new aspects of the gospel of Jesus Christ will appear as we read his Word and meditate on the kingdom from the experience and perspective of the poor of the earth (WCC 1980:27).

According to Castro the new process of learning depends on the willingness to listen to the (his)story of the victims. In other words, *Missio Dei* turns away from theories about history to the acknowledgement that we are all entangled in the unfolding of the drama of history. In a way one can say that *Missio Dei* turned from being modern to being postmodern. The early, or modern, approach towards the understanding of history was bound to Western Cartesian conceptual thinking. *Missio Dei* was caught up in the mindset of modernity just as the whole



era was. The Cartesian call for certainty, clarity, and directness made the thinking subject to be the measure of what is reality. This 'modernist mindset' was applied to the understanding of history. But as modernity fell into crisis postmodern thinking arose which made ecumenical theology realize that theories about history are not "useful for understanding myself as a subject active in history" (Tracy 1995:228). *Missio Dei* grew with the development of postmodernism and saw that its great ideas about the character of history were simplifying history. They usurped the (his)story of 'the others' by imposing the notion of one progressing (world)history.

With Melbourne (1980), one might argue already at Bangkok (1973), *Missio Dei* came to appreciate the importance of "the other". Their stories are those who make an inclusive view of history possible. Without the stories of the others, history is just an idea with little connection to reality. Real history cannot be reduced, as modernity thought, to the continuous progress of one great idea but is the product of a diverse number of (his)stories which complement each other. As David Tracy once wrote on a more philosophical level:

Postmodern thought at its best is an ethics of resistance – resistance, above all, to more of the same, the same unquestioned sameness of the modern turn to the subject, the modern over-belief in the search for the perfect method, the modern social evolutionary narrative whereby all is finally and endlessly more of the self same. The real face of postmodernity is the face of the other, the face that commands 'Do not kill me', the face that insists, do not reduce me or anyone else to your grand narrative (Tracy 1995:228).

Christocentric universalism had made *Missio Dei* aware of the radical new quality of history in Christ. It turned towards eschatology and clarified the relationship between the kingdom anticipated in the present but realized in God's future. Furthermore *Missio Dei* embraced secular and post-secular times as the times in which it would unfold. All these were in deed important steps in the development of the *Missio Dei* concept. But it reached maturity by emerging from its modern premises and became a truly postmodern concept realizing that history is not an abstract but a reality which can only be fully appreciated by listening to the stories of 'the others'.

## E. Poverty as context of *Missio Dei*

### 1. God's preferential option for the poor between humanization and struggle

The discovery of God's "preferential option for the poor", initially made by Latin American Roma Catholics, is now widely accepted as guiding principle of mission (Scherer 1987:14).

This statement by James Scherer summarizes a consensus within ecumenical missiology which is accepted as a majority position today. However, what Scherer calls the 'accepted guiding principle of mission' is the result of a process which unfolded throughout the decades following the Willingen conference. *Missio Dei*, as pursued by ecumenical theology, has not been the driving force of that process. As pointed out by Scherer, it originated in Latin American Roman Catholic theology. But ecumenical missiology and the concept of *Missio Dei* is, and was deeply involved with, as well as influenced by, what is generally called Liberation Theology.

We cannot embark on a detailed study of the development of Liberation Theology. But "starting in the 1960s, a great wind of renewal blew through the churches. They began to take their social mission seriously" (Boff, L.&C. 1987:67). This 'great wind of renewal' was also blowing through the circles of ecumenical missiology. Protestant theologians like Emilio Castro, Julio de Santa Ana, both influential figures in the WCC, as well as many others (Boff,L.&C. 1987:71) connected the theme of the social dimension of mission with the idea of *Missio Dei*.

Initially, *Missio Dei*, as it emerged in Willingen 1952, primarily addressed the issue of the "Why" of mission? The major issue of concern was the urgent need for a new theology of mission (Newbigin 1970:178), which would justify the missionary endeavor in a modern world. Thinking more in conceptual terms about the fundamentals of mission, Willingen's social concern was rather limited. But, as we have seen already in our study on *Missio Dei* and history, Willingen prepared the ground for a new openness for the reality of the world, on account of its profound theological approach to mission. The missionary obligation of the church involved social awareness. As Willingen said:

Faithfulness to Christ will require the Church to come to grips with the social, political, economic and cultural life of the people to whom it is sent (Goodall 1952:190).

It was clear, from Willingen's perspective, that the church can only participate in God's mission if she comes to grips with the life of the people. This 'coming to grips' took place in two movements of thought which focus around modern and postmodern thinking. We have seen in our study of *Missio Dei* and history that the development of this new paradigm of missionary thinking was deeply concerned with a modern pattern of thought. It is only later that *Missio Dei's* understanding of history widened to a postmodern perspective and incorporated the 'stories of the others' into its view of history. A similar shift can be observed in the development of *Missio Dei* and the issue of poverty. With a certain amount of generalization we can observe a movement in the understanding of the issue of poverty shifting from the concept of "mission as humanization" to the concept "mission as liberation".

Both, 'mission as humanization' and 'mission as liberation' have in common that they identify the context within which the mission of God unfolds from a perspective of social concern for the victims. But they differ profoundly in their attitudes towards those victims. This difference in attitudes will become clearer as we now go on and describe these two circles of thought on *Missio Dei* and poverty.

## 2. *Missio Dei* as participation in the humanization of the world

It is not by accident that the idea of 'mission as humanization' is reminiscent of the term humanism. It is based on a rather Western-optimistic model of mission (Werner 1991:200). This model of mission understands, to use the words of the WCC assembly in Uppsala (1968), that "we belong to a humanity that cries passionately and articulately for a fully human life" and realizes that the "very humanity of man and his societies is threatened by a greater variety of destructive forces than ever" (Goodall 1968:27). In response to that threat the divine call "that man should love God and their neighbours", as stated by the second assembly of the WCC in Evanston 1954, is a call for 'mission as humanization'. Evanston continues:

In the call to responsible social action, the promise and the commandment of the righteous and loving God require us to recognize that in every human being Christ Himself comes to claim our service (Kinnamon 1997:282-283).

Evanston's notion that to 'serve man means to serve Christ' was a first attempt to clarify what mission as humanization means. Amongst others it was M.M. Thomas who clarified the issue further in the follow up to the WCC assembly at Uppsala 1968. He defined the term humanization in relation to the issue of mission and salvation. Thomas writes:

The main question raised in the present world-wide discussion of the theology of mission is that of the relation between the Gospel of salvation and the struggles of men everywhere for their humanity, which is the contemporary context of the world in which the Gospel has to be communicated. That is, the relation between mission and humanization (Thomas 1971:26).

M.M. Thomas goes on to quote from the Uppsala report on "Renewal in Mission":

There is a burning relevance today in describing the mission of God, in which we participate, as a gift of a new creation, which is a radical renewal of the old and an invitation to men to grow up into their full humanity in the New Man, Jesus Christ (Thomas 1971:26).

Humanization does not simply mean to improve the world so that it might be a more human place. According to Thomas and the Uppsala assembly report it rather means to bring full humanity to mankind, a true and full humanity which has been revealed in Jesus Christ.

It is striking to note the parallelism in the pattern of thought in respect to the issue of *Missio Dei* and history, which we have previously discussed (II.D). There we saw that Christ has brought about a new quality of history, and now we see that ecumenical missiology, without any lack of certainty, claims that Christ brings about a new humanity. To quote M.M. Thomas again:

Jesus Christ and the New Humanity offered in Him are presented as the spiritual foundation, the source of judgment, renewal and ultimate fulfillment of the struggles of mankind today for humanity (Thomas 1971:26).

The 1982 *Ecumenical Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism*, to date the only official and comprehensive declaration of the WCC on mission and evangelism, also claims that "Christian witness will point towards Jesus Christ in whom the real humanity is revealed" (Kinnamon 1997:375). That these kind of claims are more than Christological idealism becomes clear when we notice that Thomas clarifies that the process of humanization, from a missiological perspective, ought to be practical. He writes:

Missionary participation in the humanization of the world should be characterized by constant knowledge and communication of the mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ, either in dialogue, presence or proclamation. Its purpose is to make Christ known as the source and foundation of true humanization. The glorified humanity of the Risen Christ is to be realized

not after death but within the historical process, not by isolated individuals but by men in the corporateness of their relations in society and to the cosmos. This is sufficient theological justification for considering participation in the humanization of the world as essential to mission (Thomas 1971:32).

The foundation for the involvement in the humanization of the world is laid in a Christocentric understanding of humanity (compare the parallelism to the Christocentric understanding of history!). It is based on the conviction that in the sending and incarnation of the Son God's solidarity with humanity has become obvious. This solidarity calls for dialogue, presence and proclamation, thus for the realization of the humanity of the Christ within the historical process. In short, Christ's incarnation calls for mission as participation in the humanization of the world.

This call for participation of Christians in the humanization of the world is echoed in the WCC Uppsala assembly where Visser't Hooft said "Christian faith...is man centered because it is God-centered. This is a very practical truth" (Goodall 1968:317-318, Kinnamon 1997:40). Visser't Hooft continues:

Christians have more reason than anyone else to be advocates of humanity. They are not humanitarians in the sentimental sense that is to be nice to other people. They are not humanists in the aristocratic sense that learning and culture constitutes a bond between the privileged few of all nations. They are on the side of all humanity because God is on that side and his Son died for it (Goodall 1968:319, Kinnamon 1997:41).

The practical approach of ecumenical theology towards participation in the humanization of the world took shape with the creation of an office on 'Urban Industrial Mission' (UIM) within the WCC in 1965 (Werner 1993:180-186). This marks a structural consequence in the work of WCC on an operational level which derived from its New Delhi (1961) assembly and CWME conference at Mexico City (1963). New Delhi and Mexico City had called for 'joint action in mission' (Visser't Hooft 1962:74; Müller-Krüger 1964:209-212) calling the Church "to think out together in concrete terms the forms of Christian service for today" since "there is no more urgent task for Christians than to work for peace with justice and freedom" (WCC New Delhi 1962:228).

This is not the place to go into detail of the work of the UIM office. But we note that its "goal", according to a staff paper prepared by Paul Löffler in September 1964, is "to make real the saving presence of Christ in those parts of society which are formed by industrialization and urbanization" (quoted in Werner 1993:182).

For our purposes it is important to see that the establishing of the UIM office within the WCC marks an important shift towards a more concrete involvement in the humanization of the world. The theology of the ecumenical movement, at times expressed in a rather idealistic and theoretical language, became concrete and began to stand on the ground of the real world, as it was experienced by the people.

Furthermore it is interesting to note that the participation in the humanization of the world focused on the problems caused by growing urbanization and industrialization. It had little awareness for what was to be called by the Latin American Bishops at Puebla "God's preferential option for the poor" (Thomas 1996:194). God's option for the poor was not yet at the center of attention. Ecumenical missiology rather focused around the challenges of urbanization and industrialization as the the paper "*Becoming operational in a world of Cities*" indicates. It is the most important contribution by the UIM office to the Uppsala assembly (Werner 1993:192), and states that the churches concrete involvement with the humanization of the world could be divided into three types of ministry:

Those focusing on industry, the workers as a group, management, the new technological elite, industrial relations; those focusing on poverty as a ministry with the new poor and deprived, the marginal groups of urban society, the ghetto dwellers etc., those focusing on the social and political, the world of organizations, city planning, goals for metropolitan development etc (IRM 1969: 91-92).

There was still some way to go to get from these kind of typologies, where the poor are one problem amongst others, to understand that humanization needed to start with and through the poor. Nonetheless to bring the theme of 'humanization of the world' into the center of the *Missio Dei* concept was a real achievement in the years which followed Willingen (1952).

### 3. *Missio Dei* as struggle for liberation

By the beginning of the 1970s it became increasingly clear that participation in the humanization of the world could not really happen if the issues of development and power were taken out of the equation. To focus the discussion on issues like industrialization and urbanization left out the reality of two thirds of the world, which was marked by 'underdevelopment' caused by the exploitation through the Western world for its own "vast process of development" (Boff, L.&C. 1987:68). The voice of the so called "Third World"

was needed to move the *Missio Dei* concept from an understanding of 'mission as humanization' to an understanding of 'mission as liberation'.

David Bosch (1991:432-447) in his "*From Development to Liberation*" has given a short and highly recommendable introduction into the historical, social and political dynamics which led to the emergence and rise of liberation theology. He calls it one of the most "dramatic illustrations of the fundamental paradigm shift that is taking place in mission thinking and practice" (Bosch 1991:432).

This is not the place to repeat what Bosch has done so profoundly or to try to give an introduction into liberation theology which has been done by Leonardo and Clodovis Boff (Boff, L.&C.1987) as well as others. But in our search for the concept of *Missio Dei* we might note that the emergence of the theme 'mission as liberation' in Latin America deeply influenced the development of the *Missio Dei* concept. So much so that to talk about *Missio Dei* today, without talking about the theme of liberation, would be missing a crucial point.

In his reflections after the CWME conference at Melbourne (1980) Emilio Castro could write:

The second concentration point of Melbourne is the affirmation of the poor as the missiological principle par excellence. The missiological principle, the missionary yardstick, is the relation of the Church to the poor (WCC 1980:228, compare Bosch 1991:435).

At Melbourne Castro identifies the 'affirmation of the poor' as the guiding principle of ecumenical missiology, or, as we would argue, of *Missio Dei*. This could not be anticipated when *Missio Dei* emerged at Willingen 1952. Up until the Mexico City (1963) meeting of the CWME ecumenical missiology was "too preoccupied with secularization" (Bosch 1991:435). Poverty was not an issue in theology. The rise of the developmentalist model (Gern 1987:73) during the 1960 in the West, (the United Nation had declared the 1960s the 'decade of development' (Nürnberger 1987:29)), provided the frame of reference from which the problem of poverty was understood. Poverty was a problem of development, which could be addressed if the underdeveloped countries would modernize and 'catch up' with the developed ones. As the director of the CWME complaint in 1969:

The ecumenical movement has now become seized with the urgency of Development and has launched appeals to the churches of the affluent countries to mobilize concern and resources for the development of the poor countries (Werner 1993:197).

In short, during the 1960s, the issue of poverty as well as the struggle of the poor for their liberation was not seen as an essential issue of theology. It was subsumed in the overall preoccupation of ecumenical theology with the humanization of the world. As such it was a “question of ethics, not of theology proper” (Bosch 1991:437). But this was about to change when, in 1973, the CWME conference meet in Bangkok.

This conference of the CWME in Bangkok is the one through which the split between evangelical and ecumenical missiology became final (Yates1994:199). Bangkok meet under the theme “Salvation today” and was concerned with “poverty as the center of the missiological debate” (Günther 1987:537). In an emotionally charged atmosphere those representing the rich Western churches were accused by the Third World theologians of being part of an exploitative system (Günther 1987:537). Bangkok placed its emphasis on “experiential learning” and was so controversial in its “apparent lack of theological content” that even Stephen Neill wondered if the WCC had lost its direction (Yates 1994:199).

Bangkok’s significance for the *Missio Dei* concept does not lie in its controversial character but rather in asking the question “What is salvation today?”. In its answer Bangkok indicated an “unbreakable connection between individual and social dimension of salvation” (Kinnamon 1997:354), which brings the struggle for the humanization of the world under the overall perspective of liberation. Bangkok declares under the heading “The Mission of God”:

In the power of the Spirit Christ is sent from God the Father, into this divided world “to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of God’s favour (Luke 4:18). Through Christ men and women are liberated and empowered with all their energies and possibilities to participate in this messianic work. As guilt is both individual and corporate so God’s liberating power changes both persons and structures. Therefore we see the struggles for economic justice, political freedom and cultural renewal as elements in the total liberation of the world through the mission of God. This comprehensive notion of salvation demands of the whole of the people of God a matching comprehensive approach to their participation in salvation (Bangkok 1973:88).

*Missio Dei* is identified as the liberation of the world, not just as humanization. The factor of ‘the struggle’ becomes an important feature of God’s mission and for all those who participate in God’s salvation of the world. Because, according to Bangkok, salvation works in a fourfold way: “Salvation works in the struggle for economic justice, in the struggle for



human dignity, in the struggle for solidarity against the alienation of person from person” and “in the struggle for hope against despair in personal life” (Bangkok 1973:89). Within this four-dimensional understanding of salvation mission seeks “the charismatic church which activates energies for salvation” (Bangkok 1973:88-89). The Church, as participant in God’s mission is understood as being an agent of change on the way to a liberated, if not to say saved world. Liberation and salvation become (almost) synonymous, like the Evangelicals would critically remark in commenting on Bangkok (McGavran 1977:27-32, Thomas 1996:128).

Bangkok identified *Missio Dei* in terms of the church being involved as an agent of change in the liberation of the world. This definitely called into question the predominant attitude towards development as the way to ‘uplift the poor’. The crisis of “the developmentalist model” (Boff, L&C.1987:68) had finally arrived within ecumenical missiology.

Like the WCC assembly in Nairobi (1975) said:

The Church's concern for development has arisen primarily from the concern for the poor. But how does the Church express its solidarity with the poor and fight along with them for liberation and justice? In this quest we are led to new understandings of the problem and of our tasks. Poverty, we are learning, is caused primarily by unjust structures that leave resources and power to make decisions about the utilization of resources in the hands of a few within nations and among nations, and that therefore one of the main tasks of the Church when it expresses its solidarity with the poor is to oppose these structures at all levels (Paton 1976:121, Thomas 1996:191).

Nairobi 1975, influenced by Bangkok 1973, did not only identify mission as struggle against unjust structures, and thereby giving the humanization idea a more practical and realistic perspective. Nairobi initiated a major study process about the relationship between the church and the poor. Its final document was received by the WCC in 1980, and called for a “Church which lives in solidarity with the poor” (Reese 1987:29-30, compared to the detailed study process cf. De Santa Ana 1978,1979). The study process was sponsored by the WCC’s Commission on the churches’ Participation in Development (CCPD) and was remarkable because its final document not only identified with the poor (part I) but also with the struggle of the poor for change (part II). It had a very significant influence on the CWME conference at Melbourne in 1980 which meet under the theme “Your kingdom come”. The Melbourne’s section I. report on “Good News to the Poor” reaffirmed God’s preferential option for the

poor (WCC 1980:171-172) and recommended the following to the churches which participates in God's mission:

- a) *Become churches in solidarity with the struggles of the poor.* The poor are already in mission to change their own situation. What is required from the churches is a missionary movement that supports what they have already begun.
- b) *Join the struggle against the powers of exploitation and impoverishment.* Poverty, injustice and oppression do not voluntarily release their grip on the lives of the poor.
- c) *Establish a new relationship with the poor inside the churches.*
- d) *Pray and work for the kingdom of God.* When churches emphasize their own life, their eyes are diverted from the kingdom of God. To pray for the kingdom will enable the churches to work more earnestly for its development (WCC 1980:177-178).

After Melbourne it is impossible to talk about *Missio Dei* without identifying it as a concept of missionary thinking where genuine interest lies with the struggle for liberation. During the 1960s *Missio Dei* emphasized the humanization of the world and identified with the poor as those who needed to be elevated and developed. But with Melbourne the task of humanization becomes more clearly defined as joining in the struggle of the poor, and working for a humanization of the world in a concrete and practical way which brings about justice, peace and liberation. Or, as summed up by Johannes Christian Hoekendijk, one of the fathers of the *Missio Dei* concept:

Where a liberation to a rightful humanization is taking place ... the *Missio Dei*, once again, has reached its goal (Thomas 1996:124).

## **F. Culture as medium of *Missio Dei***

### **1. *Missio Dei* mediated through culture**

Dietrich Werner, who conceived the connection *Missio Dei* and culture, correctly observed that “since the Apostles made their way from Jerusalem to Antioch the translation of the gospel from one socio-cultural context into another is the fundamental problem of Christian missionary expansion” (Werner 1993:265). Or, to quote H. Richard Niebuhr on the issue, the relationship between Christ and culture “constitutes the problem of Christianity”. Because “Christianity, whether defined as church, creed, ethics, or movement of thought, itself moves between the poles of Christ and culture” (Niebuhr 1951:11). The previously mentioned CWME conference at Bangkok (1973) put the problem in the following way; “Culture shapes the human voice that answers the voice of Christ” (Bangkok 1973:73). Mission is therefore best described as the process of incarnation of Christ in a specific culture. It is the “concrete embodiment, which the word assumes in a particular individual, community, institution or culture” as the Ecumenical Affirmation of the WCC from 1982 states it (Kinnamon 1997:376). In short, mission is concerned with the shaping and realization of Christian faith or identity in and through a new cultural context.

This adds a new dimension to our search for the *Missio Dei* concept. Because God’s mission does not happen in a vacuum but through cultural mediation. The movement of the apostles from Jerusalem to Antioch, from Judaism to the Greco-Roman world took place as a cultural mediation process. A process, as we might add, which was so successful, that today volumes of books are written to untangle the relationship between Christ and Greek culture and theologians ask: “*Must God remain Greek?*” (Hood 1990).

It would be presumptuous to suggest that we are now going to present a detailed study of the issue of Christ and culture as well as of mission as cultural mediation of the gospel. This can not be done here. Our research is mainly concerned with the task of understanding the concept of *Missio Dei* so that we will have a matrix from which to assess the experience of the Holy Spirit within Breakthrough International. We therefore need to look into the issue of ‘Christ and Culture’ especially with the question in mind how culture is understood within *Missio Dei*.

Our first finding has already been mentioned. *Missio Dei* cannot happen without culture as its medium. The human voice, which answers God's call, is formed by culture. Therefore our response to God's *missio* is shaped by our culture.

The question is, how culture, as the medium of God's mission, is understood within the *Missio Dei* concept? In trying to answer this question we will address the following issues. *Missio Dei as contextualization* (F.2), *the tension between the polycentric cultural identity of the gospel and the Church Universal* (F.3), and *Missio Dei in critical distance to culture – contextualization and transformation* (F.4).

But before we discuss these three issues, we need to give attention to a general characteristic of the relationship between the *Missio Dei* and culture. The connection between *Missio Dei* and culture tends to stir between two dangers which are characterized by the risk of becoming either irrelevant or syncretistic, to use the words of Lesslie Newbigin (Newbigin 1994:67). Culture is not only the medium of God's mission it can also become its captor. Like numerous examples have shown, culture has the potential to hold the gospel confined to its own concepts and values. Newbigin explains:

Everyone with experience of cross-cultural mission knows that there are always two opposite dangers, between which one must steer. On the one side there is the danger that one finds no point of contact for the message as the missionary preaches it, to the people of the local culture the message appears irrelevant and meaningless. On the other side is the danger that the point of contact determines entirely the way that the message is received, and the result is syncretism (Newbigin 1994:67).

Ecumenical missiology has created all kinds of terminology to grasp the challenge of being held captive by culture (syncretism) or being irrelevant in a specific culture. Terms like 'contextualization' and 'indigenization' are "frequently employed in discussions about de-Westernizing or decolonializing" (Hood 1990:111). They are added to older ones like 'adaptation', 'accommodation' (Newbigin 1989:142) or 'incarnation'. This variety of terminology was developed in order to deal with different aspects of the same concern namely with "the integration of culture and Christian faith" (Müller 1987:177) moving between syncretism or irrelevance.

## 2. *Missio Dei* as contextualization

Of the above mentioned terms we will now single out 'contextualization', since it has great importance for the *Missio Dei* concept. The term 'contextualization' was coined in the 1970s and soon caught on to become a blanket term for a variety of theological models. According to Ukpong (cf. Bosch 420), one can identify two major types of contextual theology. They are the:

... indigenization model and the social economic model. Each of these can again be divided into two subtypes: the indigenization motif presents itself either as translation or as inculturation model; the socio-economic pattern of contextualization can be evolutionary (political theology and the theology of development) or revolutionary (liberation theology, black theology, feminist theology, etc.) (Bosch 1991:420-421).

Bosch goes on to qualify this rather broad definition of contextual theology.

I shall, however qualify Ukpong's categorization somewhat. In my view, only the inculturation model in the first type and only the revolutionary model in the second qualify as contextual theologies proper (Bosch 1991:421).

Even though this definition of contextual theology still lacks precision we shall work with it adding one point concerning the task of contextual theology as a local enterprise: Contextual theology, as the word suggests is primarily concerned with the analysis of the context in which the mission of God unfolds. Waldenfels points to three areas which are of particular interest for the analytical work of contextual theology. These are the (1) socio-economic conditions and developments; (2) the intellectual history (*Geistesgeschichte*) and cultural orientation; and (3) the world view and religious situation; of a society in a certain time and location (Waldenfels 1987:226-229). In that sense contextual theology is a truly local theology, concerned with a very particular situation or context, as opposed to a theology which deals with concepts and ideas removed from the experience of the people.

Contextual theology was not explicitly on the agenda of the IMC conference at Willingen 1952. The idea of contextualization does not appear in the statements of the conference, which was of such fundamental importance for the emerging *Missio Dei* concept. Even worse, with respect to the issue of *Missio Dei* and culture, Willingen displays an attitude of spiritual colonialism.

The conference statement on "*The indigenous Church – The universal Church in its local setting*" is very clear on that. There it says:

Churches should take a positive yet critical attitude to the national cultures. We believe that churches have the right and duty to make captive to Christ such elements of these cultures as can serve as vehicles of Christian truth. The churches have to return to the task and seek to fill cultural forms with Christian substance; to transform, under the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit, the ideas, practices and traditions of the people, so that the Christian message may become an integral part of the life and experience of the people (Goodall 1952:196-197).

Willingen is bound to a concept which tries to take 'captive to Christ those elements of culture which can serve as a vehicle of Christian truth'. With statements like this mission takes on the form of 'spiritual colonialism'. Because the context, in which the text of the gospel is proclaimed, is basically irrelevant. It becomes relevant only in as far as it needs to be taken serious, in order to make the message heard more effectively.

Willingen's understanding of culture as material to be used in order to communicate timeless gospel more effectively underwent major modifications in the years to come. The preparatory conferences of the IMC assembly in Ghana 1957 already saw the focus shifting towards taking the contribution of culture, in this instance African culture, towards the identity of Christian faith seriously (Werner 1993:290, cf. All Africa Conference 1963: 32ff). But the definite turning point in the discussion on *Missio Dei* and culture is marked by the CWME conference at Bangkok 1973.

Bangkok is basically the first CWME conference where the voice of the so called third world is heard loud and clear and initiates a major shift in missionary outlook. "The anger and resentment of churches from the two-thirds world against Western dominance exploded" at Bangkok (Scherer 1987:123), as the report on "Culture and identity" shows. It asks:

How can we responsibly answer the voice of Christ instead of copying foreign models of conversion – imposed, not truly accepted? We refuse merely to be raw materials used by other people to achieve their own salvation. The one faith must be made at home in every context, yet it cannot be completely identical with it. Therefore there will be a rich diversity ... Racial and cultural identity are divine gifts and human achievements to be taken up into Christian identity (Bangkok 1973:75).

This did not just call for a more diverse understanding of culture. It initiated a farewell from a Western understanding of culture. The West, especially during the 1960s, understood culture as unavoidably 'developing' or moving towards one global world-culture, or "single secular culture" as the WCC assembly at Uppsala 1968 calls it (Goodall 1968:18). Within this 'world

culture' some folkloristic reserves in which to live a pre-modern life would still be possible, but in general the world was part of what John Marsh called 'universal history'(Marsh 1962:3).

But the Bangkok ecumenical missiology understood that this developmentalist perspective was simplifying the issue of culture. Phillip Potter remarked, contrary to idealistic belief, nurtured by a certain affinity to Hegel's philosophical thinking, that the reality of the world is not marked by a development towards harmony, but is "in reality deeply divided - politically, economically and racially" (Potter 1973:18). This deeply divided world is the context in which the voice of Christ needs to be heard. The voice of Christ is answered by the people who live in diverse, or even divided cultural backgrounds. Since, as Bangkok said it, "conversion is always related to the place and the circumstances where it occurs" (Bangkok 1973:76); cultural diversity is understood as a condition, under which the gospel forms its concrete identity. It is not a tactical maneuver to eventually take a culture captive, in order to fill it with Christian substance (Willingen). But a requirement of an authentic process of incarnation. Missionary models of adaptation or accommodation, which assume that the gospel is a 'timeless truth' and just needs to be packaged in the right cultural form, don't take the incarnate character of the gospel seriously. As Dietrich Werner says with respect to Bangkok's theme "Salvation today" :

There is no culture-free gospel any longer, which subsequently just needs to be adapted. The question of salvation is culturally conditioned, and is now asked and answered with reference to experience and context, rather than in a deductive and universal manner. To contextualize the search for salvation within the horizon of the socio-cultural reality of man is therefore a condition for the gospel in order that it can achieve concrete identity (Werner 1993:311).

In other words, *Missio Dei* does not happen if the gospel is not contextualized (cf. Wilson 1990:43-44). This is a local process, happening where incarnation of the gospel takes place within the concrete context of certain communities and their cultures.

The Ecumenical Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism (1982) of the WCC reiterated the importance of contextualization. It stresses the indigenization model but also refers to the social economic model of contextual theology, (cf. Ukpong in Bosch 1993:420) by pointing to the struggle the poor. The statement says:

The planting of the Church in different cultures demands a positive attitude towards inculturation of the Gospel. ... Inculturation has its source and inspiration in the mystery of the Incarnation.. The word was made flesh. Here flesh means the fully concrete, human and created reality that Jesus was. Inculturation, therefore becomes another way of describing Christian mission... inculturation sees mission in the perspective of the flesh, or concrete embodiment, which the World assumes in a particular individual, community, institution or culture. Inculturation should not be understood merely as intellectual research; it occurs when Christians express their faith in the symbols and images of their respective cultures. *The best way to stimulate the process of inculturation is to participate in the struggle of the less privileged for their liberation Solidarity is the best teacher of common cultural values* (Kinnamon 1997:376).

Contextualization is not just an intellectual concept but a requirement for the proper participation in *Missio Dei*. Missiology can therefore not talk any longer of one culture but needs to talk about the many cultures in which the gospel comes to life. In short: the idea of culture itself needs be contextualized (Werner 1993:373). The cultural conditioning of the gospel is taken into account as a reality caused by the character of God's mission, which is expressed in the sending of the Son incarnate. Because of the incarnate character of the sending of the Son, God's mission is aimed at "the total context in which people are now living and in which they now have to make their decisions" (Newbigin 1989:142). Consequently *Missio Dei* means contextualization.

### 3. The polycentric cultural identity of the gospel and the Church Universal

We have noted that the apostles made their way from Jerusalem to Antioch, thereby making the "translation" of the gospel from one socio-cultural context into another the fundamental problem of Christian missionary expansion. But we need to note as well that the Apostles did make the journey back from Antioch to Jerusalem, so that the Judaist and the Hellenistic version of Christianity would join hands (Acts 13). Paul even called on Greco-Roman Christianity to collect money in support for their brothers and sisters from a Judaist cultural background, thus acknowledging a oneness of the body of Christ which transcends contextualization (2 Cor.8+9).

This means that on the one hand *Missio Dei* must be understood as contextualization (moving from Jerusalem to Antioch) thereby forming a new cultural identity of faith. But on the other hand, the oneness in the body of Christ (returning to Jerusalem) is as important to the *Missio Dei* concept, as is contextualization. The question is, how contextualization and oneness, or,



to stay in the biblical illustration, going to Antioch and returning to Jerusalem, relate to each other?

The WCC assembly in Nairobi did follow up this issue in its section II. report “*The Search for Cultural Identity and the Oneness of the Church Universal*”: It states:

The Church’s oneness has to include and transcend every culture, but the gospel can not be wholly separated from those cultures through which it has in fact come to us.... No church should become so identified with its own or another particular culture, present or past, as to frustrate its critical dialogue with that culture. When the church’s loyalty to a given culture becomes uncritical, the oneness of the Church Universal suffers (Kinnamon 1997:113).

The problem is as clear as it is difficult. *Missio Dei* implies contextualization for the sake of the gospel which by its very nature creates the catholicity and unity of the church. As the 1982 Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism of the WCC puts it:

Growing cultural diversity [born out of contextualization] could create some difficulties. In our attempt to express the catholicity of the Church we may lose the sense of its unity. But the unity we look for is not uniformity but the multiple expression of a common faith and a common mission (Kinnamon 1997:377).

This issue of catholicity and unity of the church was extensively addressed between the Canberra assembly of the WCC in 1991 and the CWME conference at Salvador de Bahia in 1996. A study process where “many groups worked at local and regional levels” (Matthey 2002:6) had been initiated in preparation for the conference in Salvador. The conference met under the theme: “*Called to one Hope: Gospel in diverse Cultures*”. The Salvador conference was the first one, since Edinburgh 1910, exclusively addressing the issue of culture and mission. Christopher Duraisingh, editor of the conference report, noted that a major shift in missionary thinking, from ‘euro-centric to poly-centric understanding of mission and culture’, took place in Salvador (Duraisingh 1998:194).

According to Duraisingh, to qualify the cultural context of *Missio Dei* as ‘polycentric’ refers to more than the existence of many churches around the world. It needs to be understood as a ‘systematic principle of differentiation - diversity in life and witness, theological formulation, and dialogue and communion’. This kind of understanding of culture and mission refuses to accord epistemological privilege and adjudicating power to any single church (Duraisingh 1998:195).

The discussions which took place in the different sections of the conference spelled out what the polycentric understanding of mission and culture meant and how this was tied together with the fact that the church is a Church Universal (Nairobi). Therefore we will briefly summarize what the section I to IV contributed to topic.

Section I. “*Authentic witness within each culture*” reaffirmed the contextual stand that the gospel is the gospel of Jesus the Incarnate which is lived out in a particular context. Salvation is a contextual reality (Duraisingh 1998:34). Therefore an authentic witness within each culture is not only required but actually widens the understanding of the gospel. As the section I. report said:

To affirm that cultures illuminate the gospel is to hold that culture, manifested in art and other forms of human activity, enlightens and enhances our understanding of the gospel (Duraisingh 1998:35).

Differences are therefore welcomed and “hold together within the living structure of a differentiated unity” demanding a “culture of dialogue, a dialogue in which Christian may give univocal witness to God’s love in Christ (Duraisingh 1998:205).

Furthermore Salvador was not guided by an uncritical and idealistic understanding of culture, but notes that culture can be held together by structures which maintain exploitative relationships of power and status. Section II. “*Gospel and Identity in Community*” therefore asked:

What are the structural factors in societies that lead people to lose hope? What role does the search for local or narrow group identities and the possession of globalization play in promoting the fragmentation of human community on the one hand and the destruction of local culture on the other? How many Christians witness to the gospel of Christ as the power of God which frees and unites? How may they proclaim the gospel as the relevant word of life to the public structures of society? (Duraisingh 1998:xi).

This range of questions points to the fact that Salvador does have a grasp of the fact that culture in itself is not just good. It might contain structural elements against which the church, participating in God’s mission, needs to stand up.

We will return to this issue when we discuss *Missio Dei* and critical distance towards culture (2.F.4.). For now we note that Salvador went beyond an uncritical understanding of culture. Because the Gospel is a liberating message, and as such does not only affirm the cultural

identity of those who believe. But it takes all beyond their own identity into the new identity of being part of the community of the Spirit (Duraisingh 1998:41).

The 'polycentric' cultural identity of the gospel does bring with it tension and conflict which is mostly felt and expressed at the local congregation. The concern of section III. "*Local congregation in Pluralistic Societies*" was therefore to reflect on the role of the local congregation in contextualizing the gospel. The local congregation can either be the stumbling block or agent of transformation within the dialogue between 'Christ and culture' (Philip 1999:www.religion online chapter 7). It is at local level that the church becomes meaningful in a particular cultural reality. It is also at local level where the church has to overcome any possible captivity by cultural realities which leads to an unwelcoming attitude towards the ethnically and racially "other" (Duraisingh 1998:206). Therefore the "report suggested that when distinct communities existed along racial or ethnic lines within a local congregation, they should be encouraged to cultivate together the multiracial richness of the church as a privilege, and as a gift of God" (Philip 1999:www.religion online chapter 7).

But cultural plurality is not only reflected within the local congregation. It is also a sociological reality in the world in which the local congregation operates. Local congregations everywhere find themselves in religiously plural societies. In this context they are called to give account of their faith by way of dialogue with people of other faiths. This dialogue should allow for genuine sharing if the partners meet in a spirit of humility, honesty and mutual respect (Duraisingh 1998:206; Philip 1999:www.religion online chapter 7). This emphasis on the local congregation underlines not only the culturally polycentric identity of the gospel but also the diversity of the church. It poses the question which has been asked before. How do the local, contextual church and the Church Universal (Nairobi) relate to each other?

The question was discussed in Salvador's section IV. "*One Gospel and diverse Expressions*" asking: What binds the diverse expressions of the gospel together and guards against the danger of disunity or syncretism? (Duraisingh 1998:64-70). Without going into detail on the discussion on syncretism we note two ways in which the issue was tackled. The first one was a rather systematic one, the second one was more practical.

On a systematic level Salvador stressed that any authentic understanding of the Gospel is

both, contextual and catholic thereby changing the terminology of the 1982 Affirmation slightly. T.V. Philip has summarized it in this way:

Identity and context on the one hand, and communion and catholicity on the other are not opposed to each other but complementary. Cultural contextuality in the Christian sense does not mean isolated and self-contained expression of the Gospel but affirmation of the gifts of each culture for the proclamation of the Gospel in communion with other contexts. Similarly, catholicity does not mean a universality that sweeps away particular identities, but is the expression of the fullness of truth that can be experienced in each particular context. Catholicity is not the destruction or overwhelming of the local; it is the local in communion (Philip 1999:www.religion online chapter 7).

Here we see that from a systematic point of view contextuality and catholicity are held together by the 'local congregation in communion'. From a practical point of view Salvador therefore calls on the local churches to constantly engage in a dialogue with each other. The conference reminded its participants of M.M.Thomas' statement at the Nairobi assembly in respect to a Christ-centered syncretism. Duraisingh quotes Thomas:

What is important is for the churches to commit themselves to each other across cultures so that they may "share a rich diversity of the Christian faith; discover the unity that binds these together; and affirm together the Christological center and Trinitarian source of our faith in all its varied expressions" (Duraisingh 1998:210).

Salvador's contribution to the development of the *Missio Dei* concept is that it reaffirms the cultural identity of faith. Faith is always expressed in cultural forms which leads, due to the contextual character of the gospel, to cultural polycentrism within the Church Universal. Despite this diverse cultural character of the church Salvador spells out that the catholicity of the church, the oneness of the body of Christ, needs to be realized on local level. This happens through a constant process of dialogue between the churches which thereby hold each other accountable to the foundations of Christianity. *Missio Dei* is therefore culturally mediated and happens in an interdependent practice of the local churches within communion participating in the Church Universal and the contextual expression of the gospel facilitated through the church locally.

#### 4. *Missio Dei* as critique of culture – contextualization and transformation

We have mentioned already that any culture might contain structural elements which the church, participating in God's mission, needs to oppose. The Salvador conference, for instance, points to the fact that in Africa women have been silenced for centuries in the name

of culture. It calls therefore for a critical approach to culture applying 'cultural hermeneutics'. This "Cultural hermeneutics ... seeks to demystify the abstractness of "culture" by calling for analysis of and reflection on culture and its effects on people" (Duraishigh 1998:104).

But it is not only the oppressive structures from within which 'cultural hermeneutics' tries to expose. Salvador also realized that globalization seeks to "impose a single consumer identity" which "leads to a loss of self-identity" and the creation of an "homogenizing economic community" which, contrary to the values of the gospel, enriches the few and excludes the many (Duraishigh 1998:40). The conference therefore asked "how Christian witness to the gospel can be an articulation of a counter-culture?"

This idea of the church forming a counter-culture was not really new. The CWME conference the Bangkok 1973 said that it "played with the concept of Christian community as counter-culture; but we abandoned this idea because it cut us off too definitely from the communities of men of which we are also part" (Bangkok 1973:77). Nonetheless Bangkok realized that Christianity can not uncritically identify with the ruling cultural trends. It describes the relationship between Christians and culture like this:

Usually we shall have to live in a somewhat dialectical relationship, participating with a certain hesitation, identifying ourselves while keeping our critical distance. Our identity is in Christ and with him we identify ourselves (Bangkok 1973:78).

Even though Bangkok shies away from the designation 'counter-culture' it is clear that it calls the church to operate within a certain critical distance to the predominant culture of the day. In that sense ecumenical missiology is implicitly 'culture-critical' (Werner 1993:340-41). Or, to refer to the thinking of the assembly of the WCC at Vancouver 1983,

evangelization and culture are in a dialogical interrelationship. Evangelization happens through contextualization in a certain culture. But the proclamation of the gospel has a dynamic which is refusing to be held captive by culture and tends to change culture where it might be bound by exploitative structures and pattern (Müller-Röhmfeld 1983:261-262).

In other words, *Missio Dei* does not only mean contextualization in a certain culture but also transformation of that culture. On that note John Stockwell has recognized two major needs where the gospel needs to work on the transformation of culture. He identified these during his presentation at the CWME conference at San Antonio. According to Stockwell the

Two current needs are (1) to challenge the strong impact of secularistic, technological, consumerist, and often militarist, cultures that spread across the globe, frequently masquerading as “Christian”, and to seek to affirm the many cultures of the poor (Wilson 1990:123).

There comes the time when the church is called to ‘cultural disobedience (Verstraelen 1987:42, in Werner 349), as some have called it. San Antonio calls it “resistance” as “an attitude of vigilance in the defense of life, so that the purpose of the God of life may be upheld - a combat to restore life sapped by distress, sickness, injustice and death” (Wilson 1990:41). In that sense *Missio Dei* is not only to be understood as incarnation ‘in culture’ but also as uprising ‘against culture’, to use R.Niebuhr’s classic distinction (Niebuhr 1951). The element of struggle emerges in relationship between Christ and culture. It is a struggle which is primarily directed at overcoming oppression and exploitation. The chief opponent is a globalized culture which does not realize the right of the culture of the poor and marginalized and eventually will be self-destructive.

## G. *Missio Dei* and the experience of the Spirit

### 1. The spirituality of the ecumenical movement and the experience of the Spirit

Kinnamon and Cope say about the ecumenical movement:

The ecumenical movement, especially when seen from the outside, can look like an endless series of meetings and texts. Those who participated in it fully, however, generally affirm – in the words of the great Roman Catholic ecumenist Yves Congar – that “the way through the door of unity is on our knees” (Kinnamon 1997:497).

Any look at *Missio Dei* concept which emerged from the ecumenical movement would therefore be incomplete without coming to terms with the spiritual dimension of the meetings which over decades produced so many texts on the issue of mission and evangelism. Ernst Verwiebe, a German delegate at the IMC conference in Willingen 1952, has described the spirituality at the conference which made the participants feel to be “part of a universal, worldwide brotherhood (sic!)” (Freytag 1952:19). Verwiebe writes:

The unity and brotherhood, which included all conference participants, ... was found in the shared knowledge to be called by the one Christ ... Therefore it was clear that the delegates meet every morning in the beautiful church at Willingen to pray together ... The three times, when Holy Communion was celebrated at the conference, were of outmost importance... The plate with bread went from hand to hand, everybody broke off a piece from himself and passed the plate on to the neighbour. In the same manner it was done with the cup. Everybody drank from it and passed it on to the next. A different way to celebrate, but anyhow it is the same Lord who in, with and under bread and wine gives himself to his people (Freytag 1952:20-21).

From today’s perspective this report does not seem noteworthy. But, to celebrate communion, during Verwiebe’s days, in the above described manner, where Anglicans, Methodists, Lutherans, Baptists and even Pentecostals participated, was a major spiritual experience of unity. Willingen is only one of the examples for the spirituality which was alive during the various conferences and meetings of the ecumenical movement. It is difficult to measure the impact of spirituality on the development of the ecumenical movement in general, and ecumenical missiology in particular. But Willingen’s ‘experience of unity in communion’ does not stand alone, even though it is not the sort of thing one usually would find in an assembly report.

It would give material for a whole separate study to see what kind of spirituality is expressed in the liturgical material which has been prepared for the various assemblies and conferences of the ecumenical movement over the years. We cannot do this here. Nonetheless we need to take note of the spiritual side of ecumenical missiology. Because it is in its spirituality where

ecumenical missiology goes beyond being an endless series of meetings and texts, and points to the divine experience which is the basis of the movement. By looking into the history of the ecumenical movement one is drawn to conclude that the movement is in itself a spiritual process where it is both a driving force of the Spirit and being driven by the Spirit. Ecumenical theology, 'passing through the door of unity on its knees', has a spiritual dimension 'celebrating the unity in Christ' (Willingen). This dimension becomes tangible by having a closer look at the spirituality expressed and experienced at the numerous assemblies and conferences of the WCC and the CWME or IMC respectively.

Those meetings were foremost an opportunity to unity in "prayer, praise and thanksgiving", as Samuel McCrea Cavert has said it for the 1961 WCC assembly in New Delhi (Visser't Hooft 1962:9). They could even lead to overwhelming Pentecostal like experiences of unity like it happened at the IMC conference at Whitby in 1947. Whitby, the first meeting of the IMC after the Second World War, created a unity which, despite of national, racial and historical separation, lead, according to the testimony of their participants, into an "experience which can most adequately be described as 'Pentecostal'" (Günther 1970:69).

Throughout this whole second chapter we have stressed the conceptual side of the ecumenical movement, analyzing texts and statement on the issue of mission, but the above observation should be sufficient to show that there is an experiential side to it as well. This experiential side focuses especially around the experience of worship in multi-confessional and cultural settings. A particular important moment in that respect was the WCC's sixth assembly (Vancouver 1983) known as the "praying assembly" (Kinnamon 1991:20). There, according to Kinnamon and Cope, several factors contributed to 'the experience of Vancouver'. Those are:

- a conviction that worship is every bit as important as, if not more important, than the business of the assembly;
- an effective use of symbols that cut through barriers of language, culture and confession;
- a respectful, authentic incorporation of non-Western materials, including hymns and chants;
- a careful balance between liturgical form and charismatic freedom;
- a powerful celebration of the eucharist using the so-called "Lima liturgy" ...;
- an insistence that ecumenical worship, like all worship, is for the purpose of praising God, not pushing a political agenda (Kinnamon 1997:497-498).

Vancouver was 'an experience' because of its spirituality. This affirms that there is a experiential side of ecumenical missiology, in which the Spirit is made tangible. Those who



participate in God's mission feel that they belong to something greater than themselves and their conceptual thinking is at times overwhelmed by the experience of the Spirit. Unfortunately this is not something, which is talked or written about a lot. But even on a conceptual level the CWME conference at San Antonio refers to the presence of the Spirit which makes the proclamation of the kingdom possible.

At the very heart of the church's vocation in the world is the proclamation of the kingdom of God inaugurated in Jesus the Lord, crucified and risen and made present amongst us by the Holy Spirit (Wilson 1990:25).

San Antonio is clear that ecumenical missiology is aware of the need for a spirituality in which the presences of the Holy Spirit is experienced or 'made present'. The question is what ecumenical missiology has to say about this Holy Spirit which it acknowledges as the driving force of God's mission? In other words, what role does the Holy Spirit, or even the experience of the Holy Spirit, play within the *Missio Dei* concept? In attempting to deal with this question we will focus on two issues: Firstly we address the topic "*Missio Dei and the Holy Spirit – Pneumatology versus Christology*", where we will trace the role which the Holy Spirit played in the *Missio Dei* concept ever since Willingen 1952. Secondly we look at "*Missio Dei as the coming of the Holy Spirit – renewing the whole creation*".

With regard to the latter issue we are in the fortunate situation that we can draw extensively from the the seventh assembly of the WCC at Canberra which entirely was dedicated to the topic of the Holy Spirit. Canberra met under the theme "*Come Holy Spirit – renew the whole creation*", and was part of a new orientation of the ecumenical movement from a mainly christological frame of mind to a more pneumatological understanding of mission, which is rooted in a sound trinitarian theology (Werner 1993:386). It is therefore good to discuss the main points of Canberra in detail, since we see a new understanding of the role of Holy Spirit in a theology of mission emerging.

## 2. *Missio Dei* and the Holy Spirit – Pneumatology versus Christology

We had said, that the IMC conference in Willingen took several groundbreaking theological decisions with respect to a theology of missions (cf. II.C.4.2.1-4). One of those was to understand God's mission in a trinitarian frame of reference. Furthermore we noted that this trinitarian understanding of *Missio Dei* was guided by a certain 'christological imbalance'

(Werner). Which means that generally speaking the Spirit played a lesser role in the new paradigm of missiological thinking emerging at Willingen. Ecumenical theology tended to perceive everything through a “christological perspective” (Werner 1993:69). This might be illustrated by the fact that virtually all assemblies of the WCC as well as the conferences of the CWME and IMC respectively, ever since Edinburgh 1910, had themes with a christological focus. It was not until the Canberra assembly in 1991 that this changed with respect to pneumatology. Canberra was the first assembly of the WCC in the history of the ecumenical movement, which chose the third person of the Trinity as its theme (Kinnamon 1991:14).

this is not to say that ecumenical missiology had no understanding of the role of the Spirit within God’s mission. Willingen itself can serve as an example to that effect. There F.W.Dillistone had emphasized that the gospel can not be preserved in amber but must be communicated in the power of the Holy Spirit (Freitag 1952:55-56; cf.II.C.3.2).

F.W. Dillistone spoke of the work of the Holy Spirit in communicating and in creating community. The story of Pentecost records that it was through the Spirit that the apostles were able to communicate to people of all nations the wonderful works of God. The story ends with the description of a community knit together by the Spirit into a common life in which natural divisions and barriers were transcended (Philip 1999<sup>15</sup>, cf.Goodall 1953:86-87).

Furthermore we need to note that the Willingen conference received a report entitled “The theological basis of the missionary obligation”. The report was very clear that the sending of the Spirit is as important for the continuance of the church participating in God’s mission, as was the sending of the Son for the her inception. The report says;

For God also sent forth the Holy Spirit. By the Holy Spirit the Church, experiencing God’s active love, is assured that God will complete what He has set His hand to in the sending of the His Son. ... The work of the Holy Spirit in the Church and through the Church ensures that ‘mission’ should also belong to the continuing life of the Church. By the Holy Spirit the Church only continues to live as the Church when it is the place at which God’s love, active in the death of Christ, is sent forth into the world by witness and re-presented to God by worship (Goodall 1953:241).

The Spirit, according to Willingen, is essential for fulfilling the missionary obligation of the Church. Because it is through the Spirit that the Church bears witness of the love of God, and represents this love in acts of worship. Willingen was clear that any separation of the three persons of the Trinity would be counterproductive to God’s Mission, because “mission’ is

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15 Internet reference [http://www.religion-online.org/cgi-bin/researchd.dll/showchapter?chapter\\_id=1520](http://www.religion-online.org/cgi-bin/researchd.dll/showchapter?chapter_id=1520)

woven into all three and cannot be separated from anyone without destroying it” (Goodall 1953:241).

But Willingen cannot only serve as an example of how the Holy Spirit was integrated in a theology of mission, based in the Holy Trinity. It is also an example of the christological imbalance which, despite understanding the essential role of the Spirit, as realizing God’s mission in the present, is so prevalent within the first decades of ecumenical missiology. Willingen affirmed that the Holy Spirit is the one who brings the church to life in witness and worship. But;

...those who are sought out, gathered together, and transformed by Christ are the Church. Their very existence, therefore springs from God’s sending forth of His Son (Goodall 1953:241).

Here a certain tension between a trinitarian and christological understanding of *Missio Dei* becomes visible. On the one hand it is by the Holy Spirit that the Church is assured that God will complete what He has set His hand to in the sending of the His Son. On the other hand it is through the sending of the Son that the church is been sought out, gathered together, and transformed. This allows only for a facilitating role of the Holy Spirit within God’s *Missio*. The Spirit is not really the one who “gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church”, as Martin Luther would say (Tappert 1959:345), but the activity of the Spirit still ‘springs from the sending of the Son’.

In short: Even though Willingen saw the Spirit at work within its trinitarian understanding of mission, it also tends to focus on Christology, thereby setting a trend which would predominantly for years to come. Ecumenical missiology affirmed that God’s mission is realized through the Spirit, but still its main focus for decades after Willingen was on the issue of Christology.

It is only a few times that this focus shifted towards pneumatology. One of the most significant times in that respect, except for Canberra 1991, was the WCC assembly at Uppsala in 1968. The assembly produced a paper on “The Holy Spirit and the Catholicity of the Church” which is one of the first documents of ecumenical theology dealing explicitly with the role of Holy Spirit. The report begins with an astonishing acknowledgement. It says:

We give thanks to God the Holy Spirit that at this very time he is leading us into a fresh and exhilarating understanding of the Body of Christ, to the glory of God the Father. He is transforming the relationships between separated Christian communities, so that we now speak to each other with greater mutual trust and with more hope of reconciliation than ever before (Goodall 1968:11).

The emphasis of the report, indicated in the heading, is on the unity between the churches coming together in the World Council of Churches. But one notes with surprise that the report attributes the progress in respect to unity to the works of the Holy Spirit. It is not the confession of Christ's Lordship – Christology - but the leadership of the Holy Spirit – pneumatology - which creates a 'fresh understanding of the body of Christ'. Uppsala accepts that "the same Spirit who brings us together in the Church does, in fact, make us aware of the needs of the world" (Goodall 1968:12). But the Spirit does more than 'bring together' and 'create awareness'. The Uppsala report continues:

The Church gladly confesses the Holy Spirit as "the Lord, and giver of life".... In giving this life the Holy Spirit

brings sinful men through repentance and Baptism into the universal fellowship of the forgiven; bears witness through the Church to the truth of the Gospel, and makes it credible to men;

builds up the Church in each place through the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist;

stirs the conscience of the Church by the voice of the prophets to keep her in the mercy and judgment of God;

maintains the Church in communion and continuity with the people of God in all ages and places;

equips the Church to accept and make use of the great variety of God's gifts, bestowed upon its members for the enrichment of human life;

empowers the Church in her unity to be a ferment in society, for the renewal and unity of mankind;

sends men into the world equipped to prepare the way for God's rule on earth by proclaiming freedom to the captives and sight to the blind;

awakens Christians to watch for the Lord's coming, when he will judge the living and the dead, and open the gates of his city to all his people (Goodall 1968:13-14).

This is probably the most comprehensive statement made by ecumenical theology about the role of the Spirit within *Missio Dei* ever since Edinburgh 1910 and until Canberra 1991. It is worthwhile to quote it in its full length. Because Uppsala clearly indicates the importance of the Spirit for any understanding of God's mission. Despite of the christological imbalance

prevailing within the ecumenical movement until Canberra 1991 we can note that Willingen as well as Uppsala talk about the pneumatological dimension of *Missio Dei*.

Willingen makes clear that it is through the Spirit that the Church bears witness to the love of God and represents this love in acts of worship. Uppsala goes further and spells out in detail what the Holy Spirit is doing. It is the Spirit who brings sinful men together, establishes universal fellowship, bears witness of the gospel and makes it credible to men, builds the church locally through word and sacrament, stirs the conscience of the church, maintains the Church in communion and continuity, equips the Church, empowers the church, sends men into the world, and awakens Christians to an eschatological way of life.

In summary we can say that Werner's notion of the 'christological imbalance within ecumenical missiology' needs to be modified. Even though Christology was the predominant perspective through which God's mission was understood between Willingen 1952 and Canberra 1991, pneumatology was not totally neglected. The ecumenical movement was aware that God had not only send his Son, but also did send the Spirit. Yet the sending of the Spirit was the one building on the sending of the Son.

Willingen's groundbreaking statement on the *Missionary calling of the Church* sums up the this relationship between pneumatology and Christology quite comprehensively. It says

God has sent forth one Saviour...who ... has broken down the barrier between man and God.... On the foundation of this accomplished work God has sent forth His Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, to gather us together in one Body in Him, to guide us into all truth, to enable us to worship the Father in spirit and in truth, to empower us for the continuance of His mission as His witnesses and ambassadors, the first fruits and earnest of its completion (Goodall 1952:189).

### 3. *Missio Dei* as the coming of the Holy Spirit – renewing the whole creation

#### 3.1. Canberra 1991 - ecumenical theology addressing the issue of the Holy Spirit

Before we look at the reports of WCC assembly at Canberra 1991 in order to shed light on the role of the Holy Spirit within the *Missio Dei* concept, we need to make a few remarks about the assembly itself. This will put our findings into perspective.

It has been said already, that this is the first assembly of the WCC focusing on the Holy Spirit and it does so in form of the prayer "Come Holy Spirit, Renew the whole creation". This focus on the spiritual led people to suspect that the WCC was distancing itself from the "existential reality of struggle and suffering" and escape into "religiosity" (Kinnamon 1991:155). Nonetheless Emilio Castro, in its function as General Secretary of the WCC, affirmed that the spiritual focus does not remove the WCC from the reality of conflict in history, since the "creator God who redeems and sanctifies is the God who acts in history" (Kinnamon 1991:155). Castro goes on:

The energies which sustain the universe are a manifestation of the Spirit.... The symbols of the Holy Spirit in the Bible are symbols of action, movement and struggle. The Spirit is breath, wind, the dove, fire, the finger of God. It is our faith in the Holy Spirit the giver of Life which places us in the midst of situations of conflict.... The Church, called into being at Pentecost by the coming of the Holy Spirit, is a dynamic missionary body send to serve the whole world in the discipleship of Jesus Christ. ... The Holy Spirit obliges us to be in solidarity with the downtrodden, to proclaim peace, to uphold human rights, to challenge all historical reality that seems to militate against the vision of the kingdom (Kinnamon 1991:155-156).

If one compares what Castro says with the documents which the assembly commended to the churches for study and appropriate action, one notes that he in essence sums up what Canberra had to say about the role of the Spirit in God's mission. In other words the conference did not, unfortunately, present a sound pneumatology of the ecumenical movement as one might have hoped for. With its over 4000 participants (delegates, visitors etc. cf. Kinnamon 1991:8), it resembled more a 'festival of faith' (Kinnamon 1991:25) than a theological conference. This 'festival of faith' did "lack of substantial theological input" as Michael Kinnamon, the editor of the assembly report, put it (Kinnamon 1991:24).

