



Missio Dei's Pleromatic Disposition: The Infinite Missionary God

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Abstract

What characterized the missiological shift from pre- to post-1952 Willingen and its resulting perspectives is the recognition of the pleromatic (Greek for “Fullness”) nature of the mission, denoting the totality of the Trinitarian God constantly or coherently at work saving the entire universe. Although the missiological literature commendably continues to emphasize total salvation and the attainment of the all-encompassing kingdom of God as the fundamental objectives of the *missio Dei*, its pleromatic character, that of the missionary triune God, so to speak, remains less obvious—and therefore in need of explanation. Accordingly, this article relies upon literature to highlight the importance of the *pleroma* as a theological concept, with the intention of contextualizing its use along with efforts to deepen the understanding of the *missio Dei*. Although this terminology is more associated with Gnosticism, it is intentionally used here in a different sense from that of the Gnostics, but merely streamlined to emphasize the infinite nature of the *missio Dei*. Consequently, it is here concluded that the scope of the *missio Dei*, when understood through its pleromatic character, transcends conceivable human and ecclesiastical limits, religious parameters, and even the limits of the universe or the cosmos itself. Therefore, the scope of this paper justifies further research aimed at uncovering the pleromatic character of the *missio Dei*, which is constantly at work and inhabits the universe in its entirety.

Keywords: *Missio Dei*, Triune God, *pleroma*, total salvation, all-encompassing Kingdom.

Introduction

In recent years, since the Willingen Conference of the International Missionary Council (IMC) in 1952, at which interdenominational and predominantly Protestant delegates set the course for ecumenical mission, the concept of *missio Dei*, which rediscovered mission as God's own work, has remained a topical subject in missiology. Several studies within theology, and in particular missiology, have taken the trouble to examine the implications of the *missio Dei* (Cronshaw, 2020; Kemper, 2014; Verkuyl, 1979). A comparative look at missionary theology before and after Willingen shows how missionary theology before Willingen neglected the eternal presence of the triune God in His mission. Consequently, it was precisely this neglect that the Willingen Conference and the resulting scholarship sought to correct by emphasizing the missionary God as the source of mission, or as Nurnberger (1990) puts it that God is the source of the whole of reality or its criterion (Nurnberger, 1990: 206,2012). However, although the subject of the *missio Dei* has been constantly studied and developed, such scholarly efforts have left somewhat untouched the question of the pleromatic character of the *missio Dei*. To fill such a gap, this contribution uses the theological concept of *pleroma* to describe the fullness of the *missio Dei* and



thus the presence of the missionary triune God constantly at work throughout the world. Understanding the *missio Dei* from the perspective of this rich concept will imply that not only the human community or religious parameters, but the cosmos is subject to God's coherent mission. In other words, it will show how every aspect of life is involved in or inhabited by the redemptive activities of the triune God.

Although the apostle Paul has been accused of promoting Gnostic concepts, his use of terms like *pleroma* innocently sought to emphasize the fullness of the triune God in all phases of mission, consistent with the Christian thought that preceded his letters. In fact, some might even suggest that such usage comes from Old Testament scriptures such as Jeremiah 23:24 and Isaiah 6:3, where an attempt is made to indicate the omnipresence and providence of God throughout the universe. To this end Merklinger (1965) states: 'Paul was steeped in the thought of the Old Testament, as the entire Pauline corpus patently exhibits' (Merklinger, 1965:740). Consequently, it can be argued that while there is a grain of truth in the allegations linking Paul's teachings to Gnosticism (Merklinger, 1965:739), his use of the term *pleroma* was intended merely to emphasize the fullness of the Triune God in mission (Polhill, 1973:439-450; Wessels, 1987:183-202). From this it can be concluded that the use of *pleroma*, both in relation to the New Testament in general and to the epistles of the apostle Paul in particular, simply accentuates fact that no aspect of mission will ever lack the presence of the triune God. As presented in the next section, this usage is similarly underscored by Christian doctrines on divine attributes such as omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence, all of which equally express the unconditional presence of the triune God in mission.

The workflow of this paper will attempt to examine the pleromatic character of the triune God in the context of the *missio Dei* as follows: First, this paper will extract elements of *pleroma* through God's attributes such as omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence, among others. Second, it will seek to deepen the pleromatic character of the *missio Dei* as expressed through the person and life of Jesus Christ, but especially through the understanding of what is meant by deep incarnation and resurrection. Third, the action of the Holy Spirit is examined as intended to give or expressing the pleromatic character of the *missio Dei* in the whole world.

Pleromatic *missio Dei*

The Greek term *πλήρωμα* - *Pleroma* generally refers to the totality of divine powers in the whole of the universe (Evans, 1984:259-265). Derived from the Greek *πληρόω* comparable to *πλήρης* which means "full", this term was first used in Christian theological contexts in the work of the Apostle Paul, who is credited with introducing it to Greek and Gnostic literature (Rambiert-Kwaśniewska, 2020:199-202). *Pleroma* is also used in the general Greek language and is used by the Greek Orthodox church in this general form since the word appears in the book of Colossians. Some scholars strongly suspect that this is due to the possibility that the apostle Paul had been affected by the influence of Gnostic teachings (Pagels, 1992; Quispel, 1965). Proponents of the view that Paul was a pro-Gnostic, view the reference in Colossians as something that was to be interpreted in the Gnostic sense. However, their view is not too far from the truth, as Gnosticism was born out of the Jewish and early Christian sects of the late 1st century CE, which claimed extraordinary or personal knowledge of the hidden deity beyond established religious institutions. Consequently, its writings flourished among early Christian groups in the Mediterranean world before they could be denounced as heresy by the early Church Fathers. Thus, there may be a grain of truth in the claim that the apostle had his own share of influence from Gnosticism.



In fact, New Testament scholars such as Stanley Porter and David Yoon have long affirmed the possibility that the apostle had a relationship with Gnosticism (Porter & Yoon, 2016). However, this paper does not intend to examine or deepen such a discussion, but merely attempts to use *pleroma* as an acceptable term to describe the fullness of God's mission in the world. In any case, both Gnostics and Christians do not see the world as existing in a vacuum, but believe that it exists in the fullness of God's presence. In this way, so to speak, no life or its parts can ever be without God's mission, but the entire universe with all its contents becomes *missio Dei's pleroma*, essentially indicating that God's mission subjugates or fills the entire universe. Consequently, this paper make use of *pleroma* to show the fullness universalistic character of the *missio Dei*. This will mean that the entire cosmic totality, insofar as it exists, is maximally filled with the mission of God. Furthermore, this will show that the *missio Dei* is not accidental but is in accordance with the nature of God as reflected in various Christian core teachings.

Gnostic Pleroma

Before examining the likely use of the term *pleroma* in the context of the *missio Dei*, it is undoubtedly important to first contextualize it within Christian history, particularly considering its dissemination by Gnostics. In general, Gnosticism refers to a collection of religious ideas that emphasize personal spiritual knowledge that goes beyond what religious institutions would consider orthodox teachings (Van der Broek, 2013). Consistently, the term Gnosticism is from Ancient Greek term *γνωστικός* which broadly means having knowledge, generally refers to a collection of religious groups that merged between the early Christian and Jewish sects in the late 1st century (Casey, 1935:45-60). These groups claimed to have a deeper wisdom or personal knowledge of spirituality beyond the confines of Orthodox Christian teachings (DeConick, 2017; Hoeller, 2012; King, 2003), and consequently pursued Gnosis (knowledge) or enlightenment of divinity with the expressed purpose of finding salvation (Carus, 1898:502). Although the Gnostic writings flourished among some early Christian groups, particularly around the second century in the Mediterranean world, the early Church Fathers later denounced them as heresy, based on their claims of secret knowledge and belief that human beings contained a piece of God's knowledge exclusively within itself (Brakke, 2012; Longan, 1996; Morris, 2008).

Although Christian scholars to this day remain skeptical of any knowledge associated with Gnosticism, perhaps like all other heretical teachings with roots in early Christianity, it continues to offer fragments of insight fundamental to understanding Christian thought and core philosophy (Waldstein, 2000:341-372), or in the words of Crus (1898): 'It is of far wider significance, and its proper appreciation will throw a new light on the origin of Christianity and the early history of the Church' (Carus, 1898: 502). This finds harmony within the observation of Markus (1954) who stated 'It was a religious current of vast dimensions, independent of, and perhaps anterior to Christianity, which, for a time and in certain places, crossed Christian territory and assimilated Christian elements into its language and symbolism' (Markus, 1954:193). To this end, the next paragraph introduces the somewhat invaluable Gnostic understanding and use of the term *pleroma*, particularly with the intention of using it to further the understanding of the *missio Dei*.