Some parts of the reports of the four sub-sections, into which the main theme was broken down, read more like a political program than a serious attempt to become a Spirit driven 'dynamic missionary body send to serve the whole world' The report of section II. "*Spirit of truth set us free*", for instance, has not much to say about the Spirit and its relation to liberation. It rather mentions the Spirit in the first "*Theological perspective*" (Kinnamon 1991:73-74), and then turns to issues and recommendations spelling out a program of action (Kinnamon 1991:74-97). "The Spirit seems to drop out of consideration after the first section" as Emmanuel Klapsis, a delegate from the Eastern Orthodox Church (USA), remarked (Kinnamon 1991:94).

Bearing in mind that, theological speaking, the documents produced are of “less than the highest standards” (Kinnamon 1991:24), we can however draw on them to identify some key contributions to understanding of the Holy Spirit within the *Missio Dei* concept. With those key-contributions we do not necessarily mean the highly controversial and well publicized presentation of Prof. Chung Hyun Kyung who called upon the ancestral spirit as agents of the Holy Spirit. Her comment that “because of them [the ancestral spirits] we can feel, touch and taste the concrete bodily historical presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst” (Kinnamon 1991:39), stirred up the proceedings a bit. But the key-contributions with regard to the topic of this thesis rather emerge from the reports on the four sub-themes, which give some idea how the role of the Holy Spirit is understood within ecumenical theology.

According to Philip Potter, the breakdown of the main theme into four sub-themes resulted from the various ways in which “scripture and the tradition of the church speak of the Spirits work” (Kinnamon 1991:48). Notably these ‘ways’ in which ‘scripture and tradition’ speak about the Spirit, at least in view of the Canberra assembly, don’t include the experience of the Spirit, which is of so vital importance to the central theme of this thesis. Canberra even goes further than just omitting the experience of the Spirit as a matter of possible theological discourse. In a rather short section on Pentecostal and charismatic movements it says:

In this century the world has witnessed the rise and growth of movements which emphasize the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.... These movements can contribute to Christian division when a particular experience of the Spirit is introduced as normative for all Christians. Over-emphasis on the Holy Spirit as working independently of the Father and the Son can also be divisive (Kinnamon 1991:107).

Canberra is not willing to explore the issue of the experience of the Spirit further, since this could imply that certain experiences are normative for all Christians thus contributing to division rather than unity. Instead, based on scriptural testimony, it links the Spirit to creation (Gen.1:2;2) and understands the Spirit as the “giver of life”, a formulation which recalls the respective confession of the Nicene Creed. The first sub-theme is therefore entitled “*Giver of Life – Sustain our Creation!*”. The second sub-theme deals with the topic “*Spirit of Truth - Set us free!*” Here the Spirit is identified as the one who reveals and exposes, thus leading the believer in all truth (John 16:13). That the Spirit creates and unites community is reflected in the third sub-theme “*Spirit of Unity – Reconcile our People!*”. Finally, sub-theme four “*Holy Spirit – Transform and sanctify Us!*”, pays attention to the transforming and sanctifying activity of the Spirit through which newness of life is experienced (Kinnamon 1991:48).

### 3.2. Canberra's contribution to define the Holy Spirit and *Missio Dei*

A lot of what is said within those four sub-themes does not contribute anything new to our search for the understanding of the Holy Spirit within the *Missio Dei* concept. Sometimes the reports are disappointing. Especially when one considers the lack of theological content of report II. However, the reports on sub-themes I, III and IV bear more fruit in respect to our quest for the *Missio Dei* concept.

Section 1 “*Giver of Life – Sustain our creation*” is remarkable in that sense, that it tries, based on scriptural evidence, to tie a theological understanding of the Spirit into a “theology of creation as challenge for our times” (Kinnamon 1991:54). The reports says:

The Holy Spirit ... manifests God's energy for life present in all things and reminds us of the total dependence of all things on God. ... Yet, while the earth was created by God out of nothing in a pure and simple act of love, and the Spirit has never abandoned the creation or ceased sustaining it, the earth on which we live is in peril. Creation protests in treatment by human beings. It groans and travails in all its parts (Rom. 8:22). Ecological equilibrium has been severely broken. Through misinterpretation of our faith and through collective and individual misbehaviour we as Christians have participated in the process of destruction. ... In the Bible danger and destruction are understood as the signs of the time which call for repentance and renewal of relationship with God and the whole creation. The stark sign of our time is a planet in peril at our hand. The invitation is to return to God and call upon the Spirit to reorient our lives accordingly (Kinnamon 1991:54-55).

Canberra goes beyond the usual christological understanding of God's mission. God's loving action did not start with the sending of the Son but with the creation of the world, which is sustained through the Spirit. It is the Spirit who will enable people to repent and form a new relationship to God and his creation. Unfortunately the report does not develop this ‘Spirit and creation approach’ towards the ecological crisis of the world much further. In addition, there is, as one delegate remarked, no ecclesiological perspective and the intimate link between the Spirit and Christ is missing (Kinnamon 1991:71). But we note that Canberra is at least trying to develop a theology where God's loving action, his *missio*, begins with creation and where pneumatology is understood as the key force in a reorientation of the human understanding of creation.

Section III, draws in essence on the Uppsala findings on the issue of unity which is facilitated by the Holy Spirit. It calls for openness to the Holy Spirit “who works among us



and also in the world – leading the whole humanity into the community (*koinonia*) which is both a present and eschatological reality” (Kinnamon 1991:97).

What is new, compared to Uppsala, is that the part B. of the report talks about “*Mission in the power of the Spirit – the ministry of reconciliation and sharing*” (Kinnamon 1991:100-104). Uppsala was clear on the fact that the Spirit establishes the “universal fellowship of the forgiven” (Goodall 1968:13). But Canberra gives this statement a more practical dimension. It insists that this fellowship is a sign of the reconciled and renewed creation God’s mission seeks to accomplish (Kinnamon 1991:100). The fellowship is achieved by concrete acts of sharing. It therefore calls for a ‘community of sharing’ (Kinnamon 1991:101-102).

The report says:

The church’s mission is reconciling all humankind with God and with each other. Sharing means giving and receiving by all to one another to effect reconciliation and to promote growing together. In response to the cries of the poor and marginalized in the world, sharing means committing ourselves as churches to the sharing of power and resources so that all may fully participate in mission (Kinnamon 1991:102).

Regrettably the report fails to spell out how exactly the ‘power of the Spirit’ is facilitating such a *koinonia*, where unity is affirmed by acts of sharing power as well as resources, thereby fostering reconciliation. But it is important to note that this is one occasion where ecumenical missiology links rhetoric on the issue of mission and unity with tangible suggestions for concrete steps of action. *Missio Dei* is happening in real acts of sharing which “means that we work concretely to overcome economic disparities and social antagonisms between classes, castes, races, sexes and culture” (Kinnamon 1991:100).

These concrete acts of sharing will be possible only if transformation of lives and structures takes place. As sub-theme IV. “Holy Spirit – transform and sanctify Us!” says:

“Do not be conform to the standards of this world, but let God transform you...” (Rom.12:2). God calls people to be transformed and sanctified. God’s grace is give to penetrate our lives and structure so that we may serve humanity and all creation, and in all things glorify God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Kinnamon 1991:111).

This transformation towards the standards of God, rather than those of the world, is deeply rooted in the Holy Spirit. Section IV. affirms that;

The Holy Spirit accompanies us on our ecumenical journey: keeps alive the vision that all things in heaven and on earth will be united in Christ; encourages, corrects, challenges and moves us forward until we come to our true unity and glory in God through Christ (Kinnamon 1991:120).

Transformation needs a spirituality which is able “to organize life as to allow the Holy Spirit room to act” (Kinnamon 1991:111). That this spirituality has an experiential side becomes clear when the report states:

Spirituality has thus a practical dimension. It has to do with setting the priorities, calendars and rhythms of life. Schedules and structures, culture, tradition and personality affect how communities and persons express their spirituality. Different experiences of God’s presence through the Holy Spirit in word, church and life also determine our understanding (Kinnamon 1991:111).

This statement is taken from part “1. *Understanding spirituality*” of the section report, which not only points to the experiential side of the Spirit. It is one of the few times when ecumenical theology reflects on its participation in God’s mission and how the Holy Spirit is accessed along the way through something which the report calls “ecumenical spirituality”.

The report roots spirituality in baptism which inaugurates in a life of discipleship and gives the gifts of the Holy Spirit in order to lead a life consecrated to the service of God, and God’s children. Spirituality is the celebration of God’s gift, life in abundance, hope in Jesus Christ and transformation through the Holy Spirit. It means to receive energy for life, being cleansed, inspired, and set free to be conformed to Christ (Kinnamon 1991:112).

Therefore the report calls for an ecumenical spirituality which it describes as follows:

An ecumenical spirituality for our times should be incarnational, here and now, life-giving, rooted in the scriptures and nourished by prayer; it should be communitarian and celebrating, centered around the eucharist, expressed in service and witness, trusting and confident. It will inevitably lead to suffering; it is open to the wider *oikoumene*, joyful and hopeful. Its source and guide is the action of the Holy Spirit. It is lived and sought in community and for others. It is an ongoing process of formation and discipleship (Kinnamon 1991:112).

Again, this statement marks one of the few occasions where ecumenical missiology gives serious attention to a spirituality in which the Holy Spirit is experienced as source and guide of God’s mission. Spirituality is here understood as driven by the mystery of the Holy Spirit who is bound to the Holy Trinity, proceeding from the Father, pointing to Jesus Christ and

unbinding God's people from the structures and strictures of this world (Kinnamon 1991:112).

Furthermore the report is clear that one of the main works emanating from 'ecumenical spirituality' is the call of the Holy Spirit to move towards unity as the churches journey through time. The reports says:

Throughout history and especially during this century, the Holy Spirit has drawn churches out of isolation and division. The Holy Spirit is calling us to acknowledge the unity that exists among us and to overcome confessional and other barriers in order to be able to share our energies, gift and ministries on a common spiritual journey towards visible unity. (Kinnamon 1991:115).

The call for unity in a universal fellowship as a call to be open for the uniting energy of the Holy Spirit had already been made at Uppsala 1968. But Canberra gives it a more practical emphasis by stating that the Spirit calls for more than a universal fellowship (Uppsala). Mission in the power of the Holy Spirit calls for a community of sharing of energies, gifts and ministries and thereby overcomes barriers which hinder a visible unity. In short: God's mission, facilitated through the Holy Spirit, pushes the churches to the visible unity of a sharing community.

In summary, and with a certain amount of generalization, we can say that Canberra's contribution to the *Missio Dei* concept is as follows: It goes beyond an exclusively christological understanding of God's mission. God's loving action did start with the creation of the world, which is sustained through the Spirit. Therefore Canberra tries to develop a theology, where God's loving action, his *missio*, begins with creation and where pneumatology is understood as the key force in a reorientation of the human understanding of creation. This reorientation is happening where a community of sharing is established which tries, through concrete acts of sharing, to facilitate transformation of lives and structures. It is a community in which ecumenical spirituality is practiced which gives room for the experience of the Spirit as source and guide of God's mission.

## H. Summary “What is the *Missio Dei* concept?”

David Bosch writes about the *Missio Dei* concept:

In attempting to flesh out the *Missio Dei* concept, the following could be said: In the new image mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God. “It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church” (Moltmann). Mission is thereby seen as movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission. There is church because there is mission, not vice versa. To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God’s love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love. Since Willingen, the understanding of mission *Missio Dei* has been embraced by virtually all Christian persuasions .... Mission has its origin in the heart of God. This is the deepest source of mission. It is impossible to penetrate deeper still, there is mission because God loves people (Bosch 1991:390-392).

This is a well written summary of some of the main ideas of the *Missio Dei* concept. But as we have tried to show, *Missio Dei* is more than what Bosch mentions. During the decades it underwent certain modification and evolved into a rather comprehensive paradigm of missionary thinking.

In the following we try to add on to Bosch’s summary and formulate a summary of our own understanding of the *Missio Dei* concept as it has emerged so far.

### 1. Early developments leading towards the *Missio Dei* concept

- I. *Missio Dei* is a new missionary paradigm which emerged within the ecumenical movement. The ecumenical movement can be divided into a Roman Catholic, an evangelical and an ecumenical stream. The ecumenical stream is associated with the work of the International Missionary Council (Edinburgh 1910, Lake Mohonk 1921), and later the World Council of Churches and its Commission for Evangelism and World Mission (New Delhi 1961). Even though the *Missio Dei* concept is widely accepted within the three main streams of missiology we focus on the theological development within ecumenical missiology, since it is here where the *Missio Dei* concept is most clearly articulated as ‘leitmotiv’ (Bosch) of missionary activity.
- II. *Missio Dei*, “a new theological paradigm” (Bosch), developed against the background of an old missionary paradigm which evolved in the shadow of colonialism ever since the days of the Spanish conquistadors. It understood mission as an activity of the church

aiming at the christianizing of the non-Christian world (*missio ecclesiae ad gentes*), thereby expanding the *corpus Christianum*. This old paradigm of missionary thinking was the predominant one within the early ecumenical movement and especially tangible at Edinburgh 1910. Even though it started to disintegrate after Edinburgh 1910 (Jerusalem 1928, Tambaram 1938, Whitby 1947), it continued to be the predominant paradigm of missionary thinking until the IMC conference at Willingen 1952.

III. The shift from the old (*missio ecclesiae*) church centered paradigm to the new *Missio Dei* paradigm is part of a general shift in theological thinking, marked by the emergence of dialectical theology in opposition to liberal theology. It was Karl Barth, who suggested in the 1930s that the missionary activity must be justified in a profoundly theological way, as emanating from the will of the Father, thereby becoming an activity of the triune God rather than the doing of the church.

IV. Johannes Christiaan Hoekendijk pursued the criticism of a church centered missionary paradigm and contributed three major themes to a new understanding of missionary activity:

- Evangelization can not mean expanding the *corpus christianum* by building the church on the idea of a Christian culture, but it is rather to be witness of faith within a secular context.
- The idea of evangelizing the nations (*Volkschristianisierung*) limits God's 'mission field' to the middle classes, who subscribe to the notion of the "Volk". It neglects that world history as a whole is God's 'mission field' and not just the "Nation" or "Volk".
- Thirdly he calls for a theology of the apostolate that proceeds from the Father, and in which the church participates as an instrument of the shalom-ization of the world.

## 2. Willingen 1952 - From a church-centered mission to a mission centered church

V. The IMC conference at Willingen 1952, influenced by Barth and Hoekendijk, brought together a diverse understanding of the missionary activity, which was to spell out a profound rethinking of the missionary obligation of the church, and a new theology of

missions. This was found to be necessary, since tremendous changes of the historical context in which the ecumenical movement found itself, made it increasingly clear that the old missionary paradigm was not viable any longer.

VI. The rethinking of missions at Willingen was dominated by North American and European missiological thinking trying to come to terms with “the end of an era” (Freitag). Eventually Willingen came up with a ‘*A statement on the Missionary Calling of the Church*’, a theological compromise between the parties participating, which would prove to be the foundation on which the development of the *Missio Dei* would built in the decades to come. The statement takes four theological decisions which are of essential importance to the understanding of the *Missio Dei* concept. These are:

- Ecclesiologically Willingen clarifies that the church is only church by being a missionary church. By her very nature, she participates in the redeeming mission of the Son. The “Why” of mission is not found any longer in the need of the church to evangelize for the sake of enlarging the *corpus christianum* (*missio ecclesiae*), but in the will of the Father, who, through the sending of the Son and the gathering of the Body of Christ in the Spirit, makes the church missionary in character (*nota ecclesiae*). This marks a Copernican turnaround in missiology.
- Willingen turns away from an understanding of history as an interim, in which to save people before Christ’s return. Instead the church participates in the coming of the kingdom, which is realized in the here and now of history through the signs of the kingdom. The “Where” of mission is located in (world)history, and the identification of the church with world(history) is part of her missionary nature. The church therefore is by its very character a contextual church (to use a term which was coined much later).
- The “What” of mission is defined as the proclamation of the kingdom in the context of history. The church, participating in God’s *missio* is called to confront the world with the real issues which are defined by the questions God asks the world, but not by the questions the world asks God. Especially the issue of power becomes important in a battle between the ‘hidden kingdom’, proclaimed by the church, and the ‘evil forces which lure men into false hope’.

- The conference derives the mission of the church from the triune God, who, has created the world and who's will initiated the reconciliation of the world. Reconciliation is achieved through the sending of the Son, who continues to gather and enable the body of Christ for worship and mission.

VII. Willingen marked the beginning of the *Missio Dei* concept which would evolve in much more detail and depth within the ecumenical movement during the following decades of missiological discussion. Especially its preoccupation with the Anglo-European way of conceptualizing theology (the conference basically tried to solve Anglo-European theological problems, which related to mission and ecclesiology) would be challenged by the voice of Third World Theology which would become increasingly important after Willingen, and especially articulate at Bangkok 1973.

### 3. Developments after Willingen - *Missio Dei* maturing -

VIII. Over the years Willingen's focus on history as the context of God's mission did evolve into the understanding that *Missio Dei* is located in the context of modern as well as postmodern history. This implies the following:

- Jesus as the "light of the world" (New Delhi 1961), is not only sent into history (Willingen), but his coming is also, in a universal sense, transforming history (New Delhi). Based on this 'Christocentric universalism' *Missio Dei* is relevant for history as a whole, since in the coming of the Son God's lordship has been established, and the new creation has begun. Furthermore history is elevated in status, because it is now God's history, or 'Heilsgeschichte'.
- To be church means 'participating in the history of God's dealings with the world' (Moltmann). Those 'dealings of God' (God's *missio*), have an eschatological dimension. The church therefore understands her own place in history as 'in the time between the times' (Newbigin). This eschatological understanding of history is translated into life by the local congregation (Melbourne 1980) with (a) realism, in relation to the powers which bind this world, and (b) hopefulness, in anticipation of the kingdom to come. It makes the church search for an authentic community in Christ on a local level

("Missionary structure of the Congregation"), where the eschatological reality of the kingdom is anticipated and realized in the here and now, by word and deed.

- Theologically speaking, history has changed in a universal sense through the sending of the Son. It is qualified as an eschatological reality. But this does not mean that God's *missio* imposes its own categories upon secular history. The church, participating in God's *missio*, rather shares the 'secular problems of ordinary human life' and 'exists for others'. Thereby she respects the world's 'coming of age' (Bonhoeffer), without embracing it uncritically.
- The idea of 'one-world-history', prevalent in early ecumenical missiology, proved to be of little help when the crisis of modernity brought about post-modern thinking which showed that 'theories about history are not useful for the understanding of myself as subject active in history' (Tracy). *Missio Dei* realized that history is not an abstract concept but a reality which can only be fully understood if one is prepared to listen to the (his)stories of the "others" (Bangkok 1973, Melbourne 1980).

IX. The 'discovery of God's preferential option for the poor is a widely accepted principle of missionary thinking' (Scherer). Within the context of poverty *Missio Dei* participates in the humanization of the world as well as in the struggle for liberation.  
This means:

- *Missio Dei* as humanization points to the fact that in Christ's incarnation the real humanity is revealed (Ecumenical Affirmation 1982). This calls Christians to work for the humanization of the world, since Christians 'are on the side of humanity because God is on that side and his Son died for it' (Visser't Hooft). The humanization of the world initially focused on industrialization and urbanization as dehumanizing forces in the world. Poverty was to be eradicated through development, and treated as an ethical issue rather than an issue of theology proper (Bosch).
- This changed at Bangkok 1973, where Third World theologians strongly criticized Western models of theology, which limit salvation to humanization. Instead Bangkok insists that salvation has an individual and social dimension



and happens through the struggle for: (a) economic justice, (b) human dignity, (c) solidarity against alienation of person from person, and (d) hope against despair in personal life.

- *Mission Dei* therefore means to struggle for liberation, especially for the liberation of the poor. The missiological principle, or yardstick, of the churches is therefore their relationship to the poor (Castro). The churches are to live in (a) solidarity with the poor, and to (b) identify with their struggle (Study process by the CCPD 1977-1980). They are to (c) establish a new relationship with the poor inside the church, and (d) pray as well as work for the development of the kingdom of God (Melbourne 1980).
- *Missio Dei* has reached its goal where liberation to a rightful humanization takes place (Hoekendijk).

X. *Missio Dei* does not happen within a vacuum but is mediated through culture 'which shapes the human voice answering Christ' (Bangkok 1973). God's mission is either in danger of being irrelevant to culture or syncretistic; in order to avoid both, *Missio Dei* characterizes its relationship to culture in a threefold way:

- *Missio Dei* takes place through contextualization, because there is no culture-free gospel but salvation is culturally conditioned. Salvation is expressed, asked and answered for with reference to experience and context (Bangkok 1973). Contextualization, which models after Christ's incarnation, happens as a concrete, local process within certain communities and their culture, creating a culturally diverse and polycentric identity of the gospel.
- *Missio Dei* as contextualization happens within the tension that the gospel acquires a local, polycentric, cultural identity, as well as calls into existence the Church Universal (Nairobi 1975). According to the 'systematic principle of differentiation' (Duraisingh) the churches live out the diverse identity of the gospel, by being authentic witnesses within the polycentric spectrum of cultures (Salvador 1996). The church expresses her common faith and mission by 'incarnating the gospel' in multiple cultural forms (Ecumenical Affirmation 1982). The Church Universal is thereby affirmed through the 'local congregation living in communion' (Salvador). This implies the churches

commitment to dialog across cultures ‘affirming their christological center and trinitarian source in all its varied expressions’ (Thomas).

- *Missio Dei* as contextualization implies not only identification with culture but also critical distance to culture which aims to transform its possible oppressive structures. Those are exposed through ‘cultural hermeneutics which demystifies the abstractness of culture, by analysis and reflection on culture and its effects on people’ (Salvador). At times an attitude of vigilance or even ‘cultural disobedience’ (Verstraelen) is needed in defense of the life God wants, which is threatened by a self-destructive culture (San Antonio 1990).

XI. The question of how *Missio Dei* and the experience of the Spirit relate to each other finds a preliminary answer in the spirituality of the ecumenical movement itself. A look at this ‘ecumenical spirituality’ shows that the movement was made possible through an intense spiritual process, in which the participants not only produced papers and statements but ‘went through the door of unity on their knees’ (Congar). This points to the experiential side of the movement which developed the *Missio Dei* concept. On conceptual level one can add two major points:

- Ever since its inception the ecumenical movement was dominated by a certain ‘christological imbalance’ (Werner). It is through the sending of the Son that the Church is gathered together and transformed (Willingen). However the sending of the Spirit is building on the Sending of the Son and ‘brings the churches together making them aware of the needs of the world’ (Uppsala 1968). Furthermore it is the Spirit who brings sinful men together, establishes universal fellowship, bears witness of the gospel and makes it credible to men, builds the church locally through word and sacrament, stirs the conscience of the church, maintains the Church in communion and continuity, equips the Church, empowers the church, sends men into the world, and awakens Christians to an eschatological way of life (Uppsala).
- The WCC assembly at Canberra 1991, which met under the theme “*Come Holy Spirit – renew the whole creation!*”, marks the first time where the christological imbalance is overcome in favor of the Spirit. Canberra goes beyond an exclusively christological understanding of God’s mission. God’s

loving action started with the creation of the world, which is sustained through the Spirit. Therefore Canberra tries to develop a theology, where God's loving action, his *missio*, does begin with creation and where pneumatology is understood as the key force in a reorientation of the human understanding of creation. This reorientation is happening where a 'community of sharing is established which tries, through concrete acts of sharing, to facilitate transformation of lives and structures. It is a community in which ecumenical spirituality is practiced which gives room for the experience of the Spirit as source and guide of God's mission.

### **III. BCI - Mission through the experience of the Spirit –**

#### **A. Introduction to the methodology of the research**

##### **1. The main thesis and its methodological implications for this chapter**

We have pointed out in the beginning of chapter II. that the main question addressed in this thesis is to do with whether the Pentecostal Movement as represented in Breakthrough International is an authentic expression of the *Missio Dei* concept? Our attempt to answer the above question has drawn our attention to a lengthy discussion of the *Missio Dei* concept. We have in detail established its context and content. This modus operandi was crucial with regard to the overall task of this thesis. Because chapter II., in its rather elaborate approach, defines the conceptual background from which we can proceed. It is our point of reference and we are now enabled to proceed in our quest to formulate an informed theological answer with respect to the question whether Breakthrough International and its ministry, which is both African and experiential, reflects the *Missio Dei* concept.

We now propose to answer the above question in a two step process. First we need to establish what kind of church and mission has been developed by Breakthrough International guided through experience of the Spirit. Secondly we need to ask in what respect Breakthrough International's practice is congruent with the *Missio Dei* concept as well as where it fails to reflect this concept of missionary thinking, which developed within ecumenical missiology. In short: we need to establish the missionary practice within Breakthrough International as it emanates from the experience of the Spirit. Subsequently we will need to compare this reality with the *Missio Dei* concept as it has been defined through our work in chapter II. The former we will do in this chapter while the latter will be our task for chapter IV. We venture to establish how Breakthrough International started and continued its ministry throughout its so far rather short history of 25 to 30 years. In addition we will ask what role the experience of the Spirit played in its history making the church a participant in God's mission.

When attempting to describe the practice of Breakthrough International for the purpose of our thesis we are faced with a methodological issue of great importance, which, because of its

simplicity, might not spring to mind right away. Our problem is not so much to get enough information in order to paint a vivid picture of Breakthrough International's ministry. The challenge is rather to get the information relevant with respect to the main issue of the thesis, namely, is the *Missio Dei* concept reflected in Breakthrough International's ministry due to the experience of the Spirit? To put it succinctly, we are not just challenged to get answers but to get the relevant answers regarding the central issue of this thesis. Furthermore, to continue this seemingly simplistic but essential line of argument, in order to get the relevant answers we will have to ask the right questions.

This might sound like an obvious point, but it needs mentioning since this thesis does not deal with Breakthrough International in a general manner trying to describe its overall ministry. It is a rather specific attempt to look upon its ministry from the perspective of the *Missio Dei* concept. This specific perspective calls for a very specific line of questioning when examining the practice of Breakthrough International. This specific line of questioning must be developed from our understanding of the *Missio Dei* concept as portrayed in chapter II. Because the point of reference, the background from which we ask the necessary questions, which may lead us towards the answers which are relevant to our main concern, is the *Missio Dei* concept as portrayed in chapter II. It is there that we have established the theoretical background from which Breakthrough International's practice is going to be examined.

Our rather specific approach can be questioned. One might argue that this kind of methodology predetermines the outcome of our study in an improper way. However, our main concern is with the question if Breakthrough International, driven by the experience of the Spirit, reflects the *Missio Dei* concept? Therefore it seems unavoidable to define the background from which to examine Breakthrough International with our findings on the concept of *Missio Dei* in mind. Otherwise we might lose focus because we lack a clear point of reference for our study.

## 2. Asking the right questions on BCI deriving from the *Missio Dei* concept

In view of the above argument we will now concentrate the focus of our inquiry into the practice of Breakthrough International asking which questions and issues should guide us in our investigation. They originate from groundwork we have done on the *Missio Dei* concept in the previous chapter and are as follows:

### a. Questions and issues deriving directly from the results of the Willingen conference

- Ecclesiologically one needs to ask: How does Breakthrough International understand church - participating in God's mission or as a *corpus christianum* - ?
- Closely related to this issue, but as a kind of control question one needs to ask: How does Breakthrough International answer the 'Why' of mission?
- Where does Breakthrough International locate its ministry and mission? In the here and now of history, participating in the coming of Kingdom; or in a future Kingdom to arrive in the eschatological return of Christ?
- The 'What' of mission will have to be answered by seeking to understand what kind of message Breakthrough International wants to share. The question therefore is: What message is conveyed through the ministry of Breakthrough International in word as well as deed?
- In respect to the message of Breakthrough International the issue of the power of God versus the power of the 'evil forces luring into false hope' needs to be examined. Breakthrough International's understanding of the Kingdom of God might be of interest in that respect.
- Considering that *Missio Dei* understands mission as reconciling action originating in the triune God, it will be important to ask: Does Breakthrough International define its missiological approach within a trinitarian understanding of God's *missio*?

b. Questions and issues deriving from the developments after Willingen

- If Breakthrough International locates its ministry in the context of modern as well as post-modern history one needs to ask:
  - Does Breakthrough International understand history as “Heilsgeschichte” in which the new creation is beginning and Christ’s lordship is established in a universal sense?
  - Hence God’s mission calls for the participation in ‘this-worldly’ processes of history and does not overemphasize the ‘other-worldliness’ of faith, one needs to establish how the “this-worldliness” and the “other-worldliness of faith” relate to each other in the ministry of Breakthrough International.
  - Does Breakthrough International share the eschatological understanding of history so prevalent in the *Missio Dei* concept?
  - Is this eschatological understanding of history creating a realistic as well as hopeful local congregation which produces signs of the Kingdom in the here and now; while at the same time anticipating the arrival of the Kingdom in the future?
  - Does Breakthrough International understand “the world” as partner “come of age” (Bonhoeffer), with whom she shares the problems of ordinary human life? Or does Breakthrough International try to flee this world?
  - How far is Breakthrough International prepared to listen to the stories of the ‘others’?
- *Missio Dei* happens in the context of poverty as humanization of the world and the struggle for liberation. Therefore one needs to ask:

- Does Breakthrough International have any comprehension of its role within the humanization of the world which is an ethical challenge to the church.
  - How does Breakthrough International gear its mission towards participation in the struggle for economic justice, human dignity, and the fight against alienation and despair in personal life?
  - Does Breakthrough International live in solidarity with the poor, identify with their struggle, establish a new relationship with the poor inside the church and pray as well as work for the development of the Kingdom?
- *Missio Dei* happens through culture shaping the human response to the call of God. How is Breakthrough International understanding the relationship of 'Christ and Culture'?
    - Is Breakthrough International taking an approach of contextualization towards mission thereby aiming to incarnate the gospel in a concrete and locally appropriate manner, so that the gospel acquires an authentic local identity?
    - Does Breakthrough International represent a 'local church living in communion' thereby committing itself to dialogue and correction across cultures?
    - Does Breakthrough International have a critical distance to the culture in which she operates and does she practice 'cultural hermeneutics' in order to expose oppressive and self-destructive structures within the given cultural environment?

As mentioned before these questions and issues derive from the findings of chapter II. They are proposed in order to establish if Breakthrough International's activities, based on its experience of the Spirit within the African world view, are congruent with the *Missio Dei* concept.



### 3. The narrative sources which will be used to answer the 'right questions'

If, as we propose, the findings of chapter II are accepted as the parameters of our research into Breakthrough International and its experience of the Spirit the question arises "What are the sources of our research?" Where do we find the answers to the questions posed above?

we don't deal any longer with conference reports, theological statements in written form, the results of study processes and ecumenical manifestoes on mission and evangelism. Instead, as its founders would argue, we now deal with a young church in the making which developed as a direct result, of the experience of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit had spoken to them in a prophecy (M01 2002:1) telling them to 'to sell all' in truly apostolic fashion (cf. Acts 2:45), and build a new community of faith. The key date in the history of the 'object' of our study is not based upon a rational decision taken after much theological reasoning and spelled out in accepted academic ways of discourse based on the Cartesian subject-object division. The beginning of Breakthrough International is marked by an experience which poses tremendous challenges for this kind of academic discourse. Because the experience of the Spirit transcended the subject-object division, so fundamental for the modern world view in which "God can objectively neither be known nor experienced" (Moltmann).

Unlike our study of the *Missio Dei* concept, which developed within ecumenical missiology, we cannot rely on 'proper theological material' in the traditional sense when embarking on a study of Breakthrough International. The way in which Breakthrough International does theology does not conform to the Western way of doing theology, to which even the ecumenical movement, for better or worse, has ascribed. As we have seen, the "contemporary ecumenical movement was born among the churches that share the culture that has developed in Western Europe and North America in the past centuries" (Newbigin 1994:151). Therefore *Missio Dei* is a concept which was developed by "those who have had long training in the methods of thinking, of study and research, and of argument that have been developed in Western Europe" (Newbigin 1994:151). This constitutes, to use Newbigin's phrase, a 'specific defect' inherent to ecumenical missiology. Breakthrough International does not share this 'specific defect' of the ecumenical movement. but reflects the African worldview, where God is a tangible reality rather than a concept or object of proper academic research (cf. I.C.).

This problem, or rather this nonconformity to the Western way of doing theology, has been discussed at length in Chapter I. There we proposed that it is intellectually authentic and truthful if we want to engage in a discussion about the experience of the Spirit, which befell the believers in Breakthrough International, to let those believers tell their story. Because it is within their stories, which are subjective, that 'the truth' is revealed. The experience of the Holy Spirit, which constitutes the 'normality of faith' as we have argued in chapter II. (cf. II.B.), is accessed by letting the people tell how the Holy Spirit has intervened in their life. It becomes theology of a different kind, because the people find the metaphors and analogies which for them truthfully capture the content of their experience.

It is therefore through the vehicle of personal narrative that we will engage in a study of the Spirit which has moved the people of Breakthrough International to be incorporated into God's *Missio* in which they so actively participate. This narrative approach will allow us to access the thinking which evolved from the experience of the Spirit. It will give us a way forward in assessing what concepts and ideas are leading the believers of Breakthrough International. Because storytelling, the narrative, is their way of making sense, of thinking through, what they have experienced.

It is a 'heuristic process' as A. Robinson and L. Hawpe have called it; a practice in which they create theology of a different kind. They write:

Experience does not automatically assume narrative form. Rather, it is in reflecting on experience that we construct stories. The stories we make are accounts, attempts to explain and understand experience. Narrative thinking is, therefore, a type of causal thinking. Narrative thinking consist of creating a fit between a situation and the story schema. Establishing a fit, that is, making a story out of experience, is a heuristic process, one which requires skill, judgment, and experience. Everyday stories are no more fictional than any other product of thought... In effect, narratives are a solution to a fundamental problem in life, viz., creating understandable order in human affairs (Robinson & Hawpe 1986:111-112).

The primary source of our research will therefore consist of the stories which people, who are involved in Breakthrough International, are going to tell about their experience of the Spirit and subsequent involvement in God's mission. These stories are both a reflection of the experience which has turned the people into what they are today, as well as a reflection on the thinking processes which the people derived from their experience of the Spirit.

In total we have conducted thirteen interviews with 15 people who are deeply involved in the running of Breakthrough International. Those interviews were on average one and a half hours long. The interviews, together with four presentations of the senior leaders of Breakthrough International of about two hour each, have been transcribed into 249 (single spaced!) pages of primary research material (cf. Appendices A.; B.; C.;).

Some of the interviewees are related with each other which might be cause of concern. But it is unavoidable since the Breakthrough International is grown within a close net of a few families which stood at he beginning of the church. Furthermore it is a concern of which the people themselves are aware of and which is openly discussed within the church (cf. H04:82; P06: 152-153; H01:10; P09:205-206).

In respect to the interviews we need to note that we have been guided by a two way approach. Firstly, we devised a set of questions having the study of the '*Missio Dei*' concept in mind, thus 'asking the right questions'. In that sense our questions might be called leading, because we left out a number of issues which were not of importance in respect to the findings in chapter II. Secondly, during the course of the interview we didn't stick slavishly to the prepared questions but allowed the interviewee to direct the course of our conversation centering around what the interviewee wanted to say. We are guided in this approach by Carl Rogers and Helga Lemkes 'Person-Centered-Therapy' (Rogers 1961; Lemke 1992), in which we have a received a basic training. The Focus of 'Person-Centered-Therapy' is to help and authentically assist the interviewee to formulate his or her own emotions as we explain in little more detail under III.B.6.

The interviews are the primary source and they are supplemented by sermons, bible-studies, cell notes, manuals and other material used within Breakthrough International which amounts to approximately 400 pages of material. But the focus must be on the narratives, the stories of the people, otherwise we would not be able to access the experience of the Spirit, which is our prime concern.

#### 4. Presenting Breakthrough International – chronology and main themes

Our methodology has important consequences for the outline of this chapter. It is therefore good to recap what we have tried to say so far.

We have clarified that we need to base our line of argument on the our findings in chapter II. in order to arrive at a theological answer in respect of the question whether the practice of the people involved with Breakthrough International realizes the *Missio Dei* concept. The point of reference, to which we will return throughout this chapter, will therefore be the questions which have been posed on account of our reflections on the *Missio Dei* concept. Because our very specific concern is to prove or disprove that the *Missio Dei* concept is realized through the experience of the Spirit within Breakthrough International. In this thesis we do not at all propose to leave behind the ‘specific defect of prescribing to a Western way of theology’, as Newbigin would call it. On the contrary, it rather wants to probe a theological concept, which has emerged within the confines of the ‘defective theological discourse bound to a Western pattern of thinking’, against a reality encountered in an African world view. We want to do so without compromising what from a Western theological point of view would not be called ‘defective’ but ‘proper theological discourse’.

In short: We hold to a methodology based on a Western, rationalistic, dualistic, if not to say Cartesian world view. But within this admittedly limited epistemology we allow for the phenomenon of the experience of Spirit, and make it accessible through the narrative. The justification for this epistemological approach has been outlined at length in chapter I, and needs no repeating. What needs to be clear though, is the fact that the stories which we are going to use as our primary sources are explored with the findings of chapter II. in mind.

Having said this we propose an outline for this chapter which tries to correspond as much as possible with the outline of chapter II. In doing so we will make use of the issues and questions identified above as being crucial to the concept of *Missio Dei*.

This chapter will therefore unfold in the following way: We will begin by establishing in a more or less chronological order how Breakthrough International came into being and what forces and experiences shaped its development. The information needed for this historical approach will derive from the interviews with those who were crucial for the beginnings of

the church and its subsequent growth. After that we will try to identify main themes emerging from the ministry of Breakthrough International and being conveyed in the stories its members tell. The main themes identified previously with regard to the *Missio Dei* concept will guide our investigation. This means we will especially look into issues of history and poverty as contexts of Breakthrough International's mission as well as culture as medium of its mission. The theme of Spirituality and the experience of the Spirit will be woven into all these themes since this is what makes Breakthrough International the focus of our attention.

In concluding this introduction it seems proper that we indicate our personal position in respect to Breakthrough International. The writer of this thesis is not a charismatic Christian, even though we would argue that no one can call Christ Lord except for the Spirit (cf. 1Cor.12:3). In line with that argument we would see ourselves driven by the Spirit, but we can't claim to speak in tongues or prophesy. We acknowledge that we have been, at times, impressed by the openness and transparency with which the people at Breakthrough International allowed us to look into their affairs (please note in this respect footnote 4). Their willingness to assist did not even end when asked to open up their finances, which is quite remarkable. Nonetheless I conducted the research as an outsider. Those whom I interviewed were aware that they were interviewed by a Lutheran pastor, some had heard this pastor preach, with some we had worked regarding community matters. It is therefore safe to say that despite an obvious distance the research has been conducted on the basis of trust and openness and people were very willing to share their story.

Furthermore the senior pastor has expressed his desire to find a way in which the results of this research might be made accessible to his leadership team. We have tried to do that in chapter V., thus bringing this research - done within the academic world - back to the reality from which it has originated. This hopefully contributes to a dialogue between theory and practice.

## **B. The Spirit experience initiating an African empowerment agency for mission**

### **1. The experience of the Spirit calls “to proclaim, get, train, equip and send”**

According to Harvey Cox a famous saying among Pentecostals pronounces that “The man with an experience is never at the mercy of a man with a doctrine” (Cox, H.1996:57). He refers to the Azusa Street Revival in 1906 and the events surrounding it (Cox, H. 1996:45-66). Cox recounts the days of the Azusa Street revival thus:

It was during one of the hundreds of revivals that broke out all over the country following the eruption at Azusa Street. During these often hectic meetings... churches were transmuted into scenes straight out of apostolic days. Anything, it seemed, could happen. People prayed all night, spoke in unknown tongues, leaped in the air, shouted and fell to the floor.... People were slain everywhere under the mighty power of God including the ministers on the platform. The case of one young lady... was quite remarkable. She was caught away in the Spirit and rendered wholly oblivious to anything natural.... The power of God took hold of the physical and she was raised bodily from the floor three distinct times. She afterwards stated she had seen a vision of a golden ladder and had started to climb it (Cox, H. 1996:68).

The Azusa Street Revival of 1906 does not mark, as Pomerville has convincingly argued (Pomerville 1985: 41-62), the beginning of the modern Pentecostal movement. But it is one step within a whole array of events which formed what is today called the Pentecostal or Charismatic movement.

Cox admits that initially he was a little annoyed by accounts such as the above (Cox, H. 1996:70). Hollenweger even goes further and views those accounts as having assumed legendary proportion which can by no means be compared to the “eschatological outpouring of the Holy Spirit” (Hollenweger 1972: 23-24). Despite Hollenweger’s and Cox’s comments stories like the above are a good example of the “outpouring of the Spirit” which has many parallels with what is happening within Breakthrough International. In the eyes of those who have been befallen by the Spirit God imposes himself upon the believer. This happens through the experience of the Spirit, which in turn renders doctrine and theology at best of secondary importance, at worst irrelevant.

A description of a service at Breakthrough International might illustrate the parallels between Azusa Street and Breakthrough International we refer to. Furthermore the following partial account of a service held by Hilton Toohey, founder and Apostle of Breakthrough International, might as well serve as first introduction into Breakthrough International’s

practice. Close to the end of his sermon Hilton Toohey begins to pray for the Spirit to move and says:

You will find that when the Holy Spirit is coming in, something is gonna want to come out. And when that something is gonna want to come out, you let it out. You just let it out.

Father, in the name of Jesus I am praying this morning. I am praying this morning, God, your people will be changed. Father, you need to release something in them, that is gonna implement change. Come on, Come on, Father! In the name of Jesus, God, we are talking about change in your peoples lives, Father!. In the name of Jesus. Those that need shaking from God begin to shake from God. Those that have gone dead within their Spirit, begin to revive them Father! In the name of Jesus!

[people begin responding to the 'altar call'] That's right, come on, come on, come on, come on, come on, change God, change, change, change, just release your Spirit, release your anointing on your daughter right now [soft music is being played]. Come on, just receive it, that is right, thank you Father!

Susan [a women who had responded to the altar call], implement change in Susan right now [hands laid upon the women who has come in front]. Shababababab, change her right now!!!

Shababababab, change this man Lord, Shababababab, Lord change him!!, Shababababab!!!

[the laying of hands and the invoking of the name of Jesus continues, people begin to cry, fall to the ground, resemble symptom of epileptic fits, soft music is being played, the whole assembly is deeply concentrated upon the proceeding, all this takes about 10 minutes, eventually Pastor Toohey returns to the microphone while the music continues to be played and people remain in an attitude of prayer]

Let's be together a few minutes just praying for you: "You are gonna change me God! You are gonna break the power of indecision over my life." Just become desperate this morning. Something is gonna be broken! God, something is gonna be broken.

[louder, music is still playing people get prayed for personally, people shout and scream, other pastors and elders move in to pray for those who have come forward and who show symptoms of convulsion and epileptic fits. Pastor Toohey screams for the evil Spirit to move from certain people, the music continues, people remain in a concentrated prayer attitude while the screaming and shouting of some continues, others start weeping with tears rolling down their cheeks, this continues for about another 10 to 15 minutes with scenes reminiscent of how the Azusa revival in 1906 has been described. - Eventually pastor Russell Toohey takes the lead]

Thank you very much pastor Hilton. People you might rise to your feet again. Hallelujah! Can we just give the Lord a clap in praise, he is exalted, Hallelujah. Thank you! Praise You and bless you! (P/S O1:219).

This account of what happens during services at Breakthrough International comes close to what people might consider a caricature of the charismatic, ecstatic way of worship in general. It might even affirm the prejudice which the modern reader, such as Cox and Hollenweger, has. The parallels to Azusa are obvious and one is tempted to respond in the same way as they did. Furthermore one is reminded of R.A.Knox, who, as we have seen

(cf.I.B.1.), talks about the experience of the Spirit in the days of St. Paul. He refers to the bewilderment the modern reader feels when he or she listens to accounts as the above which we have coined the “normality of faith”. Knox writes

There is no question that St. Paul recognizes the existence of the charismatic ministry. For him, as for every other Christian of his age, prophecy and speaking with tongues were a normal (though supernatural) privilege granted to a multitude of the faithful. The *gratia gratis datae*, in that dawn of the new dispensation, were lavished in a profusion scarcely credible to the modern reader; he is bewildered to find Christian worship in the first century so unlike what we mean by Christian worship nowadays (Knox 1987:21-22).

Indeed the ‘modern reader’ is bewildered by what is reported about the way in which the believers of Breakthrough International experience the Spirit. Nonetheless we choose to begin our study of Breakthrough International with this rather dramatic display of its worship practice because it demonstrate in a characteristic form what we refer to when we talk about the experience of the Spirit within Breakthrough International. We will see at a later stage that this experience does not necessarily always involve as spectacular forms as the above (cf.III.B.7.). Nonetheless it tends to come along in a way which is quite unsettling to the modern mind. Yet in terms of our methodology, and despite how the thinking, Cartesian, modern mind might feel, we need to stress that there is no reason to be bewildered or annoyed. There is also no cause to deny that what is happening is not comparable to the eschatological outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As we have said before, our methodology aims to let Breakthrough International tell their own story rather than passing judgment upon what is happening to the believers<sup>16</sup>. Therefore we refrain from being annoyed and propose to let the people, who see themselves “slain in the Spirit”, explain themselves. In talking with them (cf. West 2003:31-32), and thereby acquainting oneself with their way of theology, we are going to see how the experience of the Spirit has shaped the people of Breakthrough International.

to start with, one would need to turn to those people who were part of the beginning of Breakthrough International in August 1984. This date marks, according to their own account, the birth of the church during a Sunday morning prayer meeting (M01:1; M16:2). Originally called New Zion Christian Fellowship, a name “inherited from the church’s birthplace, the New Zion Community located at the St Joan of Arc Catholic Church, Orthman Road,

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16 This does not mean that we don’t endeavor to assess the way in which Breakthrough International participates in God’s mission eventually. We will do so from a very precisely defined point of reference (the *Missio Dei* concept) in chapter IV.



Pietermaritzburg” (M01:1), it was not intended to be a new church. The beginnings were rather driven by the search for a more meaningful and scriptural experience of faith insufficiently fostered within the traditional Catholic setting from which New Zion/Breakthrough International emerged.

Chester Rawlins, one of the people who was part of the movement from the beginning remarked about those days:

But the whole starting of the church was not something we just wanted to do. We were more led to do it. It came where we opened scripture. We wanted to live the scripture, you know I mean not just being told you know what I mean just be at this but now we wanted to make it a reality (H03:32).

What Chester Rawlins calls being ‘led to do it – wanted to make it a reality’ has eventually given birth to what is today an “Apostolic Network” (cf. Wagner 1998:13-25) called “New Zion Ministries International”. It sees itself as part of the “Post Denominational Movement” which “represents the fastest growing, identifiable segment of Christianity in the 1990” (Cannastracy in M01:1). Within twenty years after its inception New Zion Ministries International has grown to a network of 24 churches located all around Southern Africa, as well as the rest of the continent, and even the United States. These different churches were either planted by New Zion Ministries International or came into contact with the movement and affiliated themselves with what began in Woodlands, a formerly Colored Township in Pietermaritzburg (M13:7).

The beginnings are marked by Pentecostal like experiences of the Spirit reminiscent of the Azusa Street revival. Hilton Toohey, a former building contractor and his wife Rhoda, now the founding figures of the movement, see the vision of this Apostolic Network originating in the intervention of the Holy Spirit calling African people into God’s mission. Hilton Toohey explains:

- H. I think the thing that really rested in me was the driving force behind me, it is I only saw missionaries as White people. And God began to show me that surely there was a place in God’s agenda, for Blacks to become missionaries too, and I think this was the driving force. That God surely got a place for Black people. As far as our mission plan is always concerned and I think with that, that’s what motivated us to start and say, God, here we are available. Would you start something through us?
- L: So you wanted to be a missionary?

H: Missionary, church planting all that that the missionaries did. And special involvement in the lives of people and all that. Which we were not doing. We were just receiving all the time, and we weren't giving and I thought maybe the time is coming, this is the season and God could use us to spearhead something...that was the driving force (H04:71).

He and his wife Rhoda continue:

H: I personally think in as far as the Black community is concerned an important aspect of New Zion International Ministry is to break through into missions. The church needs to branch out. And I believe that God is going to use the South African Church, the Black church, to bring the gospel to the whole world. I really believe that which was a White controlled thing, all of a sudden, its going to be - The Blacks are going to have an opportunity to enter into this. That is our very strong point. You've come to go, to equip people to go and be caught in the great commission because I think if you're a Christian, and you have never taken part in the great commission, I think you've missed out on a great part of your calling.

L: So Breakthrough International would be kind of an empowerment agency for Africans to be part of the great commission?

H: That's it! To be part of the great commission! That's it! Part of the great commission!

L: Part of God's mission?

H: Ja, there's a greater commission that we weren't part of and this is the thrust on which New Zion is built on, we can be part of it.

R: Its not even that we can be part of it, we feel called to it (H04:78).

Hilton Toohey goes on and describes what kind of vision is behind this 'empowerment agency for missions':

H: When we started a ministry, we got a word from Colossians 1:28 "Him we proclaim warning every man in teaching all men in all wisdom, that we may present all men mature in Christ." Now that was the basic thrust of our ministry from the beginning that we get men, we equip them, we train them, and we present them back to God and say God you do with them what you will. It was never part of our ministries that we would contain and keep men with us all our lives (H04:76).

It is important to note that Hilton Toohey traces the thrust of this vision back to a word which they had 'received from the Spirit'. Using biblical terminology (e.g. 2Ki 18:25; Jer 37:16; 1Th 4:15, cf. Ac16:6) he attributes the vision guiding New Zion/Breakthrough International to an intervention by the Spirit, or, as he says, a word received from the Lord. It is from within the context of this word in which the main thrust of New Zion's ministries needs to be understood.

Considering what Toohey says about mission being 'a thing controlled by Whites', one might be tempted to see New Zion/Breakthrough International as a protest movement against

missionary control. New Zion/Breakthrough might be viewed in line with one of the interpretations regarding the emergence the African Initiated Churches. As Paul Makhubu has said “AIC's are churches that have completely broken the umbilical cord with the Western missionary enterprise” Makhubu 1988:5). But this kind of analysis would not let the people we are in dialogue do the talking. Hilton and Rhoda Toohey would not primarily see their action as ‘breaking the umbilical cord with the Western missionary enterprise’, to which indeed they feel deeply indebted (P/S01:216). They rather would trace their vision back to an intervention of the Spirit. It is through this intervention that they were called to proclaim Jesus to the people, to get, train, equip and send them as part of an ongoing mission of God. The outside observer might view the founding of New Zion/Breakthrough as protest action but Hilton and Rhoda Toohey see it as act of obedience to the intervention of the Spirit.

On another occasion Chester and Rose Rawlins confirmed that spiritual interpretation. They were asked if the starting and development of New Zion/Breakthrough International was directed by an over-ambitions Hilton Toohey or the intervention of the Spirit?

R: It was definitely the Spirit!

C: It was definitely the Spirit!

R: Maybe the human factor came in here and there, where we made - who doesn't make mistakes? But definitely, without a shadow of a doubt - without a shadow of a doubt. I mean we see a reality of it and obviously we knew, we were happy just to be saved and have our marriages put together, and happy to assist in the work. I mean, I think you have to understand with kind of hearts we came with, it had to be God's grace also. It had to be the Holy Spirit... (H03:52-53)

We will now look at the process which moved the vision to ‘call, train, equip and send’ forward. This process is facilitated by what Hilton And Rhoda Toohey perceive as intervention and guidance of the Spirit.

## 2. Salvation and the Baptism in the Holy Spirit as being “sold out to God”

Ogbu U. Kalu has pointed to the observation that whenever Pentecostalism is discussed amongst African theologians “a dialogue would ensue contesting the facticity of origins” (Kalu 1998:7). This basically raises the question of whether the Spirit movement, commonly referred to as Pentecostal or Charismatic movement, has authentic African origins or, as often assumed, is a reproduction of the American electronic church (Kalu 1998:7).

As we now intend to listen to Rhoda and Hilton Toohey’s story telling us how they experienced their Salvation and received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit Kalu’s response to that question is quite enlightening. He acknowledges that there is an undeniable influence of the American Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement on Africa but;

.... the matter is more complex. For one, Pentecostal roots lie in the promise of the Holy Spirit and the explosion at the day of Pentecost. Since then, the pneumatic factor has continued to bob up like a cork throughout church history... Before 1970, which is our starting point, the Spirit was manifested in many African communities without foreign influence (ibid.).

Kalu answers the ‘question of the origin’ of the Pentecostal movement in Africa not by locating its roots geographically but within the self revelatory actions of the Spirit and therefore in the event of Pentecost itself. In a truly African fashion where the realm of the Spiritual is a ‘tangible reality’ (cf. A 2.1), Kalu claims that the Spirit became manifest in Africa without foreign influence, but ‘bobbed up’ in Africa as it did throughout the history of the church. This bobbing up is something he essentially attributes the self-revelatory character of the Spirit, and is not at all an imported American experience but a genuinely African phenomenon.

This excursion into the complexity of the ‘question of origin’ is helpful in respect to the question if the emergence of Breakthrough International is a truly African phenomenon or rather a product of the expanding American charismatic movement. Kalu’s point can be applied to Rhoda and Hilton Tooheys experience of Salvation and Spirit baptism which marks the beginning of their walk with the Spirit leading to Breakthrough International. In a sense Breakthrough International’s beginning is truly African since it is evolved through the Toohey’s tangible experience of the Spirit. In Kalu’s words one might say that Breakthrough International represents another “bobbing up” of the Spirit within the African community.

This is not to say that especially after their ‘salvation and baptism in the Holy Spirit’, Hilton and Rhoda Toohey were not influenced by American Pentecostalism. They themselves recall that they were reading charismatic magazines from the United States (H04:64) to develop what the Spirit had begun with them. But nonetheless, thinking along Kalu’s lines, we need to note that what we are about to relate here must primarily be viewed as an African experience, where the Spirit ‘bobbed up’ and did manifest itself. It was “more an experiential thing”, a “supernatural intervention” as Russell Toohey has described it, and not an imported experience from America. In that sense, as a tangible supernatural experience, it is rooted within the African world view of Rhoda and Hilton Toohey.

The date which changed the life of Hilton and Rhoda Toohey is the day when they both “got saved” and the Spirit ‘bobbed up’ in their life. This happened in 1975 at a rally held by Michael Cassidy, a South African Evangelist and the founder of African Enterprise, an evangelical, though ecumenical, para-church organization. The rally took place in Woodlands, Pietermaritzburg, at the community hall (M16:2). In those days Woodlands was declared a Coloured township by the Apartheid regime.

This is how Rhoda and Hilton Toohey talk about what happened at that rally:

R: Marie was about?, oh shame! She was about seven months. Our baby, she was seven months old at April, then we attended a mission to Woodlands and Michael Cassidy was preaching and that’s when we responded to an altar call and we committed our lives to Jesus and we experienced Him and that was a life-changing experience.

H: It was very interesting in my life, because I used to go to church, while I was never really involved in church activities and, but my wife was. ... I used to drink a lot and that began to frighten me. Because I was going to church, I used to leave liquor for Lent and all that, and then Easter Sunday, go back again. And I was desperate for something to happen in my life, and then on this particular Monday, I tell my wife, you’re always going out every night. This Monday, I’m going to go out. So I leave her, and I go to this meeting where Michael Cassidy’s preaching and it was the first time I’d ever been to a meeting like that. The people are clapping hands and all that and after the sermon he makes an altar call. He says those who want to commit your lives to the Lord can come up. And I went up. - And I ran home that night, because I was so excited.

L: Why did you go up?

H: Because I was desperate for something to happen. I’d been in church for thirty-five years, and there was nothing that I ever experienced that could help me overcome my problems which were getting bigger and bigger, and I went up that night, and I ran home and I told my wife I found something that’s going to help our marriage, and we knelt down, and we prayed. And that’s how it happened.

L: Do you [Rhoda Toohey] remember that day?

R: Very, very well, because I was already having an awakening in the idea of what salvation was all about. So I was eager to go to the meeting with him on the following evening. And Michael was preaching about the forgiving father, and that's what I needed to hear that night, because I just felt that I was such a terrible sinner, that I was going to hell and so I responded to the alter call and asked Jesus not just to be my Saviour but to come into our lives as Lord.

And it was just an absolutely life-change. The God that seemed to be a million miles away from me was so suddenly so personal. I knew that he was in me and that life would never be the same again (H04:61-62).

This experience of salvation in 1975 marks a change within the spiritual journey of Hilton and Rhoda Toohey. Their relationship with God became very personal, based on experiences which made them feel that 'he was in them and that life would never be the same'. Both Tooheys had not been strangers to church before. They, especially Rhoda, were practicing Catholics before their conversion experience. This is an recurring feature within a number of interviews which were conducted. Especially the women were in one way or the other rather active in their churches, prior to their 'salvation', while the man were often nominal church members and into drinking or other self-destructive activities.

Rhoda Toohey for instance remarked about their Spirituality prior to coming to "know the Lord" on a personal level, that "we were radical Catholics" (Interview 20.06.2003). Hilton Toohey adds, "we used to put medals on people and all these sort of things and give medals for travelling and all of a sudden we found we weren't using those things anymore" (H04:63). So what we find is a Catholic family, which was active within the traditional Catholic way of doing things. Their children were taken to Sunday School and brought up in a Catholic tradition (P06:151). But the family was faced with problems for which, in their view, traditional Catholic Church didn't seem to offer solutions. It was a situation where at least Hilton Toohey felt 'frightened' because of mounting personal pressure. Through the experience of salvation this kind of 'personal desperateness', a truly existential crisis, was addressed.