As mentioned in the introduction, the Greek word *pleroma* has several meanings that emphasize or encompass the idea of what fulfills, satisfies, or completes, especially when it refers to the deity in relation to the universe. According to Macdermot (1981), the gnostic concept of *pleroma* denotes the totality of both the manifested and unmanifest qualities of deity in the universe. Underscored by the myth of the fall of Sophia, Gnosticism uses it to show how humanity became deficient and lost connection with divine fullness, or plenitude so to speak (MacDermot, 1981:76-77). In other words, the deficiency created by the fall of Sophia is taken to explain human deficiency in relation to the divine pleromatic character. Accordingly, the exploration of the



pleroma in relation to the fallen Sophia myth typifies a flawed human state from the fullness of divinity. Consequently, this speaks to God's ability to inhabit both heaven and earth pleromatically, or through His divine fullness. He alone can fill the entire universe with his presence since he does not suffer from forms of deficiencies like human beings. Aligned to this broad understanding, the next paragraph introduces a use of the word *pleroma* to describe the total presence of the triune God in mission, or His fullness in *missio Dei*, so to speak. As if interpreting the incarnated presence of the triune God through the concept of *pleroma*, Theodossiou et al., (2009) writes: 'Jesus-Savior came down to Earth sent by the *pleroma*. His mission was to place all the spiritual elements of humanity back into the *pleroma* and, thereafter, to cause the destruction of the material world' (Theodossiou et al., 2009:49). The next section will place the use of the term *pleroma* in the New Testament context in order to make it acceptable language in describing the presence of the triune God in the *missio Dei*. As the rest of this paper will try to show, the missiological literature that has emerged in response to understanding the *missio Dei* from the perspective of the Willingen Conference tends in some ways to emphasize the pleromatic character of the triune God in the *missio Dei*.

Pleroma in the New Testament

The term *pleroma* from the Greek word *πληρώω* comparable to *πλήρης* and their conjugations, undoubtedly played a fairly significant role in the New Testament, where it is integrated into words like *πληρωθῆ* which loosely means 'may be fulfilled' (Matthew 1:22), *ἐπληρώθη* 'it was filled' (Matthew 13:48), *πληρώσεις* 'You will fill' (Acts 2:28), etc.,. This is similarly used in the gospel of John stating: 'For from his fulness (*πληρώματος* - *plērōmatos*) we have all received one gracious gift after another' (John 1:16). However, what seems to have brought this term in theological discussion desk is its use by the apostle Paul in cases where he was attempting to emphasize the totality of the knowledge of God, particularly in his addresses to both the Colossian and Ephesian churches. First, in his address to the Colossians he used the term *πληρωθῆτε* in his address to the Colossians when he informed them that they would not stop praying that they (Colossians) 'may be filled with' the knowledge of God (Colossians 1:9). He also used *ἀνταναπληρῶ* indicating that he is filling up what is lacking in the church (1:24), and the term *πληρῶσαι* underscoring that he is carrying out his ministry making the word of God fully known (Colossians 1:24-25). In Colossians 2:9 he stated: 'For in Him [Jesus Christ] dwells - *πλήρωμα τῆς Θεότητος σωματικῶς* - all the fulness of the Godhead bodily'. In particular, the latter use of *pleroma* places a strong emphasis on the full measure of the triune God, or the way God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit fully inhabit the mission as embodied through various avenues, whether in the mortal ministry of the Son (*missio Christos*), the Holy Spirit (*missio Spiritus*), apostle ministry (*missio hominum*) or the church as the body of Christ (*missio Ecclesiae*). In other words, the apostle Paul used the term *pleroma* theologically in his address to the Colossians to accentuate that the fullness of the triune God dwells in every phase of mission.

Much like in the letter to the Colossians, the apostle Paul used the term *pleroma* coherently in his address to the Ephesians to stress the undeniable fullness of the triune God in mission. Incidentally after underscoring that Christ has authority and dominion over all things (Ephesians 1:19-22), he concludes the statement by using it (*pleroma*) in reference to Christ as: 'head over all things to the church, which is his body, the *πλήρωμα* fullness of him who is *πληρουμένου* filling all in all' (Ephesians 1:23). Similarly, in chapter four he speaks about Jesus Christ as the one who descended and ascended above all the heavens so that he might *πληρώσῃ τὰ πάντα* - fill all things. Here the apostle Paul emphatically qualifies that the presence and authority of Jesus Christ and the triune God by extension fills both realms (heaven and earth) without exclusion or distinction. It is therefore not surprising that the Epistle to the Ephesians is known for its language,



associating the usage of terms such as *οἰκονομία* – stewardship and *πλήρωμα* – fulness to accentuate the yearning for steadiness of the apostolic mission towards foreign nations. In other words, a fundamental language that underscores the continued indwelling of the Triune God in mission to the ends of the world (Van Aarde, 2016:287). This then makes it pertinent to recall that the term *pleroma* was used in a similar way in Acts 2 to record how the followers of Christ were filled with the Holy Spirit empowering or enabling them to carry out the mission to the end to fulfill the world.

God's Pleromatic Nature

According to Christian thinking, the triune God possesses many qualities that distinguish him from human beings or from all of creation. Among these qualities, at least three are immediately recognizable: omnipresence (everything is there), omniscience (all-knowing), and omnipotent (all-powerful). Each of these three *Omnis* incorporates the other and thus works hand in hand to characterize the Triune God as possessing the fullness of knowledge, presence, and power. However, right at the outset it should be made clear that while there are some who questions Christian doctrines of the above attributes, the purpose of this paper is not to enter nor reflect such arguments, but merely to place their understanding in the context of *missio Dei*. Therefore, these attributes will be briefly described in the next three sub-chapters to emphasize the pleromatic character of the *missio Dei*.

Omnipresence – *Missio Dei*

Although the literature is replete with studies attempting to explore the implications of omnipresence, it has not received much attention in the context of the *missio Dei*. Consequently, the view here is that the pleromatic character of the *missio Dei* cannot be fully expounded without first pointing to omnipresence as an important attribute of God. The term omnipresence comes from two Latin roots: *omni*, meaning all, and *praesent*, meaning present, and thus to declare that God is omnipresent means to say that God is present in everything (Percy, 2021:139-146). In other words, omnipresence as God's innate attribute is applicable in several contexts which are indicative of the divine presence, including but not limited to the *missio Dei*. Goris (2009) traced the omnipresence position largely to the work of Thomas Aquinas, emphasizing that Thomas Aquinas treated omnipresence as the innate attribute that characterizes the doctrine of God in its entirety, since he attempted to assert that God is the proximate cause of all things, and similarly His existence is present in all things (Goris, 2009:34-35).

Similarly, Inman (2017) stated: 'to say that God is omnipresent is to say that God is present or located at each and every place' (Inman 2017:2). Accordingly, the assertion that the *missio Dei* is ubiquitous essentially suggests that not only God, but His divine activities, through the extension of His sovereignty, occupy every single aspect of life. Consistent with this claim, Cowling and Cray (2017) compared accounts of ubiquity based on occupation, dependency, and existentialism. They then argued that an entity can be said to be ubiquitous only if it can occupy every single region at the same time. They also stated: 'the omnipresent entity knows what is occurring at all regions and is capable of knowingly exerting its will at each of those regions' (Cowling & Cray, 2017:2). *missio Dei* indisputably possesses innate qualities that allow it's infinite mandate to be unlimited and not tied to one place. Goris (2009) referred to the idea of the mover and the moved object and attributed it to Aquinas, who in turn adopted it from Aristotle as he inductively argued that the mover and the mover remain in the same proximity (Goris, 2009:35).



Consequently, since the Triune God as the primary initiator of the *missio Dei* is said to possess the attribute of omnipresence, submissive to such an important attribute, the infinite presence of the *missio Dei* is likewise unrestricted. The *missio Dei* extends to all parts of the universe, with the Triune God himself present everywhere. In this way, through his eternal presence in mission as the missionary God (Stott, 1979:3-9), he has complete and total control over every aspect or facet of his mission or *missio Dei* so to speak. In addition, this is to affirm that the mission of God is everywhere without being limited to any place or community. This is exactly what the Willingen Conference had to recognize and underline the all-encompassing character of the *missio Dei* from preceding to forthcoming infinity or 'from everywhere to everywhere', as some would briefly put it (Bosch, 1991:260; Kamper, 2014:189).