Viewed from the outside one might see this experience as another example of Pentecostal escapism, where people avoid to face their real problems in favor of some kind of spiritualism which let's them forget their personal misery. This is a rather common rationalization of the salvation experience as an individualistic, escape- or flight mechanism helping to cope with the often cruel reality (Wietzke 1995:15, cf. Poewe 1989:371-374,

Roelofs 1994:220-221). It sees faith as a kind of 'faith for the fearful' (Schlemmer 1984, Poewe 1994:53-58).

To apply this kind of explanation to Rhoda and Hilton Toohey is problematic. Because their experience of the Spirit didn't make them escape from their problems. It rather enabled them to face and work at their marital as well as family troubles. By being enabled to pray together and thereby placing their tribulations before God, they also found a way of dealing with their problems. This becomes even more obvious as the Spiritual journey of Rhoda and Hilton Toohey processes. It led them to another life changing encounter with Spirit, commonly referred to as the 'baptism in the Spirit'. This experience, just a few month after their salvation, intensified their personal and experiential relationship with God, and helped them to address their personal problems. They themselves recount what happened:

R: ... it was a few months later that we were introduced to the baptism in the Holy Spirit and we didn't hesitate we just asked: "Jesus just come and baptize us and fill and immerse us and saturate us with your Holy Spirit." And that again we just felt we had entered into another realm another reality which gave us a whole new being.

H: One day we were in a meeting and there was a priest from Belgium and he was talking about the infilling of the Holy Spirit and all that, and we asked him how do we get that? So he said you can come to a seminar at St Joseph's seminary, and we used to go up there, every Friday night, a group of us, and they took us through a series of teachings and then we came to the night they spoke about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. And they prayed for us, and we received it.

R: With the evidence of speaking in tongues! ... Well, we were just so desperate for God and all we said, "God if it comes with that, we accept whatever you do. We don't understand but we are just desperate and we want whatever you have for us". So it was immaterial you know, that we were not used to all this.

... I felt like when Jesus said: "Anyone who is thirsty, let him come. And the Spirit it will be in you." John 7: 36, 37 that it says "it will be like a well bubbling up from your innermost being." And ja, and I just felt the tongues were like that, bubbling up and over. Whether I understood it or not, I was just so, I just wanted everything that he had for me that night. Basically, no I didn't really fully understand. I think it was just by faith. They told us, lay hands on us, and we will be filled. And we believed that we will be filled, and so we were filled. ... [I felt] Peace and the joy that I've never experienced before and an assurance that God was with me, with us. Hilton had another experience...

H: I had a different experience on that night. I felt the surge of power coming over me, I just experienced a tremendous love for Rhoda and I used to....

R: He immediately knelt down, there by me, and was just holding me, he was just filled with love....

H: She wasn't accustomed to this anymore, because over the years, you know what I mean, we had drawn apart from each other. So there the Holy Spirit fills me and he restores all this love for my wife, she couldn't handle it.

But that was my first experience. Later on, I experienced speaking in tongues and all. But on that particular night, I didn't experience speaking in tongues. I experienced the overflowing love for my wife (H04:62-63).

It is noteworthy that primarily the 'baptism in the Spirit' is experienced as a restoration of the love between Rhoda and Hilton Toohey. The fact that Rhoda Toohey received the gift of speaking in tongues that night seems to be of lesser importance. At least they don't put the kind of emphasis upon it which one would expect, when reading established research on the Pentecostal movement. There speaking in tongues is seen as characteristic sign, constituting the charismatic/Pentecostal experience. But for the Tooheys, especially for Hilton Toohey, being enabled to again love his wife made a much stronger impression on him than speaking in tongues. Instead of emphasizing 'speaking in tongues' they accentuate the restoration of the love for one another and associate it with the indwelling of the Spirit. Not that the 'speaking in tongues' is insignificant, but it seems to have little constitutive character. Hilton Toohey remarks in this respect:

- L: You said you weren't filled with the Holy Spirit that evening when your wife was so how did the Spirit move you?
- H: There was no evidence of speaking in tongues but I knew I had been filled with the Holy Spirit - the evidence came later on in another meeting.
- L: So the changing of your heart basically..
- H: Yes, he worked on this first, which I felt that was what I needed was a heart change to love my wife and my children again (H04:63-64).

The experience of the Spirit enabled Hilton Toohey, for whom the family was the most important thing in life (M04:), to rekindle his love for his wife. As he says himself, for him it was not so much the speaking in tongues but the fact that the Spirit worked on an area in his life which needed urgent attention, what made the Spirit experience real, tangible and relevant.

It even translated in a rediscovery of his fatherly role, as Hilton Toohey recalls:

- H: I also think a significant change in my life was that soon after my conversion, I could gather my family every night.
- R: Which I had done every night before.
- H: Rhoda used to do that before. And I could take the bible and I would begin to read it to them, I would begin to share with them Christian principles and all that, whereas we used to pray the rosary before that, and she used to lead it (H04:72).



Here is a man, who seems to fail in his role as father and husband, who's family seems to disintegrate and who finds in the experience of the Spirit a new perspective to deal with his problems.

The experience of the baptism in the Holy Spirit made a slightly different impression on Rhoda Toohey. She was deeply affected by the newly found love of her husband towards her as well as the recovery of her family life. But furthermore she regained a kind of confidence in the power of the Spiritual which she had not known before. She summons up what happened:

R: But I want to say this very significant thing also happened that night. I saw a lady crying across the room, and it was just like the most natural thing for me to get up and go and lay hands on her. And I had such boldness and such faith, and I knew that if I began something, I just knew that as I laid hands on her whatever I'd asked for, you know like for God to bring healing to her emotionally, and peace, I just knew God would do it. I was just confident.

...that was surprising because whatever I had prayed before, I had never see results. Never! But this night I knew that as I laid hands on her, something was going to happen, she was going to get healing and she was going to get the peace she was longing for – I was feeling so sure about that.

H: The whole life changed after that. We felt like we could we were able to touch people after that (H04:63).

For both, Hilton as well as Rhoda Toohey the personal encounter with the Spirit of God was a life changing event which shaped the character of their future ministry. The experience of the Spirit had restored Hilton Toohey's love for his wife and his role within family. It had given Rhoda Toohey a fundamental confidence that her prayer and laying hands on people would actually make a difference. Their life was changed through the Spirit encounter and thereby they were enabled to touch other lives. On a cognitive level they didn't understand what was happening to them (H04:62) but existentially they had experienced a turn around of their lives. Rhoda Toohey describes it like this:

R: I think one could call it weird. We had a long honeymoon period OK [with the Spirit], we got born again filled with the Holy Spirit and we were so in love with the Lord, and the word was just so real, and so alive to us, and we were just, we were ready to do just anything for God, anything because it was alive - our marriage was heading for the rocks, and here was something that had come and just turned everything around. And that we were, we felt secure that our relationship with God that things could only become better (H04:66).

This willingness, to 'do anything for the Lord' was born out of an attitude of gratitude for what they had experienced and sustained through a intimate relationship with God where 'things could only become better'. Theologically one might argue that they had experienced the grace of God in a very personal manner which now sustained their future spiritual journey.

Doreen Ullbricht, a lady who was part of the beginnings of Breakthrough International, has described their attitude and called it, in typical charismatic terminology, "being sold out to the Spirit".

D: I really felt that I don't know what. Hilton was truly a man of God and he was a person that I felt that I could trust. He was a person that I felt you know I marveled at the things he did you know. He was like from the very beginning he was sold out to the Spirit, he was ready to do anything for God. God just had to say anything to Hilton, and he was ready to do it (H02:15).

Indeed, as we will see now, what was going to happen to the Tooheys, illustrate this willingness to do what ever God was asking them to do.

### 3. Drawn by the Spirit to sell all and go into community

The salvation experience in conjunction with the experience of being baptized in the Holy Sprit took place in 1975. What followed was period of about 3 years in which the Tooheys got more and more involved in the charismatic renewal within their Catholic Church. They describe this time as follows.

R: Yes, we were having weekly prayer meetings and then what we did was every first Saturday of the Month, we were having a renewal services.

And then we would invite priests who were born again and filled with the Holy Spirit and they would come and minister to us. And yes, then we were reading lots of things, ... going into conference and things.

And then we were also having bible study with the priest what was his name, Fr.Charles Strueber. And as we were going through the gospels and he was sharing on what it means to be a follower of Jesus, you are going to say that you're born again. Then you've got to be prepared even to leave things. And then we would argue with them, we said but those were for the disciples and the apostles but it was like a preparing us.

And then we worked a lot also with the poor we belong to St Vincent de Paul and then we did things differently from the usual Catholic way of doing it. We said we are not going to ask people to give money, for the poor, we ourselves are going to tithe to save St Vincent de Paul and share what we have, so it was all in preparation and working towards this third year when God would call us.

L: So right from the start, when you were involved with this experience of the Spirit it was going along with ministering to the poor?

- H: We were, we have been ministering to the poor before, but it just grew once the Spirit took over you see. The Ministry really grew once the Spirit took over.
- R: Then at our meetings, with the we had weekly meetings, the St Vincent de Paul, with the group that worked with us amongst the poor, and then we began to study the book of Acts as well. That's right then we began to long for the Holy Spirit to move in our lives, in the way it did in the early days (H04:65).

It seems as if their salvation experience didn't draw the Tooheys away from the church of their birth. The years from 1975 until about the beginning of 1979 were marked by deeper involvement within the Catholic Church (H04:62). They had further Spirit encounters through conferences, reading of charismatic magazines, revival services and prayer meetings.

In addition Hilton and Rhoda Toohey's involvement in the social ministry of their church was boosted through their encounters with the Spirit of God. Russell, their son elaborates:

- T: Yes, dad had been with St. Vincent DePaul. He was a Catholic saint who ministered to the poor and needy. It is a department in most Catholic churches. He was the chairperson of that department. That worked nicely with the charismatic experience. In the sense, that its inspired them to reach out. But after his conversion there was an added passion for the poor. They went into prayer meetings with them, they gave food parcels, raised funds to help them and touched many people's lives. And then the people began to flow in (H01:3).

Moreover Hilton and Rhoda Toohey embarked on a serious process of the study of the bible. This, considering their Catholic background, in which the reading of the bible was not encouraged, is particularly significant. Doreen Ullbricht, who, together with the Tooheys was part of the early bible study group within the Catholic Church, recounts what happened:

- D: But it was amazing how God unfolds you. You know he unfolded the word, because we weren't encouraged to read the word in our church, ... we had bibles in our homes, but they were just on the shelf and never ever would we read them.

We weren't encouraged to read it, because I remember many years ago having been brought up in a Catholic school, we were encouraged not to read the bible or else we'd be confused. But then one understands why we would have been confused because we weren't taught the bible anyway in the first place.

...Yes, Father Strueber [the priest leading the revival in their congregation] encouraged it and even later, when he felt he could leave us we continued. I feel God really inspired the ladies at that time because we were having wonderful bible studies you know. Learning and God teaching ourselves about the Holy Spirit and being taught by the Holy Spirit was the main thing. ... I felt there were times when I would read the word of God, and think, "Lord I really don't understand this and I really would like to understand it, and I just read and all of a sudden a verse of scripture would just jump at me and I would understand.

... I felt so moved in this matter of reading the bible and it was is so beautiful. So beautiful, it made me read it again. And as I read the word over and over and it starts

ministering into my Spirit and this is what I really felt. I felt: "This is real, this is the Spirit of God.". And I'd read the word of God, and another time I'd go back to the word that I'd read and hadn't understood and all of a sudden it lights up - I'm understanding this now that's the way I felt just when you're willing and your heart desires nothing else than this understanding of the word (H02:13-14).

The study of the bible became another vehicle through which Spirit encounters were facilitated. While salvation and Spirit baptism happened within the context of an emotional charged atmosphere of prayer meetings and altar calls, we now see an intensified interacting with scripture taking place. The main feature of this interaction, as we will see on other occasions as well, is the fact that the reading of the bible becomes a real opportunity to hear God's voice.

The bible is not just a word to be studied as an intellectual exercise but to be encountered, to be experienced. The bible becomes more than "a symbol of the presence of God...a resource in the struggle for survival, liberation and life" (West 2003:ix) as G. West has argued for the South African context. His point makes sense from the perspective of the biblical scholar. But for 'believers' like Doreen Ullbricht and Hilton and Rhoda Toohey, who speak from an experiential point of view, the bible is more than a symbol of the presence of God. The bible is real because they have experienced the bible as 'real, and thereby seen the "the Spirit of God at work' within their reading of scripture. Therefore the bible is not just a 'resource for survival and liberation' (West), it is God talking to the believer in the most intimate way. Craig S. Keener, a New Testament scholar familiar with the Pentecostal and charismatic way of reading the bible from his own experience (Keener 2001:14-15), has described this way of study of the bible, as "another method of hearing God's voice that could complement and anchor the prayerful, 'charismatic' method (Keener 2001:47).

In was partly through this way of the reading of scripture, in which 'they listened to the voice of God that Hilton and Rhoda Toohey were stirred to take another step within their spiritual journey. This step is what they refer to as "moving into community" which entailed selling all their belongings and move to the St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church living in community (M07:5).

What had happened was that Hilton and Rhoda Toohey, within "three years of coming to the Lord"... felt a distinct call to leave all things" (H01:3) and enter into a communal life style. Their bible studies focused on the Book of Acts as well as the Gospels as a model of how a

Christian life style should be designed and the Tooheys were thereby challenged to take that next step and live according to the "First Century Christian schema" (Poewe1989:369)

they treated the bible like most other Christian traditions do. "Some biblical aspects are stressed and up-graded, others are de-emphasized and made subsidiary" (Barr 1984:114). But reading the Gospels and the Book of Acts as a real account of the Spirit of God at work made them long for the Spirit to move among them like in the early days of the church (cf.Droogers 1994:36). Eventually they identified with God's call of selling and living in a communion of believers described in Acts chapter 2. They understood it as a call for themselves and not just an exclusive call to the first disciples and apostles.

Here we need to note that their study of the bible was supplemented by the reading of "charismatic magazines and books" which "were talking about Christian communities that were being formed in America" (H04:64) and some influence might have come from there as well.

However, in an interesting turn of events the move into a communal life style was set off through a rather dramatic intervention by the Spirit. Rhoda and Hilton Toohey talk about it:

H: I was at work one day just before lunch break because I was a builder, and I must have been on about the third floor and all of a sudden, it was like I heard the voice of God saying "Leave all things, and come follow me".

And at that instant I went into a little closet because I began to cry, and for the whole lunch break. I was in that closet just weeping - Because I knew that that God had called me into the ministry now. That I must leave everything and come follow him.

And when I got home that afternoon and I was relating that story to Rhoda, and she asked me, what time did it happen, I told her just on 12 o'clock, and she said: "Exactly the same thing happened to me." So we knew that God was calling us into ministry.

R: And so when the call came, I was busy, and all of a sudden, it was like I was arrested by the Holy Spirit and I heard this a voice say to me to leave all and to come, to sell and to lead a new life and you know, to follow and so what came to my mind was to leave, and to go into a community (H04:64).

Russell Toohey recollects this Spirit encounter as well:

T. It was a Catholic hymn "Leave all things and come and follow me...". So one lunch break my dad was reading his bible at work, on a construction side, and the Lord touched him supernaturally. He broke down in tears, went into a tool shed he was so overwhelmed. At that precise moment my mother was polishing the floor at home and

had the same experience and had the same impression of that song. And so with that they connected with a Catholic priest who was running a community of reconciliation. Sold up everything at give away price. Gave away lots of stuff and we shifted down there and lived very simply, very humble vegetarian lifestyle (H01:3).

, the practicalities of 'moving into community' are much more complex than the recollections of Spirit encounter like the above might indicate. The Tooheys sold their belongings which is something, as we might mention in passing, that had been prophesized over their lives before by a pastor from Durban (H01:4). After that "they lived by faith", as they call it (H04:66-67), which basically means living off donations. They moved into a community which had been envisioned by a Catholic priest and was called "Zion Community of Reconciliation" (H04:67:). Hilton and Rhoda Toohey had felt a clear call to team up with this priest. Hilton Toohey remembers how they visited him for the first time:

R: We'd heard about him, and that he loved to pray so we invited him to come and talk on prayer, and somehow we felt just some kind of connection with him .... And one Sunday afternoon, we went and visited him, and we couldn't get over the simplicity of the way in which he lived, and we experienced the power of God in the church. When he took us into the church, and then he talked about his dream, to have this community of reconciliation and somehow in our hearts we felt that God was linking us. So a few days later we called in another priest who we knew very well ... we told him we felt now we'd heard God say to us, "Leave all things and come and follow me" and we feel that God wants to link us up with this priest.

So then he said you've got a big house, why don't you get people to come and stay here with you. But we said no, the poor are not comfortable with us in our big house. And we feel God is calling us to live with this priest. So I mean the priest eventually said he also feels God want us to form this community together. And it was a year later that he spoke to us about having meetings together, with the other. ... He spoke in his heart.

H: I was praying and ...God gave me the names of these couples, we could work together with, ... so we went to approach them, told them about a vision that God wanted us to reconcile the church, and then we formed a team. We called it a "Team of Reconciliation" (H04:67-68).

This is how the "Zion Community of Reconciliation" was born which seemed to be driven by two contradicting aims. While the priest was rather into reconciling the different religions, the Tooheys aimed for bringing together the different denominations. Russell Toohey explains:

T. Yes, the priest was a maverick himself, father Michelson. He was a former lecturer here at St. Joseph's. He was always a unique thinker. Doctor of theology and the rest of it. He had a vision for such a community. But that was not uncommon in that time. A lot of charismatic communities sprung up all over the world. Not that he was a charismatic. He was more a rationalist. A liberal thinker. We run a community of reconciliation amongst churches and he did it amongst religions. He visited mosques and so forth (H01:4).

Despite the difference in opinion Hilton and Rhoda Toohey followed through with what the Spirit had called them to do. Hilton Toohey sums up:

H: Well, the community was actually started when we went down there, because it was an old derelict Catholic Church, it was in a terrible state. And so we sold our house, and all the money that we got from our house we used to build a community up then, then I left work to work on the community. We built rooms, where people could come and stay, and all that (H04:66).

The ministry developed over the years (H01:2-4) and people gathered together for charismatic and interdenominational meetings. Hilton Toohey describes it as follows:

H: We used to have meetings once a month, where all the different denominations came. We used to fill the church in Ohrtman Rd. and we used to invite ministers from the different denominations to come and minister to us and then we began to do various works in the communities. And I remember one day because then in our meetings, Whites will come in and Blacks and Indians and Coloureds, and we got a special visit from the special branch. And they started to question us. What are the Whites doing in our church? But I eventually began to minister to the - I invited him to also come. So it was OK – They never came back again! (H04:68-69).

... there was a real revival that began to happen there. We used to have meetings there, at 12 o'clock , and on a Friday 12 - 2pm between an hour or two, and eventually there were about 3 or 400 people used to come there during the lunch break (H04:67).

The 'living in community' opened a new chapter within the Spiritual journey of Hilton and Rhoda Toohey. They felt and responded to the call of going into ministry, notably without having the intention to start their own church. They rather wanted to bring the churches together and reconcile them and therefore joined New Zion Community of Reconciliation. From the outside one might argue that eventually this 'ministry of reconciliation failed' since it was the first step in the creation of Breakthrough International thus it gave birth to just another church instead of bringing the churches together. But as far as Hilton and Rhoda Toohey are concerned, this was the Spirit leading them, not just their own ego dissatisfied with the church of their birth. Hilton Toohey says it like this:

H: Oh no I don't just move because its from my mind. Its always in prayer, then the Holy Spirit impresses certain things on me then I've learned that whatever the Spirit of God says you must do, don't hesitate, because if you hesitate, then you begin to doubt (H04:77).

The Tooheys were 'sold out to the Lord' willing to follow wherever the experience of the Spirit might lead them. They were living a theology where "events precede ideas" (Balcomb 1998:12). Their experience of the Spirit superceded theory and shaped the construction of their reality or belief system. This experience was constitutive for Hilton and Rhoda

Toohey's story because "people's experiences form the basis of what they believe and the way that they talk about their experiences and tell their stories" (ibid.).

#### 4. Baptism by immersion or the Spirit leading into a decisive moment of crisis

In one interview Russell Toohey addressed the question whether that what had happened to his parents was to do with conceptual thinking where they would reflect on their actions in a systematic and intellectual way. He says:

- T. ...they didn't understand it very well themselves either. It was more an experiential thing than a theological one. You know there wasn't an educated understanding. So they went around a lot to Catholic charismatic meetings and they began to grow in Christ after they had been converted. But I am still amazed at how they actually brought anyone to the Lord, because it was supernatural intervention (H01:2).

This 'supernatural intervention' continued as we will see now, when we turn our attention to the question how Hilton and Rhoda Toohey were 'led by the Spirit' to break with their church and start something new.

As Hilton and Rhoda Toohey lived and ministered within the 'Community of Reconciliation' it grew and became interdenominational and multiracial. However the ministry reached a crisis point after about five and a half years of living in community. Rhoda Toohey explains:

- R: What happened, we heard, and we were listening to Pastor Creamer's testimony on how God had spoken to him to be baptized, to be immersed you know. And I think it was the third time we were hearing his story about baptism, about being immersed. And so something happened simultaneously [in the two of them] as we listened to him. We just knew that God was sacred, this was now after eight years of being born again through the Holy Spirit, we knew that day, we knew that God was saying that we needed to go through the waters ourselves.

And then we just made this announcement to the group that we were ministering to. We said to them, we feel that this is what God wants us to do. Look you don't have to do it, because now the team of reconciliation we're accountable, we said you don't have to do what we are doing, but this is what we feel God is wanting us to do. And then our five and half years, we knew that we wouldn't be in Ohrtman Road longer than that five and a half years were coming to an end. And so we took the step (H04:69).

This step did kick start Breakthrough International as Chester Rawlins has remarked (H03:35). The relationship between the 'Team of Reconciliation' and the churches from where its members, mostly Anglicans and Catholics, came, was redefined, because of the 'believers baptism'. This "believers baptism" is still stressed by Breakthrough International



as the only form of baptism since “Baptism follows conversion in the New Testament” and “there were no unbaptized believers”(M07:13). The difference with ‘orthodox theology’ adhered to by Catholics and Anglicans alike is obvious.

At this point one needs to note that even the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement itself has no clear stand on the issue. Even though in most cases “water baptism takes place by immersion” (Hollenweger 1972:391), practices can differ. Baptisms are carried out by immersion or sprinkling. Furthermore infant as well as adult baptism is practiced (Hollenweger 1972:390-391). But Hilton and Rhoda Toohey, had encountered scripture ‘where baptism follows conversion’ and they desired to make it a reality. Thereby they took a step which brought them in direct and public confrontation with their church. After the baptism took place at Albert Falls, a dam near Pietermaritzburg, the Tooheys as well as the other members of the group were met with strong opposition.

Chester and Rose Rawlins give an account of what happened to them after they had gone “through the waters’. They say:

- R: So two weeks later, in that whole baptism talk, we went to baptism at the Albert Falls Dam. In the river below the dam. So lot of people went. So that morning, somebody told the Father from the Anglican church, this is how he came to know and saw that we wanted more. This was the first time. Even Hilton told me about it himself, it was the first time that we did this baptism and all of us got baptized that day at the Albert Falls Dam.
- R: Now the Anglican minister, he came there the Monday ... he wants to have a meeting with us.
- C: So it was two of us and Rose’s brother. So we went there and when we got there he was sitting with the wardens and church wardens, so he says, “Listen here you guys, I believe this is what you all have done. And its against the rules of the Anglican faith. So in other words you have all denied the Anglican faith. But if you all can say you all just went for an experience then I mean we can accept it.” But we definitely said that we didn’t go for an experience. So we said: “Listen here, according to scripture this is what is right.”
- R: But he said: “You never studied anything, so you can’t tell me anything, can’t even open a bible you’ll know nothing of the bible.” So we kept quiet. So we said , no we are convinced that this thing we have done is the right thing. So we’re are not saying that this was wrong (H03:33-34).

Considering the pressure which was brought upon people like Rose and Chester Rawlins one is amazed that they stood against the establishment of their churches. A number of others who had been rebaptized didn’t handle the pressure and slipped quietly back into their respective churches (H03:33). But Chester and Rose Rawlins, he a former alcoholic with

little education, and she a factory worker (cf. H04:75), stood their ground. That those two, who “never studied anything” were not giving into the pressure put upon them, had to do with the way they read scripture. It was real to them, or as Chester Rawlins put it; “We wanted to live the scripture, you know I mean not just being told, you know, what to do“ (H03:32).

They, like Rhoda and Hilton Toohey were heavily criticized by the churches which had been their spiritual homes all their lives. But they were overwhelmed by the feeling that God wanted them to experience the ‘believers baptism’ (H04:69-70). A sense which was supported by the insight gained through their study of the bible. So they did it, even though they acknowledge that it wasn’t easy to break with their respective churches (H02:17).

Another reason why they could stand the pressure was the experience of the ‘believers baptism’ itself. Chester and Rose Rawlins experienced it as a major encounter with the power of the Spirit. Chester Rawlins recollects:

C: Yeah, it was like when the scripture says when Jesus was being baptized, the skies, the heavens opened. We never experienced something like that... , But just when everybody, was just starting, we were just on the tail of the people getting baptized, I tell you the skies you know it was hot that day, I tell you but it just got dark, and everything was lightening and thundering and. Now like that thing just like caught you, you know I mean , it was like the heavens are being opened and a special moment had come (H04:34).

Rhoda Toohey experienced the baptism in the river as a Spiritual encounter which gave her an immense feeling of freedom. Se says:

R: It was tremendous excitement, it was also in fear and trembling because we felt that it was a turning point in our lives, and well I was very... , I didn’t like water too much, I was scared and I said: God now I’m a very cold person, I said, Lord, you going to have to perform a miracle, because it was in August, I said this water is going to have to be warm. Ha, ! and that’s exactly how it was.

But I tell you there I wouldn’t - there was fear. I just felt somehow that life was never going to be the same again. That we had just in a sense gone too far. A lot of Catholics had gone through with baptism but in secret, whereas with us now it was a public thing, and I knew that life would never be the same again.

I felt as I went through into the water, went under the water, this was something that I saw it was almost with my physical eye, like something had come off me. Something I don’t know whether it was the religious Spirit or what, but I came out of there but I just knew I was free. ... For me it was like a great I don’t know what. The old man had gone! .... I felt more so that whatever umbilical cord there might have been to all these old in me together, it was just like cutting it off. You know what I mean, I just

felt because we already sensed that what God was saying, it was time to move out (H04:69-70).

Hilton Toohey connects this feeling of freedom to a new understanding of faith, which liberated them from the Catholic, traditional way of doing church (at least as he understood it). He states:

H: And you must understand that as far as Catholicism is concerned, we were really, we did every religious practice of Catholicism. Every religious practice, we were part of it so when we found our new life, in God and the basic thing is love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul, and the neighbor as yourself.

And there we were with all this old unnecessary baggage, and that's why we felt when we got baptized all that unnecessary baggage was left in the river. And we came out just with the simplicity of loving God and loving people. That's a basic message of Christianity, anyway isn't it? (H04:70).

Hilton and Rhoda Toohey effectively broke off with the practice and tradition of the Catholic Church going through the experience of the 'baptism of the believers'. They did so because they were feeling that God wanted them to 'move out' and leave 'all the unnecessary baggage of religious practices' behind. their public baptism by immersion at Albert Falls forced the "orthodox" church to exclude them since it did not concur with orthodox teaching. But while for their church this might have been a matter of doctrine for Hilton and Rhoda Toohey it was a matter of allowing God's Spirit to move them. Their understanding of God's will and their action was informed by a desire to experience the Spirit moving 'like in the early days of the church'.

Traditional theology which operates under the notion that "experience is not theology" (Pawson 1988:65) might try to explain what happened to Hilton and Rhoda Toohey as an unavoidable conflict between doctrine and experience. Pawson for instance claims that doctrine is by its very nature not as dynamic as experience. Both cannot come together because experience has nothing to do with proper theology (cf.Pawson 1988:65-70). This is not the premise of this study. We submit for reasons stated above (cf.I.C. & II.A.) that experience, especially the experience of the Spirit, has a theological content, which Hilton and Rhoda Toohey make theologically accessible through their narrative. The experiential approach towards theology is Hilton and Rhoda Toohey's way of doing theology which is moved forward by experience rather than reason in the modern sense of the word. Therefore the break between the "Team of Reconciliation" and the church from which it emerged is

more than a conflict about the doctrine of baptism. It rather raises the issue of how change is facilitated within the realm of religion which is by its very nature the realm of the Spirit.

For Hilton and Rhoda Toohey change and development happened through the leading and intervention of the Spirit. In that process the 'baptism of believers' created a moment of crisis leading eventually to the founding of Breakthrough International.

to break with the church of one's birth is one thing, but to start a new church is another. Hilton and Rhoda did not intend to do the latter, they "were too inexperienced and naïve to know that this is how many churches get started" (H01:5). It was, as they would say, rather the Spirit which moved them along towards the beginning of Breakthrough International.

This time the Spirit encounter happened while Hilton Toohey was praying. His wife talks about this when she was asked if they ever intended to start their own church. She answered:

R: No, we began to visit the Christian Center and New Covenant, and there was an Anglican church that we were really close to, the one in Raisethorpe. Because they were charismatic, so we thought you know, God, what are you saying to us? What are you saying to us, and then one day He came out of prayer [pointing to Hilton Toohey] and said he just feels that we don't know how to do this thing, we don't - the only way we know is well with all the rituals and things, but he just felt that God was saying to us that we need to start that church. And then we said that's just fine, and well we needed a venue (H04:70-71).

A little later in the interview Rhoda Toohey elaborated:

...when we got baptized and then we heard the Lord say that we must start a church, so then we approached Chester and Rose and asked if we couldn't start because we were still living at the old community [of Reconciliation] so we asked Chester and Rose if we couldn't start a church in their house. So in that August [1984] already and we started the church with about eight of us OK, but we remained in the community until December the 21<sup>st</sup> (H04:73).

Indeed, in August 1984, the church started in Chester and Rose Rawlins's House. But it is only in retrospect that this date is identified as the founding of Breakthrough International. The intention was not to start a new church. The time from August 1984 until the end of the year is rather a time of transition when people tried to come to terms with what had happened to them "looking for something different - something more". Searching for something "that we felt was more church, bible-based church" (P06:151).

Chester Rawlins called this time a 'time of waiting on the Lord': He says:

- C: After the baptism, it all got moving. In other words, if then you are getting told, you are not going to get accepted, because of what you believe God is leading you to so we you have to wait for God in finding the way ahead. So we meet that morning, waiting on the Lord, it was a church. And that was beginning, only eight of us that morning (H03:36).

Russell Toohey agrees; “While we were waiting on the Lord ... we started these prayer meetings ... more and more people came and the whole process just went along spontaneously” (H01:7). In their own view of how things happened the people who began Breakthrough International would say; “We just did what came naturally and it became a church and so forth and so on ” (H01:7).

Once again, while from the outside the beginning of Breakthrough International might look like just another charismatic church springing up, from the inside people felt that the Spirit was moving them. Furthermore they felt that the only way forward would be a way which was ‘impressed’ upon them by the Spirit, to use Hilton Toohey’s terminology.

#### 5. Living according to Acts 2 or 2½ years of Spiritual formation

The period of ‘waiting on the Holy Spirit’ lasted from going through the ‘baptism of the believer’ in August 1985 until the following year. It was filled with great anticipation for those who were part of what used to be the “Team of Reconciliation”. The people were waiting on the Lord to act because he “had promised a smallholding” (H01:7) where they could live a communal life style like in the Book of Acts.

Rose and Chester Rawlins have given a detailed account of what happened:

- C: So now over the time, sharing about these things we were reading in the bible, praying about these things and asking God to direct us and lead us and so on, you know, and moving into this thing of the Spirit and then I remember it came to December and then we had set...
- R: set a date, the 21<sup>st</sup> December we move.
- C: Now without any knowing where you moving, but that was the date that was set.
- R: So that morning, everybody knew their act, I mean by then, we had given our stuff away to my mother, to Stella, sister in law, and everybody The only thing we had, the only thing I kept telling Chester, I must take my washing machine you know, and my children’s bunk beds those are the only two things I kept and then there were two suitcases as well.

C: Then an interesting thing happened, the Friday, the day we were supposed to move, it wasn't actually, it was a week before the move, we met up the Friday, and Pastor George he's in Ixopo now, he had a house in Rosetta so we used to have evening services at his place. So we met there. When we met there, we never went back to our homes that weekend, we all just stayed as a family and changed and brought our clothes here, we started living there, so the Monday, the end of the month was coming close, so we had placed our notices Rose and myself were renting, so we came and we lived, and we had our first Christmas all of us, all together in George's house. But now George's house was also been sold, he had sold his house.

R: So we had to be out by the end of the month.

C: We were about 26, including children, so Hilton went out to find a place. We had no where to go...

So one night as we were sleeping I had a dream, I saw us digging two toilets, two farm toilets, in the farm, you know, and I got up the next day and I shared this dream. Anyway we started saying: "Oh there's a name that comes to mind, a Mr. Pitout." He was living in Ashburton so, Camperdown, so I said let me go and see Mr. Pitout maybe he can give us a piece of plot on the side of his house somewhere that we can put tents around. Then I went and I see him. So I see him so I shared the vision what we all about and he gave us a piece of land. So then we moved everything, caravans, tents so we camped there. We stayed there for about a year, I think, or just less than a year. The farmers around there ... so the farmers got together, and they said no, we can't live around like this here, ... So they gave us three days notice to get out. So we had to break tent. And then..

R: Bronwyn, who used to come to Zion Church, she was a white lady, ... Tedder, the farmer, was in her church, and then that's how she's spoken on behalf of Hilton and them, so he was out in Foxhill, he said: "They are welcome." So he gave us a place in Foxhill (H03:40-42).

Living a communal life at Foxhill opened up a whole new period within the development of Breakthrough International. Still people there were not primarily concerned with starting another church but rather with "living the Book of Acts" (H03:42). Resources were pooled together and life became focused on the Spiritual.

"It was fantastic" to use Chester Rawlins words, he elaborates:

C: Every morning we used to get up at five out of our tents and caravans and go to the river there, and there was a rock there, and we used to pray for about an hour every morning and the living all together, sharing meals, and a lot of character building and also you know the unity and the flesh rubbing against flesh but it really brought out something out of us. It was I believe it was like a preparation time. You know how you can live with people how you can relate to people, it was all learning stages, you know, it wasn't just you and your family only now, you had to consider other people. ....we had a lot of time of - although we were a lot in the area- , a time of quietness was a lot. Because each one used to just go into their own corner, and just wait on God and I think this is where we really allowed the Spirit to move us, to work in us. ... I was like a type of retreat type of thing but I think that God was really working, (H03:42-43).

Hilton Toohey echoes such sentiments in a presentation he gave 18 years later recalling the Spiritual significance of the communal life at Foxhill:

H: I remember when we lived in Foxhill, and we didn't know why God was leading us to our life in Foxhill, when we lived in tents for two and a half years. Only now I realize he wanted us to come and discover another aspect of our lives. Ask George and Chester and everyone of the people who were with us at Foxhill. Every morning we used to go and pray on a big rock. 5 O'clock in the morning. Everyone of us. It was amazing. The guys who lived in that community that disregarded the rock are not in the ministry today. Because they never discovered that other aspect of their life ... You know, ministry is just another aspect of your life. We all are called to be ministers. Amen! Not all pastors, but we are all called to be ministers. ... The ministry aspect of your life ... it is all got to do with prayer. Do you stand on the rock every day? We stood on the rock every day. Ask George, it was winter, but you know, when we came out of the community we had all discovered another aspect of our lives. That's it (P01:225-226).

Life at Foxhill marked an important aspect of the development of Breakthrough International as well as of the Apostolic network later to be called New Zion Ministries International. People discovered 'ministry as the hidden aspect of their life' (Hilton Toohey).

In that respect one needs to bear in mind that all those who got involved were not trained pastors and had been brought up in the Anglican as well as Catholic tradition. There they had experienced ministry as the domain of the trained theologian. One might argue now that Foxhill became something like the seminary of New Zion Ministries International. Hilton and Rhoda Toohey explain:

H: Because we felt that God saw just certain areas in our life, that God wanted to develop and prepare us, and then he showed us part of his farm, under big pecan nut trees, and kikuyu must have been about 20 or 30 cm long, and we had to get sickles and cut it, and then we pitched tents, and Chester and Rose lived in the caravan, and we lived there for two and a half years, and we got water from the reservoir, not from the dam out there, so we drank just raw water, and it was a hard life but it was absolutely fantastic. I had never slept in a tent in all my life, and we spent three winters there, and we used to freeze in the night but it was an incredible experience. We used to pray a lot there. Because it was out in the country, it was solitude.

R: It was absolutely fantastic, because it was so quiet, so then what we'd already gleaned and learnt from that Catholic priest was just a kind of a contemplative prayer. So then we would ja, on the personal level we would just it was the intimacy with God, and meditating on the Word, but what was also of significance was that our total dependence was on God, we had been rejected, in the community, and in the church now, because we had left you know, each one of us had left our denominations and we'd formed this church.

H: Every meal was communal. And every supper we used to meet, spend some time in the word, I used to give them scriptures, ... Three or four scriptures to learn on a Monday night we used to test whether they knew it. Get God's word in your heart. Sometimes you got to memorize it (H04:72-73).

Hilton Toohey's suggestion that the years at Foxhill were a time which God used to prepare them for the ministry indicates how important this time was for any future developments. It is a time marked by 'intimacy with God, meditating on the word and absolute dependence on God' to use Rhoda Toohey's words. These features describe the elements of a Spiritual formation which enabled those who went through it to develop Breakthrough International. It represents, at least in view of those who participated, a kind of theological-Spiritual training which is experiential in outlook and where people learned to listen to the Spirit of God in an intimate way in order to minister to the people.

#### 6. The bible is real therefore why not raise someone from the dead?

Intimacy with God's Spirit is a feature which runs through most of the interviews which have been conducted. It is an intimacy which created expectations amongst those involved with Breakthrough International that the Spirit would act amongst them in the most miraculous ways. An outstanding incident in respect to what people around Hilton and Rhoda Toohey would expect the Spirit to do took place in 1985, shortly after the separation from the Catholic Church. Hilton Toohey attempted to raise a man who had died of cancer from the dead.

Russell Toohey comments on this incident from the early days of Breakthrough International:

- T: We were simple enough and unschooled enough and came to believe that if the bible says that Jesus raised people from the dead and the bible says we can do it, lets go for it (H01:6).

This 'raising someone from the dead' marks another major crisis in the development of Breakthrough International. After the raising from the dead had failed "the church halved" (H01:5) and the remaining group was ostracized (H04:72). Yet for those who stayed it was also an experience of spiritual growth. In some respect the 'honeymoon with the Spirit' (Rhoda Toohey) came to an end and people matured spiritually (H04:5). Russell Toohey describes what happened:

- T. Oh yeah! A lot of people had utterances that that man, who had cancer would be healed. He was with us from the beginning, he was a founder member. His wife was with my parents in the Catholic church. My father and him, the families were very close. He, Edwin Ullbricht, died and we said, "Maybe the Lord means to...[to raise him]" So, I was at the funeral, I was there when we took the cover off the coffin, and



we laid hands on the body and laid hands on the coffin and prayed passionately, people shook and the coffin shook and we thought the man was shaking but he wasn't. He didn't rise from the dead. Somebody nearly hit my dad at the cemetery. That was 3 O'clock, by 5 O'clock the whole of Woodlands and Eastwood knew about this. Yeah, we were trusting the Lord, that what happens in the word can happen today. We were really trusting the Lord. It was powerful, awesome, there was a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Hair was standing up on peoples arms and the works, but it didn't happen. No, it was a tremendous maturing experience. That happened in 1985 (H01:5-6).

At first glance one might think that what Russell Toohey describes is the culmination of charismatic madness. The word madness is used here very deliberately since the charismatic and Pentecostal scene is full of examples where the above described 'faith healing approach' is doing more harm than good. Austin Miles, a former minister of the Assemblies of God, would call it a type of "faith ministry" where people are encouraged to look to God for their healing" and get hurt in the process (Miles 1990:74-75). He describes it as ministry practiced by a "Pentecostal Doctrine-Enforcement Officer" deluding "their supporters into believing that they can have anything that they ask God for in faith, 'unwavering faith'" (Miles 1990:107; cf. Gifford 1995:45).

Miles himself had become a victim of this kind of treatment which is so widespread within Pentecostal and Charismatic circles. He writes about what happened to him after he had been diagnosed with cancer:

Collectively, brothers and sisters of the assemblies of God convinced me that God would heal. God had allowed this to happen in order to show His healing power... After the evangelist Robert Thom prayed for me, I agreed with him in front of the audience that God healed me. Following the prayer I was told, ...If any of the old symptoms connected with the cancer should "crop up", I should reject those "false" symptoms as a "temptation of Satan to get me turn loose of my healing"(Miles 1990:71-72).

Miles, being a victim of the church himself allows other "victims" to speak and shows how potentially harmful faith can be. His own story is a good example why, for convincing reasons, many of the 'healing experiences' reportedly taking place in Pentecostal and Charismatic circles are viewed with suspicion by the outside observer (Balmer 1993:73-77). Paul Gifford classifies this treatment as a symptom of "Wealth and Health-" (cf. Gifford 1995:45) or "Faith Gospel" (Gifford 1998:39) also called "prosperity gospel" (Poewe 1994:59). Favazza points to the fact that many of the medical miracles, when followed up, might fail to "demonstrate any lasting medical benefit" (Favazza 1982:729, cf. Miles 1990:73-74). Therefore they do more harm than good.

, within our research we are not primarily concerned with the authenticity of healing experiences or the pain and disappointment which the lack thereof might leave in the believer. The focus of our research is to establish the narrative through which the people of Breakthrough International acquaint us with their experience of the Spirit. Nonetheless our brief excursion into the criticism coming from people like Miles, Gifford and others (Poewe 1994:50-69) provides us with an interesting point of comparison and helps to understand the significance of Breakthrough International's narrative better. Miles was collectively 'convinced that God would heal'. His brethren had found very subtle ways of making him believe that healing would happen. This turned out to be doing more harm than good. On the other side those who were involved in the failed raising of Edwin Ullbricht tell a story which is not so much marked by the pain and disappointment caused by falsely raised hopes. Doreen Ullbricht, the sister in law of the deceased, remembers:

D: Well that was my brother-in-law. The man that Pastor Hilton tried to raise. He had lung cancer and he really - a lot of men of God, pastors, in Woodlands, ministered to him, and they felt that his cancer - God is going to heal him of cancer its not up to death and he had a word from four pastors, that this cancer is not unto death, God is going to heal him.

And he had great faith, Edwin. He wouldn't even take the medication he said I'm not taking the medication, I'm trusting in God for my healing so he and both him and his wife were really trusting in God. And he had a lot of ministry, over his life.

Anyway, he just got worse. And my sister-in-law phoned me in the morning that he died, she phoned me it was like before he died she said "Just come and see Edwin, he's not looking very nice. And by the time I got there, I could see he was dead, but she, I suppose she's not accepting it even if she was half towards something like that she wasn't accepting it. "I think it would be advisable for you to get a doctor" and then she says, "Do you think he's dead?" So I said, "no I'm not saying that at all just get the doctor," so she got the doctor.

But she said: "You go in the room with the doctor" and she was praying in the lounge. So I went in with the doctor. He just looked at him, and opened his eyes he says, "you know he's gone." So I said, "I did think so doctor" you know it was best that you tell his wife. So he mentioned it to her. She said "No ways, I'm not accepting it" and she was hysterical, she said after all these promises of healing, I'm not accepting this death (H02:20-21).

So far the story seems to be going along Miles' narrative - seemingly another 'victim of the church' is in the making. The 'brethren in faith' had collectively created an expectation 'that this cancer was not unto death', which was disappointed. One difference is that the widow did not start blaming those who had raised her hopes but went into a state of denial. At this point of the story it is interesting to note how Hilton Toohey as well as those who had formed

around his ministry responded. Doreen Ullbricht describes the kind of treatment she and her sister received from her fellow 'brethren':

So she [the wife of the deceased] phoned Pastor Hilton and when he got there, she said "I'm not accepting this" Hilton said to her, "Do the necessary thing, Norah, get the undertakers to come and take him." She says "No, I'm not accepting the death" she was adamant about it. She says "I believe that God can raise the dead, we're going to start praying now" "I'm not sending my husband's body to the mortuary." So he said to Norah, "Norah, I think we have to let Edwin go, cause its against the law to do that. We have to take him to the mortuary." And by then she had agreed and she said "Well God can even raise him even when comes out of there" she says, Lord Jesus was raised on the third day and came out of the tomb, so I believe that this can happen to my husband, and I'm trusting in God.

So Pastor Hilton said, "Norah we stand with you every step of the way, every step of the way, we stand with you in trust we are really go into a fast now and pray." So that we did. quite a few of us, like the core of us really, prayed for those days, and truly we felt in our heart in our heart deep down in our hearts that you know that the power of God was so tangible. You know, if I ever felt God's presence, I used to feel it at those times that we used to pray.

Hilton was willing to go every step of the way. I really admired this man of God. I really admired him. Because I feel its not anybody that would do that. You know, we were so scared of what if it doesn't happen? I'm going to be a laughing stock of the community. No, he went he was so selfless, you know he never just brushed past your faith, rushed by, and say well you know its got to be done like that, he said he'll stand with you, he'll stand with you.

So as the core members we stood together with the family. So at the time we didn't have a big church and the funeral was so big, because by then, it had spread, round the community, and everybody wanted to see this miracle. And we had it in the hall at Woodlands, the community hall there.

Pastor Hilton said look, there were so many pastors, you all in this place today that has prophesied over this man's life and said that his cancer wasn't unto death. Come let's lay hands, God has risen, he raised the dead, you know, so whoever wants to come, so they going to do this laying of hands. So the men in our church came and all stood round the coffin, they took the lid off the coffin

Only the men and we all stood there, and we all sat, we were all in front and the coffin was there in front and we just prayed, and he prayed, and he said "Well, nothing happened, he prayed, he prayed, well the miracle didn't happen and he said "Look, let God be God." We just closed the coffin and Norah, and by then she was satisfied. She was satisfied, and they closed the coffin and that was it (H02:21-22).

We note that Hilton Toohey and the 'core group' didn't tell the grieving widow to hold on to the prophecy that 'this cancer is not unto death'. They also didn't call her to give up her hope for a supernatural intervention. They neither joined her in her denial nor did they accept what happened as a wake up call to become more realistic. Furthermore they also did not go the route Miles' 'brethren' would have gone and blamed the whole thing on a lack of faith on side of the deceased or his widow (cf. Miles 1990:72). They rather remained convinced that that what happens "in the Word" can happen today (Russell Toohey), and 'stood with the grieving widow every step of the way'.

Considering Miles' example this is a remarkable response. Hilton and his group didn't 'brush past her faith' (Doreen Ullbricht), but went 'all the way' to allow the Spirit to move on his own terms. This 'stand with you' approach had also a therapeutic effect and allowed for the widow to work through her grief. Hilton Toohey's handling of the situation provides us with an interesting case study regarding the manner in which the church engages in the experience of the Spirit as well as traumatic and disappointing events in the life of the believer. Here the comparison with Miles is again helpful to understand the significance of the story. Miles experienced victimization on account of being forced into a false belief of miracle healing by 'his brethren'. But Breakthrough International's people go through a disappointing experience with the Spirit and see it as an opportunity for spiritual growth.

On the one hand the openness towards a supernatural intervention is maintained, even where there is seemingly nothing to hope for. People remain 'simple enough and unschooled enough' (H01:5) to expect the impossible, even though their hopes have effectively been disappointed. On the other hand the church provides a nonjudgmental support system (Favazza 1982:732) which is characterized by 'standing with each other all the way'. Thereby, as in this case, the widow is enabled to work through her trauma until she is 'satisfied' with the situation as it is.

Both, Edwin Ulbricht's widow as well as Austin Miles, experienced disappointment because their faith in miracles was shattered. The difference between the two of them is that Austin Miles was told by his brethren that the fault is with him and his lack of faith. Edwin Ulbricht's widow on the other side is not blamed for a lack of faith. Her 'brethren' rather accept what they cannot explain and just walk with her remaining convinced that the Spirit in general indeed can do miracles. In short: They don't give up their faith in the Spirit nor in their love for their fellow believer.

To use Rhoda Toohey's words, one might say that this 'intimacy with the Spirit' and unconditional solidarity with the fellow believer is a pattern which represents a prime characteristic in the operation of Breakthrough International. It creates a kind of atmosphere where even a possible catastrophic disappointment such as described above is compensated for through the intense feeling of God's presence and solidarity with each other. Another

witness of the events during the funeral of Edwin Ullbricht accounts for this. Doreen Ullbricht relates what he had to say:

But the presence of God, that was something that was phenomenal because people that came to the funeral said it. A relative of ours came from Durban, he's a pastor, and he came here to visit us and he said: "My, please tell me about this whole thing, he says I believe every step of the way, he says, I take my hat off to this man that dared do something like that ... he said when he walked into the entrance, he said he looked around and he said "God, Angels are singing in the place," the way the singing was so powerful. He said he felt it was Angels singing, he said felt such a power of God that he walked in bowing through the power of God that was so strong and so tangible in that place.

So why the miracle didn't happen he said he didn't have a doubt and he said, Lord I'm so happy I came, Oh God I'm so happy I came to witness something like this that's so beautiful he's never witnessed and he's a man of sixty then, he had never witnessed so beautiful in his whole life, and so he said he didn't have a doubt (H02:22-23).

Doreen Ullbricht herself acknowledges a sense of disappointment but it becomes clear that this disappointment did not strain her relationship with the Spirit. She says:

- D: I was sitting with such expectation, and thinking that this is the presence of God, that what was there it was going to be done. There was, I'm talking for myself, about a sense of disappointment, because I also, with what was happening during that week I really felt that this is going to .. we were all really waiting with such expectation.
- L: Did you ever feel the power of God or the Spirit is not with you any longer?
- D: No, no. We didn't feel that at all we just felt thanks to Pastor Hilton, because he made sure that he says, "Look we are not God, we tried, it didn't happen, but God knows why. God knows why, and maybe we are not understanding it right now but in the days to come, we'll understand why this had to happen...." Well having chats with Pastor Hilton [over the years], he felt maybe we were not mature enough, we wouldn't be able to maintain it and perhaps, God wouldn't have been able to do all that he's done through the church today, because how do you know, we might have got swollen headed. And perhaps we were premature to maintain such a miracle at that time, this is what he felt, so that was very comforting and good (H02:23-24).

It is crucial to understand that this kind of reaction to an obviously disappointing encounter with the Spirit is based on a unique intimacy with the Spirit. The people of Breakthrough International had built their relationship with the Spirit on a number of positive, previous Spirit encounters which helped them through this time of distress.

Psychologically one might explain the ability to work through their disappointment by using a point made by Carl R. Rogers in developing his famous Person-Centered-Therapy approach. Rogers describes the 'character of a helping relationship between client and therapist and asks what makes this relationship so strong that it can even deal with

disappointment? In response he argues that “being trustworthy does not demand that I be rigidly consistent, but that I be dependably real” (Rogers 1961:50). Helga Lemke, inspired by Rogers, Watzlawick and Schulz v.Thun, has specified this point. She suggests that trust within the client therapist relationship is build on the experience of real or, to use Roger’s terminology, congruent encounters, with each other, and can therefore survive disappointment.

Lemke distinguishes between two levels of interaction, the factual level and the relationship level. The factual level centers around the exchange of information which might be right and wrong and which does not involve the element of trust. The relationship level on the other hand is built on trust or trustworthiness. Lemke’s argument is that any relationship which has grown from the factual to the relationship level is able to withstand pressure resulting from disappointments on the factual level. The experience of inconsistencies on a factual level might strain the interaction between client and therapist, but due to the trust built up on relationship level people will overcome hurt created on a factual level (Lemke 1992:46-48).

What applies to the client-therapist relationship might be applied to the relationship between the Spirit and the believer as we have observed it within Breakthrough International.

The people around Hilton Toohey live in ‘intimacy with the Spirit’ (Rhoda Toohey). They therefore have passed beyond a kind of interaction with the Spirit on factual level, where the Spirit is supposed to be consistent and heal those who have enough faith (Miles’ brethren were on that level). They rather had built up trust in the Spirit and lived in a intimate relationship with him. Even when on a factual level the Spirit was not consistent with what they had experienced before (healing did not happen), on a relationship level he remained real because of that intimate interaction. Therefore people rather tried to find explanations for what had happened such as ‘we were not mature enough’ rather than questioning the trustworthiness of the Spirit. This response indicates a strong intimate relationship between the Spirit and the believers. This intimate relationship enabled Hilton Toohey and those around him to turn a potentially devastating experience into “a tremendous maturing experience” as Russell Toohey has called it (H01:6).

#### 7. The Spirit interacting with personal (his)story through prophetic gifting

So far we have approached the study of Breakthrough International's way of mission by allowing those who felt 'arrested' (H04:64) by the Spirit to tell their story. In listening to their story we have established that Breakthrough International was not a planned exercise, resulting in the formation of a new church. The people around Hilton Toohey rather felt that the "Spirit did lead" (H01:5; H03:36; P/S02:221) them towards a ministry where God was using Africans to call, equip, train and send Africans, so that they may "be caught in the great commission" (Hilton Toohey).

A prominent feature in this process of calling, equipping, training and sending is the 'intimacy with the Spirit'. It is an intimacy built on experiences which the people of Breakthrough International identify as 'experiences of the Spirit'. One of the most important experiences of those supernatural Spirit interventions is what Breakthrough International's people refer to as the 'gift of prophecy' or a 'word of knowledge'.

Russell Toohey has put this prophetic gifting within Breakthrough International into the perspective of what Pentecostals refer to as "Five Fold Ministry". It is an understanding of ministry based on Ephesians 4:11-13. Five Fold Ministry sees the "Five gifts of ministry mentioned in Ephesians, - apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers not as mere titles, but "ministry functions" ([www.harvestfaithinternational.org](http://www.harvestfaithinternational.org)). Those who carry the gifting have been "called by the Lord to equip the saints" (Wagner 1998:113) to form a ministry that follows the "New Testament pattern" to find the "New Testament power" (Wagner 1998:60).

According to Russell Toohey those five ministry functions can be seen as having different decades or 'seasons' during which they played a prominent part in the development of the charismatic movement (H01:9)

T: At about the time when my dad and them came into this experience [of the Spirit], in the 1980s, this was the decade of the prophets. Massive excitement and enthusiasm about prophecy, and personal prophecy, people been prophesied over and so forth. It happened quite spontaneously. Because the strong focus of the Catholic community was contemplation in the church. In other words, you spend one, two hours every day just being in the church. Sometimes within this mediation a prophetic release would happen (H01:9).

A number of interviewees agreed that the basis of the success of ministry of Breakthrough International in the beginning was based on the gift of prophecy. The 'prophetic release'

became the feature which attracted people and it remains of great importance until today. As Chester and Rose Rawlins said when they were asked why people like themselves were drawn to Hilton Toohey's ministry. They say:

- C: I think it was the prophetic ministry which Hilton had been given by the Spirit.
- R: And also, ja, we had never ever experienced what we were experiencing.
- C: The prophecies being fulfilled and recognized, because this was just amazing. When someone has spoken a word over you and that thing takes place, I think that was the whole thing which made the people think (H03:37).

Doreen Ullbricht adds to that statement:

- D: Hilton was truly a man of God and he was a person that I felt that I could trust. ...Yes there was a special gift of prophecy. I felt he was really a prophet of God at the time (H02:15).

Hilton Toohey sees himself and the gift of prophecy as part of 'the time of restoration', where in his understanding the Spirit did restore the (five fold) ministries as ordained by the Lord. He says:

- H: I think when we started it was during the time of restoration...Restoration, like all the ministries there was a restoration. There was a restoration of the evangelistic ministry, and the healing ministry, like Billy Graham and all of them, and teaching, and we got saved during the restoration of the prophetic ministry. And so there was quite an evidence of that in our meetings. And the laying on of hands and all that. Inner healing and all this (H04:73).

He then goes on to describe how the prophetic gifting developed within him.

- H: Well prior to you coming to the relationship with God, everything that you move by comes from your mind. And then, as you develop, as the Holy Spirit begins to enter in you, and slowly you begin to hear not just what the mind is saying, but what the Spirit of God is saying. And you learn to begin to function accordingly. So when the Spirit of God says something to you, maybe in initial stages you might not hear properly, but eventually you begin to pick it up. And that's how we begin to move into prophetic ministry. Because God will show us certain things about a person. And we begin to speaking to them, and they'll sort of be an Amen from them, and there'll be a link up and that's how we start. ...they call it like a word of Knowledge, ja, and a word of wisdom. That word concerns a certain person, and by faith you speak it out (H04:73-74).

Prophecy in this understanding means essentially that one is "inspired to speak directly as God's agent" (Keener 2001:121) expounding revelatory words sometimes spoken in a congregational setting (ibid. 120). It is interesting that Hilton Toohey talks about this kind of inspiration almost like learning a new language rather than some all of a sudden Spiritual



intervention which enabled him to speak 'words of knowledge'. It seems to be quite different to F.D. Bruner's definition of prophecy who sees prophecy "similar to tongues in occurring most often in an ecstatic or para-ecstatic condition" where the "Spirit delivers his mind and heart spontaneously and directly to the assembly through his prophets" (Bruner 1982:142-143).