Omniscience – *Missio Dei*

As is perhaps the case with God's omnipresence attribute alluded to above, the omniscient attribute has been extensively studied in theological literature (Pettazzoni, 1955:1-27), but not to the extent of showing its relation to the *missio Dei*. The word omniscient comes from two *Latin* roots: *omni*, meaning all, and *Scientia*, meaning knowledge, and consequently to say that God is omniscient is to imply that he possesses all knowledge there is. In essence, this means that in every moment of His divine life, God knows everything there is to know, not even a single aspect of all knowable things is hidden from His divine knowledge. The Bible is full of miracles, or what people will consider miracles, that demonstrate extraordinary knowledge possessed only by the divine, especially those witnessed during the mortal ministry of Jesus Christ. One of the appropriate examples that illustrate this divine property is the miraculous catch of fish in Luke 5, where Jesus Christ knew beyond human perception where the fish was gathered at that time. While those who were ordinary fishermen at the time obviously did not know where exactly the fish had gathered, Jesus Christ, as the embodiment of the triune God, had omniscience of their current location (Erickson, 1998:407). Consistent with this, Job stated: 'For he views the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens' (Job 28:24). Consequently, this divine attribute appeals to the extraordinary knowledge possessed exclusively by the divine, and far transcends the limits of what humanity deems as natural law or laws of nature as it were. In other words, the divine all-knowing attribute is not confined to the limits of human knowledge nor that of nature itself and encompasses the past, present and future. To this end Willimington (2017) stated firmly: 'God is omniscient (all knowing) – God possesses (without prior discovery of facts) complete and universal knowledge of all things past, present, and future' (Willimington, 2017:1).

In the book of Isaiah, God himself is mentioned as expressing the timelessness of his knowledge, saying: 'I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say my purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please' (Isaiah 46:10). Similarly, the Apostle Paul in Romans stated: 'Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways.... For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever' (Romans 11:33,36). This is nicely explained by John Calvin where he stated: 'When we attribute foreknowledge to God, we mean that all things have ever been and perpetually remain before, his eyes, so that to his knowledge nothing is future or past, but all things are present' (Calvin, 1960:145).

Consequently, given the understanding of the Triune God as the primary initiator of the *missio Dei* in possession of the omniscience attribute, submissive to such an important attribute, the infinite awareness and manifestation of the *missio Dei* is likewise infinite. Everything the triune God does in His own mission has an intelligent saving purpose centered on a specific goal of establishing His kingdom. Subsequently, the Church and other human entities can only participate or join in any missionary activity directed by the omniscient Triune God.



Omnipotence – *Missio Dei*

As is perhaps the case with both omnipresence and omniscience divine attributes alluded to above, the omnipotence attribute has been the subject of scholarly reflection within the theological literature, but not to the extent that its implication in relation to the *missio Dei* is considered. The term omnipotence comes from the Latin combination of two words: *omni* meaning everything and *potent* meaning power, resulting in monotheistic theological expressions such as all-powerful or almighty God. The monotheistic starting point of this divine attribute is posited in scriptures such as Genesis 1:1-1:10, which essentially underline that God is the Creator who brought the universe into being through his infinite powers. From such a standpoint it has thus been realized that there is absolutely nothing that God cannot do, as He remains the supreme authority over the entire universe. Undeniably, this is supported by the testimony of the prophet Jeremiah, who says: 'Ah, Lord God! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you'. Similarly, the psalmist constantly hints to this omnipotence by designating God as great and abounding in power (Psalm 147:5). Although this monotheistic claim is widely accepted, it has led to a situation where philosophers ask paradoxical questions such as: If God is so powerful, can he create a rock too big and heavy to lift? Consequently, any answer to that question, yes or no, would lead to another question that contradicts the assertion itself. If yes, then that means there is something he cannot do? If no, then that means there is something he cannot create something?

Early church fathers like St. Thomas Aquinas sought to dismantle such a paradox by limiting God's omnipotence to the creation of possible solutions. However, Rene Descartes is among those who answered this question by stating that indeed God can create such a stone and even lift it. In fact, the Bible answered these questions through scriptures like Numbers 23:19, Titus 1:2, and Hebrews 6:18, which reveal that God can do nothing contrary to or beyond His character. So, if there is one thing He cannot do, it is to contradict Himself, His mighty character, or the scope of His mission. In the book of Revelations, God Himself declares: "I am the *Alpha* and the *Omega*", says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty' (Revelations 1:8).

Consequently, since the Triune God as the primary initiator of the *missio Dei* is said to possess the attribute of omnipotence, submissive to such an important attribute, the infinite mandate of the *missio Dei* is likewise unrestricted. From eternity past to eternity to come, the omnipotence of God has governed and continues to govern the history of the universe, including, but not limited to, the daily works of man and the purposes of the future. Consequently, God, through His omnipotence, was the mover of missionary events and their practical manifestations. Through his sovereign rule as the initiator of all that is, he is the source of the mission (*missio Dei*) to save the chaotic universe in its fullness from past to future eternity in ways beyond human imagination. Thus, the omnipotence of God lies not only in creation, but is also evident in His plans and intentions to preserve His creation through His mission (*missio Dei*).