The prophetic gifting within Hilton Toohey seemed to be released (to use charismatic nomenclature) through "training and activation" (Wagner 1998:54) which took place informally by learning to 'listen properly' to what the Spirit says. Viewed through Hilton Toohey's eyes ecstatic or para-ecstatic conditions seem not to have the importance which outside observers like Bruner attach to it.

Patrick Dlamini, one of the missionaries of Breakthrough International gave quite a detailed account of the way in which a 'word of knowledge' would come to him. He describes:

P: We were in a prayer meeting and we were praying and praying, and it was as though I was going around praying and I started praying in the Spirit and for a moment it was as though God just shut me out you know, and it was like absolutely feeling the nudge, whew, hold on, and in the time I just kept quiet, just kept quiet, and it was almost like pictures were coming to me, you know, with words with people saying that this is the story. And so when I pulled her [the woman to which the word of knowledge was addressed to] a side, and prayed for her in that area, first for the one God was showing me, I said I'm not too sure maybe I could be wrong about this, but this is what I kind of sensed, that God is saying and when I spoken into her life, then she just crumbled down in tears and she said that's exactly where I'm at ... a day later she shared her story. Of where she comes from where they collaborated to the God with what the Spirit had given me. It was something that I didn't necessarily know you know, not at all (P07:180).

Arguably Patrick Dlamini went into a para-ecstatic state 'going around praying' but, contrary to the outside observers emphasis, he does not stress this para-ecstatic state. He rather describes what happened to him as being 'shut out by the Spirit'. He was keeping quiet while the Spirit gave him a picture. Patrick Dlamini continues:

P: You know, its almost having background knowledge or something that I definitely know is not of myself. ... I understand that is something that is outside of me, it is something that is supernatural ... There are times, when I particularly have heard an audible voice but sometimes its a thought that's kind of brought into my Spirit, not even just my mind. And when that and that happens ...it will speak that over into a person's life. And I've had people say, "How did you know that? I've never told anybody about this thing" (P07:179)

This experience, where someone like Patrick Dlamini encounters that 'something outside of him will speak over into a persons life' is a feature of which Hilton Toohey gives account as well. When asked to give an example of a prophecy which caught himself by surprise he responded:

H: One day ... the Spirit of prophecy rose and I said "George [an acquaintance of Hilton Toohey], I've sensed God is saying you are a pastor of the church in Ixopo". You know what he tells me afterwards. He told me afterwards, oh Hilton just likes to encourage people. And three or four years after that, God led him to Ixopo. And he's pastoring a successful church (H0:74).

Seemingly those who received and receive a 'word of knowledge' within Breakthrough International see it as something beyond them, as a 'listening to the Spirit'. But to appreciate what this 'listening to the Spirit' does for the overall missionary outlook of the church one needs to also consider the kind of effect a 'word of knowledge' has on those to whom it is directed.

Doreen Ullbricht is one example where the prophecy was spoken into her life and she felt that it identified her 'true self'. Hilton Toohey had prophesied that she would be like the biblical figure of Anna, a widow who never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying (Lk.2:36-37).

D: He used to always say I'll be like Anna and that I'll pray through the night, he said this, and I knew in my heart - that's who I am, that's Anna (H02:15).

She also recollects a prophecy of her granddaughter years ago:

D: There was a time he prophesized over my granddaughter, ... this particular Sunday morning I went with sister Alder and Pastor Hilton to my son's home, and I'll never forget, he prayed over this little child Tracey and he said, "Tracey, my darling you are a worshipper," and she was three years old and I'll never forget that. Well it wasn't long after that when Tracey started speaking in tongues and she was about four years old - playing church.

And she gathers a few children together and she starts worshipping and she was always the leader, and she'll worship and she says "Raise your hands, now stand up, we're going to sing this, and she knew all the choruses and she'd sing, and she'd say, and all of a sudden she goes off in tongues... The mother phoned me and she said, you know mum, I'm worried about Tracey, this is what she's doing and I said, please just leave her, just leave her, have you forgotten the prophesy that Tracey had that she will be a worshipper? ... You know and today she is a praise leader in the church (H02:15-16).

How the gift of prophecy impacted on their life is something which Chester and Rose Rawlins speak about as well:

R: I remember one day, in the Anglican group, the one lady, we went to her house and this lady said to me: "Do you know the Lord's going to require you to leave work. You're going to leave work soon." I said: "Yes I know." But in the back of my mind I didn't want to leave because I wanted Chester to stop drinking and all that then I leave work(H03:38).

Even though Rose Rawlins wanted to leave work, she couldn't because her husband was still drinking and not working. Hilton Toohey explains her predicament:

H: Let me tell you another prophecy. Rose was working and Chester wasn't working. And we believe that God wanted to work in Chester's life. And the prophecy came through that Rose must leave work. God was saying that Rose must leave work. If Chester's going to come [to the Lord] and in the midst of all that, Rose left work. And there was no income (H04:76).

Once again, from the outside one might think that this kind of prophecy did not help Rose Rawlins but rather contributed to the frustration she was feeling. In addition to her own desire to leave work and to take care of her daughter (H03:28), she now had to listen to people who claimed that even God wanted her to leave work, while she saw herself unable to do so due to financial constraints.

This is not at all how Rose Rawlins responded to the prophecy of her 'leaving work soon'. She continues to tell her story:

R: So the company went through a bad patch that year... the director called me, and he said: "Listen here work is bad, so I give you two months to find another job. ... So I went the next day, and I said to the company, Listen, here, I am leaving now. Pay me on Friday, I don't need to stay the two months, I have no intentions of looking for another job. Then the people in the other departments came and they said we talked it through with this one and that one, because they knew I needed to work. I said to them: "No. I think its crystal clear now, I know that this was the year I was supposed to leave work, but its not only my own belief inside, but people that have spoken into my life ... So that's how I left!

And I mean, I saw God, I saw God in action in less than a month, Chester turned around, and our lives were never the same and so now I look back, and say, Lord, it was important you know, faith is not moving when things is in places, believing God when he speaks (H03:38-39).

Here we see how a prophecy becomes a catalyst for change to happen in the life of Rose Rawlins. Something she was hoping to do but couldn't became an act of faith which turned her life around. Rose Rawlins says it herself:

- R: Now I mean I didn't have a clear picture of how God was going to do it, but I knew from all that God had been speaking in my heart, through these meetings and all that, that definitely something would happen, and it did happen (H03:39).

The importance of prophecy for the growth and development of Breakthrough International cannot be underestimated. The examples above point to that fact. Prophecy, at least in the beginning, was so central that it would sometimes dominate the services at Breakthrough International to such an extent that the sermon fell away (P08:193). It is still of major importance to the life of the church.

All of the interviewees have stated that at one point or the other prophecies had a major impact on their life. Interestingly enough this did not always involve great Spiritual moments or "para-ecstatic conditions" (Bruner 1982:142-143). Some of the interviewees even identified what the outside observer would call 'practical advice' as a prophecy spoken into their life. Irvin Howard, one of the pastors at Breakthrough International, when he was asked if Hilton Toohey ever prophesized over his life. He replied:

- I: Yeah, he did prophesy over me, Pastor Hilton I've come to know him well. I mean Pastor Hilton, he was instrumental, he would never come to me and say "Thus sayeth the Lord" he would come to me and talk to me and say, "Irvin, I would like you to do this" and then I would do it and then I would reap the fruits of that, and now and again when he was preaching he'd say to me, I don't see you playing the drums for the rest of your life, there's more that God had in store for you. And just in this, he's very prophetic just in his speech, just when he's talking to you. I remember not so long ago, he says to me, don't sacrifice your family for the ministry. And I mean, he didn't sit me down and you know, say Thus sayeth the Lord, he just told me that. But that was prophetic, because at that time we were going through something and I needed to hear that. So that's how I've come with Pastor Hilton, that's how I've come to appreciate his prophetic gifting, he's very prophetic like that, and yeah, just like that, in listening to him (P01:90).

Obviously prophetic gifting is not the only factor which contributed to the development of Breakthrough International. But for our purpose we need to stress that the prophecies, seen as supernatural intervention in the personal stories of people, give Breakthrough International quite a convincing appeal. As Chester Rawlins said: "When someone has spoken a word over you and that thing takes place, I think that was the whole thing which made the people think" (H03:37).

What makes it especially significant is the fact that in the perspective of those who are confronted with 'word of knowledge' it is God himself who chooses to involve himself with

their life. It is God who uses the vehicle of prophetic gifting to clear up issues in their personal life. They see Hilton Toohey or whoever else is prophesying as a mere tool of God who want to personally interact with the individual and his or her story. In view of those affected it is quite clear that through this personal dimension 'where things are said and take place' change happens and God interacts with his people. This interaction does not necessitate a 'semi-ecstatic state' (Bruner) or a Spirituality charged atmosphere but just the ability to 'listen to the Spirit' (Hilton Toohey; cf.Re 2:7.11.17.29;3:6.13.22).

#### 8. The encounter with the Spirit embedded in a people's based church

Gerard Roelofs has presented a study of Flemish Catholic charismatics trying to show how the charismatic Christian experience is translated into religious narrative (Roelofs 1994:217-233). He argues that "religious experiences are not merely reflected, but also constructed by the form, content, and context of the utterances in which believers express them" (ibid. 217). He points to the kind of interaction between what we call the 'experience of the Spirit befalling the believer' and 'the narrative which the believer constructs to make sense of the encounter with the Spirit' (cf.I.C.2). Roelofs continues his argument:

One could therefore say that charismatics are involved in an exchange relationship with God in which they are asking for a religious experience... By their enthusiasm charismatics create a context in which they are able to have a religious experience. Awareness of their submissive position toward God is not only a precondition for this enthusiasm, but it is also continually reexperienced in the religious events that it evokes (Roelofs 1994:219-220).

Roelofs proposes that charismatic spirituality is based on a submissive attitude toward God and in need of the reenactment of any original Spiritual experience. He therefore sees charismatic spirituality as a circular movement where 'charismatic enthusiasm' is not only caused by the experience of the Spirit but where this very enthusiasm constantly aims to recreate the experience of the Spirit. This outside view understands charismatic spirituality as a self-centered circle of repeating – if not to say reenacting - the experience of the Spirit. One is tempted to apply it to Breakthrough International's spirituality. Because, as we have seen, Breakthrough International is built on an intimacy with the Spirit which became especially tangible through 'words of knowledge' or prophecies. These intimate experiences with the Spirit caused a kind of enthusiasm which in turn, following Roelofs, created a spirituality which centers around the reenactment of those experiences. And indeed a first

look at the Spirituality of Breakthrough International indicates that its praise and worship practice, its “charismatic celebration” (cf. Suurmond 1994:20-26 for an interesting characterization of charismatic worship), aims solely to ‘reenact the experience of the Spirit’.

But this kind of analysis grows out of an observant outside perspective. From an inside perspective, through the eyes of the people of Breakthrough International, things look differently. In order to appreciate that inside perspective we need to take a closer look at Breakthrough International worship practice and then see how Breakthrough International defines the center of its spirituality. Russell Toohey explains:

R: [praise and worship] ...builds a platform for the gifts of the Holy Spirit which is not necessarily an emotional you know, on an emotional level. ... So from the platform of praise and worship, you'll find that there's a motivation to be in the flow of the Holy Spirit. People get engaged, in what is, they leave their distractions, they get engaged, for example you'll find that there tends to be faster songs, that gets the rhythm and so forth of the songs, the wording of the songs, gets people involved emotionally, rationally, holistically, and then from that platform we'll often pray for healing, pray for deliverance, pray for people once there's an openness and a responsiveness to God (P08:191).

Initially it seems as if Roelof's point is confirmed. The experience of the Spirit stands at the beginning of Breakthrough International and is reenacted Sunday by Sunday. The people seem to be going around in a self-centered circle in which “the Sunday service is carefully calculated to contribute to the life of the church” (P08:192). It is therefore more ‘performance than a gathering of the Holy’, a presentation where it is ‘God who is supposed to perform’ so that the service can be appealing to newcomers (P08:192-193). However an observation like the above would lead to the assumption that the Sunday service is the spiritual center of the life of Breakthrough International, since it is there where the experience of the Spirit is reenacted in a carefully planned performance. Surprisingly this is not how the people of Breakthrough International see it.

Russell Toohey, when he is asked if the Sunday Service is the Spiritual center of Breakthrough International responds:

R: Actually to talk about service when referring to Sunday morning services is a misnomer. Because the one thing people don't do on a Sunday is to serve. Its just a limited number of people that serve on a Sunday in a normal service. In actual fact, a the Sunday morning service is rather a program item in the life of the church than a place were people serve. The Sunday service is carefully calculated to contribute to the life of the church but its not the ultimate – not the focus on church life. Can't be,

because its so non-participative you know, in this, it excludes so many of the people (P08:192).

Following this argument Roelof's observation can only be applied to Breakthrough International's Spirituality in a very limited way. Even though Breakthrough International was created and is sustained through 'enthusiastic Spirit encounters', it does not solely focus on the recreation of those encounters. This might apply to the general Pentecostal/Charismatic way of operating. There the recreation of Spirit encounters would "focus on the sustaining of the ordinary level of Pentecostal praise" (Johannesen 1994:191), where the "Sunday service particularly dominates the weekly circle" (ibid. 182). The Sunday morning service is the event where the congregational life culminates in the reenactment of a personal Spirit encounter, facilitated by means of praise and worship, altar call and outpouring of Spiritual gifting is repeated. Elements of this type of reenactment are clearly visible in Breakthrough International's Praise and Worship practice. But according to Russell Toohey, those carefully orchestrated performances don't form the center of Breakthrough International's Spirituality. The reenactment of Spiritual encounters by means of creating the proper 'enthusiastic context' is not the primary concern of Breakthrough International. Even though in the beginning Breakthrough International's spirituality focused around the exercise of the prophetic gifting described above it seems as if the need to sustain or reenact the experiences associated with such gifting is not driving the church. This does not mean that they don't happen any longer, or that they are not desired. On the contrary, but in its own view those Spirit encounters are not at the core of Breakthrough International's ministry.

In view of those involved with Breakthrough International it is not the Spirit encounters but the call that grows out of those encounters what matters most. As we have seen earlier, Hilton Toohey has described the thrust of the ministry. He said:

That was the basic thrust of our ministry from the beginning that we get men, we equip them, we train them, and we present them back to God and say 'God you do with them what you will'. It was never part of our ministries that we would contain and keep men with us all our lives (H04:74).

That this vision, impressed upon the Tooheys by the Spirit, would be transformed into action did not necessarily call for an reenactment of the Spirit encounters which had befallen Breakthrough International in its beginnings. Rhoda Toohey explains that the real challenge

was the question of how the people who were ‘won for Christ’ would be trained and thereby equipped to be used by God. She says:

R: The question was, how would we train them? And then the Lord made Russell meet a pastor in Newlands, I think, and they were onto a program called Kingdom Advancement Ministry. So then they introduced us to that, and that was a follow-up. People would come and visit the church and we’d follow-up so then we got training as to how to follow people up, just to introduce them, we’d proclaim Christ to them and tell them that they need to accept Jesus into their lives, then we’d lead them into a baptism, and the baptism the Holy Spirit and then we would give them the foundational teachings. And I mean, we would train up three leaders would go out. If you went out, got training and got taught how to relate to people, how to present the gospel and that. And then from there we started cell. Home cells and there we trained leaders again and that’s how we began to train people (H04:76).

Rhoda Toohey points to two changes within Breakthrough International which took place in the middle 1990 and the beginning of 1994. The Church started KAM (Kingdom Advancement Ministry) which is a follow up system for people who are visiting the church. Furthermore it changed from being “programmed to cell based” (M07:6). While KAM provided something like a first step into a coordinated system of training and equipping of its members the changeover to cell groups gave a new dimension to the work of Breakthrough International. From now on it sees itself as people based and thereby aiming at what the initial vision, ‘impressed upon Hilton Toohey, called for. “The right Hand of Fellowship” a manual for new members says it like this:

We put people before programmes. The reason for our programs is to provide a framework for radical productive, life-giving fellowship. 1 John 4:20 “For everyone who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen (M07:8).

The center of Breakthrough International is the cell groups which “foster greater efficiency because of 100% involvement by the membership, thus creating a community-based rather than clergy-based church. There the focus shifts from the Sunday group to the faith of the individual” (M07:12). This change of focus keeps in line with the initial vision because people get trained and equipped through the cells to “penetrate enemy territory because every Christian has become a minister” (M07:12).

All this contradicts the typical judgment passed upon Pentecostal/Charismatic churches, that the “Pentecostal is in a constant struggle to encounter the authentic Pentecostal religious experience” (Droogers 1994:36). “Meetings are designed to be expectant and explosive, marked by an openness of heaven and/or the inflammability of the congregation” (Bruner



1982:137-138). While this might be true about the charismatic phenomenon generally (even though we would doubt that assertion) our research into Breakthrough International does not confirm such a position. The people, at least in the view they have of themselves, seem not to be preoccupied with a self-centered kind of spirituality which aims at the reenactment of past experiences (see Roelofs). They rather aim to train, equip and release believers into ministering to the world. Russell Toohey, in his charismatic nomenclature calls it to 'disciple people'. This 'process of discipling' is the focus of Breakthrough International. He explains:

R: We emphasize Luke 19, 10. Christ came to seek and to save those that were lost. So the role of Christ and his church, is to make disciples, Matt 28, 19; First we seek and save them, and than more broadly, its not just about adding a religious conviction to peoples mind but to renew them, we want to disciple people, deeply so that their values change holistically. We don't like to leave that for chance, and hence we have quite a well-developed discipleship mechanism (P08:195.197-198).

## **C. BCI's experience of the Spirit in the context of (post)modern (Hi)story**

### **1. (Post)modern History as personal history – a terminological clarification**

As mentioned before we approach this study in the context of Breakthrough International's missionary practice using a terminological framework which emanates from our study of the *Missio Dei* concept (chapter II). There '(postmodern) history' was identified as location of God's mission (II.D.). Since we are guided in our analysis by what has derived from our study of the *Missio Dei* concept we now look at Breakthrough International's experience of the Spirit within that context of (postmodern) history. Our underlying assumption is that the *Missio Dei* concept as well as Breakthrough International share the same location of ministry, which is (postmodern) history. This is an assumption which needs to be clarified since it is not without problems that one might use the term 'history' in conjunction with Breakthrough International's experience of the Spirit.

We have already indicated how multifaceted the concept of (postmodern) history can be (II.D.4), and that the term (postmodern) history needs to be used carefully when equated with the *Missio Dei* concept. In our study of the *Missio Dei* concept we saw that the missiology which grew out of the modern Western world view understood history initially as 'one-world-history'. Ultimately peace, liberty and justice for all would be achieved within the progression of that 'one-world-history'. But time has shown that this idealistic notion based on a Hegelian concept of history turned into a 'nightmare of conflict, bondage and injustice (Bosch). *Missio Dei* can therefore not simply be located within an understanding of history based on Hegelian thinking where the 'Weltgeist' unfolds itself through a dialectical process (Störig1985:462). Ernst Jünger, the German philosopher, has rightly remarked that in a history, viewed through Hegelian glasses, change takes place as dialectical evolution of ideas. In such an ideal history one might be able to disagree with an idea, but this is different in real world history where one might find it impossible to disagree, as Jünger put it succinctly, "with a machine gun" (Störig1985:464). Therefore, as we point out in chapter II. *Missio Dei* has positioned itself within the context of concrete and not ideal – Hegelian – history. Within that real history *Missio Dei* listens to the (his)stories of the others, especially of those who are the victims of the processes of 'history'.

The problem of terminology becomes even more complex when one applies the term (post)modern history to Breakthrough International's experience of the Spirit. Because Breakthrough International would not necessarily use a term like (post)modern history when defining the context of its ministry. While we have identified (post)modern history as the location of *Missio Dei* (Chapter II.D) they would rather recognize the "world controlled by Satan" as the context of their ministry. Russell Toohey says it like this:

R: Well, 1 John 5:19 says ... that we are children of God and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. So without a doubt, I would say ... the devil controls the world systems (P09:204-205).

Russell Toohey is clear that it can not be the world which defines the agenda of the church (cf. WCC 1968:20-23, Bosch 1991: 382-383). Because the world is "Satan's territory" (cf. Wright 1995:74). People need to be saved from the world, the stronghold of the devil, the place of darkness, and it is through salvation that people are being freed from that darkness (P/S01:221). Breakthrough International therefore believes strongly that their objective is "to save people for heaven and eternity" (P08:195). The aim is not to come closer to the world thus coming closer to Christ (Willingen), but to disassociate oneself from the world. Russell Toohey describes it as 'unlearning the world's principles'. He says:

T: ... by reading lots of the bible, listening to much preaching, we encourage to unlearn the world's principles so they [the members of BCI] can operate from a biblical world view. ... obviously [they] live and work and school in a normal secular environment. We don't tell them they have to come out of that in order to be good Christians. But they must be in the world though not of the world. I'm of the opinion that you can't read secular books, listen to secular music, watch secular TV and still be Bible-based. So I strongly discourage TV watching but I don't enforce not watching TV. We encourage people don't marry un-saved people. Ja, and where a leader will marry an un-saved person I've told him, I will demote him from leadership because we must set very strong standards in terms of people walking in ... not of the world (P08:201).

It seems as if Breakthrough International reflects what G.Francois Wessels has called the 'charismatic worldview' (Wessels 1997:362-363). He describes the charismatic perception of the world as dualistic, apocalyptic and pessimistic" (Wessels 1997:363-366). The locus of the struggle against evil is "not this earth but an unseen spirit-world" where divine and demonic forces fight with each other. Therefore the causes of socio-political inequalities tend not to be located in manmade history, but in the world which is seen as a spiritual battle ground. Hilton and Rhoda Toohey's understanding of Apartheid might illustrate this point. They respond to the question of how they would relate to P.W.Botha and say:

- H: I wouldn't condemn him because ... he was still living in his old nature.
- R: Because it was the Spirit, it was the Spirit of Apartheid. Not only them themselves did what they did. They were controlled by a Spirit, not like a Spirit of God, and that's what leads them to do things like that (H04:85).

Political processes and historical developments are seen as results of conflicts within a spiritual world. In accordance with that world view Charismatics like Rhoda and Hilton Toohey seem therefore to be either indifferent or conservative when it comes to "activism within the public domain" (Wessels 1997:361-362). Because to get involved in 'making history' by involving themselves in the public domain and joining the arena of social activism they would go against their charismatic world view. Therefore it seems as if Breakthrough International has abandoned the physical world and its problems thus fleeing into a world of religious dreams (cf. Wessels 1997:361; Moltmann 1992:186).

Consequently to say that 'history is the context in which ' Breakthrough International's ministry unfolds would be totally off the mark, if looked at from Breakthrough International's perspective. Because in Breakthrough International's view history, at least when understood as the creation and participation of a public process changing the ways of the world, is irrelevant. The church seems primarily concerned with a life beyond history thus apparently being 'other' rather than 'this-worldly' focused.

But at this point it is important to apply an observation made by Wessels to our study of Breakthrough International. He claims that one can only allege that Charismatics are completely "indifferent to the social gospel and take no interest in politics" if one "defines participation in politics and social justice solely in terms of involvement in the public domain and social activism" (Wessels 1997:366). Wessels calls for a wider understanding of social and political involvement. He does so by defining the charismatic world view not merely as a system of cognitive beliefs but as social activity. He bases this understanding of the Charismatic world view on Peter L. Berger's concept of religion as a "social enterprise of world-construction and world-maintenance" (Wessels 1997:363; Berger 1969:26, cf. Berger 1967:3-52).

Wessels recognizes the social dimension of the charismatic world view. Despite the charismatic world view being dualistic, apocalyptic, and pessimistic, he sees a social

dimension becoming visible within the life of charismatic churches themselves. He therefore concludes that Charismatics might be reluctant to be socially active in the public domain but in their congregational practices they seem not at all bound to an attitude of 'other-worldliness' and indifferent to social action (Wessels 1997:366). It is the congregation that provides "identity" for the marginalized. It creates "fraternity" hence belonging for the socially uprooted. Additionally it forms "sociability", thereby offering a network of friends constituting an important support group for the survival within the wider society (Wessels 1997:370-371). Wessels sums up what he wants to say:

By providing its members with strategies to structure and order their world in the face of social lawlessness and lack of vision and direction (what sociologists call *anomie*), charismatic congregations are indeed dealing with this world in which we all live (Wessels 1997:370).

His argument is important in respect to our terminology. Because as we try to let the people of Breakthrough International describe the experience of the Spirit, we locate that experience within the context of (postmodern) history. This is based on our study of *Missio Dei* which, as we have seen, poses a problem. Because it is seemingly difficult for the people of Breakthrough International themselves to identify "history" as the context of their experience of the Spirit and their missionary activity. On account of their charismatic world view they appear detached from historical processes and identify the world not as manmade history which can be changed but is controlled by the devil. In short Breakthrough International seem more concerned with 'saving people for heaven' than making the world a better place. From that perspective Breakthrough International might be called otherworldly and it would be difficult to use the term (postmodern) history in a study of Breakthrough International's ministry, because the church itself does not identify with (postmodern) history as the context of its activities.

But following Wessels we have opened a different perspective. We conclude that Breakthrough International is deeply 'this-worldly' on account of the social character of their world view and ministry. This 'social character' is tangible in Breakthrough International's involvement in the problems of its members. There the church deals to a large extent with the problems of 'the world' or (postmodern) history, as one might call it from a perspective of *Missio Dei*.

To summarize one can say that Breakthrough International is concerned with history as the story of the people which they reach out to. Due to their charismatic world view, their involvement in issues pertaining to the public domain is rather limited, because 'this world is enemy territory'. But within the private domain, where the non-publicized stories of the people unfold, Breakthrough International is quite involved in making history through involving itself in the stories of the people. In that sense Breakthrough International would locate its ministry within history. This kind of indirect or private approach towards history as the context of ministry is explained by Russell Toohey. He says:

R: ... I believe that scripture clearly indicates that we need, ... - and even though we are not of this world, we owe the world a lot-, we need to be salt and light to the world. So for me, I believe that just by virtual fact that we live on the planet, we have a responsible, ... to be stewards and caretakers of the nation. ... And somebody with the leadership gifting, for example, I believe that leadership gifting is not just to be exercised in church, it should be exercised in their job situation in their pursuit of specific area of work, politically, or you know in industry or the economy. ... So my personal call is to develop gifting and if that gifting leads a person to become a president of the country then so be it.

And so I believe, yes, we have a part to play in writing and re-writing the history of our nation. We need as the church, to be a lot more than clergy church oriented. I believe just by people expressing their gifting the Kingdom will be aggressively advanced. ... And the nations of the world don't see Christians rising up as they should, because we have been concerned with ourselves rather than with developing people (P08:201-205).

In short: Breakthrough International does not primarily see itself involved in making 'world-history' but 'people's history'. While they don't see themselves as actors in the making of (world-)history they see themselves as acting upon the stories of the people. In that sense, where history is personal history, we can now look at postmodern history as the context of Breakthrough International's ministry.

## 2. Universal salvation through the change of personal (his)story

Since, as we have pointed out, Breakthrough International concerns itself primarily with 'people's history' we will now look at some people and how their stories are related to the experience of the Spirit in Breakthrough International. In doing so we keep in mind that Breakthrough International's involvement in the stories of the people is based on what Wessels calls the 'charismatic world view'. Within that world view Breakthrough International is uncompromising on a cognitive level. Because from a doctrinal point of view

it sees the world controlled by Satan and everyone is in need of salvation. But due to the social character of the charismatic world view Breakthrough International is surprisingly flexible and accommodating when it comes to the social construction of faith in form of involvement and relationship with people.

One hermeneutical illustration of this ‘uncompromising stand in respect to salvation’ coupled with flexibility on a relationship level’ is the way in which Patrick Dlamini reads the story of the women at the well. He says:

P: ... salvation is very important but ... let me use ... a scriptural example ... Hebrews were not really getting along with the Samaritans which is why Jesus in one instance turned around and said "How can I take the children's food and give it to dogs?" The Samaritans were really people who were undermined and had labeled themselves as being underdogs ..... but when he goes there, ... he waited at the well for this woman. This woman comes, ... instead of just giving her the stuff that God had told Him about her life and how she was an adulterer and all these things, what does he do? Its not that he was really thirsty, but in asking for water and to drink from the same bucket with her, he is saying, in spite of the fact that I'm a Jew and you're a Samaritan, let me tell you something: "In God there is a equality. God looks at us in the same manner."

So in other words he dealt with her inferior complex and made her feel like somebody first, you know. He restored her dignity. Then asked questions that led her to begin to see what God had showed him about her life. . whereas the charismatic approach, or the normal church behavior would have been "you're a sinner, you're an adulterer" and God says repent otherwise you going to die, you're destined for hell. He didn't do that.

He spent time around her, ministering to her. Due to that, after that time that had been spent with this one woman, who's life had changed by how this man, related to her not only about the things that he had told her about her life, ... she goes off to the village and says: "I met a man who knew everything about my life". ...and ... these people are in a hurry to run back to the same Jew, who is their master in their underdogs mind set. But there's something that is so different in the women, that attracts the others to run to Jesus. It is that her dignity had been restored.

So even though He spent a lot of time with her, at the end of the day, he got her saved and the rest of the village came to Christ (P07:186-187).

Patrick Dlamini describes the approach of Breakthrough International towards mission within history, or the world. It is modeled after what Breakthrough International perceives as the missionary practice of Jesus himself. In their view he was uncompromising and saw the Samaritan woman in need to be saved. But he approached her by creating a relationship which would empower her to change her life. This might seem like a rather shrewd way of doing mission but to Breakthrough International it is not just a method. For them it is the way in which they put into practice their vision of being a people's centered church where they "put people before programmes" (M07:8).

How in its own perspective Breakthrough International put peoples before programs will concern us now. Therefore we will let people tell how this approach 'people before programmes' is realized within Breakthrough International's congregational life. Furthermore By listening to the peoples (his)stories we will be enabled to observe the social construction of faith, which, as we have pointed out, practices social activism, or 'this-worldliness, within the private domain (Wessels).

### 2.1. The experience of the Spirit as experience of healing and divine therapy

One of the primary features of Breakthrough International's practice or 'this-worldliness' is their openness to pray for those who are in need of healing. Russell Toohey describes it as a major issue within the worship practice of Breakthrough International. He prepares the Sunday services by way of "praying most of the night" before and trusting "the Lord for a good idea" he must pray for (P08:191). This often includes "praying for healing". Thandi Dlomo, female (sic!) elder and leader of the prayer ministry describes this healing ministry exercised by Russell Toohey. She says:

T: ...He always has different focuses like for weeks he will call people for miracle saving. "This week I'm going to pray for people with like ear problems", and then people will come and say, "Hey, Pastor, I have always experienced this, and now its all gone." For most people, they don't tell us during the service [about a perceived healing]. They tell us later... For some it's not an instant thing (P03:123-123).

Thandi Dlomo is quite clear that Breakthrough International prays for the sick with an attitude of being certain that people will be healed. 'Miracle Healing' seems to be a standard feature of Breakthrough International worship as well as congregational practice. Thandi Dlomo can even relate an incident where this happened to herself. She reports:

T: ... I got sick and actually I went to hospital, I went to a doctor and went back again, I had cramps in the tummy and nausea and I didn't understand what it was. ...the second time I went to the doctor he said OK, no, he thinks its my appendix ...I did go to the operation. ... but the pains were still there, despite the operation...I continued to have these cramps and pain.

And during one all-night of prayer Pastor said "Aich, Thandi, we must just pray for you, Thandi has had an operation but she still is experiencing the same problems and she's gone back to doctors, but we don't know what the cause is." So they prayed for me and that following morning after the night of prayer I was well for the first time in



those months and I could drive to Durban on my own, without any pain I could wear belts and things that before I couldn't wear anything, only dresses without a belt or anything round my tummy, so that was with me. I felt it myself. Prayer, power of prayer (P03:123).

Despite her own experience Thandi Dlomo is aware of incidents where people try to make healing happen and hurt the feeling of those who are sick by making false promises. She continues:

T: I've seen a lot of incidents of healing but also when people are trying to make it happen and that is wrong. For me healing ministry is one thing that I always pray to God for. Because I believe its one of the most needs that people need. Its one thing that they cannot buy but because I've no confirmation or there are not many cases that I knew that people were healed from major diseases I cannot boldly say, that it will happen all the time. And at times there are many people I've seen they don't get healed they are prayed for and are promised that they will be healed but at the same time I think its good to tell the people boldly: "Have faith in God" but to make such bold statements, you really need to know that you have heard from the Lord and especially when in a congregation you have to be really cautious because you can be hurting other people's feelings (P03:124).

Her 'boldness in faith, where one tells people 'have faith in God' seems to be going along with a certain sense of reality which tells Thandi Dlomo that not all prayer are having the desired result. This in turns leads her to be cautious when it comes to making any promises which might not be delivered on. Even tough she has 'felt it herself, the power of prayer' one might call he attitude "cautiously bold in the Lord"

This kind of "cautious boldness in the Lord" needs to be noted especially on the background of the overall African charismatic scene where healing is easily promised. We, for instance, had people leave our Lutheran Church because they were promised healing from HIV Aids by a charismatic church. In addition to that Paul Gifford points to charismatic pastors who claim to have the ability to cure Aids especially bestowed upon them (Gifford 1998:159). Seemingly Breakthrough International would be much more careful with what they promise.

However, in addition to the "faith healing experiences", as for instance seen in Thandi Dlomo's story, where healing is achieved rather instantly we also come across a different type of healing associated with the experience of the Spirit. This type of healing reminds one more of a therapy session. The Holy Spirit is perceived as having a therapeutic character contributing to 'inner healing'. The experience of the Spirit is consequently directly associated with experience of healing. In other words: The Spirit experience and healing are the same.

Jacinthia Toohey, sister in law to Hilton Toohey, gives an account of this type of intimacy with the Spirit, where the Spirit heals through what is felt as his presence. She reports:

J: ...to my life. The Holy Spirit is, I would say, its a process of healing mostly, its been a long process, ... lots of healing, from brokenness, my parents are divorced so I guess its a lot of emotional brokenness. A lot of trauma. ...I don't think the healing process is complete, its still on-going, but there are a lot of things that I didn't realize. Things like bitterness and anger were a big issue in my life. A lot of resentment towards things and decisions that were made, [for example] that I had no control over my parents divorce. The circumstances that were around the divorce. The choices that they had to make. That affected me.

One evening my mom had some people over, they were having a prayer meeting in the house. ... It was not something I had experienced before. Ja, I just started feeling strong sense of anger, a lot of things, like flashes of my past were coming up. ... Certain incidents in my life. During that prayer meeting the leader of the prayer group started praying for me, and ... I had just this intense feeling in I my heart. I started weeping a lot, ...it was just - I wasn't just weeping, I was very angry, quite violently angry, I was very angry. Just dealing with a lot of things, the way I was feeling towards my dad, sort of coming up. ...So it was actually quite an experience for me to start realizing how angry I was towards him. So that's when the healing started taking place. ... I could let the anger out (P06:149-50).

This intense experience of the Spirit within Jacinthia Toohey initiated in her a new way of relating to her mother and opening up to her. She says:

I started talking to her a lot, we started praying together a lot, our relationship changed a lot, the way we related to each other. It was unusual; there were many nights that I was praying by myself and she would come into the room and pray with me, she had no idea what I had been praying about, she just joined in prayer with me. And we were a bit distant with each other, but also after a few attempts I responded to her differently, somehow or other I was more open towards the way I spoke to her and expressed certain things of the past, things that I couldn't talk about before. ...

I would say that the Holy Spirit gave me the strength to actually speak to her because before I couldn't actually ever just say anything to her. It was quite a battle to say, I'd rather just bottle it up; keep quiet, not face it (P06:150).

Once again these therapeutic like features are associated by those who are going through, it with the experience of the Spirit. Nina Toohey, Russell Toohey's wife, relates a similar experience. She says:

N: I was a really broken young person, I was saved, and yet I hadn't dealt with issues in life as far as relationships, relationships with authority, relationships with men, because I had been very hurt growing up. But I remember one specific time I think it was in my second year of marriage, where I'd been struggling, in fact my poor husband had been, it was a battle between us - not him so much, me. ... I'd go to my mother-in-law and say: "I can't handle this you know," and this one day I went there and she welcomed me with open arms - she was with this friend they used to pray together. I remember she distinctly said: "Nina I've been praying for you I just want you to lay on the bed and we want to pray for you." They began to pray, and it wasn't a hifuluted type of thing, it was just led by the Holy Spirit. Why I say that is because

they began to pray for issues from when I was a little girl and as they began to pray for every year of my life growing up, I remember for three hours I just wept and wept and wept.

After that I felt ...like God had washed me in such a deep way, and dealt with deep memories ...some of them I thought I'd forgotten. Most amazing thing was I many of the things I didn't share with them, but they would actually say certain things, and I could identify you know, what they were saying was true. ...it was a Godly therapy to say the least, it was a Godly therapy (P04:132-133).

Both kinds of healing experiences, the instant 'miracle healing' and the 'spiritual therapy type' of healing, point to the 'this-worldliness' of Breakthrough International. It is individuals in need of healing which make Breakthrough International act and approach the Spirit for help through prayer. In this way the church deals with the needs of the people and changes their own, personal (hi)story in a profound way.

## 2.2. The experience of the Spirit touching and restoring the broken

When asked what special contribution Breakthrough International (formerly New Zion) has made within the church scene of Pietermaritzburg, Rose and Chester Rawlins had this to say:

- C: I think the New Zion was touching the broken.
- R: Definitely, Ches!
- C: ...it was going beyond just me having church ... come into ... church and going home. It was the fellowship that used to take place. It really was touching the broken man.
- R: The kind of time they would spend with you, ... Most men of God, they'll take you to be part of their vision, because you are polished. You know, but with us it was different. I mean Chester's drinking, and still doing his own thing, and Hilton says: "I know, God's told me. This is going to be a man of God!" He says, "I'm not moved by what I see I know what God has spoken."
- C: I think that the whole starting of Zion didn't take men who were men...outstanding in our communities. They took ordinary down and out guys.
- R: Because I believe this is the kind of people God uses and this is where New Zion was so special. Because they saw the jewel in the man. ... They saw its worth investing in this person because ... God is putting them here. I mean our family will ever be grateful ... That was our lowest time as a family and yet, that's the time he [Hilton Toohey] appears and shows such confidence in us, you know when everybody else would be looking over you, and you are not the person. ... No self-confidence, no self-worth. Nothing. Somebody's telling you every day, This is who you are, this is who you are, nobody. You can't do it! (H03:48-49).

Rose and Chester reflect on something which is an important aspect of Breakthrough International's practice. Right from the start it reached out to the lower stratum of society, or the "Evangelical poor" as D. Martin has called them in his study of Latin American

Pentecostals (Walker 1997:27). Rose and Chester Rawlins don't focus on their poverty but rather on the fact that they had internalized the feeling of being "nobody" as the given reality in their lives. In retrospect they call this feeling 'brokenness', which manifested itself in Chester Rawlin's alcoholisms and the general dissolution of their family. Considering South Africa's Apartheid legacy one might as well assume that next to their poverty the fact that they were marginalized due to racial laws of the land added to the feeling of being 'non-people'.

It is interesting to note that they felt that their getting in touch with Hilton Toohey addressed this feeling of being broken. Considering the impact of poverty and racial oppression in their life from an outside position one might argue that what they really needed was to address those issues of poverty and racial oppression. But from their inside perspective they let us know that meeting Hilton Toohey did not address those two issues immediately. What happened rather is that a change in self-image took place. They turned from being 'non-people' to being 'people'. Hilton Toohey didn't see in Chester and Rose Rawlins what they saw in themselves. Instead he saw 'the jewel' buried under their brokenness which was caused by alcoholism, lack of education and victimization due to racial oppression. Instead of affirming their brokenness, identifying Rosa and Chester Rawlins as victims of oppressive systems Hilton Toohey announced Chester as a 'man of God'. He did so, because he had received a 'word of knowledge' about Chester Rawlins future.

This 'word of knowledge', as we have seen before, is a prominent feature in Hilton Toohey's ministry. He claims to have received special, divine insight, through which God shows him certain things about people (H04:74). In respect to Chester Rawlin's future Hilton Toohey claims to have been told by the Spirit that Chester Rawlins was supposed to become a pastor and leader of the church. Notably he had received this word of knowledge even prior to Chester Rawlins' salvation. When asked at what point he knew that Chester was going to become a pastor and leader in the church Hilton Toohey said:

H: While he was drinking, right from the beginning. And people used to be quite offended with me when I used to include him in meetings and all this. How can you include that guy, he's drinking he'll never make it. I said, No, he's going to make it, he's going to come right (H04:75).

What Hilton Toohey describes as 'coming right', and what Chester and Rose Rawlins would call 'healing the broken' was not something which happened within an instant. It is rather

described by those involved as a process initiated, sustained and consolidated through 'divine intervention'. Chester and Rose Rawlins story is a good example. The first divine intervention impacting upon Chester Rawlins is the fact he is 'delivered from alcoholism'. Hilton Toohey recalls how Chester Rawlins came out of his alcoholism (H04:71). He says:

H: ...we started a bible study in Rose and Chester's house and but he never used to attend, because he was drinking. ...when he got home there, he didn't see my car he didn't see me, he got in the house, and I began to talk to him. And I was challenging him about changing his life, and he began to cry so he said, I said to him listen, I'm coming to you on Sunday and I'll take you to KwaSizaBantu to sort of have some form of rehabilitation and that's how it all started. Chester was a real alcoholic, he wasn't working, he hadn't worked for a long time. And you had to walk with him for a long time. But he had a breakthrough and he came out of it (H04:75).

Chester Rawlins adds from his own perspective:

C: I wasn't so much of a churchgoer you know. I used to sit drinking and doing my thing, having a good time. So my drinking became so bad, so I needed to have a break then I went on a Sunday to a place called KwaSizabantu for a week and I came back on the Friday from there, then the Saturday they [Hilton Toohey and the Renewal group] were having a whole night prayer. I wasn't feeling good you know. So I went there that night and we had a meeting, I was being part of the meeting but battling along till the morning. But it was amazing, something happened that day because I went home at six o'clock in the morning.... I slept from Sunday morning until Monday morning. When I got up I was delivered from my drinking by God....Never touched it again....I can't say, like, what happened, you know what I mean. But I think that by me just being there in that presence of God, some deliverance took place I think. Because I got up the Monday, I was never the same. ...they prayed and all that over me, laying hands and praying you know. I got my deliverance. I mean obviously we know that God's presence was there. ... God did something. How? We don't know (H03:27-28).

Chester Rawlins proposes that God did something with him which he can not explain. He refers to it as 'deliverance'. This is a significant term within terminology used by the charismatic movement. Presenting a study on John Wimber and the Vineyard Movement Stephen Hunt even claims that the charismatic movement is preoccupied with what it calls "deliverance, healing, prophecy and territorial Spirits" (Hunt 1997:92-93). While this might or might not be true, for our context it is important to note that Chester Rawlins uses the term 'deliverance' in a specific way. For him deliverance is an existential experience of God acting upon his life, freeing him from the power of alcoholism. He understands it as a divine intervention which happened during the course of a prayer night and caused him to 'never touch alcohol again'.

The second divine intervention, arguably the more important one, is the restoration of Rose and Chester Rawlins self-image. They turned from being non-people into people before God. This happened by way of the Spirit giving Hilton Toohey a word of knowledge, through which he knew that Chester Rawlins is “going to be a pastor” (H04:74). Due to divine insight Hilton Toohey saw himself able to walk with Chester Rawlins for a long time until he would come right. Hilton Toohey, to use Rose Rawlins words, was enabled to see the jewel in the man.

The restoration, or better, the healing, of the broken depended on these two experiences. Being delivered from alcohol and meeting a person who would look at Rose and Chester Rawlins from a divine perspective enabled them to reframe their outlook on life and on themselves. In addition it provided them with a model of reaching out to ‘the broken’ which they designed according to their own experience. Rose and Chester Rawlins describe this model as they talk about how change in people can be facilitated. They say that if one wants to change people it is necessary that one...

C: ..got to believe in you, ...I tell you not just what you are, you know, but that God can do something for you.

R: ...I believe its back again to the Holy Spirit. Because you can't have confidence in people if the Holy Spirit don't show you that he has confidence in people. Its that kind of insight, that God's giving you that you don't let this person go. They may be struggling, right now, but they are going to come through. You just continue, invest in them, work with them, walk with them (H03:50).

### 2.3.The experience of the Spirit as finding meaning, purpose and personal growth

As we have seen so far those people who share their stories, claim that the experience of Spirit happened in some extraordinary way or through divine healing or intervention, thus changing their life. Yet in the course of our research we have come across a number of other stories where salvation was not necessarily equated with extraordinary experiences as described above. In those stories people talk about the experience of the Spirit in a less dramatic fashion. For them the experience of the Spirit has to do with finding meaning and purpose in life. Even though these ‘other stories’ still relate the experience of the Spirit it seems to appear less dramatic even though they are as much of existential relevance as being delivered from alcoholism or being healed from disease. Russell Toohey shares one of those ‘other stories’ as he talks about his salvation. He says:

I was always in church, but I wasn't always a believer. ... By the time I reached nineteen years old I felt that church and religion is empty. I needed something more. I was tired of being like all my friends. Having the same fears as they have, and the same frustrations that they have, and the same limitation that they have. I wanted more out of life. I hadn't read the bible before. I knew the stories, but I hadn't read them for myself. And so for a whole year I began to read the bible. The more I read, the more challenged I was, the more I read the more changed I was, the more I desired God, the more I desired to come a higher level. That is when I understood about Jesus because he died on the cross so that I can be born again. I said: "I want to know you, I want to be born again! I want to live on a higher level." And he answered my prayer. I couldn't believe the change which took place in my life. It is like the life had been switched on. ...it is not like I was a bad person. I was a good boy. No drinking, no smoking, no womanizing, but still I was empty until I invited Christ into my life (P/S04:238-239).

Patrick Dlamini echoes these kind of sentiments. He says:

... I used to look at life, and I wasn't content with the norm. You get born, you are a child, you go to school, your parents raise you up, you finish school, you get a job or you study, you get married, you have your own children, they have their children and you die. And I was looking for something much more meaningful to life. ... if there really there is a God out there, there must be a purpose for which he has placed me. ...I realized that there was a need, that I had in my life. ...all of a sudden there was an inner peace that was unexplainable. I found this meaning to life,...I knew that there was a higher source and because I'm connected to Him. ...I understood that this is a right connection. If I am connected to God my father, I would have the right connection I needed in life (P07:167-168).

It was Victor E. Frankl who pointed to the fact that "the human being is in essence a being who is constantly searching for meaning" (Frankl 1984:11). Frankl looks upon the human being from the perspective of a psychotherapist with limited theological inclination. Yet it is interesting to note that for some people who are involved with Breakthrough International the key experience with the Spirit lays in the fact that they found meaning for their life. They describe this as if 'life was switched on' or 'I had the right connection to the source of life'. An 'emptiness which was felt was filled and people knew that God had put them into the world for a purpose'. Russell Toohey elaborates on this point:

...You see how God works? He brings all kinds of people together in his church. Broken people, rich people, they all have the same need. ... Because your purpose is not in being rich. It is not in being poor. It is being sent by the living God. When we connect with his purpose, life makes sense. Its got nothing to do with the car you drive, or the job you have, or the good looking partner you have. Purpose is in knowing God. So the doctor is looking for purpose. The drunkard is looking for purpose. That purpose is found in God. The God who sends people (P/S04:241).

To find meaning in life is related to the purpose God seems to have with everyone. Russell Toohey calls this purpose 'being sent by the living God'. This naturally transforms any ordinary life into a divine endeavor thereby creating a kind of self confidence which is

remarkable. One is now connected with God and expects a personal growth which goes beyond ordinary life stories, where people are born, go to school marry and die. Russell Toohey says it like this:

...we don't realize that each of us was put on this earth with a destiny. God has a plan. We have been sent. We love to live for ourselves. But that is not why God did send us here. We are sent here with a purpose and it is time to discover that purpose! (P/S04:241).

In Breakthrough International's understanding no life is accidental and the object of the forces of history. On the contrary every life is endowed with a divine purpose. As people experience the Spirit they find this purpose and they find it in a very specific and personal way. Furthermore they embark on a process of personal growth. People who have gone through the baptism of the Spirit, people who are born again are therefore set apart from "normal church people" who basically repeat the same old things without ever progressing on a personal level. Rose Rawlins expresses this when she talks about her roots within the Anglican Church. She says:

Now I must admit I was very strong in the Anglican Church, ...I'll never be critical of the Anglicans, but I think that there is more in me that wants to be stilled in me. They definitely started a journey in me, but I needed to grow and needed more. If I look back after twenty years, you know what makes me sad, we left the others, twenty years later, they still doing the same so after its gone twenty years now. That was '84, so I look at that, I think, Yes, it was the right thing to do. ...I mean its not enough to go to church and come back and have prayer meetings and all that, your life has to change for the better, you need to see your life developing (H03:32).

Russell Toohey is very clear on that issue as well. He uses his own life as an example, where the initial discovery of purpose and meaning is followed up by repeated personal growth experiences. He calls it to 'get to a higher level' and says:

But even then, although, Christ was filling my life, I found that there were new achievements to reach, ... I began to strive for more. I read in God's word that I can be filled with the Holy Spirit, so I desired that and I pursued it until it happened to me. After enjoying that experience I began to learn, that there was more, that there was still another higher level. I used to be a very shy and timid person. I couldn't go up to people and confront them, make friends with them. But as my life was filled with Jesus and I saw in his word that he wanted me to share his message with others, I responded to that challenge. ...I went into full time ministry. I wanted a higher level. That is what I want for each one of us here. There is a higher level! Don't be content with where you are! Don't remain where you are for a month, for two month. Keep advancing (P/S04:239).



## 2.4.The experience of the Spirit as experience of unconditional love

This is what Nina Toohey, now the wife of Breakthrough International's senior Pastor Russell Toohey, had to say about her first visit at the church. She wasn't married yet and remembers:

N: ...before I visited the church, I need to say that I had heard a lot of rumors about the church, being a bit crazy,...there were rumors also in Durban, my pastor, my own pastor ... when I mentioned that I'm visiting this church, ...he immediately tried to make me to sort of cut this tie because he felt that this church was a cult. So on coming here, the first person I met was my mother-in-law. My mother-in-law today. And I was struck by the fact that there was such love and compassion in her, and the fact that when I mingled with the family ...I was amazed at the love that was portrayed in the family and some things that I've never seen before. So that was my entrance into the church. And that let me see the authenticity of the people. ...how can the church be false, if the people's lives at home and the things they do, seem so real and so genuine. I saw such genuine compassion and openness to God and such transparency to God, it shocked me (P04:131).

Nina Toohey's initial encounter with Breakthrough International is marked by experience of 'genuine love and compassion' coupled with 'transparency to God'. Even though she was arguably biased, since she was meeting her future in-laws this 'genuine love and compassion' seems to be a feature which other people who get in contact with Breakthrough International can relate to as well. Another story in that respect is one which Noleen Howard can tell. She recalls how she visited Breakthrough International because her son was in its Sunday school:

N: I remember I was going to church, and walking up to the door, and I knew the charismatic way. I knew when I go there, they are going to start visiting me, following up. I thought: "Oh Lord, I don't want this!" Anyway, I walked towards the door and I thought to myself: "You know what, these people mustn't worry me. They must leave me alone and they mustn't worry me." And so I moved to the church with that attitude that I didn't want to be worried. I was still in the driveway looking up and saying to myself: What am I doing? They mustn't worry me!" Anyway, this was supernatural, because I walked in the door, and aunty Rhoda [Hilton Toohey's wife] came up to me. At that time I did not know who that was. She just hugged me, for about, it seems like an eternity and then she let me go. Never said a word. But it was like, I didn't know, when I explain it to people, is sound like a fairy tale, I wasn't saved, but that hug saved me. That hug, it was like the Lord, I don't know it was like he reached right down into my heart. And that was it.

I don't know, I never, obviously it wasn't the hug, it was the Holy Spirit working through that hug. And when I left her, I remember I stepped away from her going into the church. I looked around and said... "I have come home." I didn't now, I didn't know if I was saved or what I just knew I had come home (P02:103-104).

Notably Noleen Howard does not experience the Spirit as some kind of ecstatic encounter during an altar call as she says herself:

N: Anyway, I went in and pastor Hilton was preaching and I knew what I had to do,... he hadn't even made a full altar call, and I was by the altar. This is how I got saved. And I thought, I saw people fall down, you know, so Lord let me fall too. Let me fall too, so that I know I am saved that kind of stuff. But nothing, nothing happened. Nothing, I felt nothing. Nothing happened and I was very disappointed that nothing happened (P02:104).

'Nothing happened' at the altar call, but as Noleen Howard put it, she was saved by 'that hug'. She felt that being embraced by Rhoda Toohey meant that the Holy Spirit addressed an issue which she identifies as a major personal problem in need of attention. She explains:

N: ...in looking back I understand that the issue for me, which was so important and so painful for me, was that I did not believe that I was unconditionally loved, somehow I didn't believe it. And that is the point that God touched. That is where the Holy Spirit touched me. Because that was the only way I was going to listen. It think he knows everyone, our lives and points at which we need to be approached, you know (P02:104).

Noleen Howard came in contact with Breakthrough International and calls it 'coming home', because she experienced the Spirit in way that she felt completely accepted and unconditionally loved. Patrick Dlamini has a similar story to tell when he recounts how he came to know Breakthrough International. He says:

P: Wow, it was phenomenal! ...I think this church is known for the way that we embrace outsiders and I came in for the very first time, and man, I was overpowered by the love that everybody had. They wanted to know who I am, people I met before the service, and after the service they could still call me by name ...phenomenal! By Monday I got a phone call - I got a letter from the church, thanking for having visited on Tuesday.

L: Did it seem to you that this is the usual Pentecostal charismatic way of follow-up?

P: No - I felt genuinely loved, you know, people had a particular interest in me, ...they were interested about who I am. They paid attention to me as a person...., they really took a particular interest in my life (P07:171).

This particular interest in the life of the people who are new to Breakthrough International seems to be combined with a certain nonjudgmental attitude. A nonjudgmental way of welcoming people which one usually does not expect to be displayed in a church. Patrick Dlamini points this when he talks about how amazed he was when Breakthrough International was visiting him at home even though his mother was a well known tavern owner. He says:

... my mother at that present time was running one of the famous taverns in town, and so you know, I was coming from that kind of background. A background you wouldn't expect pastors ... come into my house, coming down to my level, and meeting my family and talking to them.

They used to come and visit me at home you know. Normally church people would think that they would get stained, because how can they be in a tavern. Normally they would ask: "What are they doing in a tavern?" But not the people from Breakthrough International. They were very like showing a different attitude and never at any stage did I feel condemned. They accepted me as it was. It was like saying "God is able to change those things – we are not here to judge you. It will come right for you so you don't need to be embarrassed and necessarily try and maneuver your way out." But they knew what they were there for me and you know I just felt part of it (P07:171).

It is interesting to note that on initial encounter Breakthrough International does not seem to fit the image people have of 'the church'. It seems that within Breakthrough International's practice relationship comes before judging or even condemning a certain life style. Forming relationships and creating an environment of acceptance or even love appears to be taking preference to moral and ethical judgment. This does not mean, that Breakthrough International is not pretty clear and rather strict in its ethics. But the strict ethics is embedded in a 'relational approach to evangelism' as Breakthrough International's Cell leaders hand book calls it. This approach is based on the idea that "Evangelism is a process of extending community" (M08:4.2) which basically means that 'people come before programs'. The manual states:

Evangelism in a cell church is relational. The majority of unbelievers would be turned off if we are too trigger-happy in persuading them to become Christians. We must first develop relationships with them. We must be completely genuine in knowing them as people, and extremely natural in talking about God's goodness in our life... One day they will ask you about this God you talk so much about (M08:4.2).

The handbook does talk about more than just another method of saving people. The aim is to 'harvest the unbelievers', to use a term applied by Breakthrough International. But notably evangelism is understood as a call for genuine and natural relationships with the 'unbeliever' therefore we are looking at more than a mere method of evangelism through which unbelievers are made an object of missionary activity. Even though the language used might indicate this kind of approach the practice shows that the 'unbeliever' is foremost seen as a person to be related to rather than an object of Breakthrough International's missionary zeal. One last example in that respect might illustrate this attitude as well. It is taken from an interview with Thandi Dlomo where she explains how she came to know the church. At that time she was having an affair with a man and didn't feel comfortable about this. She recollects:

T: ...I think in 97 I was visiting for the third time when Pastor Russell noticed me, he said: "Oh, ja, Hello, you are Thandi Oh, and you live in Edendale," I said: "Oh, there's someone who knows about me. I've only come here once or twice and they know about me, then I could come again." ... I was regularly attending church, and I

even went to their cells, ...I realized that I need to make a commitment, I knew about the Lord, I knew ...my relationship [the affair] was not pure, ...Pastor Russell and Nina, ... they would call all of us like maybe for supper. ...So I told them about it and they would pray with me....They didn't put any pressure on me, they just were compassionate (P03:113).

This type of compassion seems to be more than just a method to eventually convert a soul. It is a way of relating to one another which does concentrate on the need of salvation. But it seemingly leaves it to God or rather the Spirit to do the 'convincing' at the appropriate time" as the cell leaders handbook says it (M08:4.2). At the center of this genuine compassion shown to others stands the experience of genuine compassion which has been experienced by those who are part of Breakthrough International themselves. This experience of genuine love is ultimately traced back to an encounter with the Spirit. This, in view of Breakthrough International, enables the believer to 'know God' as opposed to just know 'about him'. Thandi Dlomo is quite clear about that as she talks about the character of the church in general. She says:

T: In church I'm in with other believers who are born of the Holy Spirit as well, so its a whole new thing. Through the Spirit now I know God, I don't just know about him, but I know him. Because I can really understand what God meant to convey to me in the bible. There I take every word personally. I am in a relationship with God now, he is now personal to me. I know that some of the scriptures were written to the Israelites, so initially they are not meant for me. But all that what I read in the Old and New Testament makes me understand Him more, makes me see better how he operates. I can see His love at work right through from Genesis to Revelations. Church is all about knowing that love working through all the way from Genesis to Revelation until it comes to me. But Church is also letting other people know about this. We can't keep this love for ourselves. ...because His love is wide, to the ends of the earth. Everyone must know about this love.... It [spreading God's love] can be better done than said that at times. ...because of this love that I really see in God for me, makes me really want to do more. I want to show love for others because I have experienced his love (P03:118-119).