Christ's pleromatic nature

According to Christian teachings, Jesus Christ is God incarnate, the second person in the Trinity who is central to the history of salvation through being the mediator between God and humanity (1 Timothy 2:5). This mediating role of Jesus Christ was necessitated by the increasingly sinful human nature, lack of righteousness, and lack of perfection, since all humankind had fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:10,23). Now that human sinfulness had emptied the earth of the



presence of God, His divine presence came to reveal the fullness of God's plan to counter such ungodliness (Romans 11:25-27). It is precisely because of this image of fullness that the apostle Paul viewed Jesus Christ as the perfect fulfillment of time, through whom the fulness and totality of divine powers was revealed. In his Epistle to the Galatians, he linked the sending or *missio* of the Son to the appearing of the fullness or *pleroma* of time - *πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου* (Galatians 4:4). He then repeated this in the Epistle to the Ephesians, speaking of all things to be gathered in Christ in the dispensation of fulness or *pleroma* of the times – *πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν* (Ephesians 1:10). Similarly, in the Epistle to the Colossians, he mentioned the *pleroma* - *πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα* which dwells in Jesus Christ (Colossians 2:9). In other words, all the fullness that encompasses the triune God dwells in the Incarnate Son and is consequently intended to fill the rest of creation.

Incarnation and Resurrection

To underscore the pleromatic character of the presence of the Triune God, particularly as embodied in the person of Jesus Christ, the two doctrines of Incarnation and Resurrection not only remain instrumental as central tenets on which Christianity is founded, but systematically underscore the pleromatic character of the triune God. Both the incarnation and resurrection doctrines, viewed in the light of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, transcend the narrative of the Holy Spirit descending upon the apostles into the discourse that explores the deepening pleromatic nature of the triune God in the world, and consequently treated here under themes of deep incarnation and deep resurrection. In other words, beyond mortal ministry, the death of Jesus Christ, and the miracle of Pentecost, the next section underscores the pleromatic character of the triune God through understandings of incarnation and resurrection, and later integrates it under themes of deep incarnation and deep resurrection. This is to show that both the incarnation and the resurrection signify not only the unique presence of the triune God, but also the deepening pleromatic nature of the triune God and, by extension, *missio Dei*.

***Pleroma* in Incarnation**

The term incarnation corresponding to the Greek term *sarkosis* was adopted from the Latin word *incarnationem* (nominative *incarnatio*) pointing to the act of being made flesh. Throughout the history of Christian theology, from the time of early Church father, this term was used in explicit reference to the embodiment of God in the person of Christ and is therefore widely recognized as one of the central foundations and cornerstones of traditional Christian theism (Cross, 2009; Pawl, 2020). It underscores the belief that Jesus Christ remained implacably the second person of the Trinity even after assuming human form, and thus possessed the dual nature of true God and true man. This is further accentuated by the classic statement of the fourth-century theologian Apollinarius of Laodicea (n.d.-382 CE), who, while consistently denying the existence of a fully rational soul in Christ, nonetheless made a valuable contribution to understanding the dual character of Christ's body when he argued that the body of Christ lives on the sanctification of divinity and the whole is perfectly united in one (Anderson, 1985:197-206). Against such heresy, however, orthodox teaching consistently proclaims that Jesus Christ was fully human and also simultaneously God as a *Theanthropos* (Nicolaidis, 2019), during and throughout his mortal ministry, while at the same time embodying the fullness of the triune God, which comprised the hypostatic presence of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. "For in him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9). Certainly, this is substantiated by the observation of Coffey (1984) noting that the language used by the Council of Chalcedon captured this very well, asserting that God the Son existed in the divine nature from eternity to eternity, even during the



time of assuming human nature in the person of Jesus of Nazareth (Coffey, 1984:466). As a result, or beyond its superficial interpretation, the incarnation is accordingly viewed as the divine act of becoming one with humanity through Jesus of Nazareth as the custodian and initiator of such reunion.