### 3. The Kingdom of God advanced through the ministry of all believers

As we have seen, Breakthrough International's ministry, or, for that matter, the experience of the Spirit within Breakthrough International, has a very personal dimension. People experience healing, get their self-respect restored, find meaning and purpose as well as unconditional love within the Spirit encounter. This personal dimension of the experience of the Spirit leads to a new self-understanding of the believer. People feel that they have experienced God through the Spirit and they now realize that this God is "a God who sends people" (P/S04:241, cf.III.2.3). Therefore people, or better, the believer is more than just an

ordinary person but a person with a mission. The believer sees his or her life transcending ordinary life because it becomes part of God's mission. Thandi Dlomo expresses this new self image by calling herself an agent of God' love. She says:

T: I believe you can't just know about the love God has for you. God wants to use me as a human agent to convey his love as well. So sharing this love is it, what I feel I must do, not just in words but as a whole being (P03:119).

Hilton Toohey refers this new found identity of 'being an agent of God's love' back to Jesus himself. According to him Jesus has gone through a 'Gethsemane breakthrough'. In that experience Jesus accepted what the Father, who had sent him into the world, wanted him to do, rather than insisting on his own will. Similarly the believer needs to ask what God wants him to do rather than asking what her or she wants to do. Hilton Toohey makes clear that...:

T: ...when we a experience a Gethsemane breakthrough we will say like Jesus in John 4:34: "My food is to do the will of him who send me and to finish the work... (P/S01:217).

Consequently he calls upon the believer:

T: Don't get caught up in the things of this world. You are born at a time like this to finish a particular work. Amen! No one else can finish it, but you. God has brought you into this world, so that you can finish it. There are so many things which are left undone. When we come before the judgment one day, we will be judged according to the things that we left undone, that we were brought into this planet to do (P/S01:217).

People who are involved in the ministry of Breakthrough International get this new perspective upon their life. After being born again life is understood in connection with what they perceive as the mission of God. They are sent into the world to finish the job God has started when he send Jesus. Jesus like them understood that he needed to do what the Father wanted him to do. The believer participates in God project to save the world. This happens especially when the believer understands that God has a very specific, personal, and individual destiny for him or her. Russell Toohey explains:

T: Now often we say: Yah man, God had amazing plans for Jesus. He had amazing plans for Paul and the other bible heroes. Or maybe he got an amazing plan for pastor or the worship team members. But we don't realize that each of us was put on this earth with a destiny. God has a plan. We have been sent. We love to live for ourselves. But that is not why God did sent us here. We are sent her with a purpose and it is time to discover that purpose! But that purpose is like a gift. It has a special gift wrap. It is wrapped up in Christ. ... You might do a lot of exciting things. But your ultimate purpose is wrapped up in Jesus. It is only through Jesus that you can get to your destiny. So I want to ask us a question this morning. Do you know Jesus? Because in knowing him you will discover the truth about yourself. You will see how

much beauty there is in you. You will see how much achievement and potential there is in you. And when you come to him, he begins to lead you to higher levels. Amazing things he does. He cause us to become apostolic, send ones, purposeful people, people who have a goal and a destiny. Do you have a goal? Do you have reason to live every single day. This is what he has for us. He doesn't want to save us. He doesn't just for us to meet with him, but he wants to send us (P/S04:241).

Breakthrough International's priority is to 'save the lost' and everyone who has been found is called to participate in this mission. Every born again Christian is 'send by the God who sends people'. Yet interestingly enough Breakthrough International has no clear cut model according to which the individual believer is supposed to participate in God's mission. It is up to the individuals concerned to figure out how they should participate within this mission of God. Because everyone has his or her own destiny.

The calling or sending of the believer consequently takes on all kinds of different forms depending on personal story and gifting. Because destiny in view of Breakthrough International is something very personal and individual. The church would therefore claim that they are not interested to create uniformity amongst its members but rather strive to help everyone, provided he or she is born again, to find his or her own divinely ordained destiny. The assumption is that every believer has his own unique ministry. This unique ministry or destiny must be found, developed and released by the believer for the benefit of the Kingdom. Borrowing a little bit from Lutheran terminology one might call this individual approach towards ministry the 'ministry of all believers' (notably not priesthood). What it entails might be illustrated in the way how Rhoda Toohey describes the ministry style of her husband. This is what she has to say:

R: I think I would - speaking for my husband - I think ...he's driven also by something just to help like people, to fulfill their destiny. To fulfill God's call on them. ... I have never ...met another person who will take the back seat and like the way he will just to promote other people's ministry. I've yet to see that. That he just wants to raise up these men for God, and women (H04:77).

Breakthrough International is convinced that people have a personal call or destiny. They therefore see themselves promote a fully participatory type of ministry where all believers contribute to the advancement of the Kingdom in a unique and personal way. There is a divine personal plan or destiny for the individual and it is seen as an important task of the ministry to help people 'fulfill God's call on them'. Noleen Howard, Breakthrough International's youth leader explains.

- N: I think a young person needs to know that they are here for a purpose. Otherwise they just ... they do whatever. But if I find that a young person got purpose and they understand purpose and they understand destiny than they behave differently. They don't loose their youth but they behave differently. That is one thing that, since I have taken over, that I have enforced, try to make them see that. That there is destiny and get them to understand who they are in Christ. Simply because when you understand who you are you behave differently.
- L. Who are they in Christ?
- N. ... talking about psalm 139, that God has known you before you were born and he has a plan for you, it speaks of destiny. God says he knew you and he has a plan for you. Life is not just swimming around but having a focus. God has a plan, and so we need to be able to live in a way that is conducive to finding out what that destiny is. And that's it (P02:110).

That God has a plan, a destiny for everyone is of tremendous importance for Breakthrough International's ministry. This becomes especially apparent when one looks at the reasoning which underlies the practice within Breakthrough International to ordain women. To allow women to speak in the assembly, to make them elders and even ordain them into the ministry of the church is an issue which is hotly debated within Pentecostal as well as Charismatic churches. But in line with the assumption that God has his own personal, spiritual agenda or calling for everyone Hilton Toohey argues in favor of ordaining women. When asked why he has no problem with women prophesying and being ordained in the ministry he says:

- H: ...there's a certain realm of the Spirit where there's no difference between male and female. In the natural, there's a difference. In the home, there's a difference. But in the Spirit realm, there's no difference. And I believe if a woman can get that maturity, that spiritual maturity, I don't see why she can't pastor. But I also believe that if she's married, she must be in submission to her husband. ... her husband might not have the calling, she might have the calling And if she's got a calling then her husband should support her. As she would support him (H04:78-79).

Hilton Toohey applies a rather conservative interpretation of the role of the women within the 'realm of the natural'. In the 'realm of the natural' a woman is supposed to be submissive to her husband. But in the 'realm of the Spiritual' she might be elevated to prophesy or enter into the ordained ministry. Breakthrough International seemingly wants people to find their own spiritual way or, how they would say, to find their destiny and calling before God. The 'call or destiny' is what makes people extraordinary and the ministry of Breakthrough International aims to discover this call upon every single life. This approach is taken for a good reason as Hilton Toohey explains:

- H: ... getting back to Colossians 1:28 I would think [our task is] equipping every man to discover his God-given potential. .... Once you discover your special gift that God

has given you, there's no turning back from that point. Because if you discover your gift, you are able to function 100% in it. And because of that function 100% in it, that gift will make way for you. ... Regardless of where you were born, your standard of education, or anything. If you discover your gift, and you walk in your gift, and you give God the glory and the honor, it will make way for you (H04:80).

The individual believer must find his or her own destiny in order to function properly within God's plan to advance the Kingdom. Russell Toohey affirms this point using the issue of women ordination to explain why the discovery of personal gifting and destiny is so important for Breakthrough International's ministry. He points out:

A: ...70% of my congregation is female. If I don't have females in leadership, then they have no voice, there's no ways I can understand where they are coming from. If I ignore them I've effectively reduced the potency of the ministry of the church. Therefore those 70% must be represented on leadership level and they must be representing themselves. Otherwise the church can not be fully mobilized. And that's my passion, to mobilize every possible leader, release every possible gift – so that all participate in the ministry with who and what they are. The church can be only strengthened if we use the women and release them into leadership (P09:207).

Both Hilton as well as Russell Toohey express in a nutshell what Breakthrough International means with finding one's destiny. Based on the assumption that God has a personal story with everyone they believe that finding the God given potential, discovering the individual gifting, will set people free to excel on all levels of their life. This in turn will advance the Kingdom. From a less spiritual perspective one might argue that personal development and self-fulfillment is at the center of this type of theological thinking. But for people like Hilton and Russell Toohey finding ones calling in God has nothing to do with self-fulfillment. It has rather to do with allowing the Spiritual to move, develop and grow the individual toward becoming what he or she is supposed to become within the divine plan.

Priscilla Donelly, the Sunday School leader of Breakthrough International talks about this point of finding personal growth and development as she describes why she left the Baptist Church and joined Breakthrough International. She says:

P: ... I left there [the Baptist Church], not because of any problems or anything, but ... I had just reached my potential with the Baptist church. It was like part of the roof sort of thing, and I couldn't go any further, I didn't know how to go further, because they weren't giving us, there was no further spiritual grows...I felt that God was leading me to more and I just visited New Zion because my sister's belong there and I felt that there was God leading me. ... I was so free in the New Zion church,... it was a new experience. ...very free to speak and not hold back you know (P05:142).



Pricilla Donnelly sought and found 'spiritual grows on a personal level' within Breakthrough International, which confirms what we have observed before. People see themselves involved with God on a personal level who has a plan or destiny for their life. They see themselves not just as people but as 'send people' participating in God's ministry or mission in their own right. The Church is experienced as empowering its people to participate with their life in the unfolding of the divine plan for the world, to participate in the ministry.

Cliffort Donnelly, a builder, explains how he experiences this 'ministry of all believers'. He says:

C: Well, growing up it was more that we had to go to church on a Sunday, ... Now being born again its good to go to church, ... you get a lot of blessings from the service you take part in. ... the flow is far different to the ways of the Anglican church.... The things that are done in church like the praise and worship is far better than what it was. The dancing in church, and talking in tongues all that is much better.... I really feel closer to God, ... I can understand it, I can talk to God. Whereas before I never read a bible, it was just put there that was for the minister to read. ... now I'm encouraged to read the bible, and I read it daily, and I can spend time with God.... God was a stranger, I took him for granted but now I know that there is a God and I can talk to Him like I talk to any of my friends, all my needs, I can put it to Him, ask him for direction, He'll really shows me where to go (P05:144).

According what we have said so far we might conclude that the self-understanding of individual believer is affected by the experience of the Spirit in two ways. Firstly the believers self-confidence is boosted tremendously. Because the life of the believer is more than just an ordinary life. It is a life lived for the mission of God. Every single believer takes part in the divine project and his life comes to stay within a new, a divine perspective. In addition to this new look upon life as being part of the divine sending of Jesus to save the world, it is also believed that God, who is the Almighty and powerful (!), has a personal plan or destiny for every believer. The believer understand himself charged with the task to find and live this destiny. In doing so the Kingdom will be advanced with great fervor.

A prayer which was collectively prayed by the whole congregation during one of Breakthrough International's services might give an indication of this new found identity. An identity where one turns from being a ordinary human being into someone with a destiny send by God participating in the ministry of all believers and thus advancing the Kingdom of God. The people prayed during the service as follows:

I am part of the fellowship of the unashamed. I have the Holy Spirit power. The dice has been cast. I stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I am a disciple of his, I won't look back, slow down, back away, or be still. My path is redeemed, my presence makes sense and

my future is secure. I am finished and done with low living, walking by sight, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tamed visions, mundane talking, small giving and dwarf goals.

I no longer need preeminence or prosperity, position or power, promotions, plaudit to popularity. I don't have to be right, first or tops, I don't have to be recognized, praised, regarded or rewarded. I know life by presence, I lean by faith, love by patience, live by prayer and I labor by power.. My faith is set, my step is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my way is rough, my companions are few, my guide is reliable, my mission is clear. I can not be bought or compromised, I can not be detoured or lured away, I cannot be turned back, diluted, or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice nor will I hesitate in the presence of adversity. I will not negotiate at the table of the enemy, nor ponder at the pool of popularity or wander in the maze of mediocrity.

I won't give up, shut up, let up or burn up till I preached up, prayed up, paid up, stored up and stayed up the cause of Christ. I am a disciple of Jesus Christ, I must go until he comes, give till I drop, preach witness till all know, and work till he stops. And when he comes to get his own, he will have no problems recognizing me because my colors will be clear.

Lord, develop in me the perseverance and faithfulness to pursue your goal for my life even in the face of rejection! (P/S 03:233).

#### 4. For better or worse - world(history) as a place of power encounters

Our investigation into the way in which Breakthrough International's ministry unfolds within the context of (postmodern) history has so far pointed to the fact that history is understood as personal history focusing upon the private sphere of the believer. Even though Breakthrough International is therefore reluctant to engage itself in making history within the public sphere it is a rather indirectly involved in the making of public history. As we have seen this involvement in 'public' or 'world-history' happens through the making and changing of personal (hi)story. We also have seen that on account what Wessels calls the 'charismatic worldview' the locus of the struggle against evil is 'not this earth but an unseen spirit-world'. Consequently the causes of socio-political inequalities tend not to be located in manmade history. History is rather a product of a spiritual struggle between godly and demonic forces and the world is seen as a spiritual battle ground of those forces.

This dualistic charismatic world view has important implications for Breakthrough International's understanding of the Kingdom of God. Because the Kingdom of God becomes a reality by way of revealing its power within this world. Since this world is shaped and controlled by demonic forces the Kingdom of God does not advance through humanly effort but through spirit encounters where God prevails over evil. Russell Toohey explains:

R: ...as a charismatic I wouldn't just see [the] Kingdom [of God] ...as a matter of principles and political idealism, you know, like the liberation theologians. But for me, Kingdom is...to do with ...power encounter, because the demonic Kingdom is antagonistic to God's Kingdom. To advance God's Kingdom, we directly confront demonic principalities and powers. ...because people's lives don't necessarily change if you don't preach the gospel of the Kingdom as a power.

1 Cor 4:20 Paul says: "The Kingdom of God is not just a matter of talk, but of power." So ... there has to be power dimension. Luke 11, 17 – 21, Jesus says: " ...you know that the Kingdom of God is come to you when I drive out demons by the finger of God" and so, hence you know, the importance of the power, dimension of the power encounter (P08:198).

Breakthrough International perceives the world as place where power encounters between demonic-satanic and the divine powers take place. The Kingdom of God therefore is advanced through the demonstration of its power. Russell Toohey bases this view on the bible. But it is not just based on a scriptural, thus cognitive line of argument. To perceive the progress of the Kingdom of God as power encounters is also born out of the way in which many people in Breakthrough International experienced their own salvation. The people who experienced 'salvation' within Breakthrough International's ministry experienced it often as an encounter between God's Spirit and demonic powers, where eventually the divine power prevailed.

The language used by the interviewees is for example filled with references to powers which kept them in their 'old worldly lives', until the power 'from on high delivered' them from those powers, thereby incorporating their personal story into the advancement of the Kingdom of God. People saw themselves delivered from the powers of alcoholism (H03:22), aggressive behavior (P02:105), bad spells, demon possession (P03:122), as well as from their painful past (P/S04:244). This deliverance happened through a powerful intervention by the divine Spirit. Noleen Howard describes one of those power encounters which changed her life.

N. ...on a Friday ... I went home, I started cooking and all that, I put the music on. I loved the music. But I remember clearly, that day, when the music hit my ears, it was like, you know when someone burns you, it was like that, that pain and the heat, ... I was cleaning fish and I threw the knife down because of that pain, and switched the music off. I knew straight away what it was, I had to switch the music off. That was the last time that I voluntarily listened to worldly music. I was delivered from that simply because ...God knew the power ...that music had over me. So he had to break that (P02:105).

Noleen Howard refers to a type of rap-music which she used to listen to before her salvation. She felt that this 'worldly rap' had a quite negative impact on herself and describes it as a

force having power over her. The deliverance from this kind of power happens through what is perceived as divine intervention in form of a power encounter which manifested itself in physical symptoms. As result of this 'deliverance' Noleen Howard never voluntarily listens to worldly rap again.

Notably this change in is not caused by a personal decision taken by Noleen Howard. Within the context of what Russell Toohey calls 'power encounter Noleen Howard does not experience herself as an individual in control over her own life. Quite the opposite is the case. Her life is changed because she experiences a powerful intervention by the divine. This divine force, as she would see it, broke the demonic hold worldly rap music had over her. It was 'like fire burning, like extreme pain' caused on account of the fact the power encounter between divine and satanic forces took place within the Noleen Howard herself.

For people who have gone through experiences like that it is just small step, to interpret the respective biblical testimony along the lines of a dualistic charismatic world view in which the Kingdom is advanced through power encounters. Because personal story and biblical testimony seem to concur. Even more, biblical testimony affirms personal experience. When Russell Toohey cites scripture to explain that the hold which demonic forces have on the world can only be broken through the encounter with the divine power he clarifies an issue which people from Breakthrough International can relate to on an existential level. The cognitive – biblical explanation just clarifies what experience has taught them already: 'The Kingdom of God is not just a matter of talk, but of power!'

In addition to the existential dimension which we observe in stories like those told by Noleen Howard Breakthrough International has developed a whole theory on the issue of advancing the Kingdom through power encounters. Inspired by Peter Wagner they refer to it as 'Spiritual Warfare' which Russell Toohey explains in the following way:

- R: If you read some of the writings of Peter Wagner he talks about three levels of Spiritual Warfare. In the church we have therefore a ministry called 'Three Needs'. There we would minister into people's lives and take care of what is called 'Ground Level Spiritual Warfare' which would deal with demonic manifestation and demonic issues in people's lives. There is a second level, of Spiritual Warfare, that has to do with geographical areas and neighborhoods that come under the control of demonic power Wagner would call 'Principalities'. As a church we would pray for those areas and neighborhoods so that they may be delivered from those demonic powers which destroy them. Than there's a third level of Spiritual Warfare that one would also engage in, which extends on city- and national level. This is why I am involved with

the City Prayer initiative, and the National Prayer initiative. Because our city and country is held by demonic powers which need to be broken through the power of the coming Kingdom. So that is why we are involved in city-wide and nation-wide prayer so that we prepare the nation for revival and the work of God (P08:199).

In this kind of thinking advancing the Kingdom is a matter of God's power being released. The believer becomes merely an instrument of this release because it is on account of his or her prayer that the power of the divine might be invoked and the Kingdom become manifest. Thandi Dlomo clarifies this Spiritual Warfare, where prayer becomes the main tool for the believer, to advance the Kingdom. She refers to the personal and geographical aspects of Spiritual Warfare as she gives the following examples:

- T: Prayer is needed especially in areas where it was difficult for us to minister and to preach the gospel. But because we have prayed there, and we have seen doors being opened. Like there was a case in Scottsville. We had no venue, so we looked for a place and we couldn't find anyone. The guys were a bit discouraged and we were going back to the car, and I said: "Guys let us pray along this area, just pray and we walk around and just pray, and have faith in God." And that same time another lady came that used to visit the church. ... We went in and prayed for her and said we are looking for a venue, she said, you are welcome to be there.

That was an instance that may seem easy, as if it was a coincidence. But there was also one time when we were young believers I think it was in 1998 when ... we were supposed to go and pray at so-and-so's house. There were only three of us young ladies and when we were at the house we only heard that this lady has a spirit that worries her at night all the time. So we had to pray for her, we praying, and praying from the little experience that we had. But she said, she came back the following Sunday, and she said it was the first time in years to really experience a peaceful sleep. She no more saw that dog that used to come and bite her and that heaviness in the house (P03:125).

These are two examples of how the Kingdom advances through the release of divine power on account of prayer which creates power encounters. The fact that the youth does not find a place to meet is not just understood as a practical problem but as an action caused by the 'demonic principalities' which have a hold over the area. Accordingly it is not in the power of the believer to change the situation. For that a powerful divine intervention is needed which can be invoked through prayer. The same applies to the lady who complains about sleepless nights. Her problem is understood in terms of Spiritual Warfare. It is addressed accordingly because 'the world is controlled by the devil' (Hilton Toohey). His hold over the world can only be broken by calling upon the divine power.

Finally, as Russell Toohey has pointed out, Breakthrough International's understanding of advancing the Kingdom in terms of power encounters does not only apply to the realm of the

personal as well as to certain neighborhood and geographical units. The hold of the devil on the world extends into the realm of the political as well. Russell Toohy explains that...

R: ...there's ...political systems that are intrinsically evil and for that we can blame the devil obviously (P09:203). ...there is systemic bondages that control people in a given nation, in which the system operates. ... Apartheid was such a demonic system. Given the fact that it was Christians that were perpetrating it, you see, it is even worse, you see the wiles of the enemy. It reminds one of Galatians where Paul says: "You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?" . ... if ever there was an example of a national church being bewitched, it is Apartheid. ... And so with hindsight I would say, that the prayer of the church, the work of the church, had everything to do with liberation. Because in no ways would have politicians to be able to unseat this demonic stronghold of Apartheid. No matter what the political resistance could achieve through strategy and maneuvering - the church had everything to do with it.... So, we wouldn't discourage people from involvement in politics. We don't detach ourselves you know from political processes and so forth. But we would say that the prayer of the church has everything to do with the direction of the nation. Because the direction of the nations is determined by the principalities at work in it (P08:199-200).

## D. BCI's experience of the Spirit within in the context of the poor

### 1. Seek the Kingdom, receive the kingdom goods – a perspective from within

We have seen so far that Breakthrough International's way of approaching its ministry is based on its charismatic world view with a strong focus on the private rather than the public sphere. We will again observe this focus on the private rather than the public domain as we attempt to understand how the ministry of Breakthrough International, or rather the experience of the Spirit within that ministry, is located in the context of the poor.

It seems that whatever the members of Breakthrough International have to say about 'the poor as the context of their ministry', it is embedded in two important personal experiences.

Firstly the majority of Breakthrough International's membership see themselves coming from an impoverished background thus identifying themselves as poor. Secondly those affiliated with Breakthrough International have experienced what they call 'living by faith' as a way of overcoming the context of their poverty which kept them, to use their language, 'in bondage'.

Russell Toohey describes these two issues of being poor as well as the experience that God frees its people from poverty in the following way.

R: In terms of the social make-up of the membership I would say about our church: When we first started the church it tended to be majority tradesman, artisans, most of the women were housewives. But then, I think some church growth guys called it redemption and lift, which says that as people are redeemed there is a lift in their social standing [and] their lives stabilize. They are not into boozing so much, and so they got much more money with which to develop their homes, and to educate their children. And we saw that the children of the founders tended to be professional people most of us were teachers and nurses and so forth so you found that the income of the church increased in that five to ten year period as the majority of people came from professional basis, so we'd have many people being, lower middle class. We still have a lot of factory workers working class people. They make up the majority of the congregation (P08:196-197).

Russell Toohey makes two important points confirming the above description of 'being poor and living by faith'. Firstly he is clear that in its majority Breakthrough International is made up of people who come from a disadvantaged background<sup>17</sup>. Especially when keeping the

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<sup>17</sup> The church is not made up of "middle class Coloreds" who might have played a leading role in the beginning of Breakthrough International. But the church appealed over the years more and more to people from what Russell Toohey calls "working class". However, considering the South African context -still haunted by racial classification and prejudice-we don't really like to use these types of classifications, but one seemingly does not get away from discussing issues of class and race when dealing with the South African reality.

legacy of Apartheid in mind, one realizes that these people experienced themselves as disadvantaged and marginalized people. Secondly as those disadvantaged people got saved they experienced a 'redemption and lift' phenomenon which saw their life improve dramatically. This 'redemption and lift experience', where being saved liberates from poverty, is something which is of great significance to understand Breakthrough International understanding of poverty and its listening to the poor.

But in order to understand Breakthrough International's dealing with the poor we need firstly to pay attention to the obvious. This is that church sees itself coming from and working within the context of poverty. Russell Toohey even sees poverty as a factor limiting Breakthrough International's ministry. He explains:

R: BCI is made up of poor people. Basically this is been always one of our limiting factors that I would say, if we've got 230 earners, people who would be able to give money, who do contribute, easily, 70% of those people would earn under R2 000 a month. And so that becomes a major problem in that there's projects and efforts that we'd like to engage in that we can't (P09:204).

From a statistical point of view we might add that in 2001 Breakthrough International had 716 members. This was the year with the highest membership rate in the history of the church. Of those 716 people only 278 people earned any money and 79 members were single parents (M13:13). The income base is therefore rather slim. On a critical note, however, we might as well add that Russell Toney's figure of a monthly income below R 2000, which supposedly indicates that people within Breakthrough International are rather poor, can be questioned. Compared with overall figures available for the South African society an income below R 2000 a month compares relatively favorable with those 48 % African women who are the poorest of the poor in South Africa and who earn less than R 500 a month (cf. Census results 1996<sup>18</sup>).

However our task is not to discuss the levels of poverty inside Breakthrough International in comparison with overall poverty levels within South African society. This kind of approach would not be in line with the general focus of this chapter, where we want Breakthrough International to tell its own story. Despite some possible statistical ambiguity in respect to

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18 Available under [www.helio-international.org](http://www.helio-international.org). See also SAHDR 2003:5-6 which states the National poverty line for 2002 as R 354 per month per adult.



absolute figures we therefore note that the members of Breakthrough International see themselves coming from a poor background.

This leads to an important observation: Since Breakthrough International sees itself by and large (70%!) made up of poor people (P09:204) one might say that in whatever Breakthrough International has to say about the experience of the Spirit within the context of the poor, we are listening to a voice from within. The primary experience of Breakthrough International's people is that they themselves are part of the poor. Therefore what they have to say about the poor as the context of their ministry is grown out of being existentially affected. The members of the church experience themselves as being affected and victimized by their poverty which is understood, as we might add, in terms of personal bondage.

Since this bondage affects the majority of the church membership it is one of the main issues which Breakthrough International addresses throughout its ministry. Hilton Toohey describes it as one of the main focal points of his personal ministry. After his 'born again experience' he felt an "added passion for the poor" (H01:3) and remembers the beginnings of the church:

H: We have been ministering to the poor before [while within the Catholic Church], but it just grew once the Spirit took over you see. This ministry to the poor really grew once the Spirit took over (H04:65).

In line with its 'charismatic world view' (Wessels) Breakthrough International addresses the issue of poverty in its midst from a spiritual perspective. Poverty is not merely a social phenomenon but calls for a spiritual response which Breakthrough International refers to as 'living by faith'. 'Living by faith' is the way of overcoming the context of poverty. What this means might be illustrated by a statement of Hilton Toohey. He speaks about overcoming poverty and says:

H: I am telling you there is one man that will change your financial position, when you get in good books with God. When you begin to pray more, your financial position will change. Amen! ...The bible says: "Seek first the Kingdom of God and all its righteousness and all those things will be added unto you." I am a great believer of that. If you know God, if you know God, - the bible talks about Moses, the bible talks about Abraham, the bible talks about David, the wealthiest man in the world- . Why were they wealthy? Because they discovered Jehovah. The bible says: "Abraham was God's friend." If you want the resources of the Kingdom, you better get in contact with the king! The bible says: "There is no good thing that he will withhold from those who walk uprightly." There is some old fashioned things that we owe him, this is to treasure him and to walk uprightly. If you never seek the Kingdom, you never get the

Kingdom goods. Even if you get them the devil will come and take them away from you (P/S01:215-216).

Being poor is a matter directly linked to one's personal spirituality, because by being in touch with the King one will receive the Kingdom goods. This might sound like the typical 'Wealth and Health-Gospel' of the Charismatic movement (cf. Gifford 1995:45), but it is a kind of message which seems to be backed up by what the people of Breakthrough International experience on a personal level. Russell Toohey calls it the experience 'redemption and lift', which, as we have seen, means that as people are redeemed they are lifted up in their social standing and their lives stabilize. For those inside Breakthrough International, the poor and marginalized, living by faith is therefore not just a message which might or might not be true. Because on a personal level 'living by faith' is been affirmed over and over again through corresponding experiences. Due to what people perceive as a direct intervention of God in difficult times people experience the merits of Hilton Toohey's claim. He himself recollects one of those experiences from the early days of the church where the cognitive is affirmed by the experiential. He remembers:

H: We then began to live by faith. Someone in the community used to work, and he used to give us R300-00 a month, but then Russell had started university. But God supplied, God supplied all our needs ...God's hand started moving. He provided enough money everything. I never forget, one morning, we got up and on our front verandah, because Russell majored in English, and there was a box of books, every English book that he needed for that year, and we don't know who put it there. That's how God provides supernaturally (H04:66-67).

Russell Toohey adds another experience where he saw the 'King providing the Kingdom goods.' He says:

Last week we had a meeting here, A lady gave my wife a hundred Rand and she said: "This is for the daughters." The girls were very happy. They were looking forward to the holidays and now they had a hundred Rand pocket money. So my wife said: "OK. We take the hundred Rand and we buy you some McDonalds." As they arrived at McDonalds there was someone from the church there. He said: "Order whatever you like I will pay for it." When I got home my daughter was so happy. She told me: "Daddy, the Lord is so good." You see? ... it didn't come straight away. We have been serving the Lord for years. Faithfully!. But there is a reward (P/S04:245-246).

These kind of experiences drive home the point that living by faith really works. It might not happen straight away and one might need to serve the Lord for years until the rewards are coming in, but they come in. One last example how living by faith indeed works is a story

which Nina Toohey tells. She indicates to what extent prayer has to do with accessing the 'Kingdom goods' and says:

N: Prayer has become part of our lives. In the ministry there are things that we need, for instance, recently when my husband went to Zambia to minister there, we had no money. In fact he left us with nearly nothing in the cupboard and so it affected the whole family, the girls [her two young daughters] as well. And I really felt a bit angry because I thought how could he leave me without anything. And but I was forced there again just to say to the girls, we need to ask God, we don't have petrol, the cupboards are empty and stuff like that. So we prayed but it wasn't a long prayer. Just saying; "Lord, please we need you to come through for us. And the night my husband was going to leave ...the most amazing thing happened. ...he got an e-mail from America and this pastor from America said "Listen, the Lord has moved us to bless you with some money."... He actually said while they were praying the Lord had supernaturally moved him to bless us with some money for my husband's trip to Zambia. So you can imagine, my amazement. I'm always amazed at the way God undertakes and it was amazing that the money that came through, was just enough for paying our lights and our telephone account, our petrol, and some food that we needed. It was just enough (P04:136-137).

These kinds of personal experiences are at the center of Breakthrough International's understanding of the 'poor as the context of its ministry'. When we therefore try to understand how Breakthrough International views the poor as the context of its ministry we might acknowledge the following: Firstly the people of Breakthrough International see themselves as those who are the poor. When listening to their stories we are listening to the poor, their story is therefore a story from within. Secondly they experience God as provider if they seek his Kingdom as we have seen with Hilton Toohey and others. Hilton Toohey takes the biblical testimony literally that 'there is no good thing that he will withhold from those who walk uprightly' (cf. Ps.112:2, Pr.11:14). This biblical testimony is affirmed by personal experience, which gives it a credibility going beyond the cognitive. Because the people of Breakthrough International not only know that the 'Spirit provides supernaturally to those who seek the Kingdom', but they even claim to have experienced it themselves. In short: The poor have seen in their own life that living by faith works.

## 2. God is a big God or poverty as curse to the nations

In line with the experience that God provides for those who are seeking the Kingdom Breakthrough International sees poverty as a curse. Russell Toohey explains:

- R: We believe that our objective is definitely to save people for Heaven and Eternity. But we believe strongly that Jesus came to make our lives more abundant in the here and now. And so we believe that step no. 1 is to get people saved, and when they are saved, their lives will inevitably change for the better. [we] don't take the more eastern belief of some sectors of the church where the clergy will even take a vow of poverty. No ways, we believe that poverty is a curse (P08:195).

In general Breakthrough International holds the view that being poor is something which God did not intend for his people. Someone who is saved is supposed to reap the reward of his salvation in this world. Those who are saved and live a Spirit controlled life are supposed to be well off, even wealthy, because they serve a God of prosperity. Anthony Toohey, head of the business ministry within the Breakthrough International, even complains that Breakthrough International does not display visibly enough the fact that God is a God who prospers. He says:

- A: But the fact of the matter is that there's very few in the church who are wealthy. So we rather display poverty in the church. But then there's scripture which tells us a different story. When we talk about Abraham, Abraham was a wealthy man. ...When we look at David's line and his family. They had assets. Even the church in the New Testament, they were in a position to support Paul. And they did so quite well. All the different missionaries were supported from in the church. And if we look at the guys they called them tent makers. Because whatever this is, a tent-maker, it means that those people were self-supporting people. They were self-sufficient people who were blessed and portrayed the abundance of God in their life. So when we come to God, I mean irrespective of how poor you might feel the people are, their poverty is also part of their belief system. I think its very much a part of the belief system, and if we believe in a big God, ... God needs to come through (P06:156).

Breakthrough International believes in a big God who wants his people to prosper. In addition Breakthrough International has experienced this big God who comes through and blesses his people. Poverty is therefore something which is not supposed to continue for those who indeed change their whole way of life and lead supposedly Spirit-controlled life. Russell Toohey makes it clear:

- R: Life styles must change, and people must be impacted through personal experiences with the Holy Spirit. Why? The Holy Spirit would make you rich or heal you, if you let it. In every area in your life where you're not successful, you're not being led by the Holy Spirit ...the more you teach, preach, or talk about the gifts of the Spirit, the more they work for you, you got to protect them with your life. The church gives the kind of

gospel that it preaches, if you tell God you want the gifts, the Holy Spirit will have the freedom and right to manifest them before you (P08:189).

A Spirit controlled life is a life where seemingly poverty has no place. Because if one 'protects the gifts of the Spirit with ones life, which means that one shows total personal commitment to the Spirit, the Spirit will manifest itself. The underlying logic of this kind of argument seems simple. The more and stronger people commit to what they perceive as the Spirit leading their life the more blessing is bestowed upon them. The Holy Spirit brings prosperity to those who surrender with their whole life. This type of logic is so convincing to the people of Breakthrough International because it is not just based on a cognitive argument, but based on personal experience as Russell Toohey states emphatically:

R: Oh, yes. I've seen it absolutely. For example, where my dad and them started to pray strongly and exercised their prophetic gifting people would respond and the Spirit would come through. There's a saying in Pentecostals circles that God hasn't touched anyone, till he's touched the cash pocket. So we saw it happening. People who are touched by our ministry would respond by giving. We were not calling them to do so but they would respond spontaneously by giving. So our experience is when the gifts of the Spirit operate powerfully there is no shortage of income (P08:189).

At first glance one might assume that within the above logic prosperity is something like a magical result of the right connection with the Spirit. But even though at first it seems that way Russell Toohey is adamant that this would put it to simple. He says:

R: What we teach is, that God's financial blessing is not magical. That every financial blessing, every blessing for that matter needs to be seen as one of a composite of things and attitudes which need to be in place. In order to enjoy financial blessings God deals with us as a whole person. The basis of the blessing is laid in the Word of God. You can't be blessed on the basis of the Word, unless you know the Word. So it is not just enough to tithe or give to God in order to be blessed. ... You've got to be obedient to the word. Many people misunderstand tithing. They think if they tithe they will be blessed. But you can't built your life on just this one word on giving. It takes the whole person to be blessed ... So its a package deal. ... The last thing I would ever say is give a whole lot of money, and you are going to be healed or become rich, no ways. But do apply yourself to the whole counsel of God and then your whole life will change (P08:190-191).

Russell Toohey guards against a too simplistic identification of 'having faith and becoming rich'. He makes clear that for the 'blessing to flow the personal life style needs to be based on the Word of God. So the challenge before the believer is not just to believe but to be obedient and apply oneself totally to the 'whole counsel of God'. The aim is therefore a total transformation of the believers life rather than a superficial change in beliefs.

This is confirmed by Breakthrough International answer to the question: "Why people are poor?" Since poverty is not what God intended for his people this question must arise. , within this kind of thinking, poverty can not be something which has its origin in God. It is rather caused by the poor surrendering to the forces of evil and not applying themselves to the whole counsel of God. In other words poverty is caused not just by a lack of faith but by the giving in to the forces of evil. Russell Toohey makes this clear. He explains the roots of poverty and social evil in the following way:

R: What I have seen is that poverty is a condition that doesn't exist independently, it is often related to the worship practices of those poor people who are poor. For example, in Africa, witchcraft is common. If you read Deuteronomy 28 for example, we see that God specifically says that he will curse witchcraft practices. It might take generations, but its inevitable that people practice witchcraft they get progressively poorer. Another issue is bloodletting, which happens all over Africa. The bible is clear that when there is a loss of innocent blood, that subsequently God will curse the land, and eventually the land will spew out the inhabitants who are guilty of bloodletting. Now, when we see how the land in Africa has progressively become hostile, how ...there is drought. All of these factors show you that the hand of God. It is the bloodletting which destroys Africa.

So the poor are often to blame, for their plight.

Then , there's systems political systems that are intrinsically evil and for that we can blame the devil obviously. But then and this is round the world, Presidents themselves would consult occults, witchdoctors and the rest of them. In effect, they release curses over their nation and as we've seen in Africa, so on many levels. We see the causes of poverty, and responsibility must be claimed by even the governments of Africa. Because they entrench poverty by consulting occults, mediums and the rest of it.

I would say that's another big cause another big factor in the breakdown of our moral fibre and our nationhood is a destruction of family. God is a family man and where there's a destruction of family, there's all kinds of resulting evil released on society. Without a doubt in South Africa, the Afrikaners methodically dismantled the family and as the result they've created an absolute monster. The country became ungovernable, and we've seen all kinds of lack of discipline in our populace. ...by the group areas act, and their promotion of migrant labor, we saw that Black families in particular were destroyed. ... So, basically the nation was just destroyed in a very short time by the Boers. By destroying the family they destroyed the nation (P09:203-204).

Russell Toohey raises a number of issues but the main thrust seems to be that, as he put it, 'the poor are to blame for their plight'. Notably he does not clearly distinguish between individual and communal failure in respect to the plight of the poor. In true African fashion, where one lives through and because of the relationship with the others, the sin of the one

becomes the sin of all and vice versa<sup>19</sup>. Poverty must therefore be seen in relation to what the poor are doing as individuals but even more importantly as part of a nation or society.

Consequently the poor or their leaders are to blame because their poverty is broad upon them due to wrong worship practices, and the performing of witchcraft. Furthermore the shedding of innocent blood, and governments which indulge in occult practices or destroy the family add to the plight of the poor. Poverty is therefore more than just the result of unjust economics, a legacy of colonial exploitation or Apartheid, or even a lack of faith. Poverty is a curse. It is a curse which is bestowed by God in response to practices by nations, societies and its leaders which are not in line with what is perceived as God's will.

Hilton Toohey confirms this notion of poverty being a curse to the nations. In his view poverty stricken nations don't do the will of God as he indicates by pointing to what charismatic circles call the 10/40 window. The term '10/40 window' refers to a "belt that extends from West Africa across Asia, between 10 degrees north to 40 degrees north of the equator". This geographical area forms a "rectangular shaped window" and includes countries, like for example Sudan, Libya, Saudi Arabia, India and China. The countries located in the 10/40 window "have in common that 2/3 of the world's population which has not yet been reached with the gospel live there. Furthermore the heartland of Islam is located in the 10/40 window" (cf. [www.crosswinds](http://www.crosswinds)). In respect to the existing relationship between 'not doing the will of God' and 'being in poverty' Hilton Toohey remarks in relation to the countries located in the 10/40 window:

H: You know very often why poverty prevails is because darkness prevails. But when the light of the gospel is come, everything about your life will change. You find in the 10/40 window, where the majority of those nations don't serve God. Darkness prevails. The greatest poverty is in the 10/40 window. Am I right? But you'll find as soon as people turn to the Lord, and the light comes in, your whole life will change. Because God is a God who blesses you (H04:79).

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19 Russell Toohey, as one might argue, applies the African concept of "Ubuntu" which is more than "humanness" and "compassion" (Richardson 1996:139, cf. Battle 1996:94-97) but might be used to describe the African world view in general. Because, as I would call it, using Sundermeier's terminology, Ubuntu sees life as an "interdependent relationship" between the living, the ancestors, and creation (Sundermeier 1988:27.124-128). If this "interdependent relationship" is broken it is not just the individual but the whole of society and creation which suffers. In that sense Russell Toohey presents a very African perspective. He moves beyond that African perspective and takes a very particular biblical view when he criticizes Africans for practicing, what he calls, witchcraft. Because, from an African point of view, the consultation of the ancestors would not be seen as witchcraft, bringing God's curse upon the people, but as proper response to restore "Ubuntu," the interdependent relationship of all things, thus acting in accordance with the African interdependent and holistic view of the world.

Once again, poverty is understood as a curse brought upon the nations not just because they don't believe in God. It is brought upon by the fact that people or nations do not actively serve the biblical God. Breakthrough International does not call poverty a curse on account of a lack of faith by people or nations but rather on account of a lacking spirituality which submits to the biblical God and leads a to life accordance with that God.

### 3. Listening to the experience of the poor as spiritualizing of poverty

As we have seen above Breakthrough International's understanding of poverty is based on the personal experience of the people themselves. They experience being poor. Even more important they experience God through the intervention of the Spirit, as the one who breaks their bondage to poverty. Breakthrough International' understanding of the poor as the context of its ministry must therefore be understood within a spiritual framework. For the people of Breakthrough International listening to the poor means primarily to listen to their own experience of poverty as a spiritual problem. The experience of the Spirit befalls the believer in a rather personal and all encompassing way which also addresses personal poverty. Consequently poverty assumes a whole new dimension and becomes a spiritual rather than a social or political matter. Russell Toohey calls this kind reframing of poverty the 'spiritualizing of poverty'. He illustrates it by talking about Luke 4 and John 6:

R: I'm definitely inclined to spiritualize Luke 4. We are stronger on the anointing, preaching, proclaiming, than on literally uplifting the poor visiting prisoners working with the politically oppressed directly. ... In our eyes, Jesus deliberately sidestepped Kingship. This is clear from John 6, which would have laid a political emphasis to His call. And so we would likewise, give less emphasis to political strength. However our ministry has attracted more poor than rich. As we have proclaimed the gospel their social well-being has improved social standing. I mean that's inevitable, so definitely this is a core teaching of ours ... the anointing will break the yoke of bondage and so we focus on the flow and the operation of the Holy Spirit (P08:200).

In Russell Toohey's view Jesus himself spiritualized poverty by refusing in John 6 to become the 'king of bread' (John 6:15) and stressing that he is the bread of life (John 6:3). Consequently Breakthrough International seems primarily concerned with spirituality rather than with issues of poverty alleviation and social justice within the public domain. One might say that poverty is not seen as the real problem of those who are poor. The real problem is rather a lack of spiritual bond with the king who can provide the Kingdom goods.



Interestingly enough this 'spiritualization of poverty' does not lead Breakthrough International to neglect to listen to the daily needs of the poor as the outside observer might expect. The opposite seems to be happening. Despite understanding poverty within a spiritual framework the voice of the poor is heard in very practical as well as personal ways. How this happens will be described below.

### 3.1. Listening to the poor from within - addressing bread and butter issues

Breakthrough International's 'listening to the poor', which means primarily listening to the experience of its own people, takes place in several ways. One major way is a rather hands on approach where the poor identify their needs on personal level and work towards elevating their poverty. This approach of addressing "Bread and Butter issues" is part of the church activities right from its early days as an example shared by Rose Rawlins might illustrate. She talks about the beginnings of Breakthrough International when she was having prayer meetings in her house and her husband was still into drinking.

R: ...Hilton and them they came and had a [prayer]meeting in our house ... it had a leak on the corner there. One day... while we having a prayer meeting the rain came down and it was really leaking. ...he said to me, Rose, I've got zinc there, I'm going to come and do your leak. ...and he came and fixed the roof (H03:46-48).

Doreen Ulbricht gives another account of this kind of hands on approach in which Breakthrough International 'ministers to the poor'. She recollects how the church started working in Happy Valley, an area of Pietermaritzburg which till this day is notorious for poverty, crime and social decay:

D: We used to have Sunday service there [at Happy Valley], we used to have meetings in the week then we started visiting homes, and doing Evangelism, reaching out to people. ...We did what the word of God said. That we have to be disciples, be fishers of men, you can't just go to church Sunday after Sunday and not reach out to people. We started ministering at the flats and Happy Valley. We had meetings there got quite a number of people saved .... We went in to the houses, we used to have meetings in their homes, we really nurtured them. And in the week we used go and educate them, and go and help them, clean their homes.

I never forget there was a young lady that stayed there and a very brilliant young woman, she just got into alcohol, she was living with a man there, unmarried, and we started to minister to her. We said, you know, you are an intelligent women. What are you doing here? She was matriculated and all that. But she had taken all her teeth out of her mouth for some reason she had to, and because of all this she was

looking old and yet she was a young woman. Indeed she was a beautiful attractive woman. So we made an appointment at the hospital for her to get false teeth, and one thing led to another we got her dressed up properly....we tried to get her a job. ...She started working , she came out of that place, we ministered to her, we kept ministering to her, and you know that young woman is in Durban now, absolutely sound, she's still saved and she's married to somebody else, and is absolutely normal.

And it used to be things like that that we did. We had to really roll up our sleeves because we felt , well we can't just give them the spiritual, we have to do things in the natural, show them how you can live a proper life. We didn't just talk, and poverty is always been there, and we used to say, "You have ground, why don't you plant?" And they started to plant. There was one, a lady there in Happy Valley, I know her name was Winnie. She had such a beautiful garden that she used to give us vegetables from her garden. We used to just give her the seeds, give her the plants to plant. "You've got enough land to plant, so you plant." And they lived so happy. Her whole life, there was just a transformation in the whole family (H02:18-19).

An account like this gives a good overall impression of the character of the ministry of Breakthrough International in its early days. Despite their understanding of poverty as primarily a spiritual and personal problem it seemed to be obvious that one can't 'just give the spiritual only'. Being a spiritual movement which was growing from within a context of poverty the people of Breakthrough International were aware about the role they had to play. They had to 'roll up their sleeves' and get involved and lives improved.

This kind of 'hands on approach', where the Spiritual is combined with very practical advise and help and improve the life of the people is still a major trait within Breakthrough International's ministry. One more example, which comes along with a strong spiritual focus, centers around an attempt by Breakthrough International to get its people debt free. Russell Toohey explains:

R: ...two years ago I did a 21 part exhortation for the offering on how to be debt-free. How to be financially free. A number of people cut up their accounts, you know, those plastic cards, and got rid of credit cards and so forth, because I teach strongly there's no ways you can give to God..., when your money's all tied up in debt and accounts. And so we encourage financially, relationally, mentally, we must live by a different system (P08:201).

This exhortation on how to be debt free was followed up by a workshop on financial matters as Russell Toohey elaborates:

R: ...in the afternoon we had people being taught how to make wills, how to draft wills, and how to budget, and then the legalities of starting a new business. And then we had another guy in talking about government tenders, and how to access them. So forth...(P08:195).

A cynic might comment and say that this type of advice serves basically the purpose of increasing Breakthrough International income through offerings. But Breakthrough International would itself see itself rather responding to a major problem which especially the poor in their midst face. Their money is tied up in several accounts for clothing, furniture and even basic food stuffs. This is caused by the questionable South African business practice that all major retail stores are offering credit facilities to their customers in order to increase turnover and open up the banking sector as a new market segment. The implications for the poor are dire since they are encouraged to buy even their basic necessities on credit. They often don't realize that they can't effort the additional interest payments which hover around 14% to 16 %, and makes them pay two or threefold for items like furniture and clothing. So for Breakthrough International it is as logical to address this issue of personal finance as it is to fix a roof or teach people how to plant a vegetable garden, because these are real problems of its people.

We might therefore note in summary that Breakthrough International addresses the “bread and butter” issues which face the poor in a twofold manner. They are given practical skills to address their immediate needs. Therefore people learn for instance how to plant a garden and how to manage personal finance. Simultaneously they are seen as spiritual beings who are in need getting closer to the King who provides the Kingdom goods. Therefore the issue of personal finance is not just a matter of practicalities but understood with a spiritual twist, because the spiritual well being is a decisive factor which determines the personal well being in the ‘natural’ (Doreen Ulbricht).

### 3.2 Listening to the poor – empower, shape character, free from poverty

Next to the “hands on” approach detailed above another approach towards the context of the poor has become quite central within Breakthrough International. This approach has to do with the building of character and empowering people to take control of their own life. An illustration by Rose and Chester Rawlins might indicate what this means. Rose Rawlins talks about a man who had been to one of their ‘ campaigns’ and had experienced the Holy Spirit which he just calls “the feeling”:

R: Now it was interesting on Sunday Chester was ministering and sharing about a couple we know [from when] we had a campaign... [after the campaign] he continued

to come [to church] and then he wasn't coming, and they sent us to go and see where is he. And he said there was a nice feeling he had from the campaign. Now he hasn't got that nice feeling anymore. What can we do to give him "The feeling" again.

So I'm saying to this guy, you know when you married your wife, there was a lot of feelings involved. But I can tell you that after a couple of years, you are not operating on feelings any more. You don't walk on that hype any more but you are still here with your family. I said its the same with church. Feelings, they disappear, and we got to continue walking. ...I said well I'm here for Jesus tonight, he's going to get you ready to get ready to keep going on this journey of building you up, of building your character up, you know...

L: So Jesus is not only about the giving of feeling its giving character?

R: That's it, after the feeling, what do we do then? ... definitely, and when the hype

C: gets finished, what happens after the hype?

R: ...you need to walk with them [new believers], and take them beyond the feeling factor (H03:57-58).

Rose and Chester Rawlins see character building as an integral part of the experience of the Holy Spirit. They acknowledge that the people who are attracted to their way of doing church are often drawn by what they call "hype". But they identify character building as one of the real challenges before the people of Breakthrough International. Noleen Howard exemplifies this point by sharing her own story. She speaks about her understanding of church and says:

N: Well, I don't know, I don't want to speak from a theological or whatever point. I speak from my personal point. For me, what is church? ...I think, you know, going back and forth, it is the Holy Spirit that makes it. Because I don't see any difference between the Anglican church and lets say our church, except the Holy Spirit. Because the word only kills but the Spirit makes it alive. The problem for me is that there was no feeling [in the Anglican Church], and I like to feel, even sometimes it is painful. But there was no feeling for me, no heart there. And I think for me that was the difference. ...I am only talking from experience, I don't know any theology, when you come in [into the experience of the Spirit], there is such a grace upon your life. You just accept Christ, and wow, you can tell anyone, you can just do anything. [But] I found, that the more you walk with God you realize: "Hey, this really is not about feeling!" And you kind of hit the ground and you realize now: "This is a relationship, where you have to got to give up some things, stop doing some things and realize it is hard work." Now it is work. Because nothing happens unless you work on it. Whereas when you got saved, the Lord just carries you, you know. But know, what is changed, for me it is, even the longer you walk with him, the deeper he goes, and obviously the more serious he becomes. You realize it is really not a feeling, ...I found this is now really tough to walk the way God says we need to walk (P02:106-107).

Initially Noleen Howard was overcome by the moving of the Spirit on an emotional level. The 'feeling' was there in overwhelming fashion. But as her spiritual journey continued she realized that the experience of the Spirit is not just about feelings but about changing lifestyle and behavior. It is about 'a relationship with the Lord which is hard work and makes you

change and give up things'. Noleen Howard's experience of being taken beyond the feeling factor is seemingly an experience the ministry of Breakthrough International is geared towards. Russell Toohey confirms this as he describes the character of the ministry:

R: we're doing our utmost to empower the people and to train them and improve their own life. ...the kind of leadership training that we do, is, if they engage in it wholeheartedly, they [are] going to be the most outstanding people in every sector; at home, as families, and in the work-a-day world (P08:195).

Breakthrough International seems to be of the opinion that the experience of the Spirit needs to go beyond the feeling factor and engage people in what it called leadership training which takes 'the feeling' on a level of behavior, personal life style, and values. Irvin Howard, one of the pastors of Breakthrough International elaborates on this point. He explains why the character building aspect of the experience of the Spirit is so important for the context of Breakthrough International's ministry. He says:

I: ...I think a lot of the guys of the poor come here too, because its a good place. Its a place where we develop people, because at the end of the day I'd rather teach you how to fish, than give you fish. So my policy is if people come with financial needs, we'll try and meet your immediate need, if there's a desperate need, but then we need to take it a little bit further, because otherwise I'm just wasting money ... I mean there's guys who come in just as ordinary employees who are now managers. Some guys who were battling financially being offered positions that triple their salaries kind of story cause we basically teach people look here, you don't have to be where you are (P01:100).

Both Russell Toohey and Irvin Howard make the point that they see Breakthrough International in the ministry of building up people. The people themselves, as we can see for example in Nolen Howard's story, experience Breakthrough International as a place where they are being developed. Here it is worth reminding ourselves that both, Russell Toohey as well as Irvin Howard, talk from within the context of the poverty prevalent in the community where Breakthrough International locates its ministry. Talking from that background they see personal development and character building as core needs of "their people". To achieve this kind of individual growth and development in a church with a membership of about 700 adults is difficult since the growth and development of people requires individual attention. Becoming increasingly aware of that problem Breakthrough International changed the structure of its operation in 1994 (cf. III.B.8.). The church turned from what it calls a 'program-based church' to be a 'cell-based church' (M07:6). This change is of great significance to understand the operation of Breakthrough International and its response to context of the poor. Because the cell groups have become the basic tool through which

Breakthrough International responds to its context of poverty on a personal level. Russell Toohey explains what the focus of the cell based church is,

R: ...we are strong on participation. We are strong on leadership, raising up leaders, and so I actually teach that the center of Spiritual life for the church is the cell group, not any event happening during the week or on Sunday morning. That's why we call ourselves the cell-based church. And the whole most engaging, growing, maturing, meeting of the church is the cell meeting, because people get to participate in leadership ...most of the Spiritual life is generated and focused on the cell groups (P08:192).

The Cell Leaders Training manual details the significance of the cell group for the life of the church and the development of its people. There one can read:

The "Cell Church" is a New Testament form of church life. ....The basic building block of a Cell Church is a community of 7-15 persons...It is a fundamental value of cell churches that EVERY CHRISTIAN IS A MINISTER... we must have a method whereby a new believer can be equipped to start ministering to others as soon as possible...the size of the group is small, with an emphasize on being intimate. The groups move from house to house. Activities are not only focused on weekly worship services. The support system is based on believers building up one another. The relationships are intimate and focused on helping one another. Discipling is a "mouth to ear" process, using modeling and shaping of personal values. ...Teachings are focused to enable members to apply the scriptures to need and relationships....the evaluation test for members is "how you serve", not "what you know" (M08:1.1-1.3)

By becoming a cell-based church Breakthrough International sees itself continue to do what it has done right from the beginning. It takes people beyond the feeling factor and raises them up to be leaders with strong personal values applying a scriptural lifestyle to their own way of life as well to begin as soon as possible to minister to others.

The ecclesiological implications of this kind of approach can not be discussed here because we are looking at Breakthrough International way of listening to the experience of the poor. However, we note within the context of what we call 'listening to the poor': The goal of shaping character and empowering people to become leaders, thus changing their personal outlook on life, enabling them to minister, is of paramount importance for Breakthrough International. This is how the church responds to the experience of the poor, which is essentially its own experience. The cell-groups therefore have become a tool of 'teaching people how to fish rather than giving them a fish' to use Irvin Howard's words, because it is a place where people built up one another. The underlying assumption is that this building up of people will enable them to deal with their poverty and help them to excel in life moving out of their poverty.

A key issue in respect to building up people is that Breakthrough International views its people primarily as leaders or leaders in the making. Even though its people are often poor, badly educated and from disadvantaged backgrounds Breakthrough International focuses on a very structured leadership-training. The cell group is one central element of that leadership-training program. The message which is being spread and put into practice is that whatever background someone is coming from, he or she is a potential leader. He or she takes charge of his own life and in addition becomes a leader of others in the cell-group system. This is possible on a practical level because the cell group system is constantly in need of new leaders since its aim is to “manufacture new Cells” (M08:1.2).

In other words the cell-groups achieve a twofold aim. They provide a close support and monitoring structure for each other and they provide a place where people develop, practice and affirm their leadership skills. This results within Breakthrough International’s reasoning in improved lives. The issue of poverty is addressed through character-building and empowerment. Noleen Howard says it like this:

N: The characters are built, many times, I find with people, that when they have to deal with an issue of their lives they want to run away and become isolated ... and when they [are] in a loving small group situation and if the cell leader and his cell trainee has a caring heart, they can help these people through these areas of struggle (P04:139).

A good way of summarizing the significance of the cell system to Breakthrough International’s listening to the poor might be to quote from a description of a cell-meeting by Rose and Chester Rawlins. They say:

R: If you want to be holistic you have to realize that when you look at an area, a neighborhood, or township which is terrible, you need to look on how you can change it. If you change one man ... you’ve done your task. Then you are beginning to change the area. Now a cell meeting, is not a bible study. Neither is it a prayer meeting, Its a meeting where you share information together and were we talk. You tell me where are you. What’s happening. You know, you do the kind of things that men normally don’t want to talk about in church. ... I mean I am not afraid to do that with people in a cell meeting, to share my own self and to tell them that I also have had to come through things, bad things. And suddenly people believe in the system of cell, suddenly they believe, OK, I can trust, them, and than they will open themselves...

C: I think most of the people are used to prayer meetings. They are used to meetings to take place in people’s houses and they think they just should be like prayer meetings so when we get into a home they got chairs set out like church. But when we come there we say: “NO, No, No, No!”

R: We say: “Let’s look at each other.”

- C: Let's put the chairs round, let's sit round and look at each other, and just talk let's have a Jesus type of ministry here (H02:56).

### 3.3. Listening to the poor – salvation on an empty stomach is hard to digest

As we have seen poverty is understood as personal and spiritual matter ever since Breakthrough International started its ministry. The issue of poverty is therefore primarily addressed through what Breakthrough International calls “Salvation”. It is through salvation that the individual is set into a new reality which enables him or her to address the challenges posed by poverty. This seems to be the prevalent view held by the church. But interestingly enough another dimension of listening to the poor is emerging. Within that emerging view the connection between salvation and blessing, the circle of ‘redemption and lift’ (Russell Toohey), is not as apparent as it used to be.

Notably this new way of listening to the experience of the poor is growing especially among those who are second generation members of Breakthrough International or who come from a relatively well off background. These, often younger people, have seen what the salvation of their parents or their own salvation has done to improve their personal life in terms of rising out of poverty and leaving behind social marginalization. But despite that “redemption and lift” (P08:196-197) experience on a personal level they don't necessary insist that the focus in dealing with poverty must be on the on the ‘spiritual rather than the natural’. ‘Salvation’, though still being perceived as the most important prerequisite for an effective fight against poverty, is viewed within the wider and complex social reality in which the poor try to make a living. Patrick Dlamini explains this new and still emerging perspective on poverty within a minority of Breakthrough International as he responds to the question what Breakthrough International can do for the poor. He says:

- P: I am particularly aware of a problem that exists between saving people from hell but at the same time make their life better here. Mission and church as a whole is designed in a way as if it just redirects people from hell to the Kingdom. But in a way we need to see that it doesn't just re-direct people from hell into the Kingdom. But its got something to do with what happens with your life whilst you are here on earth. I particularly believe, that we have been taking the gospel forward in an amazing way. But I now also see that there is no ways that I can come to a person who is on an empty stomach, who does not know where their next meal is coming from. I can't just come and press Jesus to them and turn around and say: “Now you can die in your poverty - the only difference is that you are not going to hell (P07:183).



Patrick Dlamini is aware of the problem that he can't just apply the traditional charismatic approach and tell someone who lives in poverty that Jesus is going to save him or her from hell. He feels the tension which exists between 'redirecting people from hell to the Kingdom' and the social reality encountered 'whilst here on earth'. Developing his point further he takes an example from scripture and says:

P: When you look at Jesus, it is very fascinating to think that even himself when he had the 5000 men that he had been ministering to, he had to deal with that issue. The disciples come to him and they display the very mentality of the church these days. They come to him and they say: "Listen its getting late and these people are hungry. Send them home quickly before they become our burden." In other words they say: "You've given them spiritual food, but we are not in a position to give them physical food. So send them away, so they can get to hotels and those kind of things." But what does Jesus say? He says: "No man, we cannot send them away on an empty stomach! ... isn't there something we have amongst us that we can do?"

Jesus challenges us to change our thinking. A lot of churches think that we are impoverished that we don't have nothing to give. Like the disciples they send those who are hungry away. They think the hungry should go and try and find something out there. In other words, they say the church can do nothing. It needs to send the people away so that they can go and ask other people out there to give something they can utilize to feed themselves. But Jesus says: "No isn't there anything amongst us that we can utilize?". And there comes up a young man with his few loaves of bread and a fish and the Lord blesses it, and he feeds them. So after having fed them, he has not only just taken care of the spiritual needs of the hungry, but he has met their immediate need. Which was hunger at that particular moment (P07:183-184).

Patrick Dlamini uses this scriptural perspective and suggest the following consequences for mission and the ministry of the church:

So I feel that in terms of missions – especially within Africa we cannot just go with the gospel alone. But at the same time what we need to do is that we need to have resources and things that we are able to meet people's instant need. But also, at the same time we need to be careful not jeopardizing or killing their minds as such and making them dependent by being always at the receiving end. So definitely the gospel should be advancing, Africa needs the gospel like never before. But above that, people also have needs, and the gospel tells us to meet those needs.

But you know, people will fight with me on this one. Because they would say: "Isn't it the greatest need to go to heaven – so why talking about other needs?" But I tell them that we've got many people that we have sent off to heaven. But they have never experienced God's goodness and God's faithfulness, and his provision on this side. And who's to blame for that, that people don't feel God's goodness in this world already? It is us as the church (P07:183-184).

This rather lengthy argument reflects a growing feeling within Breakthrough International towards the inadequacy of the traditional charismatic approach in respect to poverty. As we have seen, this approach focuses on spirituality in the private rather than the public domain (Wessels). Social involvement in the public domain is seen as "the social stuff", to say it in

Rhoda Toohey's words (H04:78). This 'social stuff' has no real significance for the overall ministry. But people within Breakthrough International seem to become increasingly aware of the danger to focus exclusively on the private rather than the public domain (cf. Wright 1993:31) which might let them fail in their duty to "question the system more" (Freston 2001:179). Nina Toohey, for instance, questions her own spirituality in that respect as she responds to the question of how prayer can feed the people:

N: I'm beginning to see that as Christians we need to see the reality of that, that prayer does not put bread on the table. I know of many people in my church specifically one family where they have no food. And the lady is an amazing praying lady. So I have had to realize that together with prayer, life need to change for the people. I have to play my part there as well. I need to be God's hands! So if I'm aware of a need prayer is not enough. I need to supply whatever like bread and whatever, to get involved (P04:137).

Nina Toohey starts to question the traditional charismatic view because she experiences that one of the ladies in the church, an amazing prayer lady, is still battling to feed her family. The 'redemption and lift' effect seemingly does not happen which leads her to see that she needs to get involved more. Anthony Toohey, a brother of the senior pastor of Breakthrough International puts it quite plainly He says:

A: ...in the past we've been very caught up with being overly Spiritual. ... Like I said earlier on, there's a lot of stuff, we are honing in on certain scripture, and we are not totally bible-based. [Because] there is a big social element in scripture, a very big social element. Its definitely not as big as the Spiritual aspects, which is supposed to get you to heaven. But we have a social responsibility and the church has neglected to preach this. I think the church at large had neglected to speak about it (P06:163-164).

This neglect of preaching about social responsibility has surfaced within the life of the church in a quite significant manner as Russell Toohey recollects. He refers to an incident when a young man, coming from a poor family himself, voiced his discontentment with Breakthrough International's ministry to the poor. Russell Toohey recounts:

R: ...a young man, Richard Gumbie, who was one of five children that his mother had from different men, gave me a letter once. He challenged our ministry to the poor. I said no problem, read it in front of the church. .... so he took over the care ministry opening soup kitchens, and connecting with Tandanani, the Aids ministry. They were busy in Edendale Hospital helping with Aids orphans every weekend. ...We were helping the street kids from Khaya Lethu. I have still got a cut-out of the newspaper I think it was titled: "Street Kids Angels" ...But we are not nearly as organized as we want to be (P08:196).

Richard Gumbie's initiative gave voice to a growing concern among those in Breakthrough International who felt that their ministry needed, at least to a certain extent, move towards the

public domain. On a structural level Breakthrough International therefore utilized its Care Ministry to reach out and work with aids-sufferers, street children and other people in need. This broadened Breakthrough International's involvement with the poor. It in effect modified its traditional charismatic understanding that poverty is a private matter ultimately related to the question of personal salvation. Care Ministries involvement with soup kitchens, Aids-orphans and street children pointed out that in certain circumstances the effective needs of the poor might take precedence over their need of salvation. This does not mean that social activism in the public domain might replace the need to save people. Because, to use Anthony Toohey's words, the 'social element in scriptures is definitely not as big as the Spiritual which is supposed to get you to heaven'.

Jacinthia Toohey, sister in law to the senior pastor of Breakthrough now heading the Care Ministry points to this interesting change within the overall way in which Breakthrough International views its ministry. She does not give up on the traditional charismatic believe that salvation, the 'redirection of the individual to heaven', is the main objective. But as she talks about the objectives of the Care Ministry she adds that social activism has importance in itself. She says

J: ... we are reaching out to a specific type of people firstly. Aids affected, needy people. But for me it is directly a line of the scripture, where God speaks of how we must take care of his people. So we start inside the church. So the Care Ministry aligns itself with the churches objectives by being first and foremost a ministry that must care for our people. And then reach out to the larger community, and in that ministering to people through our resources. ... I always looked to care ministry as a draw card to reach people and minister the gospel to them. ... We have soup kitchen on Thursdays, with the street people (P06:162).

.... Some of them can't read and write. Some of them come from good homes ... we said no, you know what, we need to work on a program, something where we could maybe rehabilitate them to their families or a normal stable life. So, ja we are looking at Breakthrough Church International being a place where people can come for joining a rehab program and be able to through the ministry, work them out off the streets. And its not just for them to come every Thursday and get a meal and get prayed for and get back to the street. We must be able to impact their lives. We haven't got all the infrastructure together yet, and all the processes together, but the foundations, yes, their are there (P06:164).

For Jacinthia Toohey 'social stuff' (Rhoda Toohey) has value in itself. She acknowledges that she always looked to Care Ministry as a draw card to reach people and minister the gospel to them (P06:162). But seemingly social involvement in the public domain is more than a vehicle to do the 'real stuff' which would be to save the people from hell. She sees the church

in danger to neglect the poor (P06:165) and calls for an involvement with the poor so that their lives may be changed in real terms and not only redirected to heaven.

In conclusion we might once again state that this call for social action seems to be representing a minority position within Breakthrough International. It falls on deaf ears within the wider church membership as Jacinthia Toohey readily admits. She agrees that it seems to be easier to get the people of Breakthrough International together for a prayer meetings than for a campaign of social activism (P06:163). But what needs to be noted here is the fact that at least within some people an awareness has grown that 'salvation on an empty stomach is hard to digest'.

## **E. BCI's experience of the Spirit within culture as the medium of God's Mission**

### **1. The intimate experience of the Spirit creating a ministry 'above culture'**

We have argued throughout our work that Breakthrough International's way of thinking, its making sense of what they experience as reality, is to tell its story. It is through the narrative that Breakthrough International reflects on and creates truth. Breakthrough International understanding of truth is therefore understood best by listening to its story-telling through which the observer might access its narrative thinking process. Notably within that 'narrative thinking process' Breakthrough International does not reflect as specifically on culture as one might expect from a church which locates its ministry in a multicultural context like South Africa. Culture in itself, as a medium through which the gospel is communicated is not emphasized by Breakthrough International for reasons which seem to be based on certain preconceived notions within Breakthrough International's thinking. Before we embark on a study of Breakthrough International practical approach toward culture as the medium of its ministry we need to look at these preconceived notions.

Generally speaking it appears as if culture is understood by Breakthrough International in three ways. Firstly it is something to pay attention to for the sake of mission. Secondly it is something which has little or no relevance to the believer since he or she has such an intimate and experiential relationship with the Spirit, making culture irrelevant. And finally, because of that existing intimacy with the Spirit within the believer, Breakthrough International views itself 'above rather' than 'of culture', to use a terminology which derives from of Richard H. Niebuhr. We will deal with the issue of 'cultural attentiveness for the sake of mission' below (III.E.2.1.), but for now we need to discuss the other two issues. Because the perceived 'intimacy with the Spirit' existing in the believer creates a attitude of being 'above culture' which appears to be fundamental for Breakthrough International's understanding of culture.

To begin with we might point out that we have dealt at length with the fact that Breakthrough International sees the experience of the Spirit as a personal and intimate experience and that this 'intimacy with God', as Rhoda Toohey calls it, is of paramount significance for its ministry (cf. III.B.+C.). The intimacy with which the believer is supposedly relating to God

has important consequences for the way in which the relationship between mission and culture is viewed within the ministry of Breakthrough International. Hilton Toohey points this out as he is asked: "What makes a church grow?" This is what he has to say:

H: It is prayer, prayer makes the church grow. The church is a supernatural thing. And if you think you're going to grow from natural programs, it doesn't work. Its a supernatural thing. And if God adds growth, he'll bring the right people (H04:84).

He adds an important remark about his understanding of the kingdom of God which is significant because it underlines the importance of intimacy with God. Hilton Toohey continues:

H: Bible says, the Kingdom of God is Righteousness peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (H04:84).

Hilton Toney view is that the church is a supernatural creation and the aim of the Kingdom of God is to experience the joy in the Holy Ghost. These two points remind us of the distinction between the natural and the Spiritual which Hilton Toohey has made before. When he talked about the issue of women being ordained into the ministry he referred to the realm of the natural where the woman had to be an obedient wife while she could be a pastor and leader in the realm of the Spiritual. This distinction is important for Breakthrough International's understanding of culture as a medium of mission as well. Because now we see him applying this distinction in respect to the church as a whole. The Church is built on prayer which for Hilton as well as Rhoda Toohey is one of the most intimate ways of relating to God. It is through prayer that the Church comes into being which is in itself a supernatural occurrence. Hilton Toohey experienced his personal calling into the ministry through a 'supernatural Spirit encounter' which let him to experience 'joy in the Holy Ghost'. Coming from this personal experience he sees the gospel being spread and the church been established in supernatural and intimate ways. In his view the gospel is communicated to society supernaturally thus not bound to the realm of the natural. In other words, there is no natural or, as we might say for our purposes, cultural way, of communicating the gospel to society. Because a church can not be built on natural programs but must be build by the supernatural and intimate intervention of the Spirit.

This line of thought based on the experience of the Spirit has clear implications for the way in which culture, being part of the natural, is understood within Breakthrough International.

‘The natural’, henceforth culture, has little to no significance for the coming of the Kingdom of God which is characterized by joy in the Holy Ghost. This joy in the Holy Ghost is a supernatural reality which can not be attained in natural hence cultural ways. In short: Culture is insignificant for promotion of the Kingdom since the intimate and personal Spirit encounter transcends culture. Salvation is therefore not mediated through the natural or cultural but a spiritual, hence supernatural, event

This way of thinking might be illustrated by an issue which is of great significance for the South African context and here especially to the churches in the Black communities. In the Black communities people tend to emphasize that membership within certain structures of the church, for instance the women’s leagues or men’s leagues, must go along with the wearing of a respective uniform. A women’s league member of the Lutheran Church would for instance wear a black and white uniform, while the Methodist women would stick to a red uniform and so forth. The wearing of uniforms is of such significance for the cultural expression of one’s faith that someone would be buried in his or her respective uniform. Because the uniform identifies the deceased with a particular belief system. Hilton Toohey responds to this widespread cultural practice in the following way:

H: We don't encourage uniforms and all that. Because we don't want the exterior to make us feel different. It must be the changing of the heart. That's what we emphasize a lot. So its not on clothing, and its uniforms, no we don't want to get involved in all of that. That makes you exclusive and different to compared the other denominations. We don't want to identify ourselves by these outward signs like other denominations do. They distinguish each other by the color of their uniforms. But we say "no, let's concentrate on the heart. Knowing God is a heart thing, God wants to change us from the inside (H04:82)

The issue of the uniforms, which is so important to some faith communities in South Africa that someone might even be excluded from the service if he or she does not wear the proper uniform, is seen by Breakthrough International as secondary feature. What is of primary importance is the intimacy with the Spirit, which is basically a matter of the heart while the issue of the “uniform is trivial” (P03:129).

This example indicates the general attitude towards culture as a medium of the God’s mission within Breakthrough International. The mission of God happens in a supernatural way henceforth all its cultural expressions are inconsequential since experience of the Spirit is not mediated through culture. What is important though is that the Spirit is experienced by a

person in an intimate fashion. Uniforms and other cultural practices are therefore secondary. It might even be dangerous to be caught up in the cultural expressions of faith, such as order of services, uniforms, and other traditions which have evolved within the Christian churches in South Africa. Because the church might betray its mandate to call people into a personal relationship with the Spirit by being to caught up in these 'ways of the natural'. Patrick Dlamini makes this point as he explains what he has against the church of his birth and upbringing, the Catholic Church. He says:

P: ... I have something against the Catholic Church. Because ...the fact that I could have stayed there and in the whole growing up until the age of fourteen, sixteen, I'd never been told that I'm to be born again, that what I have against the old way of doing church. All these traditions and customs but I could have been deprived of salvation; I would have went right into hell, sitting in the church..... So I was really deprived of the truth. Church made no social or cultural differences, people would live with each other as if there was no difference (P07:176-177).

Patrick Dlamini finds its dangerous if the church associates with certain cultural practices, on account of his personal story, because to promote all these traditions and practices endangered his chances of being saved. Even worse it might have deprived him of salvation right in the middle of an active traditional church life. Because, as he sees it, at the center of a spiritual life stands the need of being born again. This being born again has in view of Breakthrough International little to do with any cultural expression or mediation of faith, but is a supernatural event. If Patrick Dlamini would have remained in the 'old -Catholic- way of doing church', this supernatural event might not have happened. He might have done all the right practices but no one might have told him that he needed to be born again. Therefore he might have missed out on the most important issue of faith which is to be born again into an intimate relationship with God. Something which is not mediated through any religious thus cultural practice, but happens supposedly in a supernatural way transcending all cultural forms and expressions.

What is stressed in all this is the closeness with the Spirit happening as supernatural event. This leads Breakthrough International to view its ministry 'above' rather than 'of' culture', to use Niebuhr's terminology. Russell Toohey describes this 'being above' rather than 'in culture' operating according to a biblical world view.

R: ...we encourage people ... "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (Rom 12:2). I'm a great one for encouraging people to renew their minds. We are constantly training



on the Sunday evening – Bible school and a number s, we bring in new courses every so often, there's business courses, so that people are taken care of – marriage courses, so that they know how to live a Bible-based life no matter what field they are in ... so they can operate from a biblical world view ... (P08:201).

This reference to a life according to a biblical world view provides an important clarification in respect the understanding of Breakthrough International's relationship to culture. As we have seen culture in itself has little significance because it is part of the natural. Now we learn that the true calling before the believer is to live according to a biblical world view and not to conform to the pattern, one might say culture, of this world. In the center of this biblical way of life, or rather of the recreation of what is perceived as the biblical way of life, stands the intimacy with the Spirit, the joy in the Holy Ghost (Hilton Toohey).

Even though Breakthrough International might not use the term we might conclude that Breakthrough International would strive to live according to a 'Bible-based culture'. This does not refer to the actual way of life in biblical times. It refers to the fact that because Breakthrough International desires to live according to the biblical world view any cultural expression of faith would need to be designed accordingly. The term 'Bible-based culture' therefore needs to be understood in a very limited sense. This is why we have turned to terminology deriving from H.Richard Niebuhr's theological classic 'Christ and Culture' (1951) to describe Breakthrough International understanding of culture. Because Niebuhr's typology might help to explain what Russell Toohey means with 'living according to the biblical world view'. According to Niebuhr this position would constitute a 'Christ above culture' approach. Because Christ is understood as the "fulfillment of cultural aspirations and the restorer of the institutions of the true society" (Niebuhr 1951:42). Niebuhr continues his description of 'Christ above culture' and says:

...true culture is not possible unless beyond all human achievement, all human search for values, all human society. Christ enters into life from above with gifts which human aspirations has not envisioned and which human effort cannot attain unless he relates man to a supernatural society and a new value-center (Niebuhr 1951:42).

For those who model their understanding of culture according to a concept of 'Christ above culture' true culture is achieved through a supernatural revelation. This idea is something with which Breakthrough International could identify as well, because true culture is only found if the intimacy with the Spirit, which transforms all cultural expression of society, is achieved. The design and conduct of life should take place according to biblical patterns as

Breakthrough International would claim as well. The guiding principle in the shaping of culture is therefore to be 'Bible-based'. Anthony Toohey elaborates this point as follows:

- A: The social norms have changed over the years in society, our behavioral patterns have changed. But we as believers need to learn how to conduct ourselves. Things that weren't acceptable in societies gone by nowadays is the norm. You find that a lot of principles which are now governing our way of life in society are from Buddhism or Hinduism. But if we conduct ourselves like that we don't do what scripture says. Scripture says to the way how society conducts itself that 'your righteousness is like filthy rags'. But the behavior that would constitute our righteousness and a good society is what God talks about it in the beatitudes and in different parts of scripture. Therefore we need to behave in a certain manner which is what the bible tells us. But that what we've done in society at large, all the time we have lost that behavior. What we are saying is that scripture says that this is acceptable behavior and the society should live accordingly (P06:158).

Breakthrough International is convinced that in a world where the biblical world view would inform the behavior of society 'our righteousness would not be like filthy rags'. In this true way of life a Bible-based culture would be created. Russell Toohey clarifies this 'Christ above culture' perspective within Breakthrough International by explaining why he encourages his people to read the newspaper.

- R: Actually if I could, I would read the newspaper every day and current affairs, and magazines and the rest of it, because it illustrates stuff that usually I'm reading from the bible. And then it is also bears out the need for Christ in society, it illustrates the need for Christ, because the society need to learn from Christ what a true society is (P09:207).

By reading the newspaper Russell Toohey discovers the truth already contained in the bible and reflected in the world. In particular he understands the need of society for the message which is contained in scripture by turning to the worldly newspaper. It is clear from the outset that society is in need of Christ and a true society would be achieved if society would design its way of life according to biblical principles thus being 'above culture'.

In summary we might therefore say that Breakthrough International's understanding of culture is informed by the distinction between the natural and the supernatural. Since culture is part of the natural it has generally speaking no significance for the mediation of the gospel. This happens in a supernatural personal experience which establishes an intimate relationship with God and is not bound to cultural forms and expressions of faith. Consequently Breakthrough International sees its own ministry above rather than in culture creating a Bible-based way of life.

## 2. The experience of the Spirit creating a ministry 'of culture'

That Breakthrough International sees itself above rather than in culture is surprising if one looks at the actual way in which the church operates and rolls out its ministry. Because Breakthrough International, like Percy has observed as well in respect to the Charismatic Renewal movement in general, operates pretty much 'of culture' (cf. Percy 1997:215). This becomes evident by the fact that the church has little reluctance to utilize all kinds of 'worldly, modern ways of doing things' (cf. III.E.2.2) Despite the fact that Breakthrough International claims to be above culture it is quite willing to use worldly music, management techniques and technology to bring its message across, thus adapting to the ways of the world. In respect to management practices, to use just one example, Russell Toohey even sees himself in need of learning from the world, to be more 'of culture' for the sake of increased effectiveness. He says:

R: ...if I had the time, I would do business management type courses, just to keep abreast with latest ideas on management, because I find its absolutely vital for us to manage our work well, - not that those principles aren't in the bible anyhow. But we must be willing to learn from the worldly ways of doing things if it benefits our ministry (P09:207).

What is interesting here is the fact that Russell Toohey acknowledged the need for learning from the world and to 'keep abreast with the world'. But in the same breath he claims that what he might learn from the world can also be learned from the bible. This points to a certain inconsistency within Breakthrough International's thinking about culture. Its fundamental understanding of the experience of the Spirit makes the church see itself 'above culture' but on practical level the church is willing to be pretty much 'of culture'. On the one hand the intimate relationship with the Spirit puts the believer above culture. But on the other hand he or she tries to 'keep abreast with the latest ideas' so that the ministry can be more effective.

We therefore like to point to the observation that while in general Breakthrough International sees its ministry 'above culture' it has designed its ministry on a practical level as a ministry 'of culture'. This becomes especially evident in two areas of Breakthrough International's ministry which shall concern us now. Firstly Breakthrough International is evidently 'of culture' in designing its missionary outreach and evangelism. Secondly, and maybe even more strikingly Breakthrough International is on a practical level 'of culture' in respect to development of a personal and congregational life style according to a biblically informed

culture. In short: Breakthrough International is concerned with culture, thus 'of culture', by aiming to create a modern, Bible-based sub-culture.

### 2.1. The experience of the Spirit and contextualizing for the sake of mission

The most obvious way in which the issue of culture comes to the attention of Breakthrough International is in form of a possible problem in evangelism and mission. The South African society in general and the people of Pietermaritzburg in particular are made up of diverse cultures. Breakthrough International therefore is quite aware of the need to adjust its ministry (P08:200) for the sake of effective mission and evangelism.

Initially this awareness was not that strong because Breakthrough International, even though located in the culturally diverse South African setting, did not deliberately minister within the context of different cultures. The birth and development of the church was a Spirit leads process. Breakthrough International did therefore not reflect upon reaching out to various cultural context and its implications for the respective missionary approach. Culture was simply not an issue, because it was part of the natural. But this changed through what Hilton and Rhoda Toohey sees as an intervention by God. They recall that it was actually God's doing and not their own that the ministry of the church reached out to the different cultures represented in Pietermaritzburg. They remember:

R: When you look at the board outside the church it says that Breakthrough International is a place 'where the nations gather'. You see this is what happened to our ministry through God's doing. We didn't intend to reach out to the different races in town. But my husband felt that there is going to be a change, and that we just had to welcome the races. This is what God was doing...

H: Because when we were looking for a place to worship we found this one in Orthman Road. We were not aware but God was, because this was a place in a 'gray area', so the nations could indeed gather there. Remember, we were at height of Apartheid! But God gave us this place to gather the nations. And then because there were three pastors in the church there, we all worked in different areas. We chose to work in Northdale with the Indians, so our ministry was a lot there and my wife had a cell there and all that, and that's how the Indian got involved. Russell worked more with the Blacks, and pastor Sherwin with the Coloreds.

So because we worked in Northdale, after about a year or two, the Indian community in the church, developed. It really grew. There's a lot of Indians in the church now. And Russell works with the Blacks and that also grew (H04:86).

In order to understand what Hilton and Rhoda Toohey talk about we need to remind ourselves that Breakthrough International started during a time when the Group Areas Act

was still strongly enforced within South Africa. This meant that the church would have been more or less bound to be racially segregated because normally it would have been located in an area reserved for a certain racial group. In addition, and maybe even more significantly, Hilton and Rhoda Toohey, like so many South Africans in those days, had become so used to the idea of segregation that they didn't envision a ministry which would be multiracial, thus multicultural, in outlook. But, as they see it, God had other plans. Through God's intervention they found a venue which was situated in one of the few so called 'gray areas' of Pietermaritzburg, where they were able to minister to people from different races which in turn came from a diverse cultural background. By God's intervention Breakthrough International was made to reach 'out to the nations'.

as Breakthrough International began to reach out to the different races and respective cultures prevalent in Pietermaritzburg the issue of cultural attentiveness for the sake of mission had to be considered. Thandi Dlomo for instance points to that as she talks about the importance of dressing appropriately and behaving according to traditional Zulu-culture when reaching out to the Zulu community. She says:

T: ...simplicity is the best and a person doesn't need to conform to a certain way of doing things ... the bible is our source, I can wear a simple dress on a Sunday and still be comfortable. Dress is not an issue at all except for like, you should be responsible especially when you are a missionary, that you don't offend people (P03:130).

She continues:

T: ...I'm young which is a problem in our culture. Because as a young woman, not married, people have difficulty accepting me ministering to them. But as an elder in our church I have to minister even to older people. That is a challenge on its own. Because in other traditional churches, its only other older people that can minister to the older people. So I have to respect the elder people according to our culture when I want to minister to them effectively. I have to show them that I am a child to them, but still I am coming with the authority of the Lord. But I mustn't assume authority over someone older than me, it is the Lord who is it over them. ...We find ourselves in some places that ... requires us to put on a head covering as a lady, even though I'm not married. Some are not fussy about people who are unmarried but I have to put on a head covering and take off ear rings and so on (P03:128).

Even though Thandi Dlomo is clear that 'the bible is the source' of knowing what to wear and what to do, she is willing to adjust her way of doing things for the sake of mission and evangelism. This does not only apply to her but to the whole membership of Breakthrough International. In order to be an effective evangelist Breakthrough International makes its people aware of the need to be culturally sensitive. This even goes as far as considering how to respond when eating while on missionary outreach. The cell notes for instance advise

people to “Eat and drink whatever is served politely. Do not wrinkle up your nose or assume things are unhygienic. Pray for a missionary palate” (M 12:23).

Furthermore culture is not only an issue which needs to be considered in order to reach out to other people. The reaching out into different cultural context may also feed back into the ministry of the Breakthrough International as a whole thus enriching it and making it more effective. Hilton and Rhoda Toohey make this point as they talk about their newly established work in Cape Town, which to a large extent reaches out to the Xhosa community. They say about the new cultural context which they have entered into:

R: And we are feeling enriched by having the different cultures coming together.

H: But I personally think for example that a Black person is naturally demonstrative in everything. And I would think one of the sad things that the missionaries did was to silence that. And so when they come to our churches, they just re-discover that again what has been buried by the missionaries of old. I think our approach to ministry that begins to spark off a lot of things which are naturally in them. They like to dance, they like expression, ja, so they find they can rediscover that in church and that is beautiful. I think that's what the Black culture can really teach us, to express our faith in dance and in demonstrate what Christ is doing in us. So we don't Westernize them, and say you got to worship in a particular way, like the missionaries of old did. If they want to come with their tom-toms, if they want to dance, if they want to do whatever, they welcome (H04:81-82).

The willingness to accommodate certain cultural expressions for the sake of the effective ministry amongst different ethnic groups has also lead to a significant change with respect to the worship practice of Breakthrough International. Originally services were conducted in English. But the Zulu-Speaking element within the church has grown quite strongly in the last couple of years. In 1996, for instance, only 12% of the membership was Zulu-speaking compared to 84% Coloreds, and 12 % Indians which were English-speaking. But in 2002 these figures had changed considerably with 26 % of the membership being Zulu-speaking compared to 42% Coloreds and 28% Indians (M13:13). This change in demographics led the introduction of a Zulu Service as Thandi Dlomo explains:

T: There was a time when we were at Orthman Rd when had two services on Sunday morning, because the church was full. And we realized there were a lot of people, mostly town people who came to the second service. I mean township people, would come to the second service and some of the people who work for other people, like maids and such people would come. Most of them would be Zulu-speaking. But our message at that time was all in English, and we realized that they need to hear the Word in their own language. Otherwise they can not understand it clearly. Because we'd been suffering from that, that some of them are haven't gone much up to matric level, so they could not follow English. We realized that we could not make the

message must be simpler, because this would have been to the detriment of the message itself.

But we wanted people to hear the right thing in their own language, and although it posed a problem for some, because it irritates on the messages is integrated, you have to listen, the right way. So when we changed to Zulu we found that a lot more people could hear what was being said. Before that because some people would just switch off, they didn't understand what is being going on. And then now, not only that we are communicating better, even most of the people were raised up to be more involved. Just by interpreting the message in every other person's language. In the second service Pastors wishes to raise up people who speak in Zulu (P03:127-128).

So in general we might say that Breakthrough International is aware of culture primarily as an issue which effects its effective outreach and ministry. The church is quite flexible in adjusting and adapting to certain cultural practices since it is a matter of the natural which really does alter the core part of the message of 'salvation and joy in the Holy Ghost'. This message remains 'above culture'.

But while discussing this issue we might as well note that Breakthrough International's flexibility has its limitations. When the church feels that certain cultural practices violate the exclusivity and primacy of intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit as well as hinder the creating of a biblical life style it does not at all adjust to culture for the sake of mission and evangelism. One example is the way Thandi Dlomo views the African Independent Churches and the integration of ancestral veneration into the lifestyle of the church. She says about the AIC's and Breakthrough International:

T: The only difference that I can see is that they don't reach salvation, I mean the Zionists, they don't teach the bible truth, but they are free and they worship they dance and they also say that they are Amabandla kamoya [congregations of the Spirit]. But I don't know why they say so, because I visited some of those churches before I got saved and their practices are more ancestral. And also in their relationship to God they are mixed in a way, because believe in the ancestors, something we don't do. They are worshipping freely in their culture, but the bible they just mime, they don't live according to what the bible tells us. I mean there is no truth there, it is very different because they don't know about being in the Holy Spirit in Christ. But they have a lot of other I will say prejudices and rituals that definitely the charismatic people will not believe in (P03:129).

## 2.2. Spirit experience - a modern God creates bible-based, local, subculture

Stuart C. Bate in his book 'Human life is cultural' deals with the issue that in the past culture was often viewed along lines of biological and ethnic roots while in the present it must also be understood as an urban phenomenon where these categories are not helpful. He writes:

Today we have to make sense out of the new emerging urban African cultures which reflect an ethnic and racial mixing as well as the effects of acculturation with the global Western culture (Bate 2002:125-126).

What Bates describes applies largely to Breakthrough International's context of ministry. The church operates in an urban area where traditional culture, understood according to its biological and ethical roots, is being replaced by what I would call, for a lack of a better word, an 'culturally diverse, urban, and multilingual township-culture'. This is not so much a coherent culture in itself which can clearly be described and defined. But it is rather something which is emerging within the rapid cultural changes which takes place in the urban African society. The main characteristic of that emerging culture, and in which Breakthrough International operates, is the fact that it is constantly changing. This is amongst other factors due to modernization, globalization and Westernization, issues which we don't need to discuss here in much detail. We rather note that within this changing culture of urban Africa Breakthrough International provides a subculture for its members. This subculture helps them to deal with the changes that the urban African society is undergoing. Thandi Dlomo refers to this changing culture as she talks her own roots in traditional Zulu culture. She says:

T: ...I also do believe that some of the older more traditional people they should be willing to change because culture changes. As people change their culture changes and they should change with. Because change is good if it is something that our bible honors...But I cannot force them, as people who are used to their traditional way of doing things. I can only hope to influence them diplomatically to come too terms with the new times (P03:128).

Within these 'new times', as Thandi Dlomo calls it, Breakthrough International operates and designs a ministry which is pretty much 'of culture' rather than 'above culture'. This is, for example, illustrated in the way in which Breakthrough International devises its Sunday services. As we have seen before the services are more designed to be a performance than a church service in the traditional sense of the word. They are not forming the center of the spiritual life of the church, which would be the cell group. They should rather be attractive to visitors (III.B.8.). Consequently they display a lot of features which appeal to the modern man and woman living in the urban Africa. The services are more reminiscent of a rock concert than of a traditional church service. Like one participant said: "I found New Zion a very vibrant, energetic church. The praise and worship, the people interacting in the service was remarkable" (P06:149). The service is even managed by a 'service manager' to make



sure everything runs smoothly. Russell Toohey describes the task of the 'service manager as follows:

R: I have delegated the job of overseeing the Sunday services to a service manager ...the service manager would take care ... that the praise and worship is on time, ...that there's a convener ...the master of ceremonies, and that they do what I want them to do, they mustn't take extra time they must just get up and introduce the next person, sit down. ...they get somebody to exhort and tithes and offerings and to educate on tithes and offerings, somebody to pray for missions, somebody to give the notices, and they make sure there's every at least twice in a month, there's arts presented in the service so that more people are involved. So that's what the service manager will do. They'll ensure that our services are high quality; we stick to time, and they vary and attractive to visitors (P08:192).

The standards which are set for quality and attractiveness try to compete with what the people of urban Africa get to see on MTV and other highly professionally produced television programs. The aim is basically to keep up with the culture of the day and avoid giving the impression as if God is outdated and not relevant to the modern times which for some time now have arrived in urban Africa. Anthony Toohey expresses it quite clearly and says:

A: God doesn't make sense in this modern time if that what I see in traditional catholic services is how He behaves and if that is how He wants me to behave. Or else I feel that God should actually be passé. I don't think God should regress and become boring. He should actually improve. And by improving in this day and age, we should find him exciting, stimulating (P06:152).

Breakthrough International has experienced an exciting God so it tries to present that God in a way that God becomes relevant to the people of urban Africa. In order to achieve that it does not only use modern cultural symbols like for example rap music and hip hop, as well as the latest IT Technology. Breakthrough International also is quite modern, thus 'of culture', in itself since it creates its own bible 'based-subculture'

What I mean might be illustrated by a personal experience I had with one of the members of Breakthrough International. I tried to make an appointment with that person which turned out to be nearly impossible. Because on Sunday morning he would have to go to service and in evening he would have a training session called 'Free Indeed'. On Monday he would not be available because he attended KAM, which stands for "Kingdom Advancement Ministry" on Tuesday there was the cell group meeting and Wednesday was taken up by practice with the Praise and Worship Team. He was also not available on Friday because he was occupied

with the prayer ministry called “Rescue 911”. Finally Saturday he would be on an outing with the cell group.

When talking to this man it dawned on me that a truly committed member of Breakthrough International has basically nothing else in his private life except for church. The church creates a program seemingly designed to take over the whole life of the believer. Thereby, one might argue, being a member of Breakthrough International, becomes a lifestyle of its own. By joining Breakthrough International the believer joins a Bible-based sub-culture which eventually takes over his whole life. the believer himself does not identify this new life style as part of a sub-culture but he or she sees it as living the life a Christian is supposed to live. Thandi Dlomo, for instance would describe the new-found life within Breakthrough International in those terms. She says:

T: Yes, being a Christian became a lifestyle and is still a lifestyle, I don't think any other lifestyle will be good. I wouldn't choose any other lifestyle. I can't think of life without Christ, where I'm always depressed, where I don't know who to turn to I have other believers, but most of all I have Christ who will never let me down P03:116.

The initiation into this new sub-culture, which Breakthrough International would see as ‘living a Christian life’ or even ‘being a disciple’ happens through what the church calls “Mobilization Ministry”. Noleen Howard who took over the co-ordination of this ministry when pastor Sherwin Haynes left for Pretoria explains what Mobilization Ministry entails. She says:

N. Well, pastor Sherwin was running it, he was in charge of the mobilization ministry, which is bible school, right hand of fellowship, cell training, bible study. That is mobilization ministry. Mobilizing the church to be effective disciples basically, through the programs and gears (P02:111-112).

Mobilization Ministry aims to make people ‘effective disciples’. In other words enables people to function properly within the Christian way of lifestyle envisioned by Breakthrough International. The annual planner, which every member of Breakthrough International receives by the beginning of the year, is clear about that. There it reads:

The Mobilization Ministry is designed to equip every one of our members for effective ministry by taking them all the way from conversion to leadership (M02).

This 'taking the member from conversion to leadership' happens through what Noleen Howard has referred to as the 'Gears'. Gears is a discipleship program which is designed according to 5 steps or 'gears'. A new member of Breakthrough International is expected to go through those 'gears' (cf.M05:1) which entail the following:

1<sup>st</sup> Gear starts with a course called "First Principles" which acquaints the convert with the basic teachings and practice of Breakthrough International. 2<sup>nd</sup> Gear 'Operations Harvest' also called KAM (Kingdom Advancement Ministry) takes the believer one level further, teaching him or her an evangelistic lifestyle. 3<sup>rd</sup> Gear deals with inner healing and deliverance and is called 'Free Indeed' and 4<sup>th</sup> Gear focuses on leadership training for Cell Groups and other areas of the life in the church. Finally Gear 5 is for the truly advanced and includes a four year Bible School program, a Global Mission course as well as Prayer School and 'Psalmody' (advanced Praise and Worship training).

From Breakthrough International's perspective these kinds are designed to "take new believers from being new converts to being effective disciples" (M13:23). Yet it also initiates the believer into a whole new way of life. Irvin Howard makes this clear as he talks about KAM (Kingdom Advancement Ministry), which we might use as one example to illustrate how the initiation into a new Bible-based subculture is taking place. Irvin Howard says:

- I: Kingdom Advancement Ministry a program that is meant to be a lifestyle! (sic!)... No. 1 it teaches the Christians to be diligent, and to excel. Because we are enforcing the rules quite strictly, which means for example that you have to be there at seven o'clock sharp. No excuses, only three excuses are allowed. Either your boss has asked you to work, you are out of town, or you are dead! Those are the only three reasons you can stay away ...the following up of those visitors is very important and is done by KAM. So, you send out a letter to the visitors, and then you pay them a visit, and if they not born again, they haven't accepted Christ, then we present the Gospel to them. ...you start explaining what born again is, how do you, you know where does it come from, the latest scriptures and then you go on to repenting, believing and that believing alone is not enough. Doing what you say you believe is important, it causes you to change and grow, and you go from being a spiritual baby to an adult. Then you ask two questions afterwards, when the visit is finished: "Have you understood what I've just shared with you, and would you like to choose God's way and rebirth?" (P01:95).

This kind of training and practice does more than mature the believer to be an effective disciple. It initiates a new believer into Breakthrough International's subculture. The believer is challenged to share what he or she believes with the non-believers, to evangelize. This, in effect, does more to the believer than just making him reach out. Because in reaching out the believer identifies, thus reinforces in him or herself, that Breakthrough International's belief

system and way of life is the true one. Being a disciple becomes a lifestyle, and is reinforced by inviting the non-believer to join that lifestyle of a subculture.

The most compelling example of Breakthrough International's attempt to create a Bible-based sub-culture might be what the church calls 'Signing up for Breakthrough Brigade'. Russell Toohey explains what that is:

I want to talk very practically. Last year, at the beginning of the year, we introduced for the first time what we call the Breakthrough Brigade where we asked people to sign up. Normally we ask people to line up, and then we forget that we are line up. This time we didn't just line up, we signed up. We asked people to sign up and say: "These are the things I am committing to this year.... I want you to complete that Breakthrough Brigade Form and you keep one copy. One copy of the promise you are making with God in 2003 is your copy and one copy is for us. And we take your name and put it there on the board for all to see and you to see as well(P/S03:236).

What people were asked to sign up for were very practical things they would adhere to over the course of the year. People committed themselves for instance to:

- be available to pray in Rescue 911 for one hour a week
- read the Bible daily and journal as God speaks
- Fast twice a week
- Tithe faithfully
- Never to miss church unless sick or out of town (M2)

by signing up and 'hanging it on the board for all to see' a system of social control is enforced which goes along with any sub-culture creating its own way of life.

### 3.The experience of the Spirit and oppressive structures of culture

Our study of culture as the medium of God's mission within Breakthrough International's ministry has so far proven to be quite a challenge. This is due to the fact that Breakthrough International does not reflect as distinctly on the issue of culture within its own narrative way of thinking as it reflects, for example, on the issue of poverty. But turning to H.Richard Niebuhr and his terminology we could develop some insight into the issue of culture within Breakthrough International drawing on the stories which Breakthrough International's members tell us. One last time we might turn to Niebuhr for terminological help in order to

establish what Breakthrough International's narrative way of thinking has to say about what Niebuhr would call 'Christ against culture'.

So far we have seen that Breakthrough International's understanding of culture as medium of God's mission reflects certain aspects of what Niebuhr would have called 'Christ above' as well as 'Christ of culture'. But Breakthrough International stories also give account of numerous occasions where the church turns against certain cultural practices on account of what it perceives as the experience of the Spirit.

We have, for example, already dealt with one such occasion, where we see Breakthrough International even oppose the values of its own charismatic sub-culture. This refers to the issue of the promotion of women into leadership positions and their ordination into office of the ministry of the church (cf. III.C.3.). There we saw that there "is a certain realm of the Spirit where there's no difference between male and female. In the natural, there's a difference. In the home, there's a difference. But in the Spirit realm, there's no difference" (Hilton Toohey). Thus Breakthrough International argues from a position which sees the Spiritual overriding the 'natural' or 'cultural', as one might say. In the case of women and their role in church Breakthrough International is even willing to take that argument as far as to override scripture and Paul's hotly disputed dictum: "Women should remain silent in the churches".

This feature, that the 'Spiritual take precedence over the 'natural' or rather 'cultural', is of essential importance if we want to understand Breakthrough International's stand 'against culture'. Breakthrough International is not in general against culture nor does it oppose oppressive structures and practices within certain cultures because of the fact that they are oppressive. This would be a much too "worldly" way of thinking. Culture, as with all phenomena within the natural, is first and foremost viewed through the perspective of the Spiritual. This means that if there are oppressive structures and practices at work in a given way of life or culture Breakthrough International does not see its primary task in opposing those practices. It is rather the Spirit itself who will do that. What this means becomes clearer when we look at the way, in which Hilton Toohey has approached his new ministry amongst the Xhosa-speaking people in Cape Town. He says:

- H: Its interesting because we [are]ministering to Xhosas in Cape Town, and I never forget the first home cell we had in this house and we [are] talking about the Holy Spirit and they say, ja, they believe in the Holy Spirit but also believe in their ancestral spirits. But we didn't say anything to them, but over the period of six months, there's clearly evidence that they are moving away from dependence on their ancestral spirits and beginning to trust the Holy Spirit to lead them. You can see that, without us condemning their ancestral beliefs, we don't touch them, we don't do anything, we believe the gospel is powerful enough to take them out of the old structure. Which, I think, why they continue [to in] poverty. Because an ancestral Spirit can never make a difference in your life. The Holy Spirit can (H04:81).

Hilton Toohey is clear that he does not need to oppose what he considers a negative cultural expression of religious belief. 'Dependence upon ancestral spirits' is something which is addressed through the power of the gospel. This position takes us back to what we have said about Breakthrough International's understanding of the world as a place of power encounters (III.C.4). Hilton Toohey sees the gospel synonym of the Spirit, it opposes practices in a given culture which might be oppressive or even destructive. But notably the yardstick which indicates if a certain cultural practice, like for instance ancestral veneration, is oppressive or destructive, is if that practice hinders or promotes the gospel. In other words, Hilton Toohey's problem with 'dependence upon ancestral spirits' is that this presumed dependence hinders people to join into an intimate and personal relationship with the Spirit.

Like with the issue of the ordination of women, the 'Spiritual' is the guiding principle to make a judgment on the issue. Whatever promotes Christ, the Gospel or the Spirit, terms which are used interchangeably in this context, is considered positive. Whatever does not do that is considered an oppressive aspect of a certain culture. This 'Spiritual bias' in favor of a personal and intimate relationship with the Spirit guides Breakthrough International's analysis of cultural practices and their potentially oppressive and destructive character.

This observation is confirmed by the fact that Russell Toohey responds to the question what he considers destructive and oppressive structures within different cultures solely from a spiritual perspective. When he was asked which cultural practices he considers oppressive within the multicultural context of his ministry he was clearly indicating that practices that promote Christ are good, and practices which do not promote Christ are to be rejected. His answer is so telling, that it is fitting to quote it in its entirety:

- R: Indians for example, inherited from the caste system [that] they are quite racist as well. So it becomes quite challenging for an Indian to join a Colored-led church. So there is a negative phenomenon of culture. Coloreds on the other side they would

sooner go to a White-led church than to a church led by another Colored. Their problem is that they tend not to value their own culture. Because the perception is that it's better for their status to be in a White-led church ... even if the White-led church would create fewer leadership and ministry opportunities for them. So that is an apartheid entrenched idea still alive, you know, it exists today, and that's definitely self-destructive.

And then, ja. In terms of African folk, I think the sexuality is probably one of the most destructive areas of culture. Because people's whole future, so many talented young people, their destinies are thrown away because of promiscuity and permissiveness and for me, that is the biggest area of cultural self-destructive tendencies within African culture.

For example, we were ministering in Ashdown, one of the townships, and before age 18 we could only win young men because the young women were under too much pressure you know, sexual pressure, and so they couldn't stay in church because they were sinning. And we nailed them for that we would challenge them on that score, so they would rather not come to church. But after age 18 – 20 you'd have more women...if you haven't gotten the guys before that age, they're a lost cause after that. The gospel can't reach them because they're too deeply enveloped in what it is to be a man in Zulu culture.

So in Black society, ... the sexual norms are one of the biggest blockages to effective ministry. While obviously also, ancestral worship. For example in Panorama everybody in that area just about knew us, but they would say, "Are you from New Zion, that church that doesn't allow ancestral worship?" And immediately the doors were closed to ministry by the count of our stand regarding what they call culture. But we call it occultism. So that's the African culture

Right, then Indians, When we were just a Colored church we used to have a lot of bring and shares, picnics, and eat together, picnic together, and all that. But as soon as we became a Colored/Indian church, the dynamic changed. Because they don't like eating other people's food. And they are totally passionate about forcing their food down everybody's throats. And they are very hospitable, but they not as open to receiving hospitality. And it gets worse as they, you know, get higher in their class, this has to do with the caste system. That's why we started ministering to the lower class of Indians first, because only they would give us an ear. But later when they saw Indians in the church, then the higher class of Indians came because there were more Indians and so it took Indians to bring Indians. Because the class system is still at work. A higher class Indian does not necessarily join a Colored led church (P09:209-210).

This is not the place to discuss the factual merits and dangers of Russell Toohy's racial as well as cultural typology. What is important for our context is the observations that cultural practices are being assessed according to the question: "What hinders or promotes the gospel?"

The major problem for the Coloreds is that they don't respect their own culture, which lets them go into White led churches where they might not hear or live out the gospel in an effective manner. The Indians seems to display an inherent racism coupled with a strong caste system heritage which makes it difficult for them to listen to the gospel. Both groups are not as open to the gospel, which preached in Breakthrough International, as they would

need to be on account of their own cultural constrains. Within the Black Community Russell Toohey identifies what he considers sexual immorality as the main cultural hindrance for gospel to touch the people. Furthermore he considers what Africans would see as an integral part of their culture, ancestral veneration, occultism which hinders the promotion of the gospel as well. All these remarks have in common is the fact that the point departure for any judgment call on cultural practices is the promotion or non promotion of the experience of the Spirit.

So in conclusion we might say that Breakthrough International would identify oppressive structures and practices in a given culture not as such. Culture as having a possible oppressive quality is only recognized if culture oppresses the Spirit. As long as culture does not oppress the Spirit culture is part of the natural thus being irrelevant and adjustable to fit Breakthrough International Bible-based subculture.



## **F. Breakthrough International's Mission in the experience of the Spirit – summary –**

As with the concept of *Missio Dei* we now aim to summarize our findings in respect to the question how Breakthrough International realizes the experience of the Spirit as driving force of God's Mission. This will give us a more workable perspective in respect to our main question if Breakthrough International reflects the *Missio Dei* concept. Thus we will be enabled to compare the *Missio Dei* concept and the experientially driven side of Breakthrough International's way of doing Mission.

To begin with we need to remind ourselves, that due to the specific character of what we call 'the experience of the Spirit', our main source into Breakthrough International's experiential approach to mission has been the narrative recollections of those who have been 'befallen by the Spirit'. In the case of *Missio Dei* we have drawn solely on written material which has emerged from within a context of missiological thinking where the 'enlightened paradigm of thinking' is the guiding principle. But with respect to Breakthrough International we have accepted its narrative form of thinking as the major source from which to draw. Nonetheless, we hold on to a methodology based on a Western, rationalistic, if not to say Cartesian world view, with its admittedly limited epistemology. But within the 'enlightened paradigm of thinking' we allow for the phenomenon of the experience of Spirit, and make this experience accessible to the 'thinking mind' through the narrative.

In short: As we venture to understand the experience of the Spirit within Breakthrough International we do this appropriately by listening to the narrative of the people. Because it is the narrative form of thinking through which those who are befallen by the Spirit make sense of their experience, think through it, understand it, and make it understandable (even to the Cartesian thinking mind!).

The structure of our research into Breakthrough International's narrative derived from our finding on the *Missio Dei* concept. Those findings have helped us to ask the 'right questions' which we have tried to answer by means of listening to the narrative being told by the people of Breakthrough International which summarizes as follows:

## 1. The Beginnings of BCI's Mission in the experience of the Spirit

- I. Breakthrough International, originally called New Zion Christian Fellowship, did not start because people 'wanted to do it but they were made to do it' (Chester Rawlins). The church is a creation of the experiences of the Spirit Hilton Toohey, the founding figure of the Breakthrough International, in his desire to live scripture, felt called by the Spirit to 'get, equip, train and send man' thus forming an African empowerment agency for missionary activity rather than a church.
- II. The call to 'get, equip, train and send man' is preceded by an intense personal and family crisis of Hilton Toohey and his wife Rhoda in which they both experience the 'power of the Spirit' restoring their marriage and family life. This restoration happens through their personal experience of being 'born again' and the subsequent 'Baptism in the Holy Spirit', which gave them an intense sense of 'security with God so that things could only become better' (Rhoda Toohey). All future developments need to be understood from this forceful, existential, and personal experience of the Spirit, which turned their life around and 'sold them out to what God through the Spirit would do with them' (Doreen Ulbricht).
- III. Through their intimate and forceful personal experience of the divine Hilton and Rhoda Toohey got involved in the Catholic charismatic renewal movement. Eventually were driven by the Spirit to 'sell all and go into the Community of Reconciliation' in order to live a more authentic biblical lifestyle. This first step into the ministry, still within the Catholic Church, was accompanied by powerful and personal experiences of the Spirit who guided and sustained them as they 'lived by faith'. Notably during those early days, they felt called to bring together churches from different denominations rather than start their own church.
- IV. It is through the perceived intervention of the Spirit that the 'Team of Reconciliation', which had formed around the Tooheys, did feel that they had to be baptized again with the 'believers baptism'. This Spirit intervention created a time of crisis which eventually saw the people move out of the churches of their birth (mostly Catholic and Anglican) willing to 'wait on God' for further direction.

- V. Through yet another intervention of the Spirit during this time of 'waiting on the Lord' the 'Team of Reconciliation' felt driven into a communal lifestyle resembling Acts 2. This time lasted  $2\frac{1}{2}$  years and marks a time of forceful spiritual formations with communal sharing of resources, bible studies, and prayer times, modelled 'according to be bible', which was perceived as a real account of the power of the spiritual. Intimacy with God's Spirit is the main feature of those early days of 'living the bible'. Based on already experienced miraculous interventions of the Spirit even greater expectations, in respect to what this closeness of the Spirit could do, emerged. People 'were simple and unschooled enough to believe that they can do what the bible says' (Russell Toohey).
- VI. This spiritual naivety led to the attempt of raising a man from the dead, which failed but became an important maturing experience. It showed that what can be called 'tangibility of the Spirit' had grown on a relationship level to an extent amongst the people that they even overcame being disappointed by the Spirit on a factual level. People came to believe, despite of high expectations, that the Spirit moves in its own ways. Thereby openness towards a supernatural intervention in times of hopelessness was maintained, while the church members became an important non-judgmental support system 'standing with each other all the way' even if the Spirit seemingly did fail them.
- VII. Notably the most important feature of Breakthrough International's early ministry was the experience of the Spirit interacting as well as intervening within the personal history of the believers through what they call 'Prophetic Gifting'. This is understood as 'a word of knowledge' It is received by somebody who carries that gifting through direct intervention of the Spirit and spoken over or into the life of another person. To those who are the addressees of such a 'word of knowledge' it is God himself who speaks and gets involved in their personal life. God interacts with the personal story of the people even up to the point that total life changes are taking place.
- VIII. Another early feature of Breakthrough International's ministry was to focus on 'discipling people'. This 'discipling' takes the believer beyond the Spirit experience, because it is not the Spirit encounter that matters most but the call which grows out of that encounter (Chester Rawlins). 'Discipling' marks a training process (KAM, GEAR) which puts people before programmes and wants to provide a 'framework for radical

productive life giving fellowship, where peoples values have changed holistically' (Russell Toohey). The people who are 'won for Christ' are trained and equipped to be used by God for service and mission in the world. This happens primarily within the cell groups, which foster a 100% involvement by the membership and thus create a community based church. This cell-church is build on and centers around people rather than clergy.

## 2. The rolling out of BCI's ministry in the experience of the Spirit

IX. In respect to (post)modern (hi)story as the context of Breakthrough International's mission we note that, due to its 'charismatic world view' (Wessels), Breakthrough International does not see itself involved in making world- but 'peoples-history'. The world is 'enemy territory' (Russell Toohey). Therefore (post)modern history, as the context of Breakthrough International ministry, is relevant only as far as it involves personal stories upon which the church is acting as an agent of change. On account of the social character of its world view Breakthrough International is deeply 'this worldly' in its dealings with people and their (his)stories. But in respect to the history of the world, which is written through involvement and interaction within the public domain, it is 'otherworldly' since the world is and remains the realm of the devil.

- Breakthrough International practices social activism or 'this worldliness' within the private domain, by 'putting people before programmes' and changing peoples stories. Thereby it 'socially construct faith' (Peter Berger) which is based in people's personal story. This happens for example through:
  - The experience of healing and divine therapy perceived as a direct and personal intervention of the power of the Spirit.
  - The healing of the 'Broken' through applying a divine perspective upon the personal stories of the believers and creating an empowering fellowship thus transforming character and behavior.
  - The finding of meaning, purpose and personal grows through the interaction with the Spirit.
  - The experience of being unconditional loved as an experience of the Spirit.

- As the experience of the Spirit changes people's (hi)story their self-understanding is transformed. Personal life is seen as to be offered and lived for God's mission and comes to stay within a divine perspective. The individual believer and his personal story become part of God's sending of the Son. God, who after all is the 'Almighty', has a personal plan and destiny for every believer, who is meant to be part of the divine project to save the world. The believer is charged to find and live his or her personal and divine destiny, because by living ones personal destiny God's Kingdom is advanced. This advancement of the Kingdom happens most effectively if every believer plays his or her divinely prescribed part within the ministry of all believers.
  - Within an understanding of history as a matter of the personal rather than public domain the making of world history within the public domain is understood as a matter of 'power encounters' and 'Spiritual warfare'. The individual believers partakes in this 'warfare' mainly though prayer as the instrument with which to unleash the divine power which can break the hold of 'evil' upon the world. Notably the transformation of history through 'power encounters' allows only for an indirect involvement of the believer in the making of world history.
- X. In respect to Breakthrough International's experience of the Spirit within the context of the poor we note that the people of Breakthrough International understand poverty within the following frame of reference: They see themselves as the being poor so they tell their stories as stories from within the context of the poor. Furthermore they have experienced that 'the Spirit provides the Kingdom goods to those who seek the Kingdom' (Hilton Toohey). The poor have 'supernaturally experienced' that 'living by faith' works. This leads to the following perspectives on 'the poor as the context of God's mission':
- The main focus for Breakthrough International is to save people for eternity, but the life of the believer, while he or she is still in this world, is seen under the promise that it 'inevitably will change for the better'. Because God is a big God who wants his people not only to be saved but to prosper in the here and now as well. The assumption is that poverty has no place in a Spirit controlled life. This assumption is confirmed by personal experience rather than being a mere statement of faith. But

faith and wealth go together only if personal lifestyle is based on the word of God which will make the 'blessing flow' (Russell Toohey).