Further, this means that the incarnation symbolizes a total mystery in which the triune God transcendentally, without losing the eternal divine nature, assumed human nature for the sake of reunion with humanity. Consequently, and beyond the mediation of Jesus of Nazareth, this teaching has given a glimpse of the transcendental pleromatic presence of God in the universe and particularly among human beings, as in the case of Pentecost when the third person of the Trinity dwelt among the followers of Christ, to which the likes of Apostle Paul testified without hesitation that 'Christ lives in me' (Galatians 2:20). This is noted by those who have argued that the sending procession of the Holy Spirit should be understood in connection with or within the same theological framework that surrounds the sending procession of God the Son, appropriately as the deepening presence of the triune God embodied by the apostles, the church and the world by extension (Coffey, 1984:480). The meaning of the incarnation is therefore not limited to the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ or reduced to an abstraction but continues to transcendently find its expression in all of creation, especially through human existence. Similar understanding is expressed by Gibbins (1929), who argued that Pentecost represented a new experience in which the incarnation was successively manifested in the life of the apostles, who in turn were to help fulfill God's eternal plan of salvation (Gibbins, 1929:272-277). Beyond the point of Christ's incarnation however, the transcendental presence of God is also witnessed in the resurrection as it shall be demonstrated below. Both the Incarnation and the Resurrection are presented in this way to emphasize the progressive realization of God's saving mission, and consequently its pleromatic character.

Pleroma in Resurrection

First, it is important to emphasize the inseparability of the doctrine of incarnation and the Resurrection as a subsequent event, especially since the incarnation took place in the body of Jesus Christ and consequently the resurrection involved not only the spiritual but also the physical restoration of the body of Christ. The term resurrection derives from the Latin noun *resurrectio - onis*, with the root *surgere* meaning 'to rise' and consequently giving the sense of a state of revival from inactivity, disuse or death, and as such broadly translates as 'to straighten again', 'get up again', 'rising up again from below', and many other interpretations underscoring the process of rising back to life. Although the concept of the resurrection of the dead is often associated with eschatological beliefs in the Abrahamic religions (Merrick, 2009:3-20), it is accepted by other religions either similarly or by reincarnation, which more often involves the same person or deity but being resurrected in a different body.

In the Old Testament, there are several direct statements underscoring the promise of resurrection, the first being the Prophet Isaiah stating: 'Thy dead shall live, their bodies shall rise. Dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For thy dew is a dew of light, and on the land of shades thou wilt let it fall' (Isaiah 26:19). Similarly, many other Old Testament scriptures teach or allude in many words to the resurrection of believers, including but not limited to such scriptures as Daniel 12:2; Ezekiel 37:12-14; Psalm 49:15. Christianity, on the other hand, and from the point of view of the New Testament accounts, the resurrection doctrine is based on the historical account that testifies to Christ's resurrection from the grave three days after his death. In other words, for Christianity the idea of the Resurrection did not remain an abstract promise but came alive practically through the witnessing of Jesus Christ's resurrection as recorded principally in all three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 22:29-32; Mark 12:24- 27; Luke 20:34-38) and other New



Testament resultant testimonies. As a result, the Resurrection came to be seen as the foundation upon which all Christian faith is founded. This very fact is accentuated by the Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Corinthian maintaining that all Christian faith depends upon, or derives its existence from, the centrality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:19-20).

Consequently, beyond the biblical teaching or testimony of the resurrection, Christian literature is exhausted by the work of many scholars who have studied the doctrine of the resurrection and its implications (Baker, 2007; Bynum, 1996; Levering, 2012). What is more important to note here, however, is the pleromatic character of the resurrection through what Wright (2002) would see as a transition in understanding its second phase, which involves the second coming of the Messiah and the resurrection of his people (Wright, 2002:64-65). The second phase broadly underpins the main goal of Christ's resurrection, which is the resurrection of the whole world through the identity of Jesus Christ as Messiah. In other words, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is to give effect or expression to the resurrection of the whole world in the hope that all will eventually follow Christ as the first person to model the resurrection. Consequently, the resurrection ceases to be a mere historical event and becomes an ongoing divine activity to raise the world under God's dominion. In this way, the resurrection is not limited to Jesus of Nazareth, but extends not only to the church but to all of God's creation. Once this pleromatic resurrection is witnessed, it will accordingly be marked by the second coming, and followed by the establishment of the heavenly kingdom in the everlasting, hence the Nicene Creed asserted: 'We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come' or as per Acts 24:15: 'There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust'. In fact, the Apostle Paul assures the pleromatic resurrection by underscoring that just as all died in Adam, even so all shall be made alive in Christ (1 Corinthians 15:22). Similarly, as if making the pleromatic resurrection a condition for the establishment of the kingdom, the prophet Isaiah declared that not only will the redeemed return, but that the whole world will be resurrected with hymns to God (Isaiah 35:10).