- Poverty in itself is therefore a phenomenon which is not caused by God but rather a curse which the poor as well as the nations bring upon themselves due to them not serving God.
- Poverty is furthermore understood as a spiritual rather a social or political matter. To understand poverty one needs to understand the spiritual dimension of poverty. This 'Spiritualizing of poverty' (Russell Toohey) does not make Breakthrough International indifferent to the needs of the people but causes the church to listen and respond to the voice of the poor in very practical as well as personal ways which become especially apparent in the following features of Breakthrough International' ministry:
  - Understanding that that one can not 'give the spiritual only' (Doreen Ulbricht) Breakthrough International addresses 'bread and butter' issues like job creation, self help schemes (vegetable gardens), feeding schemes, personal financial planning (depths free campaign!) as well as business management.
  - Breakthrough International attracts the poor because 'it is a place where we develop people' (Irvin Howard) through empowerment and character building in order to overcome poverty. This is done in the cell groups, the basic tool through which the church responds to its context of poverty.
  - Cell groups provide a close support and monitoring system to built character, and raise leaders with strong personal values who apply a 'scriptural lifestyle'. Thereby people are empowered to free themselves from poverty. This empowerment is initiated by the experience of the Spirit which is not just 'hype or feeling' (Rose Rawlins) but leads to a transformation of character and lifestyle and aims to turn believers into ministers advancing the Kingdom.
  - The prevalent view within Breakthrough International seems to be that poverty is addressed through 'Salvation' which enables the individual to overcome poverty as a personal problem through the 'redemption and lift circle' (Russell Toohey). But notably there seems to be an emerging minority positions within the church which holds that it is difficult to 'preach salvation on an empty stomach' (Patrick Dlamini). Within that small group of people the social

aspect of the ministry, which focuses on the public domain, is not just 'social stuff' but increasingly understood as an imperative consequence of the gospel.

XI. Breakthrough International's narrative way of understanding its experience of the Spirit reflects rather extensively on how this experience impacts on the reality of poverty in its midst. But this is not so much the case when it comes to reflecting upon the experience of the Spirit within culture as the medium of God's mission. It seems as if culture is not as central to Breakthrough International narrative as poverty. This is due to some preconceived notions in respect to Breakthrough International's understanding of culture. They are:

- Firstly, culture is primarily to be taken into account for the sake of successful missionary action aiming to save the individual within a given culture.
  - Secondly, culture has little to no relevance to the believer because of his or her intimate and experiential relationship with the Spirit, which is perceived as an unmediated experience thus unrelated to issues of culture.
  - Thirdly, therefore Breakthrough International views itself rather 'above' than 'in culture' (Niebuhr). Consequently there is little need to reflect upon culture as medium of God's Mission within Breakthrough International's narrative. Seeing itself above culture is based on the distinction between the natural, of which culture is part, and the supernatural, within which the Spiritual is encountered and a biblical based way of life, the fulfillment of all cultural aspirations, is created.
- Despite seeing itself 'above culture' and therefore not reflecting much upon the experience of the Spirit as culturally mediated one can observe that Breakthrough International has created a ministry which is very much 'of culture' in outlook and emphasis. 'Preoccupied with empowerment, fulfillment, healing and meeting individual needs' (Percy) Breakthrough International is quite extensively concerned with culture by aiming to create a modern, Bible-based subculture initiated and maintained by the experience of the Spirit. This becomes especially evident in respect to the following issues:

- Because the church feels directed by the Spirit to 'gather the nations' culture becomes an issue for the sake of reaching out effectively to the different communities within the local context of Pietermaritzburg. There it becomes important to be sensitive with respect to certain cultural norms (e.g. dress, food, relationship between the old and the young, etc.).
- Since Breakthrough International views culture within the realm of the 'natural' is quite willing to contextualize the gospel in accordance with any respective cultural practice (language, music, drums, dance, dress etc.).
- But the core message that 'salvation creates joy in the Holy Ghost' (Hilton Toohey) remains part of the realm of the supernatural, and therefore 'above culture'. This core message is not shaped or transformed by any process of contextualization or inculturation.
- Breakthrough International's practical approach towards contextualization reaches its limit when certain cultural practices are perceived to violate the exclusivity and primacy of the intimacy with the Holy Spirit (e.g. ancestor veneration). Here Breakthrough International is uncompromising and intolerant.
- The cultural context in which Breakthrough International operates can be described as 'diverse, urban, multilingual township culture' and is a truly modern African phenomenon. This 'township culture' is constantly changing its outlook due to all kinds of influences. Within that changing environment Breakthrough International's experience of the Spirit communicates a modern God, neither passé nor irrelevant, to urban Africa, thus being pretty much 'of culture'. This 'modern God', who act through the Spirit, creates a bible-based, local, subculture which allows people to find their way within the ever-changing and multifaceted 'township culture'.
- The believers are initiated into this subculture by involving him or her in a constant discipling process (KAM, Gear, Breakthrough Brigade etc.). This process aims to take everyone from 'conversion to effective discipleship and mature leadership. Eventually the believer is being able to guide others through a conversion experience.
- The distinction between the natural and the supernatural has great significance for Breakthrough International's understanding of oppressive structures and practices within a given culture. Because any cultural oppressive practice or structure would be



part of the natural which has rather little consequence within the worldview of Breakthrough International.

- Breakthrough International would therefore not be 'against culture' and oppose a certain oppressive cultural practice or structure. Because cultural oppression, being part of the natural, don't need to be opposed on account of the fact that they are oppressive. That would be a much too worldly way of thinking. But it would be the Spirit himself who would be 'against culture' if those oppressive structures and actions would hinder his advancement. Consequently one can say that as long as a given culture does not oppress the Spiritual, which ultimately is an impossibility, culture is part of the natural thus being irrelevant to Breakthrough International Bible-based subculture.

#### **IV. Breakthrough International an expression of *Missio Dei*?**

In the beginning of this thesis we have stated our main question and said:

Could it be that, on account of its experience of the Spirit, the Pentecostal Movement in Africa, as represented by Breakthrough International, takes part in God's *Missio*, which is been described on a conceptual level quite convincingly by Western missiology? To put it in a provocative sentence: Do the Pentecostals, or Breakthrough International for that matter, do what Western missiology thinks about – participate in God's *Missio*?

In order to answer these questions we had to address three major issues. We dealt at length with the experience of the Spirit as 'normal experience of faith' though posing an enormous methodological problem to a modern, "enlightened" and Cartesian concept of truth. Furthermore we established the context and the content of what is known to ecumenical missiology as the '*Missio Dei concept*'. And thirdly we listened to Breakthrough International's narrative thereby discovering its experiential way of mission through and in the Holy Spirit. We had proposed this threefold way of dealing with our main issue because one can not find an answer to our main question without answering firstly how a "modern enlightened paradigm of thought" can begin a dialogue with something so subjective as the experience of the Spirit. Secondly we needed to know what the *Missio Dei concept* is, and thirdly we needed to inquire how Breakthrough International describes its experiential way of mission through and in the Spirit. After working through the above matters we are now in a position to attempt an answer to our main question.

This answer shall be given in five steps. Firstly we will compare Breakthrough International and *Missio Dei* in a rather historical, thus general, fashion and point to some fairly general observations. These observations derive from our study into the beginnings of Breakthrough International as well as into the formative early years of the *Missio Dei* concept. Secondly we will compare Breakthrough International's understanding of history as the context of mission with the understanding of history proposed by the *Missio Dei* concept. Thirdly our assessment of Breakthrough International in comparison with the *Missio Dei* concept deals with similarities and disparities between Breakthrough International and *Missio Dei* in respect to the 'context of the poor'. Fourthly we will compare Breakthrough International's approach to culture as the medium of the gospel with the way in which *Missio Dei* understands culture. Finally we will have to draw a conclusion from all the above findings

and answer the question if Breakthrough International's way of mission represents the *Missio Dei* concept?

### **A. BCI and *Missio Dei* compared – observing the beginnings**

#### 1. Two world views thus two different points of departure

##### 1.1. Two different experiences - Self doubt or Spiritual selfconfidence

As we compare Breakthrough International and *Missio Dei* one difference between these two approaches of mission springs to mind right away. *Missio Dei* is in essence a response to the old church-centered paradigm of mission, which failed to be of any help in modern times. Breakthrough International's way of doing mission on the other side is a response to what it perceives as the experience of the Holy Spirit. Thus both, Breakthrough International and *Missio Dei*, react to rather different realities.

Breakthrough International experiences the Spirit and answers to this experience in an attitude of spiritual self-confidence. Unlike *Missio Dei*, it creates a way of mission which has no appreciation for the historical baggage carried by the missionary enterprise because mission is understood and experienced as an unmediated, non-historical, direct and personal activity of the Spirit. It is born out of an intense experience of salvation and goes along with an astonishing sense of 'having found the right way'. Self doubt and loss of direction can hardly be associated with Breakthrough International. On the contrary Breakthrough International has gone through the 'Baptism of the Spirit' and with little self-doubt sees itself as an instrument of salvation rather than disaster.

As far as our research is concerned we might identify only two possible areas where something like self-doubt becomes traceable within Breakthrough International's missionary practice. One relates to the story of the failed raising of the brother in law of Doreen Ulbricht from the dead. As we have described at length people were taken aback by this episode and a number of the believers were so disappointed by the Holy Spirit that Breakthrough International lost half its membership. But as we have seen also, this experience had a cleansing effect for the rest who overcame their spiritual disappointment and got even drawn into a closer and more intimate relationship with the Spirit. The other area of lurking self-doubt is less obvious and refers to the rather small group of believers within Breakthrough

International who find it increasingly difficult to believe in a what Russell Toohey calls the 'redemption and lift' effect. The 'redemption and lift effect' is based on the actual experience that those who were saved improved their social standing. But some people have begun to question the idea that salvation and a Spirit controlled life must automatically lead to a better life in the here and now. These people feel that to preach salvation on an empty stomach is wrong (Patrick Dlamini). They struggle with the fact that fellow believers who display an exemplary prayer practice and live a Spirit controlled life sometimes still don't experience an improvement in their personal circumstances (Nina Toohey).

But even though there are some indications of self-doubt Breakthrough International in general displays a kind of confidence and missionary zeal which is reminiscent of the early missionary movement. John Mott's closing words at the first missionary conference in Edinburgh (1910), where he called the end of the conference the 'beginning of the conquest', is echoed by Breakthrough International. Like Hilton Toohey has said: "I believe that God is going to use the South African Church, the Black church, to bring the gospel to the whole world" (H04:78).

*Missio Dei*, in contrast to Breakthrough International, is not born out of an extraordinary experience of salvation but out of a painful experience of failure. *Missio Dei* walked away from a missionary paradigm which had failed to address the questions and issues of a modern and postmodern world. It emerged as a 'new ecumenical and postmodern missionary paradigm' (Bosch 1991:349) and understood mission as "originating in the heart of God" (Bosch 1991:392) and as God's movement to save the world. Consequently there is church because there is mission, not vice versa. This new missiological thinking broke with the insufficient old church centered paradigm of mission which aimed merely to extend the *Corpus Christianum*. St. Cyprian's (200-254) notion of '*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*' became the underlying assumption of the early missionary movement and salvation was understood as only possible within the church. This is why people like Warneck focused on mission as 'planting of national churches' and had no "problem of 'lost directness'". Because "no sharp line was drawn between the Christian message and the civilizing work of missions" (Newbigin 1994:133). Anglo-European men accepted the 'burden to evangelize and civilize' the world by way of extending the church throughout the world.

However, those who were chosen to save the world managed to kill each other during two horrific world wars and pushed the world on to the verge of nuclear annihilation. Instead of salvation the Anglo-European version of Christianity brought disaster to the world, and Anglo-European men's self-confidence got shattered. This in turn gave cause to a serious rethink of the 'How' and 'Why' of global mission. Western missiology, later to be known as ecumenical missiology, lost its sense of direction, its missionary zeal and self-confident innocence. Instead the experience of failure, gave way for the birth of the *Missio Dei* concept as a new paradigm of mission (Bosch).

One is tempted to conclude that in comparison to the *Missio Dei* concept Breakthrough International has not (yet?) lost its innocence. It does not at all occur to those who are consumed by the experience of the Spirit, that this experience might cause more harm than good to the world in which the Gospel is proclaimed.

### 1.2. Different world views creating different paradigms of mission

The issues raised above represent an important and rather fundamental difference between *Missio Dei* and Breakthrough International. *Missio Dei* walks away from an understanding of mission which was compromised and had, at least in part, disastrous consequences for those whom it proposed to save. That kind of self-doubt does not cloud Breakthrough International's missionary zeal. Its own experience of the Spirit has convinced the church of the fact that what the world needs is its message of personal and experiential salvation through the Spirit. This brings us back to our discussion of world views in chapter I. There we had argued that *Missio Dei* operates within a rationalistic worldview based on a Cartesian concept of truth while Breakthrough International operates in an African world view where the Spiritual is tangibly real. As we can see now *Missio Dei* as well as Breakthrough International are both limited by their respective world views.

It seems to be difficult for *Missio Dei* to grasp the phenomenon of the experience of the Spirit, which as we have argued is a normal experience of faith. This is difficult for *Missio Dei* on account of its world view, in which the thinking mind and not the experience of the Spirit is the ultimate measure of truth. But despite its inability to appreciate the experience of the Spirit *Missio Dei*, enabled by its modern Cartesian world view, critically distinguished

between the initial mission of Christ, where the Spirit was the 'divine principle of origin' (Holl) and the subsequent mission of the church. What Lessing has called the 'ugly great ditch' between history and faith is a given for *Missio Dei*. This created a certain historical and critical distance in assessing the old church centered missionary paradigm. From that perspective of critical distance *Missio Dei* was able to acknowledge the historical failure of the old church centered missionary paradigm. It understood its baggage and proposed a way to walk away from it.

Breakthrough International on the other side lives in a world view which has no grasp of the divide which separates the world of the bible from the world of today. Historical critical distance does not exist. The Spirit is tangibly real within an African world view and is experienced in the here and now. Without hesitation it equates its own experience of the Spirit with the Holy Spirit of the bible, and claims that it lives in accordance with that biblical Spirit (Chester Rawlins). Breakthrough International would argue that the 'ugly great ditch' between the days of the bible and the present days of the believer is nonexistent on account of the experience of the Spirit. The Spirit that was actively present as the 'divine principle of origin' in the first days of Christianity is in the same way tangibly present today and imposes itself upon the life of the believer. Within that world view mission is a Spirit-event and as such it leaves no room for the possibility that there might be more harm than good going along with the missionary endeavor. The human or historical side of mission is blanked out and Breakthrough International approaches mission as if Christianity is being reinvented with every new church plant it embarks upon.

Consequently in respect to our main question we conclude that Breakthrough International does indeed differ considerably from *Missio Dei*. The difference lies in the question from where it is coming as well as according to which world view it creates its missionary practice. On account of its world view we see Breakthrough International act as if the missionary endeavor has no ambiguous history at all. Mission and salvation are synonymous. Whereas *Missio Dei* has lost its innocence in this regard. It walks away from an understanding of mission which claimed to bring salvation to the world but has rather carried, at least in part, disaster.

## 2. Breakthrough International mission or church centered?

Willingen's great achievement was to redefine the church's nature as body of service and witness to the world. Church was not any longer the subject and aim of mission but the mission originated in the will of the Triune God who wanted to save the world and 'reconcile all things to himself' (Goodall 1953:189). God became the subject and aim of mission and the church one instrument of God's mission. It is only church if it is a mission centered church. As such the church participates in God's mission within the world and is charged with the proclamation of the Kingdom of God as an eschatological reality. John Mott's statement that "it is the Church which is to be at the center of our thinking" because the church "is the Divine Society founded by Christ and his apostles to accomplish his will in the world" (Tambaram 1939:4) became outdated. Willigen moved beyond that church centered view of mission and affirmed that not the church but the world must be at the center of all missiological thinking. Mission as God's mission is located within the history of the world. As the world moves through the times God's mission is realized by moving with the world which needs to be confronted with God's questions rather be left to its own devices. This confrontation happens through the proclamation of God's hidden kingship over the world and its worldly powers which lure men into false hope. As long as the church participates in this mission of God to save the world it is a mission rather than church centered enterprise.

Willingen's ecclesiological turnaround raises the question to what extent Breakthrough International is church centered or mission centered? In response to that question one is reminded of Chester Rawlins's claim that Breakthrough International never intended to form a church but rather was made to do it by the intervention of the Spirit (H03:32). Furthermore Hilton Toohey describes Breakthrough International's main thrust as being something 'like an African empowerment agency for mission, where people are equipped, trained and sent to be part of the Great Commission' (H04:78). He declares that he has had an experience of the Spirit and that "it was never part of our ministries that we would contain and keep man with us all our lives" (H04:76). Instead he had received a call to make 'Africans part of God's Mission' and his aim is therefore to release people into that mission. In short: Breakthrough International did not aim to create another church but rather sought to model itself according to a 'Jesus type of ministry' (Chester Rawlins; H02:56-57).

Those who began Breakthrough International had been brought up with close ties to the Anglican or Catholic Church. But circumstances and even more the leading of the Spirit encouraged them to move away from the churches of their upbringing where people seemed to do 'the same type of thing over and over again' (Rose Rawlins). Chester Rawlins, Hilton Toohey and the others wanted to live according to the bible and make what they were reading in scripture a reality. This became especially apparent during the time of communal life style modeled according to Acts 2. People were 'waiting on the Lord' (Russel Toohey) to show them a way forward. What happened to the people around Hilton Toohey was not the kind of church which they had come to know within the traditional churches of their upbringing. It was 'definitely a spiritual thing' (Rose Rawlins), a movement 'sold out to the God' (Doreen Ulbricht), willing to go wherever the Spirit would lead them.

Breakthrough International developed its understanding of mission from that initial experience, where not the church but the Spirit stood at the center. Consequently the aim of mission is not to enlarge the church, in this case Breakthrough International. It is rather to 'disciple people' which means a training process taking the believers beyond the Spirit experience. In accordance with the initial vision to 'win, train, equip and send' Breakthrough International aims to incorporate those who are won for Christ into a 'framework of radical productive life giving fellowship thereby equipping and training them to be used by God for mission and service in the world' (Cell Group Manual).

The last thing Breakthrough International wants to do is to extend church as a denominational phenomenon and put itself next to for example Catholics, Methodist and Lutherans. It rather sees itself as part of the 'post-denominationalism' era in which the 'church exist to worship, which is the original calling of man, to instruct and teach, which transforms people, to serve and evangelize thereby making it hard for people to go to hell, and to fellowship which puts people before programmes' (M07:7-8). Breakthrough International does not subscribe to an ecclesiology where the church is the measure of all things. It is pretty aware of the fact that the church is there for mission and mission not there for the church. In that sense Breakthrough International represent an ecclesiology which resembles that of the *Missio Dei* concept as it was initially presented at Willingen and developed further over the decades.



### 3. Saving the world or saving the believer?

One might call Breakthrough International mission centered and thus representing the *Missio Dei* concept in its ecclesiology because like *Missio Dei* it aims to participate in God's mission. But one can not ignore that there is quite a difference in respect to the question what the aim of God's mission is. Willigen was clear that mission is aimed 'at the world asking God's questions and proclaiming his hidden kingship over the world thus challenging the powers of the world which lure men into false hope'. In other words *Missio Dei* wants to engage the world, which is understood as God's broken creation. This holistic understanding of salvation is based on the will of God who wants to 'reconcile all things with himself'. Breakthrough International on the others side does not share such a holistic understanding of salvation. Breakthrough International believes strongly that its objective must be "to save people for heaven and eternity" (P08:195). The aim is not to come closer to the world thus coming closer to Christ (Willigen), but to disassociate oneself from the world and 'unlearn the world's principles' (Russell Toohey).

The difference between *Missio Dei* and Breakthrough International lies in the way how the world, as the place in which human life unfolds, is perceived. For *Missio Dei* it is the place in which salvation takes place as a transformation of the whole creation, because it is God's intention to reconcile the whole world with himself. This reconciliation has begun through the sending of the Son. Breakthrough International, on the other side, views the world as the place from which the believer is to be saved. This happens through the intervention of the Spirit. Being saved in turn enables the believer to live a Spirit controlled, godly life which restores him or her back to be an image of God. *Missio Dei* aims to save the world which is ultimately achieved in the eschatological arrival of the Kingdom of God. Breakthrough International wants to save the believer from the world and to enable him to survive within a hostile world until he or she will go to heaven.

Compared to *Missio Dei* one might argue that Breakthrough International's understanding of salvation is limited to a rather personal and individualistic view. It overemphasizes the 'otherworldliness' of salvation while *Missio Dei* emphasizes its 'this-worldliness'. But before rushing into such an assessment we need to remind ourselves that Breakthrough International is born out of a very particular, personal experience which in turn has shaped its thinking. For those who are associated with Breakthrough International salvation is experienced as a very

real turning around of their lives which was in crisis on account of too much 'this-worldliness'.

For example Rose Rawlins says: "I saw God in action [and] in less than a month Chester turned around [from his alcoholism], and our lives were never the same" (H03:39). For Rose and Chester Rawlins salvation was being enabled to stop drinking and being freed from this 'worldly bondage'. Hilton Toohey experienced salvation as being restored to 'be a family man', and Nolen Howard experienced it as being unconditionally loved. All have in common that salvation marks the solution to intense personal problems which are encountered within this world. As they get addressed through the experience of the Spirit salvation is experienced and understood in rather personal, individualistic categories. People experience that the grip, which their worldly problems had over them is loosened and they are saved. It is as though they have had an overdose of 'the world and its problems' and now seem to perpetuate an attitude of 'otherworldliness' as a kind of antidote which saves them from the troubles of the world. Salvation understood as a holistic act of God who wants to reconcile his broken creation with himself seems to be a luxury which people who are overwhelmed by their own brokenness cannot effort. *Missio Dei* is able to say that the world is setting the churches agenda. But the people of Breakthrough International can't agree for very personal reasons. Because they have experienced the world's agenda as endangering rather than lifting up their life and they have gone through an experience which redeemed them from their 'this-worldliness' to a spiritual life which makes this world bearable to them.

Strictly speaking we might therefore say that *Missio Dei* and Breakthrough International differ strongly in respect to the aim of mission. While *Missio Dei* participates in God's project to save the world Breakthrough International focuses on saving the believer. But if viewed within the context of Breakthrough Internationals experience of reality one needs to add the following: Breakthrough International aims to save those who often experience themselves as the victims of the world. In addressing this experience on a personal level Breakthrough International does indeed not aim to save the world, but it wants to save and make a difference to the personal life of the believer.

## **B. BCI and *Missio Dei* compared – ‘personal history’ versus ‘world history’**

So far we have ventured to answer the question if Breakthrough International represents the *Missio Dei* concept by having a very general look at the beginnings of *Missio Dei* and Breakthrough International. This keeps in line with the overall structure of our research where we firstly have looked at *Missio Dei* and Breakthrough International by approaching it from a historical perspective. But as we proceed we now look at where Breakthrough International represents *Missio Dei* in respect to its dealings with history, poverty and culture. Here we draw on our diachronical study of *Missio Dei* as well as Breakthrough International. We begin by looking firstly at the issue of history as the context of mission.

### **1. Rewriting of ‘personal (his)story’ without writing ‘world history’?**

One of the distinct features of *Missio Dei* is its understanding of history as ‘Heilsgeschichte’. With the coming or rather sending of Christ the character and quality of history has changed. The coming of Christ is more than just an event ‘in history’, but, as New Delhi (1961) says it, a ‘transforming of history’. Based on what is called ‘Christocentric Universalism’ (Verghese) New Delhi claims that ‘Jesus Christ is the light of the world’ in a universal sense. Because the coming of Christ has brought about ‘the reality of the new creation in the risen Christ as the one determining factor in world history which gives significance and meaning, despite the confusion and disorder produced by men’s endeavor to divert its destiny towards ends of his own devising’ (Devanandan).

The new understanding of history gives the *missio* of the Son universal significance. History known to mankind began with the first creation, but in Jesus Christ the “act of a new creation has been done, and it is final. The new creation began, in a very real sense, within history” (Marsh 1962:5). World history is therefore more than just the context in which the *Missio Dei* unfolds. It is the addressee of the *missio* of the Son in whom the true *humanum* is been revealed to the world. History is Christ’s history who lays the claim upon manmade world history that nothing in the history of the world is to be excluded from the reality of the new creation which has begun in the sending of the Son. The rest of mankind, those who are not yet reached by the gospel, are not just “objects of evangelization and service” (Verghese 1962:14) but belong to the new creation and are part of the universal dimension of salvation.

Compared to that universal understanding of history Breakthrough International advocates a rather limited concept of history. The study of Breakthrough International's narrative way of doing theology has shown that due to its 'charismatic world view' (Wessels) Breakthrough International does not concern itself with history as world history but primarily as people's history. The world as the sphere of the public domain where history is been made through public discourse is not the place where Breakthrough International sees itself making a contribution. Because this public realm is enemy territory and it becomes relevant for Breakthrough International only in as much as it impinges upon the personal stories of the people it reaches out to. *Missio Dei's* assertion that through the coming of Christ history has changed and that the church's participation in God's *Missio* must necessarily lead to its participation in the making of world history. The people of Breakthrough International would not go as far as that. For them it is people and not the history of the world which is transformed by the coming of Christ. The world and its history remains under the power of the devil and the challenge is to provide as many individuals as possible with an opportunity to escape from the world.

We are confronted with two different attitudes towards world history as the context in which God's *missio* takes place. *Missio Dei* embraces the history of the world as the context in which God's salvation is being realized and which demands full participation by the mission centered church. Because God transforms not just people but the history as a whole. But Breakthrough International limits its understanding of world history to a rather negative view. The church, which participates in God *Missio*, is not called to embrace world history as the context of mission but to free its people from world history since this is the stronghold of the devil.

In respect to its overall understanding of history as the context of God's Mission Breakthrough International does not at all resemble *Missio Dei*. Breakthrough International does not involve itself directly in the making of history within the public domain. But, and here we might need to amend our assessment slightly, when it comes to the issue of making personal history within the private domain, where the non-publicized stories of the people unfold, Breakthrough International is quite involved in the making of history. It does so through involving itself in the stories of the people. In that sense Breakthrough International would locate its ministry within history because in rewriting personal (hi)story world history

is written as well. However, this kind of indirect or privatized approach towards history as the context of its ministry does not change the fact that in general Breakthrough International views history negatively. While the individual believer is called to make a difference and advance the Kingdom within his or her private domain. History as a whole is seen as the stronghold of the devil passing away with the advancing of the God's Kingdom.

## 2. BCI realizing the eschatological character of history on local level?

Theologically speaking, *Missio Dei* did assert that the Christ event has changed history in a universal and fundamental way. But this 'Christological Universalism' needs to be more than a bold theological statement with no relevance to the real issues of history where pain, suffering and death still prevail. Therefore *Missio Dei* stresses that being a mission centered church means 'participating in the history of God's dealings with the world' (Moltmann 1977:65). This participation takes place in the 'sure knowledge, that the future is God's future' (Evanston in Werner 1993:69). With the coming of Christ the Kingdom of God on earth has begun and will continue to grow until Christ will return in glory and fulfillment of the Kingdom. History as context of mission has therefore an eschatological quality. It is seen with an awareness that the Kingdom is visible at the horizon of time. This makes all participation in history realistic and hopeful as Jesus' ministry has been. Because "we know that no human project can eliminate the powers of darkness as they operate in human life, but we have hope because in the knowledge of God's future we can act hopeful in apparent hopeless situations" (Newbigin 1989:114).

Mission as an eschatological enterprise. It takes place 'in the time between the times' (Newbigin 1989:107), between the times when Jesus has 'exposed and disarmed the powers of darkness, and his return. This is more than an interim time where people need to be saved for heaven but it is a time where 'the character of mission is given by the character of the earthly ministry of Jesus' (Newbigin 1989:107). The life of the church takes place like the life of Jesus incarnate was lived, in a world in which the powers of darkness are still at work. As Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God in times of darkness, so is the kingdom proclaimed as future hope and present reality by the mission centered church. *Missio Dei* therefore calls upon the church to proclaim this kingdom of 'God in word and deeds and dare to be present at the bleeding points of humanity' (Melbourne 1980:180). Furthermore in view of the multifaceted and diverse realities of suffering throughout the world the church's presence at

the bleeding points of the world takes primarily place in the local congregation (Missionary Structure of the Congregation). Because 'the base of the church which exists for mission is the local church' (Potter in WCC 1980:16).

Breakthrough International shares *Missio Dei's* perspective that the world is the place where the powers of darkness are still at work. On account of its strict dualism it would even argue that those evil powers are actually and ultimately in control of the world. But contrary to *Missio Dei* the people of Breakthrough International have little hope for the world. They have however great hope for man and women who happen to live in an evil world. It is almost as if *Missio Dei's* eschatological understanding of history as the context of mission is taking on a personal and individualistic form. Breakthrough International's primary concern lies with the people who are bleeding from wounds inflicted upon them by an evil world. As a local congregation Breakthrough International does attend to those wounds and is a witness for the Kingdom acting in hope of the Kingdom to come.

This hope centers around people who are perceived as the victims of a hostile world history. The Kingdom will come to them and their personal transformation will culminate in its arrival. But the Kingdom will not come to the world as a whole. Compared to *Missio Dei* and its eschatological understanding of history we come across a seemingly limited view of the eschatological character of history which is restricted to the personal story of the believer. Breakthrough International is present at the bleeding points of the world, but these bleeding points have names. Chester Rawlins is delivered from drinking, Nina Toohey feels as if she receives divine therapy, Nolen Howard finds unconditional love and Russell Toohey discovers purpose and meaning. The Kingdom of God becomes reality for them as something personal which has touched their life in the present and which is still to arrive in the future. Eschatology becomes real and relates to real people's stories.

Nevertheless and strictly speaking Breakthrough International does not particularly relate to any structural issues within the broader schemes of things. That which Wessels calls the public domain is not relevant. St. John's famous dictum that God did 'send his Son into the world to save the world' (John 3:17) is understood as a personal call upon the life of the believer. Salvation is personalized and it is people who experience that their wounds are being healed. The Kingdom arrives in the believers life on a personal level. This gives him

or her a new outlook on life, but it does not arrive as new reality for a broken world in its entirety.

In summary: Breakthrough International does not identify with the rather sophisticated and holistic eschatological understanding of history proposed by *Missio Dei*. It rather realizes a personalized version of it on a local level. Breakthrough International, as Melbourne declares, is present in the 'midst of human struggles' (WCC 1980:180), but those struggles have names and faces. Within the human struggles of the people Breakthrough International experiences the Kingdom and points to its future on local, and congregational level. By doing so it realizes *Missio Dei*, but it loses sight of the fact that the penultimate solution of God's salutary work is aiming to save the world and not just individuals consumed by their own struggles within the world.

### 3. The 'world's agenda' versus the Spirits agenda

It was Dietrich Bonhoeffer who called the church to share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, and to 'exist for others' in a world which had 'come of age'. Instead of imposing its own religious or theological categories upon humanity. *Missio Dei* is to identify itself with the reality of the world as it is, and not as Christian language makes it out to be. The pattern of mission in a secular world is therefore one "of constant encounter with the real needs of our ages" (Mexico City 1963, cf. CWME 1964:314). The Church can not retrieve in a ghetto and impose its own categories on the world. But it is called to be an authentic witness in a secular society. As such it takes the secular society seriously and understand the 'secular' as its context.

In addition ecumenical missiology went beyond a simplistic and overly positive view of secularism as the context of God's mission. San Antonio (1989) acknowledged that 'many would see secularization as partly a fruit of the gospel, releasing humankind from ancient powers and emancipating people to make mature choices and take responsibility for their destiny'. In addition 'the secular' as the context of mission was uncovered as a mythical notion. As San Antonio states: 'today, many who have experienced secularization in recent decades have however given up faith in its value: a post-secular era announces itself'. Ecumenical theology did realize that God's *Missio* does unfold in secular or post-secular times, but more over it takes place in 'real times', where "it is the world that must be allowed

to provide the agenda for the church” (Missionary Structure of the Congregation). Since God’s mission is concerned with the ‘real needs of our ages’ mission cannot flee from the world but happens through a deep involvement in and with the real world.

It is needless to say that the idea of the world providing the agenda of the church is an unacceptable proposition for Breakthrough International. We have stressed again and again that this kind of notion does not fit into Breakthrough International’s dualistic worldview. The world is not a partner but the realm of the enemy. Its agenda needs to be neglected and the agenda of the Spirit to be imposed.

If at all Breakthrough International identifies with the reality as it is and addresses the ‘real needs of the ages’ in a rather indirect way. This is due to the fact that Breakthrough International sees itself embraced by the Spirit. The Spirit imposes itself upon people and transforms their (his)stories and self-understanding. Breakthrough International therefore exists for others primarily so that they may be embraced by the Spirit, and be transformed as well as drawn into the divine mission to save the world. In that sense Breakthrough International understand itself as people-centered and exists for others, because it is the primary need of the people to understand their role in God’s divine mission and live out their destiny. While Breakthrough International does not embrace the secular or post-secular world it embraces the people who live in that world, and in as much as the world is irrelevant to Breakthrough International its the people with their needs who are important to the church.

Breakthrough International’s underlying assumption is that the real need of the people is first and foremost to experience the Spirit as a life changing power. The Spirit therefore sets the agenda of the church’s work. This is not seen as imposing its own religious categories upon people. On the contrary Breakthrough International asserts that people need to be set before programs because they need to find their personal and divine destiny. But the church sees itself being truly ‘people centered’ by addressing the primary ‘real need of the people’ which is to experience the Spirit as a life changing power. Within facilitating that experience Breakthrough International does indeed deal with what *Missio Dei* would call the ‘real needs of the ages’. But those needs are personalized and identified as rather personal needs of the people. They are addressed as soon as the believer lives a life where he or she pursues his or her God given destiny.



Breakthrough International therefore does not at all concur with *Missio Dei* in accepting the present times, secular or post-secular, as a partner for dialogue. The world does not know its real needs but it is God through the Spirit who sets the agenda. Being present at the 'real needs of the ages' as defined by the world would miss the point of God's mission. God did send his Son to be present at the real needs of the people as he and not the world identifies them and those needs are addressed through the Spirit.

The primary need of the people is to encounter the Spirit which transforms the self-understanding of the people and restores them to a Spirit filled life which is the life God intends for his people. In short Breakthrough International embraces the people it wants to 'win, train, equip and send' but unlike *Missio Dei* it regards the times in which this takes place as evil times which have not at all 'come of age' but are in need of the Spirit to impose his agenda upon the world.

#### 4. Understanding history by listening to 'the other' or be 'the other'?

With the arrival of post-modern thinking early ecumenical missiology and with it the *Missio Dei's* concept of history was plunged into a crisis. It became increasingly clear that 'theories about history are not useful for the understanding of myself as a subject active in history' (Tracy 1995:228). Initially *Missio Dei* like theology in general worked with an overly optimistic understanding of 'History in singular, with capital letters and without an indication of its subject', thus presenting a 'fascinating concept of the experiment of modernity' (Moltmann). But as times changed from the modern to the post-modern theology became more and more aware of the fact that a new look at history was required. In order to fully grasp history the 'history of the others' (Werner) would need to be heard. It is the perspective of the others which is essential to understand a world which is torn apart by 'conflict, bondage and injustice' (Bosch). Therefore *Missio Dei* set out to look at history from the perspective of those who had "been invaded, massacred, and subjected" (Castro) by a history which is governed by Western dominance and exploitation. In allowing for a new perspective *Missio Dei* re-examined its modern premises and turned it into a truly postmodern concept. It realized that history is not just an abstract but a reality which can only fully be appreciated by listening to the stories of 'the others'.

If we apply this thinking to our study of Breakthrough International we might reasonably claim that Breakthrough International does indeed represent the voice of the very same 'others' *Missio Dei* talks about. Breakthrough International is made up of poor people (Russell Toohey), and it is the 'evangelical poor' (Martin) to whom the church appeals because it 'touches the broken' (Chester Rawlins). In touching 'the broken' it wants to do more than replicate what Breakthrough International perceives as a traditional way of church 'where you come and go – but nothing changes' (Rose Rawlins). Breakthrough International wants to be a place of genuine fellowship where the voice of the broken is heard and healing experienced. It wants to have a ministry where people 'sit down and look at each other', and just talk and have a 'Jesus type of ministry' (Chester Rawlins). At the center of this Jesus type of ministry stands the Cell Group, where people are listened to and share their stories. As Clifford Donnelly says: "Cell, to me is a place where we are united with our friends. Where there is everything which is a problem, we share. The cell members in our group are like a brother or sister. There's nothing we don't share about everything. If we have got a problem, we sit down and talk about it, we even joke about it and we'll solve it together" (P05:146-147). This 'Jesus type of ministry' gives a voice to the story of the others. Those who are victims of abuse, racial oppression, poverty, the marginalized and disadvantaged come together. They share their stories and listen to 'history of the others' as *Missio Dei* would call it, and the 'others' themselves actually work through their stories. Together they unravel the tribulations which constitute those stories and aim to solve their problems

All this resembles *Missio Dei* in a fascinating way, because *Missio Dei*'s claim that in looking at history the church needs to look at the 'history of the others', in order to understand history holistically, turns into reality on a personal and individual level. The 'others' themselves tell their story and express their needs and concerns. The church does not just listen to the people but becomes the voice of the people. One might say that Breakthrough International's 'Jesus type of ministry' does not only listen to the stories of the 'victims of history' (Melbourne 1980) but goes beyond the listening. It let's the 'victims of history' engage with each other's stories so that they can overcome their victimization, oppression or, as Breakthrough International would call it, brokenness.

But, as we have seen before, this engagement is limited to the personal stories of the believer. Individual problems are shared and addressed and the stories of 'the other' don't really get connected to the overall historical realities in which they take place. This is the intrinsic

dilemma of Breakthrough International and it is caused by its bias that 'experience precedes ideas' (Balcomb). It plays itself out by on the one hand going further than *Missio Dei* and actually engaging with the stories of the others. But on the other hand it limits this engagement to a rather personalized and individualistic understanding of history. The church overlooks that in order to fully understand the stories of the victims of history the stories of the 'others' also needs to be positioned within the overall reality of secular or post-secular history. Because personal history can't just remain an individual or personal story in order to be understood and addressed appropriately.

### C. BCI and *Missio Dei* compared – the poor liberated or saved?

#### 1. The incarnation of Christ relevant to BCI's working with the poor?

It is consensus within ecumenical missiology, that 'God's preferential option for the poor is the accepted guiding principle of mission' (Scherer). This consensus is not a matter of 'political idealism' (P08:198) as Russell Toohey would suspect but a result of a serious theological re-evaluation of the task of mission. At the center of this theological re-evaluation stands the incarnation of Christ which is viewed in the light of *Missio Dei*. Christ's incarnation is understood as an act through which God decided to position himself 'on the side of all humanity' (Visser't Hooft). Christ becoming human has implications for the 'humanness of humanity' because the 'real humanity is revealed' in Christ incarnate (Ecumenical Affirmation 1982). Furthermore Christ needs to be made known as the source and foundation of true humanization (Thomas), and Christians need to work for the humanization of the world and to be advocates of humanity. It is a task which is 'essential to mission' (Thomas) because Christ's incarnation calls for mission as participation in the humanization of the world.

Initially *Missio Dei* understood this call for the humanization of the world as a rather ethical call. But Bangkok 1973 led to the acknowledgement that in view of the poor the issue of humanization is more than an ethical matter calling for a more human world. Poverty is matter of theology proper (Bosch) and the relation of the Church to the poor is the yardstick of all missionary work (Castro). Ecumenical theology understood that one could not talk about the humanization of the world without putting the plight of the poor at the center of this debate. Bangkok's answered the question 'what is salvation today' and related it to the poor saying: "Salvation works in the struggle for economic justice, in the struggle for human dignity, in the struggle for solidarity against the alienation of person from person" and "in the struggle for hope against despair in personal life" (Bangkok 1973:89). It became clear that salvation cannot be limited to a merely Western concept of humanization but Christ's incarnation needs to be understood in a more far reaching way. His mission didn't just aim to humanize or develop but liberate the world and especially the poor. God's preferential option for the poor and the struggle for liberation was not any longer an adiaphora of ecumenical missiology but became a *notae ecclesiae*, an essential sign of the mission centered church.

As we turn our attention to Breakthrough International we note that a church which is so thoroughly consumed by the personal experience of the Spirit has little appreciation for Christ's incarnation. The fact that Christ became human has little implications for the way in which Breakthrough International views the 'humanness of humanity'. This plays itself out especially in relation to poverty and the poor. Because, theologically speaking, poverty is not understood in relation to Christ's incarnation. Breakthrough International would not subscribe to the notion that Christ's incarnation does indicate his solidarity with humanity or, for that matter, with the poor. The church does not understand salvation as an inclusive event which includes and transforms human struggles in the world and is guided by a preferential option for the poor. Christ didn't become human and was made flesh (σάρξ as opposed to σωμα in John 1:14!, cf. Bultmann 1984:193-203, 232-238. ) to offer mankind a 'new humanity' (Thomas). Breakthrough International would concede that Jesus did live in 'the flesh', as it would be called. But it would not be able to fathom that his incarnation is aimed at the transformation of the 'σάρξ -reality' of mankind. Christ came to save humanity from this world for 'heaven and eternity' (Russell Toohey) and not to transform this world which is destined to remain the 'σάρξ -reality', or 'in the flesh'(Hilton Toohey). In short: For Breakthrough International Christ became flesh to save and deliver the believer from his or her humanness - 'σάρξ -reality'- and call him into a new spiritual reality. It was not out of concern for the humanness of humanity that Christ joined the human existence. But God aimed to free people from this very humanness which holds them bondage to a world of evil powers.

The world and with it humanity remains a place where power encounters between demonic-satanic forces and the divine take place. Christ's incarnation does not change that but rather marks God's definitive power encounter with evil. Christ is God's ultimate challenge to the demonic powers which hold the world in its 'fleshly ways'. Therefore the sending of the Son was never intended to liberate the poor but to save them together with all humanity from the 'σάρξ -reality' of the world. To suggest, as *Missio Dei* does on account of its understanding of Christ's incarnation, that salvation has to do with struggle for economic justice, human dignity, solidarity against the alienation of person from person, and hope against despair in personal life, misses, understood from Breakthrough International perspective, the point. Because Jesus himself spiritualized poverty and refused to become the 'king of bread' (John 6:15). Instead he stressed that he is the bread of life (Russell Toohey).

What is happening is that Breakthrough International not at all resembles *Missio Dei* when it comes to its understanding of poverty and the poor. This is mainly due to its preoccupation with pneumatology in a rather individualistic and personalized form. Because Breakthrough International has no grasp of a holistic understanding of Christ's incarnation. It seems primarily concerned with spirituality rather than with issues of poverty alleviation and social justice within the public domain. In short: *Missio Dei* sees Christ's incarnation bringing about the new 'humanness of humanity' while Breakthrough International sees salvation as the individual leaving behind his or her humanness and become a spiritual being. The difference could not be more substantial.

## 2. Poverty a matter of theology proper or of personal spirituality?

As we have seen above *Missio Dei* has made the relationship of the church to and with the poor the theological yardstick with which the mission centered church and its involvement in the world needs to be measured. The churches relation to and with the poor has become a *notae ecclesiae* on which the church stands or falls. As the church addresses matters of economic justice, human dignity, solidarity and hope in despair it becomes the mission centered church which participates in God's *Missio* and does not just perform an activity which the church might or might not do.

Breakthrough International, unlike *Missio Dei*, does not approach the issue of poverty as a matter of theology proper viewing it within the context of Christ's incarnation. Breakthrough International's emphasis on the experience of the Spirit is coupled with an indifference with respect to an understanding of Christ's incarnation. Poverty remains an issue within the realm of 'the flesh' and is understood as a problem of personal ethics and living a Spirit controlled life. In respect to its understanding of poverty Breakthrough International displays more than a lack of theological cohesiveness which one might expect from a movement which is based on experience rather than on concepts. Based on its experience Breakthrough International neglects Christ's incarnation and 'spiritualizes' poverty. It does so by arguing that it has 'seen that poverty is a condition that doesn't exist independently', but 'it is often related to the worship practices of those people who are poor' (Russell Toohey). It is for example 'witchcraft and bloodletting', - according to Breakthrough International widely practiced in Africa -, which makes people progressively poorer. This happens on account of the fact that God himself has said that he will curse such practices. Based on this 'spiritual perspective'

Breakthrough International would say that in effect the 'poor themselves are often to blame for their plight' (Russell Toohey). Because it is the actions and the ethics of people and even nations which bring about poverty.

Furthermore Breakthrough International engages poverty as the context of God's mission from a personal and spiritual point of view. The personal dimension comes into play because the church sees itself as made up of mainly poor people, who address the issue of their personal poverty. They do so on an existential level because their context is the context of the poor. But as the people of Breakthrough International take on their poverty they are guided by a spiritual understanding of poverty. The formative experience which stands at the center of their dealings with their poverty is that 'the Spirit provides the Kingdom goods to those who seek the Kingdom' (Hilton Toohey). The people of Breakthrough International have 'supernaturally experienced' that 'living by faith' works. The main focus of mission remains therefore to save people for eternity because as the believer 'seeks the Kingdom' and lives a Spirit controlled life his or her life will inevitably change for the better. The circle of 'redemption and lift' will improve his or her social standing because poverty has no place in a Spirit controlled life. The assumption is that faith and wealth go together because if the personal life style is based on the word of God, the blessings will flow (Russell Toohey). This is more than a statement of faith. It is confirmed by personal experience and is thus so appealing to the people of Breakthrough International.

But the difference to *Missio Dei* is obvious. While *Missio Dei* approaches poverty and the relationship between the church and the poor theologically Breakthrough International does so by spiritualizing it into a matter of personal ethics and piety. *Missio Dei* understands poverty and the plight of the poor as a this-worldly reality. As such it is not excluded from God's will to save the world which he has made visible in the incarnation of Christ. But Breakthrough International views poverty from within an understanding that people are destined for another spiritual 'otherworldly' reality in which the reality they encounter in the here and now does not matter. Poverty and the relation of the church to the poor is therefore not seen as essential or even a yardstick to measure its participation in God's mission, let alone an issue on which the church stands or falls.

This observation has important implications in respect to the question if Breakthrough International resembles the *Missio Dei* concept. When it comes to the understanding and

theological qualification of poverty as well as to the relevance of the poor to the mission of God, both, *Missio Dei* and Breakthrough International could not be further apart. The former sees poverty and the relationship of the church with and to the poor as a *notae ecclesiae*, the essential 'yardstick' of a mission centered church. While the latter reduces the issue to a spiritual matter within the realm of personal ethics.

### 3. The difference between being poor and relating to the poor

Our assessment of Breakthrough International with respect to its understanding and relationship to and with the poor has been rather harsh. It had to be since we have applied *Missio Dei's* understanding of Christ's incarnation to the missionary practice of Breakthrough International. *Missio Dei* measures mission by its commitment to God's preferential option for the poor which is a suggestion Breakthrough International would hardly subscribe to. Breakthrough International fails to appreciate the essential role which 'God's preferential option for the poor' plays for the overall task of mission.

But interestingly enough this does not mean that Breakthrough International doesn't show any solidarity with the poor. Being born within the context of poverty it is actually addressing poverty in a number of ways. This is not necessarily based on a theological understanding of poverty within in the framework of Christ's incarnation as it is the case with *Missio Dei*. The call that salvation has to do with the participation in the struggle for economic justice, the struggle for human dignity, the struggle for solidarity against the alienation of person from person, and the struggle for hope against despair in personal life is a call which resonates well with Breakthrough International for practical not theological reason. What is happening is that within Breakthrough International the poor themselves address their poverty.

The poor within Breakthrough International give a face to "the poor" which *Missio Dei* understands within a rather conceptual frame of mind. What we mean by this "conceptual frame of mind" might become clearer as one looks at the way in which "the poor" are being defined. Leonardo and Clodovis Boff's "*Introducing Liberation Theology*" for example write:

By "poor" we do not really mean the poor individual... we mean a collective poor, the "popular classes",... the poor are also the workers exploited by the capitalist system the underemployed, those pushed aside by the production process, ...the laborers of the



countryside, the migrant with only seasonal work. All this mass of socially and historically oppressed makes up the poor as social phenomenon (Boff L.& C. 1987:3-4) .

David Bosch adds to that definition:

The poor were an all-embracing category for those who are the victims of society... The poor are the marginalized, those who lack every active or even passive participation in society (Bosch 1991:436).

And finally the CWME declaration on "*Mission and Evangelism – an Ecumenical Affirmation*" (1982) makes clear:

An increasing number of people find themselves marginalized, second-class citizen unable to control their own destiny and unable to understand what is happening around them. Racism, powerlessness, solitude, breaking of family and community ties are new evidence of the marginalization that comes under the category of poverty (Kinnamon 1997:378).

It is these very same poor of which the Boff brothers, David Bosch, and the Ecumenical Affirmation talk about as concepts of "popular classes" and "category of poverty" whom we find within Breakthrough International and in the social context in which the church operates. People like Chester Rawlins or Noleen Howard, who see themselves as the "broken", experience within Breakthrough International solidarity with each other as the persons they are. The same applies to the the poor who are part of the community in which the church operates. Because the poor of Breakthrough International practice solidarity with the poor outside the church. "The poor" within Breakthrough International and "the poor" who live in the community where Breakthrough International practices its ministry are not concepts or categories but fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of the community to whom the church relates in the roll out of God's mission. On that very human level the poor in and outside the church identify with each other's plight and struggle to overcome their poverty, dehumanization, and marginalization. "The poor" of *Missio Dei* become real within Breakthrough International. Interestingly enough they don't give their solidarity with each other a particular theological twist but see it as a joining together in a spiritual and ethical struggle to overcome poverty which they can fight better together than alone.

The somewhat overly theological idea that God expressed his solidarity with human struggles through the incarnation of Christ has no significance to the believers of Breakthrough International. They have felt the Spirit touching their personal life and salvation is not seen as aiming at what *Missio Dei* calls 'the human struggles' in general. Salvation is a personal

experience where the believer is liberated from powers he or she feels deeply victimized by. This is an experience of personal and spiritual liberation but has little to do with the believers solidarity with the poor and their collective struggle to free themselves from poverty. The solidarity between the believer of Breakthrough International and fellow human beings is not primarily related to Christ's incarnation as God's act of salvation. It is rather rooted in the fact that the believer and fellow human beings share the same experience of marginalization. They are victimized by poverty and join in their human struggle for survival and dignity.

This struggle, in the terminology of *Missio Dei*, centers around the personal economic situation of the people, their dehumanizing circumstances, alienation from solidarity with fellow people, and personal despair. On a practical level, where the human struggle becomes real and personal, one can indeed observe parallels to the way of mission which *Missio Dei* would expect to emanate from its understanding of the incarnation of Christ. The solidarity Breakthrough International displays with its fellow human is at least in part the kind of solidarity with the poor which *Missio Dei* calls for. It is a solidarity which is not motivated by a unique, somewhat theological understanding of salvation but by the fact that the believer is victimized by the very same forces as his or her fellow man. Both don't just relate to "the poor" as social phenomenon (Boff) but they are the poor and address their plight in solidarity with each other<sup>20</sup>.

In effect the church does therefore indeed participate in the struggle of the poor since this is its very own struggle. But it does so in a rather practical way, and addresses what we have called the 'bread and butter issues' which are of existential relevance to the poor. Thereby it displays what *Missio Dei* would identify as the sign of a mission centered church, and lives in solidarity with the poor. Despite its preoccupation with the experience of the Spirit Breakthrough International understands that it can not give the spiritual only (Doreen Ulbricht) and engages in programs to lift up the people. The church is involved in job creation programs, vegetable gardening, feeding schemes, debt free campaigns and teaches people to take control of their personal financial planning as well as business management. Even more importantly it 'attracts the poor because it is a place where the poor feel empowered to develop themselves' (Irvin Howard). This empowerment takes place with a

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20 We are aware that one should not idealize this solidarity. Talking from a perspective of a pastor who works in the community of the marginalized one can continuously be amazed about the kind of solidarity which "the poor" practice amongst each other. But one can also be appalled by the often horrific acts of exploitation and oppression by which the poor victimize each other and display a tremendous lack of solidarity.

strong ethical focus on transformation of character and lifestyle which ultimately aims to turn the believer into a minister who advances the Kingdom in his or her personal context. The main tool to empower the poor and show solidarity with them is the cell group through which the church responds to its context of poverty. These provide a close monitoring, and more importantly, support system to raise leaders with strong personal values who apply a 'scriptural lifestyle'. It is within the cell groups where Breakthrough International's solidarity with the poor becomes most apparent as a personalized solidarity and the believers take on their human struggles in very concrete ways.

This practical solidarity with the personal struggles of the poor in general, and with tribulations of the believer in particular, warrants a reassessment of our initially harsh appraisal of Breakthrough International's involvement with the poor as context of God's mission. Yes, strictly theologically speaking, Breakthrough International fails to appreciate the essential role which 'God's preferential option for the poor' plays for the overall task of mission since it does not relate the 'preferential option for the poor' to God's work of salvation. But this picture changes when one looks at Breakthrough International's practice, which is not at all governed by its 'other-worldly' understanding of salvation. Since the church itself is made up of the poor it approaches poverty as a problem of personal ethics and spirituality, As church it lives in solidarity with the struggles of the poor and addresses those 'bread and butter issues' which the poor themselves identify as their real problems. In doing so it resembles *Missio Dei's* approach to the poor as the context of mission, though in a rather limited personalized and individualized fashion (cf. Shaull 2000: 21-40).

In short: Breakthrough International does not grasp God's preferential option for the poor' in its full theological significance. But, as poor as its members are, they feel God's preferential treatment through the experience of the Spirit. This enables them to address their personal struggles as ethical and spiritual, though not theological, challenges and they do so in solidarity with each other.

## **D. BCI and *Missio Dei* compared – mission in or versus culture**

### 1. Mission through or above culture?

One of the fundamental propositions of *Missio Dei* is that God's mission does not happen in a vacuum but through cultural mediation. 'It is culture that shapes the voice that answers the voice of Christ' as Bankgok (1973) puts it. Mission is understood as a process of Christ incarnating himself into a specific culture. The terminology which describes this process differs according to theological preference and is called contextualization, adaptation, accommodation or indigenization. But the fact of the matter is that *Missio Dei* proposes that the word of God assumes a concrete 'embodiment with a particular individual, community, institution or culture' (Ecumenical Affirmation 1982, cf. Kinnamon 1997:376). God's mission does not happen without culture as its medium and is culturally conditioned. He realizes his mission through culture and in culture and does not put it above culture. This insight of ecumenical missiology is essential to the overall understanding of the missionary enterprise. It is a kind of understanding of God's mission which differs profoundly from the way in which Breakthrough International understands culture as context of God's mission.

As our study has shown before it is Breakthrough International's blessing – the intimate personal experience of the Spirit – which once again turns out to be its limiting factor. Because the personal and intimate experience of the Spirit, shared by the people of the church, makes it impossible for the church to go along with *Missio Dei's* understanding of culture. People like Hilton Toohey have experienced that the church is a supernatural creation into which they have been drawn into by their personal spiritual experience. They have seen for themselves that the aim of the Kingdom of God is to experience the 'joy in the Holy Ghost', which happens 'supernaturally' thus per definition 'above' rather than 'in' or 'through' culture.

Growing out of that experience Breakthrough International's distinguishes between the 'Spiritual' and the 'Natural' and it is this dualism which restrict its understanding of culture. People have experienced salvation as new spiritual reality which has taken over their old natural or worldly ways. This experience of the 'joy in the Holy Ghost' informs their thinking about culture. It is a joy which is not a cultural conditioned experience. Salvation, this intense, joyful, personal and spiritual experience, is a supernatural event and cannot be mediated through the 'natural' of which culture is part. The gospel is imposed upon the

believer in a supernatural personal experience, which establishes an intimate relationship with God not at all bound to cultural forms and expressions of faith. Even further Breakthrough International cautions that to identify the gospel and culture too closely can actually endanger the chances of salvation as we have seen with Patrick Dlamini. He complained that all 'these traditions and customs' through which the gospel is culturally mediated (in his case within the Catholic Church), could have deprived him of salvation. He therefore warns of a too close relationship between culture and the gospel and says: "While sitting in church I would have gone straight to hell."

The positions of *Missio Dei* and Breakthrough International on the issue of culture as medium of mission could not be further apart. Breakthrough International does not see the voice that answers the voice of Christ shaped by culture but by a personal intimacy with the Spirit which has a supernatural thus 'super-cultural' character.

## 2. The culturally conditioned gospel versus the gospel above culture

The above described dualism has not only consequences for the way in which Breakthrough International understands culture but also for the way in which it understands the gospel.

*Missio Dei*, as we have seen, does not happen if the gospel is not contextualized (cf. San Antonio 1990). Contextualization is understood as a local process and happens where the incarnation of the gospel takes place within the context of certain communities and their cultures. Since there is no culture-free gospel salvation is understood as culturally conditioned, and since this conditioning happens as a concrete, local process within certain communities the gospel assumes a diverse cultural identity. 'The gospel is incarnated in multiple cultural forms' (Ecumenical Affirmation). An understanding of the gospel as 'the one gospel' being above cultural realities is transformed within *Missio Dei* into an understanding of the gospel as diverse incarnations of Christ. These incarnations are as varied as the culture and communities within which the gospel incarnates or rather contextualizes itself. God's mission is aimed at the 'total context in which people are now living and in which they now have to make their decisions' (Newbigin). God's mission can therefore be described as a 'systematic principle of differentiation which is at work' (Durasingh) in the world and its cultures. In short: *Missio Dei* means contextualization of the gospel.

While *Missio Dei* would argue that there is no 'one gospel' but that there are only culturally mediated embodiments of the gospel which are either in or of culture (to use Niebuhr's terminology), Breakthrough International argues in favor of 'the one gospel above culture'. To suggest that there is interaction between the gospel and culture which in effect does change the gospel or at least the way in which it presents itself within a given community or culture would not be acceptable to Breakthrough International. When considering Breakthrough International attitude one is reminded of Newbigin's dictum about Edinburgh (1910). At Edinburgh 'everyone knew what the message was'. Likewise the message Breakthrough International wants to bring across is known and not in doubt. Culture comes into play only when the issue of successful evangelization is considered, and it is primarily considered as possible stumbling block for effective outreach and ministry. Consequently Breakthrough International is quite willing to accommodate and adjust to certain cultural practices, after all, they are part of the 'natural', thus of little consequence to the gospel. The church freely adapts itself with respect to dress, language and even advises its members to respect certain eating habits when reaching out to the non-believers. But the overall principle remains that the gospel of salvation and joy in the Holy Ghost remains above culture. This message does not aim to transform a certain culture or contextualize itself within that culture. The gospel rather creates its own Bibles-based and Spirit-controlled sub-culture. Real interaction between the gospel and culture can not and does not take place. Contextualization, if one at all is willing to apply this term upon Breakthrough International's practice, happens solely for the reason of mission and evangelism (probably quoting 1 Cor 9:19 in this regard).

Moreover this 'contextualization' or rather adaptation of the gospel reaches its limit as soon as it might violate the central role of the Spirit. For Breakthrough International this is for example the case with respect to ancestor veneration. Attempts by African Independent Churches to incorporate the ancestors into their understanding of the gospel are rejected because 'they don't preach salvation' (Thandi Dlomo). The intimacy with the Spirit, in which the believer is supposed to live, and the primacy of the Spirit, to which the believer is supposed to submit, does not allow for a role of the ancestors within the life of the believer. Even though they are such an intrinsic part of African culture it is inconceivable to submit to any 'dependency on ancestral spirits' (Hilton Toohey).

The overall assumption is that the gospel does not fit into a culture but culture must fit into the gospel. Breakthrough International can't conceive of a dialogue between the gospel and

culture which changes the way in which the gospel embodies itself in a given culture. It is rather the other way around, the way Hilton Toohey talks about ancestor veneration demonstrates this. He is clear that it is not he who opposes this African cultural practice but the Spirit itself. Because when ministering to Xhosas in Cape Town he didn't say anything and didn't condemn ancestral beliefs but after a period of six months he saw that 'the power of the gospel took the people out of their dependency on ancestral spirits'. The gospel and its experience through the Spirit is not only unchangeable and above culture but is even able to impose itself and its supremacy upon culture.

In conclusion we might say that it seems as if we travel back in time to the beginnings of ecumenical missiology at the Edinburgh conference (1910). The very same attitude of supremacy over culture which Breakthrough International shows was displayed when John Mott announced that the "the end of the conference is the beginning of the conquest". In 1910 the feeling of supremacy was based on the assumption that the Anglo-European men were charged with the divine task to evangelize and civilize the non-Christian world. Breakthrough International bases its self confidence on the experience of the power of the Spirit which places the gospel above culture and is even able to impose itself upon culture. It is obvious that this kind of attitude does not agree with *Missio Dei's* understanding of contextualization as multiple embodiment of the gospel characterized by cultural diversity.

### 3. The local congregation living in communion or as Christian subculture?

*Missio Dei* understands the gospel as culturally conditioned. This cultural conditioning leads to growing cultural diversity of the gospel. The aim is not uniformity but a multiple expression of a common faith, a diversity intrinsic to the incarnation of the gospel. But this diversity might affect the catholicity of the church as *Missio Dei* readily acknowledges. It may lead to a loss of the sense of unity within the 'church universal' (Nairobi 1975) which continues to be called to one hope though expressed in diverse cultures (Salvador 1996). In addressing this problem of being called 'to one hope which is expressed in diverse cultures' *Missio Dei* suggests a polycentric understanding of mission and culture which grasp the polycentric cultural identity of the gospel within the church universal. The term 'polycentric' refers to more than the existence of many churches around the world. It needs to be understood as a 'systematic principle of differentiation' which 'refuses to accord

epistemological privilege to any single church but describes a diversity in the life, the witness and the theological formulation of the church universal' (Durasingh).

Unity within that diversity is realized in a process of dialogue and communion which takes place within the church universal on a local level. Systematically speaking the contextuality and the catholicity of the gospel and the church is held together through what Salvador calls the 'local congregation in communion'. The local church commits itself to cross-cultural sharing of the diversity of the Christian faith, and discovers the unity that binds the churches together. Furthermore the local church affirms together with other churches the "Christological center and Trinitarian source of the Christian faith in all its varied expressions" (M. Thomas).

This means there should be a willingness to participate in a process of communication with each other, to be a church in communion across cultures. This willingness becomes an indispensable prerequisite for any church to participate meaningfully in God's mission. The church universal is a process and its unity is not primarily found in a shared doctrine, except for the acknowledgement of a christological center and the Trinitarian source of faith, but in the willingness to live in communion. In short: *Missio Dei* proposes an ecclesiology where there is a general willingness by the local churches to remain in dialogue and communion with each other thus realizing the church universal.

This kind of openness is only realized rudimentary within Breakthrough International. The church claims that interdependence and accountabilities are core values (M01:2). But if assessed critically it does represent a local Christian subculture and not a local congregation in communion with other churches. The openness to engage with other local churches goes as far as the values which are promoted within that sub-culture are shared. A good illustration of this lack of dialogue is possibly the fact that Breakthrough International tries to create a program for its members which is designed to take over their whole life. Being a member of Breakthrough International becomes a lifestyle modelled after the bible and one is initiated into it through the 'Mobilization Ministry'. This way of life, which is promoted by Breakthrough International, is not understood as one but as the Christian and Bible-based way of life. The subculture, in which Breakthrough International expresses the gospel, has become so central that dialogue with other ways of expressing the gospel does not take place any longer.



Breakthrough International in essence sacrifices its catholicity for its rather successful contextualization of the gospel into a Bible-based, local sub-subculture. The church indeed manages to contextualize the gospel within its context of a diverse, urban, multilingual township culture and embraces people which tend to come from the lower levels of society<sup>21</sup> like Coloreds, Indians, Blacks and even some Whites. There it presents a God who is not at all boring or even passé (Anthony Toohey). To be a Christian becomes a lifestyle (Thandi Dlomo) which helps the individual to find its way. But there is little awareness that there are other churches who try to make being a Christian a lifestyle as well yet they arrive at different expressions of faith. This applies especially to the prejudice with which the members of Breakthrough International view the traditional churches. In overemphasizing their personal experience of being born again people of Breakthrough International tend to set themselves apart from the 'normal church' where people 'basically repeat the same old things without ever progressing on a personal level' (Rose Rawlins). In essence Breakthrough International does remain within a Bible-based subculture and doesn't seem to be able to engage in communion with the church universal on a local level.

#### 4. Cultural disobedience for the sake of the Spirit or of the victims?

Despite its strong emphasis on contextualization *Missio Dei* does call for a critical distance to culture and the application of 'cultural hermeneutics' which 'seeks to demystify the abstractness of culture by the analysis of and reflection on culture and its effects on people' (Salvador 1996). God's mission does not only aim to identify with culture but also to transform it. *Missio Dei* affirms that 'our identity is in Christ and with him we identify ourselves' (Bangkok 1973). It is with a certain hesitation that *Missio Dei* participates in culture because it can never fully identify with a particular way of life. There exists a dialectical and intrinsic tension between contextualization of the gospel within a given culture and its transformation through the gospel. In as much *Missio Dei* aims for contextualization it is also implicitly culture-critical (Werner). This might at times express itself as a Christian counter-culture, because *Missio Dei* does see the possible need for an 'uprising against culture' in order to 'restore the life of the people which is sapped by distress, sickness,

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21 As we have seen Breakthrough International sees itself to 70% made up of poor people (P09:204). For more detailed discussion of the social make and racial up of the church see chapter II.D.1.

injustice and death' (San Antonio). This applies particularly if culture holds people within oppressive structures. Contextualization and transformation go hand in hand therefore and the values of the gospel are the guiding principle in assessing local as well as global cultural practices. Especially where culture oppresses and exploits people the element of struggle or 'cultural disobedience' (Verstraelen) must become as much a defining feature of the relationship between Christ and culture as contextualization itself.

Cultural disobedience for the sake of those who are victims of oppressive and exploitative customs and structures is something to which Breakthrough International can hardly relate to. It does acknowledge the real impact of oppressive structures upon people within a given culture. Russell and Hilton Toohey identify a number of those issues where they see people victimized by their culture. They see Africans victimized by their dependence on ancestral spirits and sexual immorality, Indians are bound to racism and the remnants of the caste system, and Coloureds suffer from their lack of respect for their own culture. But since the church is caught up in its understanding of culture as part of the realm of the natural even these oppressive cultural practices, though they are explicitly identified by the church as problems for its people, don't warrant any uprising or cultural disobedience. The Spiritual takes preference over and above the natural. Breakthrough International and its message of 'joy in the Holy Ghost' stands above culture.

It is therefore not the church's mandate to oppose culture where it becomes oppressive. Based on its experience of the Spirit Breakthrough International does not identify the need for cultural disobedience as inherent to the gospel. Cultural practices which are oppressive or exploitative become important to the churches participation in Gods mission primarily when those practices obstruct the advancement of the Spirit and infringe upon the realm of the Spiritual. Cultural disobedience is therefore a matter of the Spirit and it would be presumptuous to suppose that the church can make a difference to a problem which calls for a Spirit intervention. As long as a given culture does not oppress the "spiritual", which ultimately is impossible, culture is part of the natural and therefore irrelevant for Breakthrough International Bible-based and 'spiritual' subculture.

The difference between Breakthrough International and *Missio Dei* is quite profound. *Missio Dei* stresses the need to struggle for life in the face of cultural practices which oppress people and bases this position on its understanding of the gospel. But unlike *Missio Dei*

Breakthrough International does not feel compelled by its understanding of the gospel to take a stand against culture for the sake of the victims of certain cultural practices. If at all the church feels compelled to stand against culture it does so for the sake of the Spirit because the aim of mission is to lead as many people as possible into the experience of the otherworldly 'joy in the Holy Ghost'.

## **E. Conclusion - Breakthrough International representing *Missio Dei*?**

### **1. Summary – Breakthrough International representing *Missio Dei*?**

Drawing on our detailed description of *Missio Dei* (II.) and Breakthrough International's experiential approach to mission as well as its narrative way of theology (III.) we have developed an answer to the question if Breakthrough International is an expression of *Missio Dei* (IV.). Our findings can be summarized as follows:

- I. Due to its world view Breakthrough International bases its understanding of Mission on the tangibly, real experience of the Spirit. It grows from that experience and equates salvation with mission which become synonymous terms. Therefore the church operates with little self-doubt and regard for the historical baggage of the missionary enterprise.
- II. *Missio Dei* and Breakthrough International share a mission centered ecclesiology but differ strongly in their understanding of the task of the mission centered church. The former wants to participate in God's salvation of the world while the latter participates in the salvation of the believer from the world.
- III. On account of its strict dualism Breakthrough International does not involve itself in the making of history within the public domain but rather focuses on rewriting the personal (his)stories of the believers. *Missio Dei* goes beyond this privatized version of salvation and embraces world history as the context in which God's salvation is realized.
- IV. *Missio Dei* views history with a holistic eschatological understanding. It involves itself at the bleeding point of humanity and has hope in God's future for the world. Breakthrough International realizes the future Kingdom on a local, personal level. This personalized eschatology has little hope for the world and its salvation but remains privatized and individualistically focused on the life of the believer.
- V. Breakthrough International embraces the people it wants to 'win, train, equip and send' but unlike *Missio Dei* it regards the times in which this takes place as evil times. These times have not at all 'come of age' thus being a partner for dialogue. On the contrary the world is in need of the Spirit to impose his agenda upon it.

- VI. Breakthrough International engages in the stories of 'the others', who are the victims of history. But unlike *Missio Dei* it does not position those stories within an overall understanding of secular and post-secular history. The church rather personalizes and individualizes history.
- VII. Breakthrough International, preoccupied with pneumatology, does not grasp the relevance of Christ's incarnation for the understanding of salvation. Unlike *Missio Dei* it does not understand incarnation as bringing about the new humanness of humanity in Christ, thus humanizing the world. Instead it understands salvation as the believer leaving behind his or her humanness and turning into a new spiritual way of life.
- VIII. *Missio Dei* understands poverty as a matter of theology proper and the relationship of the church with and to the poor is a *notae ecclesiae*, the essential 'yardstick' of a mission centered church. But Breakthrough International reduces the issue of poverty and the church's relation to the poor to a spiritual matter within the realm of personal ethics.
- IX. Even though Breakthrough International does not grasp 'God's preferential option for the poor' in its full theological significance it shows an extraordinary solidarity with the poor and addresses their struggles as ethical and spiritual challenges. This solidarity reflects the *Missio Dei* concept on a local level.
- X. The positions of *Missio Dei* and Breakthrough International on the issue of culture as medium of mission could not be further apart. Breakthrough International does not see the voice that answers the voice of Christ shaped by culture. But on account of its personal intimacy with the Spirit this voice is shaped by the Spirit which has a supernatural thus 'super-cultural' character.
- XI. Based on that intimacy with the Spirit Breakthrough International has no doubt about the message of the gospel which is unchangeable and above culture. While *Missio Dei* proposes that the gospel incarnates -contextualizes- itself in cultural diverse forms, Breakthrough International would reject such a proposition as distortion of the gospel.

- XII. While Breakthrough International has succeeded in contextualizing the gospel into its local, Bible-based subculture it fails to live in communion within the church universal. *Missio Dei*'s ecclesiology which calls for a general willingness by the local churches to live in dialogue and communion with each other, thus realizing the church universal, is hardly ever turned into reality.
- XIII. Unlike *Missio Dei* Breakthrough International does not feel compelled by its understanding of the gospel to take a stand against culture for the sake of the victims of oppressive cultural practices. If at all the church stands against culture it does so for the sake of the Spirit because people need to experience the 'joy in the Holy Ghost'.

## 2. Does Breakthrough International do what *Missio Dei* thinks about?

As we conclude the part of this thesis which is bound to a conceptual academic way of doing things we might remind ourselves that we have phrased our main question at the beginning in a provocative way and asked: "Do the Pentecostals, or Breakthrough International for that matter, do what ecumenical missiology thinks about – participate in God's *Missio*?" Our short answer to that question would be: "Pentecostals, or Breakthrough International for that matter, do just a little bit of what ecumenical missiology thinks about and describes as the *Missio Dei* concept". All things considered, Breakthrough International participates in God's *missio* in a rather incomplete way. *Missio Dei* has a much broader understanding of the task of mission than Breakthrough International has been able to grasp within its narrative way of doing theology so far. Breakthrough International individualizes and personalizes salvation. It has a negative view of the world and its history. The church does not realize the significance of Christ's incarnation for a theological understanding of poverty and the relationship of the church to the poor. Finally it does not appreciate God's mission as contextualization into diverse cultures and as such sees itself not in or of but above culture.

While failing to realize the overall picture as presented in the *Missio Dei* concept Breakthrough International does realize aspects of *Missio Dei*. This happens especially where Breakthrough International emphasizes the personal and experiential character of the God's mission and thereby participates in what Melbourne 1980 has called the "search for an authentic community in Christ at local level" (WCC 1980:196). It strives to create an

authentic community in Christ based on its experience of the Spirit which is a personal and individual event. Due to what the church perceives as being led by the Spirit a ministry has developed which aims to rewrite the personal (his)story of the victims, or ‘the others’, in the light of the Kingdom of God. We see a personalized eschatology at work where the church has tremendous hope for the individual and expects and even more important experiences that God acts upon the life of the believer. Breakthrough International displays a solidarity with the poor amongst itself and in its community addressing the issue of poverty mainly as a spiritual and ethical struggle. It aims to develop people enabling them to participate in a life which liberates them from their poverty. This is especially achieved by the contextualization of the biblical message into a Spirit controlled life-style which provides the individual believer with a local, Bible-based subculture. This subculture helps him or her to find direction within the ‘diverse, urban, multilingual township culture’ which is a new and rather unsettling phenomenon in modern urban Africa.

Breakthrough International does indeed make every effort to create an authentic community in Christ on local level. In doing so it is rather successful in respect to reaching out to people and changing their lives. But compared to *Missio Dei*'s wide-ranging approach to mission, Breakthrough International is limited by its bias that experience precedes ideas (Balcomb). The church's blessing – its intimate personal experience of the Spirit – turns out to be its intrinsic dilemma and biggest stumbling block. It hampers the development of an understanding of mission which resembles the comprehensiveness of the *Missio Dei* concept.

Anthony Balcomb has described what happens to Breakthrough International as “the church in a bubble syndrome” which runs isolated from history, culture and society. On account of a strong dualistic world view, based on the experience of the Spirit, Breakthrough International lacks a sense of continuity with the church universal. This leads to a lack of ecumenicity, strong individualism and absence of a historical consciousness which defines *Missio Dei* (A.Balcomb: unpublished notes).

Breakthrough International's strong focus on the personal experience of the Spirit does not allow for its narrative way of theology to develop an understanding of the task of mission which would go beyond the personal, tangible reality of the Spirit. It hinders Breakthrough International from focusing on history, poverty and culture as issues of theology proper. Instead those issues remain part of the “natural” and seem ultimately irrelevant for God's

mission which is driven by the experience of the Spirit and targets the individual. Mission is measured against this personal experience as if it is the yardstick or rather *notae ecclesiae* with which the church and its participation in God's mission stands or fails.

This overemphasis on experience, judged from a perspective of *Missio Dei*, is caused by the fact that Breakthrough International operates within a worldview where the Spiritual is tangibly real. Within that world view people experience the Spirit as real, which, as we have argued at length in chapter I., should not be disputed but can be understood, even within a Cartesian understanding of truth, by way of narrative. But, as we can see in comparison with *Missio Dei*, the problem of that world view is that it has little grasp of anything which goes beyond the tangible reality of the Spirit. It is lacking the thinking Cartesian mind, which would be able to think beyond the rather limited personal aspects of the indeed real experience of the Spirit.

One might therefore close and say that Breakthrough International is indeed driven by the Holy Spirit, this 'divine principle of origin' which is part of the normality of faith. But as the comparison with the *Missio Dei* concept shows, this 'divine principle of origin', even if it is personally experienced by the believer, does not enable him or her to develop a comprehensive concept of mission. He or she does not go beyond an individualized and rather strong dualistic understanding of God's mission. God's desire to reconcile his whole creation with himself is not appreciated. Harvey Cox, after all, might not be right when he claims that a man with an experience is never at the mercy of a man with a doctrine. Because experience is a rather limited way of comprehending reality, even if it is God's reality imposing itself upon the life of the believer.

It is indeed desirable that any church, especially one so overwhelmed by the Spirit as Breakthrough International, takes the conscious decision to work towards a critical, comprehensive, systematic, if not to say doctrinal, understanding and description of the way in which it aims to participate in God's mission. While it is desirable that *Missio Dei* discovers the more experiential, spiritual, and tangible side of mission; one would wish for Breakthrough International that it ventures to conceptualize what it is doing on account of its experience of the Spirit to a much greater extent than it is doing now. This would not lessen its impact as a church but actually enlarge Breakthrough International's participation in God's *missio*.



**All theology is a story told on earth about heaven**  
**Philip Toynbee**

**Towards a narrative conclusion**

## **V. *Missio Dei* evaluating the Spiritual - a personal response**

### **A. The “Cartesian thinking self” engages with the experience of the Spirit**

We began this work with a personal introduction and located the main question of this thesis in our existential struggle to come to terms with the experience of the Spiritual in Africa as a missionary force. In a way we have allowed Breakthrough International, with its subjective experience of the Spirit, to challenge the traditional epistemological assumptions of academic discourse. This started a dialogue which aimed to make the African charismatic experience of the divine accessible to the modern Cartesian paradigm of truth as a proper source for theological knowledge (cf. Chapter II.). We argued that Breakthrough International’s narrative way of doing theology conveyed a divine experience which may be acknowledged by modern “enlightened” theology, adhering to a modern understanding of truth, as a divine reality. This divine reality imposes itself upon what the thinking mind constructs as real. In short: The Cartesian *res cogitans* found itself learning from the African experience of reality where the Spiritual is tangibly real.

At the end of this thesis we propose a different kind of discourse. As the “thinking mind” has attempted to learn from the African charismatic experience we hope to convey to the proponents of the African charismatic experience where we think they can learn from a modern Cartesian way of doing theology. We therefore try to make Breakthrough International access our critical assessment of its experiential way of mission. In order to facilitate this kind of dialogue between the people who experience the Spirit in Africa and modern, critically academic study we keep Schüssler Fiorenza’s methodological suggestion in mind. She put forward that theology needs a paradigm shift from a “scientific to a rhetorical genre” (Schüssler Fiorenza 1995:274) in order to deal with the experience of the divine. For that reason we now change from rather academic to a more literary format. This will hopefully make our thinking accessible to the people of Breakthrough International. We choose to write a letter, addressed to the senior pastor and the leadership of the Breakthrough International, which will present our academic perspective of their experience. Yet the more personal form of a letter enables us to communicate our results to in a much more effective way than the academic language would do.

## **B. A letter to Breakthrough International**

Dear pastor Russell, elders, and leaders of Breakthrough International,

I would like to express my sincere gratitude for your willingness to share what the Spirit has done amongst you. You have allowed me to come to know you and to understand how Breakthrough International has been moved by the Spirit in order to become what it is today. I don't take your openness and trust for granted and I hope I have not violated it in the course of writing this thesis. I believe that you, as charismatic Christians in Africa, and I, as an "old-fashioned" Lutheran born and brought up in Europe, are bound together by the fact that we follow and serve the same Lord in one God-given mission. My gratitude therefore ultimately goes to God who indeed, as you would say, is a "big God". He brings people, though from different backgrounds, which don't necessarily agree all the time, together.

As I conclude this thesis I would like to share with you what I have learned with regard to the charismatic way of mission in general and Breakthrough International's participation in God's mission in particular.

### 1. Europeans need to be reminded that God is real and wants to be experienced.

The one thing which stands out before me as I think about the stories you have told me is the fact that you have experienced God as indeed real and a power which works through his Spirit. As he has been at work ever since the first days of creation he works amongst you. You might wonder why I need to mention this point, which is so obvious to you? Well, the world from where I come from, the western European world, is a world which finds it increasingly difficult to feel and experience that God is a reality to be reckoned with. People who think and live in the western European way of life tend not to relate their own story, their personal trials and tribulations, as directly and personally to God and the power of the Holy Spirit as you do. People like me, who are brought up in the western way of thinking about God, don't know him as personally as you in Africa do. We rather think that the experience of God is just a sentimental feeling, which passes as the feelings of a first love do when the real facts of life need to be faced. God, in our view, has little to do with the real problems of life. Many of us have for instance ceased to pray for the sick long ago. Even if some of us still do pray to God and ask for healing, we actually would expect the doctors and

nurses to do the job, rather than hope for a supernatural intervention of the Almighty. We have come to believe that God does not really make a difference in our lives because we have all too often experienced that he didn't intervene in our human affairs when we needed him to do so.

People brought up in the western way of thinking, are inclined to view only that as true and real what they can understand, because the uncertainties of life seem to be too overwhelming. God appears to be far removed from our real problems. The only one we feel we can be sure of is ourself. Though we are not certain of God any longer we are certain about ourselves. Thus we rely on ourselves and the ability of our mind to create and master the world through science and technology. In talking like this I generalize but it is important to understand that in the world from where I come, God is not as real as he is in Africa. For many reasons God seems to be far away and people have learned to trust themselves, which means their thinking, their skills and sciences, more than they trust him and the power of his Spirit.

This western way of understanding life does not leave Christians like myself unaffected. As Christians we see ourselves as part of a wider society which does neither expect nor experience God to be real. Therefore it is good that we meet people like you. Your testimony reminds us of an aspect of our faith which we in Europe have known in the past but which got lost over the years. We somehow lost the awareness that our faith is full of extraordinary revelations through the Spirit. But you still feel God and experience his power. This challenges us to acknowledge that God is more than the ideas we have about him. You depend with your whole being on the experience of Spirit. This questions our European faith, which has quietly accepted the western European assumption that God is not real. What you describe as the experience of Spirit is indeed God acting upon your lives and I wish that this experience would become something which plays a bigger role in the way we western European Christians live our faith.

Having said that I need to add that even though I appreciate the way in which the Spirit is moving you, I am not aiming to copy this experience which is your experience of God in Africa. I remain someone who is conditioned by my European way of thinking and who finds it intensely difficult to accept God and his power as real in the way you are able to do it. As I have said jokingly many times before, I will never be able to lift my arms in prayer, run up

and down shouting in a loud voice “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus” and call that prayer. Its just not in my blood. I have to find my own way of letting God move me through the Spirit. I remain European as you remain African, but what unites us is the desire to be people of God. While you experience him as real on a daily basis I need to go via the detour of my mind to allow him to work on and with me.

## 2. Connect your experience of the Spirit to the experience of the church universal

During the course of my study I have come to see that God indeed uses you for his mission in a seemingly extraordinary way. He does so through the experience of the Spirit. It was in a supernatural way that pastor Hilton and the others were called into what became Breakthrough International. At the beginning of it all stands the experience of God’s Spirit and people who were willing to let the Spirit lead them wherever the journey might go. Thus you were used for God’s mission through an overpowering personal experience.

What you experience as so unique and powerful, is not something really new. If you look at the history of the church you will find that this overpowering experience of the Spirit is part of the church ever since its first days. Many people who have come before you shared the very same experience. In my thesis I talk for example about a girl by the name of Mechthild, twelve years old, who like you received visions, prophecies, and words of knowledge. Like you she lived in communal life-style modeled after the book of Acts and was sold out to God. All this took place in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. In the course of the last 2000 years of church history many people have been moved by the experience of the Spirit. It is as if this ‘supernatural’ experience is actually something very normal to the believer.

Almost all of the people who have been overpowered by the Spirit did not intend to form a church, and to create or submit to any structure. As with you, people found the experience of the Spirit so overpowering that they couldn’t conceive of a day when this experience becomes a church, a religious order, a brother- or sisterhood, or any other structure with rules and regulations. I suppose you understand what I am talking about from your own experience. Breakthrough International began as a prayer movement but as time went on it became a church. Now it is about to become a denomination on its own. Yesterday you felt like living right as the first Christians in the Book of Acts and all of a sudden you buy a building and maintain the church. You even find yourself celebrating the anniversary of the

church and discover that you have a history. It is not as if you want to do that, but you find yourself doing it as you try to find forms which facilitate the experience of the Spirit. It seems to be as normal to our faith as the experience of the Spirit itself.

Breakthrough International is one church of many churches within the “one Church universal”. Initially the experience of the Spirit did touch your lives and turned them around in a private and personal manner. Pastor Hilton and sister Rhoda were overcome by the Spirit. They fell in love with the Spirit and were sold out to God. But the Spirit developed Breakthrough International as a church and as such it became part of “the church universal”. This “church universal” spans the whole world and has been around ever since people gathered in Jerusalem after Jesus was crucified. It is one of God’s instruments in his dealings with the world, and you have become part of it.

In other words: When the Spirit chose Breakthrough International as a vehicle of God’s mission it was Breakthrough International who was new within God’s mission. The mission of God is much older than you are. You didn’t invent God’s mission but God chose you to participate in it. He didn’t start his mission all over again when he called pastor Hilton and sister Rhoda but rather made you part of a bigger picture. As God chose you he made you part of a 2000 year old history of mission. As you were overpowered by the Spirit you might have felt as if this is something absolutely new and overwhelming, but in fact, it isn’t. Others experienced what you have experienced ever since the days Jesus called his first disciples.

### 3. You are part of God’s mission which is a story of blessing and disaster

You are joining in a movement which the Spirit has been inspiring for centuries. Within the history of this movement not all things went well. It is a history of blessing. But it is also history of failure, hurt, and disaster. You are overpowered by the Spirit and want everybody to have the same experience. But note that there have been people before you who had the same intention. They were overflowing with missionary zeal and full of the desire to save people for heaven and eternity. Often these people didn’t live up to their calling and didn’t bring blessing but disaster. I say that because I believe, as we participate in God’s mission, we need to understand ourselves as part of that history which did not purely center around the Spirit of God but became ambiguous, lost its spiritual innocence and sometimes did more harm than good. As somebody who is part of a mission movement which is much older than

Breakthrough International you might grant me that I know what I am talking about. When the missionaries of old went into the world they did so with a kind of self-confidence which I have observed in you. But despite their good intentions they did not only bring blessing as the following anecdote might illustrate: “When the white man came to our country he had the Bible and we had the land. The white man said to us ‘Let us pray’. After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the bible” (West 2003:IX).

As people who participate in a movement which is around for 2000 years we might exercise a bit of caution when it comes to the kind of self-confidence which many missionaries and mission agencies display. Can't our history teach us to mistrust our human motives, which are seldom as pure as we want ourselves and other to believe? You focus strongly on your supernatural experience of the Spirit, which has so much meaning to you personally. My appeal to you is however that you are a bit more critical towards your own experience. You found a new life on account of your experience of the Spirit. But you might do more harm than good if you mistake leading people to the Lord with making them repeat your experience. If your own experience is the measure of what it means to be saved you might become like the blind who lead the blind. The history of the church and God's mission, of which you are part, teaches us to doubt ourselves. We need to question our motives and ask if the experience of the Spirit, as we experience it, is the only way to indeed promote God's ways.

#### 4. Don't limit salvation to your own personal experience of life

What I mean by “making your personal experience of the Spirit the measure of salvation” might become clearer as I point to one observation I have made over and over again. A lot of the people I spoke to told me that they experienced their salvation as a supernatural intervention of the Spirit. People got delivered from alcohol, a desperate family situation, or someone experienced God loving him or her unconditionally. Salvation was experienced as rescue from the powers of the world which played their destructive games with your lives. All of a sudden people began to see themselves with the eyes of God and understood that they had a divine destiny and were heading towards heaven and eternity. Coming from this very personal and individual experience you have made it your mission to rescue people for heaven and eternity as well. You see people in need to be freed from the world which is holding them captive to its destructive powers. To me it seems as if you treat this world as a

really bad place where one can only encounter destruction and disaster. This understanding is born out of what most of you have experienced. Alcohol, drugs, abuse and poverty take people captive to powers which they can't free themselves off. Deliverance is needed and this is what the Spirit has brought to you so powerfully.

Judging from personal experience, where one only feels in bondage to the world, one might describe salvation as liberation from the world. Consequently one might become rather negative and hopeless towards the world as the place of bondage and slavery. But does this mean that God is not reaching out to the world which is his creation so that it might be saved? Doesn't Paul say that the "creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed" and hopes that "the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Romans 8:18-21)? Isn't Paul's point that he has hope for the whole world which waits to be saved? Isn't salvation more to him than being personally rescued from the world? Paul is clear that God does not only aim to save the believer from the world, but as he saves the believer he also aims to save the world from its bondage to decay and destruction (see also John 3:17!). Why do we not share in Paul's hope for the world? Please let us not make the world even more godless than it is. God has not yet given up on it, why should we?

##### 5. Don't privatize God's mission but seek peace and prosperity for the world

The bible tells us that God sent his son to save the world which is his creation. Therefore I feel that you need to re-evaluate the relationship to the "the world". So far it seems to me that you are not interested in the world as a place which is worth being saved and improved. What you are busy with is to get people saved but this has little connection to the world, God's creation as a whole. You enable the believer to survive this world, to progress in his or her situation and personal circumstances, and to eventually make it to heaven. But neither you as the church nor the believer as an individual feels that his or her life should have an impact on the life of the nation, the public domain, as opposed to your private sphere.

Let me use the prophet Jeremiah to explain what I mean. While the Israelites were in Babylonian exile they were told by the prophet Jeremiah "to seek the peace and prosperity of the city, because if the city prospers the children of Israel prosper" (Jer. 29:7). Even though the Israelites were in Babylonian exile the prophet felt that God calls his people to seek the



best for the world in which they live. Doesn't this mean for us, in the modern, secular, and democratic South Africa, that we can't just sit back when it comes to issues of wider society and preoccupy ourselves with our personal salvation? As for Jeremiah the wider issues of the world need to be of interest to us. The "social stuff", as someone of Breakthrough International has called it, is really something which Christians should concern themselves with. They should do so for two reasons: One very selfish, because as the nation prospers we will prosper. But the other is even more important. God did not sit back letting the world go to hell, but he sent his son for the salvation of the world. Therefore faith and joy in the Holy Ghost is not just a private affair. We are called to make a public statement and make our voice heard in the public domain, the society as a whole.

While you do an incredible good job in saving individuals and have an impact on the private life of the believer I feel that Breakthrough International does not participate holistically in God's project to save the world through the sending of his son. This becomes evident in at least three areas where, for God's sake (because he wants to save the world!), it would be desirable you would play a more public role.

- I. You leave the world and the making of world history to the devil. You believe that the world is the stronghold of the devil and therefore you look upon the world with too little hope. As you don't see the world through God's eyes, who wants to save the world, you don't have hope for the world. Since the world as a whole goes to hell anyhow you don't involve yourself in the wider context of civil society, in the democratic process, in the fight against unjust structures and laws or failing social norms. While you preach personal salvation to those who are under the power of the devil you don't engage the whole of society thus leaving it under the power of the devil. It is as if God has no plans for the nation but only plans for the individual believer who is to be rescued from an evil world for heaven and eternity. But isn't it us, who believe in the future as God's future, who are perfectly equipped to stand up for a better world in the here and now? We know, realistically speaking, that no human project can eliminate the powers of darkness as they operate in human life. But by the same token, we can act hopefully in apparently hopeless situations. Because we know that where "the world" has nothing to hope for we can hope in God who has promised that whatever the future may hold it will be God's future. So again, why give up the world to the devil if even God hasn't done so?

- II. Is the world really as bad as you make it out to be? Can't we work together with the positive powers in society to save the world, which would mean to seek peace and prosperity not just for us but for all the people of the land? Our relationship to the world can not be a one way street were our agenda of personal salvation dominates how we interact with the world. Don't we need to acknowledge the agenda of the world as well? Aren't there people and things in the world, don't forget, we talk about God's creation, from which we can learn to be better disciples and work for the common good of the whole of society?
- III. The way in which you intervene in the personal stories of the believer is remarkable. You enable them to walk in the light of God but you don't see the personal life of the believer within the bigger picture of world history. The people of Breakthrough International are not just private people but part of worldwide, historical movements and powers. As such they live in a very particular part of the world, in a very particular time and under very particular circumstances. These circumstances are not only determined by the individual and his or her faith in God, as you make one believe. They also depend on big politics and general developments in society. It is, for example, not just a matter of personal fate and spirituality when several shoe factories in Pietermaritzburg close down and people from your church lose their jobs. The decline of the Pietermaritzburg shoe industry has to do with facts and developments that go beyond personal spirituality. In an open and globalized economy South African shoe manufacturers just can't compete with the much lower labor costs of South East Asia. Consequently people lose their jobs on account of a changing world and not because they don't live a Spirit controlled life. Life, even the life of the believer, is never just a personal and individual story. It has to be seen in the context of the changing realities of the world and Christians need to publicly address those changing realities from a perspective of God's will for humankind.

#### 6. Christ became flesh to redeem not to flee the world of the natural

You seem to be thoroughly overpowered and consumed by the experience of the Spirit. It was the Spirit who called Breakthrough International into being and who intervened so powerfully in your personal lives. Coming from that experience you feel that you need to get bolder in

the Spirit so that your personal life progresses and reaches even higher levels. The journey of life appears to be a solely spiritual venture. It is as if the ultimate aim is to spiritually propel beyond this life, which is bound to our fleshly, human, and natural ways. We are rather to unite more and more with the Spirit just as John 6:63 says: “The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing”.

This emphasis on the Spiritual as opposed to “the flesh” tends to disregard the “natural” or humanness which makes us to be who we are. Our humanness, this mixed bag of frailty, disaster, joy and glory, is a God given reality. He has created us in his image and made us a ‘living being’ as Genesis 2:7 says. Our life is a time to be born and to die, to weep and to laugh, to mourn and to dance (Ecclesiastes 3:1-9), and as such it is a God given life. Even more in the coming of Jesus Christ God joined our God-given humanness. Why else would John 1:14 testify that “the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us”? He wanted people to know that the natural world, our humanity – our being in the flesh - is as connected to Christ as is our spiritual being. John doesn’t say that Jesus only appeared to become flesh but that he became flesh. In Jesus God didn’t pretend to join our ambiguous humanity but indeed dwelled among us in the flesh. It is in him that God lived a real life in the real world where there is time for mourning and dancing, weeping and laughing, and for being spiritual. This is what is called the mystery of incarnation. The supernatural joined the natural and dwelled among us.

If we focus solely on the Spiritual and neglect our humanness we end up acting like those charismatics whom I have experienced at numerous prayer meetings in homes which have been struck by death. Usually at some point of the evening, while people share the sorrow and sadness about the loss of a loved one, a believer gets up and says: “Don’t be sad! This is a moment of joy! Jesus has overcome death, therefore there is no reason to be sad!” Whenever I hear people testify in that manner, I think: “You might be right in principle but why do you not allow me to be what I am, a human being of flesh and blood? I am created by God with feelings of sadness and sorrow. I trust that Jesus, in whom God became human like me, knows how I feel and he understands that. Jesus does not want me to lose my humanity and deny my feelings, but to fulfill my humanity and live my true humanness including my emotions.”

My appeal to you is that even though your personal experience of the Spirit tells you that there seems to be nothing good which comes of the flesh, look beyond your own experience. Please ponder the question why Jesus did become flesh if he only aimed to save our spiritual being? I believe, as Colossians 1:19-22 says, that he entered into our ambiguous human reality because God's salvation aims to reconcile the whole of humanity with himself. He doesn't just want our Spiritual being but our whole humanness to be saved, revived and brought into the new being with Christ. There was no need for Jesus to be "made flesh" if God didn't intend for us, as the people of the flesh who we are, to be renewed into a new and true humanness. The incarnation of Christ has brought about this true humanness and thus changed the whole of humanity. Therefore flesh, the natural, does not just account for nothing, as John would say. It is the material which God transforms into true humanity and restores back to its original glory as the image of the divine.

The believers are just a foretaste of this true humanity which God intends for the world. Our personal experience of the Spirit should not make us overlook that God seeks to transform humanity. His salvation does not mean to become consumed by the Spiritual so that we forget that he wants the whole of humanity to become truly human in his sight. He is concerned that as we are saved we don't leave behind our humanness. If we don't appreciate Christ "becoming flesh" and only focus on the "Spiritual" we neglect the "natural" thereby making God's salvation too small. Because Christ joined us in the natural ways of life, not just to liberate us from the natural but to redeem the natural, the whole of humanity with God himself.

What I mean might become clearer as I draw your attention to the way in which you deal with poverty as a phenomenon of the natural world.

- I. You claim that poverty is matter of personal and collective spirituality. People as well as nations are to blame for their poverty because you can only get the kingdom goods if you seek the King. If people are not living a Spirit controlled life, like for instance those in the 10/40 window<sup>22</sup>, poverty will be part of their reality. But those who are redeemed will see the blessing flow and individuals as well as nations will prosper. Poverty is therefore something which is brought upon people on account of their wrong worship

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22 See page 293.

practice, idolatry, and bloodletting. There is nothing one can nor needs to do, because this is a spiritual fact of life. If Jesus would have liked to become the king of bread and feed the nations, he would have done so (John 6). As you say yourself, you spiritualize poverty and understand it solely through your personal and spiritual perspective.

But can you really spiritualize poverty to such an extent that it becomes a matter of personal faithfulness only? “Christ became flesh” does this message not make a difference to your understanding of the flesh, the natural as a whole and thus of poverty and the fate of the poor? Don’t you reduce the good news to the poor, which Jesus came to proclaim and fulfill (see Luke 4:18-19), to an overly spiritual statement which might go like this: “Even though you are hungry and poor in this world, as soon as you are saved you will at least not go to hell but to heaven.” Is this really all we need to say and do about poverty as a worldwide reality if we believe that Jesus really became flesh to redeem the world? Isn’t poverty in itself a crime, an offence against the very humanity which God created when he made us to be people in his image, and which he aims to restore through the incarnation Jesus?

- II. To you poverty seems to be a curse, a punishment which has nothing to do with God’s will to redeem the world and free it from the powers of darkness. In your view Christ did not become flesh to show his compassion and solidarity with those who are robbed of their God given humanness by the power of poverty. Christ’s coming rather brings about judgment upon the poor who don’t live a Spirit controlled life and don’t seek the King. It appears as if the person who is poor is God’s enemy because he or she does not properly worship the King. Consequently he or she is punished for a lack of spiritual life. But is it not the sin of poverty which is God’s enemy rather than those being imprisoned by it? You neglect that Jesus became truly human to restore humanity to be God’s image regardless of personal spirituality. Christ’s incarnation aims to redeem the natural therefore it is necessary for us Christians to continue his work towards the restoration of God’s image in humanity.

The challenge is to ask how we, who believe in a God who became one of us, relate to our humanness, our life in the flesh? Do we seek to eventually leave behind our humanness even though God decided to join and redeem it? Is our call to become solely spiritual beings, fully consumed by the joy in the Holy Ghost and not bothered by the

poverty and despair of this world? Or are we called by God, who entered into the natural and became human, to work towards the redemption of the natural, which mean to participate in the humanization of the world?

- III. We have said that Christ's incarnation aims to redeem "the flesh". In Jesus God brings about the true humanness of all humanity. This humanness in Christ is not just for the few chosen and spiritual minded ones. Poverty, this "reality of the flesh", which is a public and worldwide problem of the whole of humanity, can therefore not be addressed on a level of personal spirituality only. It is a demonic and evil structural phenomenon of the world. Humanity needs to be freed from that evil to resemble God's image. Christian or non-Christian, God created every human being in his image and as such nobody should be victimized by poverty which detroys God's image in us. Therefore Christians are charged to stand up for the good news that in the coming of Jesus any circumstance which dehumanizes humanity, whether it be poverty, abuse or marginalization, has lost its ultimate power. In other words being truthful to Christ's incarnation is not only about saving the individual for heaven and eternity but fighting for a new humanness of all people in society, believer or not, because all people belong to God.

If you apply that to the people who live in the 10/40 window you might consider going beyond your assessment that they are poor because they don't serve God. On account of Christ's incarnation we need to feel a different kind of compassion. Because the poor of the 10/40 window lack something more basic than the knowledge of Christ as Lord. As they are marginalized and oppressed by poverty and exploitation they lack the very humanness Christ has restored for the whole of humanity on account of his incarnation. Christian solidarity with the poor and oppressed in the 10/40 window therefore begins with restoring the very humanness which Christ shared with us and which we share with the poor and marginalized of the 10/40 window.

All this does not mean that personal salvation – being born again - is not an issue. But before talking about that we need to acknowledge something much more basic. When Christ joined our humanity he has sanctified it as the place where God's meets us as we are. Furthermore in Jesus Christ God has expressed his desire for humanity to live out its true humanness, its God given image of the divine. In short salvation does not happen by leaving the natural behind

but by transforming it. We don't call upon the world to keep denying its humanity but to become truly human.

### 7. Acknowledge God uses the natural to communicate the supernatural

One of the most natural phenomena of the human way of life is that we are bound to a certain way of how we do things. This way of doing things is called culture. Even God himself acknowledges this by using the Jewish culture to save the world. Jesus, the Saviour of the world, was born and brought up in the Jewish way of life with all its customs and traditions. Therefore, in order to bring salvation, God bound himself to what I call culture, and what you might call "the natural".

This is very different to the way how you personally have experienced salvation. Because you don't feel that you were saved through the natural but by God supernaturally intervening in your lives. This personal, supernatural experience of the Spirit has convinced you that the natural does not really matter when it comes to salvation. When God acts he reveals himself supernaturally. He did so for example when he called pastor Hilton, while he worked as a builder, to leave all things and follow Jesus. God chose to interact directly with him as he as interacted with many of you ever since. This was a supernatural experience leaving behind the realm of the natural. But if you look a little bit closer at what for example happened to pastor Hilton you might see, though he had a supernatural experience, God still used the "natural", manmade cultural ways, to call upon him. Because the voice which called pastor Hilton and sister Rhoda did not just come out of nothing. It was reminiscent of a very famous hymn which people used to sing in the Catholic Church. When the two heard the call "Leave all things come and follow me" they heard very familiar words which they had sung many times as they were brought up in a Catholic way of life. Am I mistaken when I therefore say that God used words which are very much human words for his supernatural intervention? Could it therefore be that the natural, culture for that matter, has a much bigger significance for bringing the gospel to the world than you, being overpowered by the Spirit, realize? Doesn't a closer look at what happens in a supernatural experience of the Spirit show that God often uses the natural, culture, to communicate the supernatural?

I am not saying that God does not intervene supernaturally, but what I say is that in doing so he often makes use of what culture, the natural, provides. This might be hymns in a more

traditional church setting or praise and worship music in a more contemporary minded charismatic church. He might use rituals, uniforms, badges, customs and traditions which have evolved as spiritual practice over hundreds of years in churches such as the Catholic or Anglican church. Or, on the other side, God might employ praise and worship music and the seemingly informal jargon used in many charismatic churches. This jargon sees a sermon frequently interrupted by loud shouts of “Amen” and “Hallelujah” and has become part of the charismatic culture or way of life through which God interacts with his people. Whether it is the old-fashioned hymns and liturgy or the more contemporary praise and worship music, all these forms developed in the natural and are part of culture, either charismatic or traditional. They are manmade and aim to give God space to act supernaturally in the natural.

What I am driving at is a call to caution in respect to an attitude which claims that whatever we Christians do and experience, especially if we do it moved by the Spirit, is something extraordinary and has nothing to do with the natural. Quite the opposite is true. When we have an experience of the Spirit we will respond to it in the way in which we have been brought up because this is what we know. I can use myself as an example. Yes, I have seen miracles happening in my own ministry. I have personally experienced God leading me to certain places and found that this was for a purpose. In your language I would say: “This was supernatural! God’s hand has touched me! Hallelujah, praise the Lord!!” But even though the experience of God has spiritually moved me I remain who I am, a white, German, Lutheran male. As such I try to follow God’s call in the only way or rather culture I know how to do it. This is the white, German, Lutheran way of life and as such it is very distinct from the South African charismatic Coloured, Indian, or Black way of life. As you are Africans and Christians I am a European and a Christian. As you can and should not separate your Africanness from your faith I can and will not separate my experience of God from my European culture which makes me who I am.

I admit this point might sound a little theoretical but to make it clearer I would like to talk about three issues where I think you overemphasize the personal experience of the Spirit. There you don’t appreciate that your experience is packaged in what I call culture and you might refer to as “the natural”.

- I. It reduces the beautiful diversity of the gospel, which is lived out in so many cultures all over the world, if you see only that as gospel what is supernaturally revealed to you the



believer. Yes, there might be only one salvation but does this mean that all people need to experience salvation in the same personal manner as you do and live the gospel in the way as you understand it? Isn't the power of the gospel being revealed in much more varied forms than in the powerful fashion it has changed your lives? Your aim is to save people and make them live a spiritual life as you know it. My plea is once again that you adopt a more inclusive view of what it means to be saved. Not everybody needs to feel what you felt to call Christ Lord.

If we would, for example, look at someone like Martin Luther through your eyes he would not qualify as a truly born again Christian. Martin Luther didn't experience salvation in the personal way you did. He couldn't speak in tongues nor was he prophetically gifted. Salvation for him was an intellectual discovery not a supernatural experience of the Spirit. Luther didn't hear a voice or had a vision but read the bible. His mind made him understand Romans 1:16-17 in a totally new light. Before he discovered this new understanding of Romans he understood what it means to be "righteous before God" as something which we humans have to achieve through keeping God's law. But through applying his mind to the study of scripture Luther understood that the gospel turned everything around. It was not us any longer who needed to work out our righteousness before God. God himself achieved this for us through the coming of Christ. Luther saw a new dimension of the gospel. This dramatically changed his life and Christianity has never been the same ever since.

Both, you as well as Luther, experienced salvation yet in very different forms. The difference between Luther and the traditional born again Christianity, of which Breakthrough International is part, is obvious. You emphasize salvation as being born again through a personal and life changing experience of the Spirit. But Luther emphasizes salvation as a new understanding of scripture. You stress the supernatural while Luther highlights ability of the mind to understand scripture in a new light. But isn't the beauty of your as well as Luther's story that both of you have found salvation? As I see it there is no need to assume that the one has understood the gospel better than the other. Luther and you traveled along different roads but at the end you professed God as Saviour and Lord. I therefore submit that instead of arguing if someone got saved in the right way, and was born again or not, we should rather praise God that his gospel talks differently in different cultures and times.

II. There is no one Christian way of life but many different ones depending on the culture in which the gospel makes itself at home. Because different people from different cultures experience the gospel differently and consequently find different forms to live it. This is in essence what I want to bring across when I compare your experience of the Spirit with Martin Luther's experience. The challenge I put before you is to make the gospel not small but big. Don't reduce the gospel to only your understanding of salvation. Because the gospel moves through time and makes itself known in all kinds of cultures. Therefore it becomes very different in outlook. Luther might have shaken his head when he had heard how God supernaturally intervened in the life of pastor Hilton. You might wonder if Luther really knew Christ since he was neither born again nor baptized in the Holy Spirit. The challenge I put before us is to recognize that the gospel is bigger than our comprehension of it. As I not for a second doubt that God indeed has spoken supernaturally to you I request that you acknowledge that he speaks in other, maybe more natural, meaning cultural, ways as well.

This might lead to the question: "What then is the truth if you claim that salvation can assume many different outlooks depending on the culture in which it unfolds and challenge us to look beyond our own powerful and personal experience of salvation?" Well the answer to this question is found in being bold in faith and not reducing God's will to save the world to your categories of faith. My request is again that you recognize that there is not one but many expressions of faith. None of the possible expressions of faith, neither the charismatic – born again version- nor the more traditional Lutheran form, have understood God completely. Nobody, no church and no denomination can claim to have the monopoly on the right understanding of faith. Because faith grows out of the power of God revealing himself in many different forms or cultures. As long as we call Christ Lord (see 1 Cor.12:3) it is neither up to the born again Christians to judge the faith of those who can't refer to an experience of being born again as starting point of their faith; nor is it up to the more traditional minded Christians to claim that they have understood the gospel properly while the Charismatics haven't.

III. You claim that you live according to the bible which neither allows nor promotes relativism but is pretty clear about what faith is and how a Christian or Spirit controlled

life should look like. I would submit that what you call 'a Bible-based way of life' is only one of many possible ways of life which can be legitimized by using scripture. You, like all Christians, live the biblical message only in part and it would be presumptuous to suggest that Breakthrough International promotes the only truly Bible-based life style.

If, as you claim, you would indeed follow the bible to the letter there would for example be no way that you could allow women to be ordained. The biblical testimony on that issue is pretty clear. Women are supposed to be silent in the assembly. A truly Bible-based life style would not allow for the ordination of women. But, I believe rightfully so, you have chosen to differ from the bible with respect to that issue. You turned against the clear biblical message on account of the fact that you feel the Spirit moves you to do so. You feel that in the Spiritual realm God might use a women to proclaim his message and we should not limit God's Spirit. I applaud you for that stance but strictly speaking you don't live the bible to the letter on this point. You might put the spirit of the bible to practice but you don't follow what is written. Thus your claim to promote a "Bible-based" life style is at least questionable. Despite your claim to the contrary the way in which you deal with the issue of women ordination illustrates that you know that one can't just extract a Bible-based life style from the bible. You need to be selective as you read the bible and adjust what you read to the realities of your world and culture without compromising what you have understood as the core message of our faith.

As Christians we join hands within that process of putting to practice what we understand in our reading of the bible. Nobody knows it all but we all see in part. To figure out what the truth is becomes therefore something we are charged to do together. Charismatics, Lutherans, Catholics, Evangelicals in short the whole church as it seeks to live the gospel in its particular situations and cultures needs to remain in communion with each other to understand what a truly Bible-based life style is. The truth which you grasp as truth, that what you understand as a Bible-based life style and that what I understand as Bible-based life style must compliment each other, so that we will see the gospel in all its richness and diversity. The challenge therefore is not to claim that one of us is right but to keep in communion and dialogue with each other. Where we question, encourage, and even reprimand one another as churches who serve the gospel

we will figure out what is right. We will make the gospel meaningful within our diverse cultural contexts and Christ will indeed become flesh, join the natural and dwell among us so that God's creation may be saved.

#### 8. Sustainable discipleship needs to apply scripture, tradition, reason, and experience

This has been a long letter and you might not agree with a number of issues I have raised. However I have gained tremendously through the encounter with your way of doing mission. I have been reminded that the experience of God is at the heart of the missionary endeavor. As theologian, pastor and missionary from the West I tend to think too much about God and his mission and lack to facilitate the experience of the divine. It seems as if my mind and my tradition makes it increasingly difficult for me to listen to God's voice in the way people like pastor Hilton and others have done. In that respect it has been a real blessing to see your commitment to a Spirit driven and people centered way of doing church.

However I see our respective spiritual journeys as eventually being one journey which aims to come to a deeper understanding of God's glory. As I close this letter I therefore I take the liberty to remind you of John Wesley, a fellow charismatic Christian, who echoes in principle what I have been trying to convey to you throughout this letter. He was like you overpowered by the Spirit and subsequently saw his life turned around. But despite Wesley's personal experience of the Spirit, his "warming of the heart", he cautioned his fellow believers not to rely solely on the experience of the Spirit as the one source of their faith. In his opinion there are four sources of faith which need to come together so that mature and sustainable discipleship develops. Those sources are scripture, tradition, experience, and reason.

He never considered these four sources of faith as of equal importance; scripture is always primary. As a means of grace, scripture facilitates a deeper understanding of the ways and will of God. Tradition, as the witness of the past, provides guidance for today by enabling us to see both the faithfulness of our forebears and the ways in which they strayed from faithful discipleship. Experience, in Wesley's understanding, refers to a vital experience of God's grace. This experience is affirmed within the broader Christian community -past and present- and holds us accountable to the gospel. Finally, reason shapes our discipleship, it is a God-given gift that enables us to interpret scripture, tradition, and experience in light of the world

in which we find ourselves. Reason allows us therefore to study and grow in knowledge and to make judgments about discipleship in the world.

After studying your way of doing mission in the experience of the Spirit I believe that Wesley's challenge to develop a wider understanding of faith through using scripture, tradition, and reason might be something God calls you to do. Your experience of the Spirit, as remarkable and supernatural as it has been, is not going to sustain you as a church which shall be found faithful to the fullness of the gospel.

In meeting you I have been challenged to rethink my own spirituality, but in turn I challenge you to think beyond your spirituality in a much more comprehensive way than you are doing at the moment. I learned from you that God's mission, his will to save the world, centers around more than thinking about the right way of doing mission. I learned that God wants to be experienced in power and in truth. But can I convince you to discover that God's mission equally centers around more than your personal life, your personal salvation and your private experience of the Spirit? God wants to save the world and you are called to define your place in that divine project going beyond your personal and private spirituality.

May God bless us as we continue our spiritual journey until, as Paul says, we will see face to face what we now know only in part like a poor reflection as in a mirror (1 Cor. 13:1).

## Encountering the Spiritual - a personal introduction

### 1. Mission a liability?

This thesis has grown out of my work as a missionary in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA). ELCSA is a church dating back to the missionary movement of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is a product of the work of mission societies from Sweden, Norway, Germany and the United States. I have been seconded to work within ELCSA by Hermannsburg Mission, a German mission society operational in South Africa since 1854. I am the kind of church worker of whom David Bosch says;

The missionary is not central to the life and the future of the younger Churches, ... the missionary is not only not central but may in fact be an embarrassment and a liability" (Bosch 1991: 364-365).

He is indeed right. When it comes to the development of the local church I find myself quite often rather to be part of the problem than of the solution. Words like "liability" and "embarrassment" seem a little harsh but they indicate what Walter Freytag saw already as early as 1958. He stated at the conference of the International Missionary Council in Ghana (1958);

While in the past the missions had problems they now have become the problem. In the past it hasn't been a questioned that the Western missions where the leaders proclaiming the gospel in word and deed. Today we don't talk about the leadership of the Western missions but rather their contribution to mission. The forms in which mission is done are not taken for granted any longer. Even the traditional view on the purpose of mission is being questioned (Margull 1961:111).

What has happened is that the missionary movement which started as a Western affair in the 18<sup>th</sup> century has become the object of severe criticism. While in the past missionaries were looked upon as a blessing now they are seen as a burden. Again David Bosch bears witness in this regard. He writes;

Since the first issue of IRM was published in 1912, in the wake of Edinburgh 1910, a fundamental 'paradigm shift' has taken place in mission and missionary thinking. Then Europe and North America were the solid beacons of orientation, the model for the 'non-Christian' world still to be brought into the orbit of Christianity, today we are involved (at least theoretically!) in 'mission in six continents'. Then the missionary was a giver and an initiator, in a position of power (also 'secular' power) in a world of fixed and evident values, today the missionary is regarded as a throwback to a bygone era (Bosch 1991:89).

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\* Please note that I am responsible for the translation of those works which have been written in German.

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