Deep incarnation and Resurrection

As this section will briefly argue, both incarnation and resurrection theologies have meanings that go beyond the confines of their presentation in the biblical accounts. That is, their broad meanings go well beyond what the human mind can comprehend solely by reading biblical accounts. Both theologies not only deal with the special life story of the Jew Jesus from Nazareth, not with one-off events in Christian history, but have an ongoing character that encompasses all of humanity, all creaturely existence and largely all of creation. In other words, both show how the Triune God has deeply embodied and revived His Eternal Divine Presence throughout humanity and throughout the cosmos. This is what has prompted some scholars such as Denis Edwards and Niels Henrik Gregersen to speak of deep incarnation and deep resurrection in an effort to take understanding of these concepts from the periphery to the depths of their implications (Bentley, 2016; Edwards, 2019; Gregersen, 2013). While the traditional concepts of incarnation and resurrection revolved around Christ's dual nature or Christ's affinity with the divine, deep incarnation and deep resurrection accordingly embody the fullness of divinity presently at work in the wider cosmos. Accordingly, in the next two subsections, what is meant first by deep incarnation and second by deep resurrection will be briefly presented in order to underpin the pleromatic character of the *missio Dei*.

As is done above with the notion of deep incarnation, it is first necessary to introduce the Christian doctrine of resurrection without appending the adjective deep in order to provide the appropriate framework for discussion of what is meant by deep resurrection. Resurrection points to how God's own Logos became flesh which was embodied by the person and life story of Jesus of Nazareth (Cole-Turner, 2013:427; Gregersen, 2013, 375). The entire Christian gospel, religious identity,



thought, belief system, or tenet is primarily defined by the story that involves the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In other words, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the foundation of Christian faith since it represents the culmination of the gospel story as a whole. However, the resurrection becomes more important or functional because of its importance in revealing God who is related not only to humankind but also to the metaphysical reality of life.

The term 'deep incarnation' was coined by Niels Henrik Gregersen in 2001 and subsequently inspired further scientific knowledge that substantiated its implications. In a somewhat broad sense, Gregersen describes deep incarnation as underlining the eternal presence of the triune God in the very fabric of material existence, thereby accentuating the interconnectedness of the divine with all of creation. The deep incarnation underscores the ability of the triune God to extend the fullness of his divinity to the very roots of creation, only to strengthen the unity not only between him and humanity, but between him and creation. As analysed in Cole-Turner (2013), Gregersen's emphasis on the deep incarnation attempted to avoid the tendency to limit the universality of the scope of God's presence in the world or to confine God's involvement to one historical instance (Cole-Turner, 2013:424). Without attempting to delve deeply into the evidence of deep incarnation, this claim can be superficially accepted on the basis that it encompasses the doctrine of incarnation, consistent with other doctrines, which seeks to give an expression of God's full manifestation in all creation. In a certain order, this shows beyond a doubt that the functioning of the *missio Dei* is not only anthropocentric (man-centred), but intended for the whole and an organized whole of the universe, including animals. In a way, the account of Noah makes it clear that God's plan of salvation is not only about human beings, but also about preserving animal life since they are part of His creation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, or as most of this paper attempts to indicate, the perspectives underscoring the pleromatic character of the Triune God in mission are salient in the shift from pre- to post-Willingen. In other words, based on the argument made in this paper, it can then be concluded that the mission of God or *missio Dei* as it were, is pleromatic or has no limits when coming to fulfilling its mandate of total salvation, but it reaches to the depth, height, and width of the whole universe. The resulting perspectives of the Willingen's conference continue to attach great importance to the fact that the triune God remains pleromatically present and active in the cosmos without restrictions throughout the course of mission. From such perspectives, the missionary God is not only accessible to the human community, but coherently pursues the goals of total salvation throughout the cosmos, indiscriminately in all facets of salvation history. Understood in this way, the *missio Dei* is never limited in time or space, but gives credence to the missionary God who acts pleromatically to save the universe in its entirety. In other words, the scope of the *missio Dei*, properly understood or interpreted, transcends conceivable ecclesiastical boundaries, religious parameters, and even the limits of the universe or cosmos itself.

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