
At the Origins of Mission and Missiology: A Study in the Dynamics of Religious Language

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The term “mission” was first used to describe Christian evangelization in the sixteenth century, probably by Ignatius of Loyola. The theological sub-discipline missiology dates from the nineteenth century. This paper compares these innovations to understand them better and appreciate how religious language that describes religious practice works. Early missiology’s distinctive rhetorical structure—namely its organization around missionaries as the “subject” of mission and those evangelized as mission’s “object”—reveals the implications of Ignatius’s innovation and explains the rapid proliferation of the term in early modern Christian Europe. “Mission” captured Europe’s emergent self-understanding decisively shaped by the new awareness of the Americas, discursively placing Europe at the world’s center, both geographically and morally. These innovations in Christian terminology exemplify *metapraxis*, a philosophical explanation of religious practice. Comparing them provides insight into how metapraxis evolves in new circumstances to legitimate religious practices both implicitly and explicitly.

BEFORE THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY, there was no Christian mission, as the term is commonly used today. There were people doing

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what was subsequently called “mission,” but the Latin *missio* was used to describe the sending of the Son and Spirit in Trinitarian theology, while a variety of terms—including “propagation of the faith,” “planting the church,” and “illuminating the nations”—labeled the task of evangelization. A new term to describe such activity was introduced in the mid-sixteenth century when Ignatius of Loyola began to refer to the places and tasks to which the early Jesuits were assigned as “missions.”¹

In a similar way, there was not always a branch of Christian theological scholarship called missiology. For centuries the study of Christian missionary activity was unlabeled, but in the early nineteenth century monikers for such a discipline appeared, ranging from the logical (e.g., philosophy of missions, *Missionswissenschaft*, *Missionstheologie*) to the clumsy (e.g., evangelistology, apostology) to the retrospectively exotic (e.g., halieutics, from the Greek “to catch fish”; matheteutics, from the Greek “to make disciples”; keryktics, from the Greek “to announce”; and auxanics, from the Greek “to cause to grow”). A cognate of missiology was first used in Dutch by Ludwig J. van Rijkceversel in 1915, and the term today enjoys wide use in theology.²

In an effort to reconsider the origins of missiology and the consequences of the deployment of the term mission, this paper compares these two innovations in theological language. It seeks to understand their causes and to argue that they had often overlooked ramifications. There were Christians who sought to evangelize and convert non-Christians before “mission” described their activity. There were also scholars who tried to guide and understand Christian missionary practice before a theological sub-discipline had been labeled missiology. At a certain point, however, *missio* was employed to describe an existing Christian practice. At another particular historical juncture, missiology became a formal theological science to study that practice.

In its comparative aims, this paper represents an exercise in what Arnold Davidson calls historical epistemology. In his study of growing self-consciousness about human sexuality over the past few centuries, Davidson “attempts to show how this new form of experience that we

¹Bosch (1991: 227–228). In their influential overview of mission history and missiology, Bevans and Schroeder refer briefly to Ignatius’s innovation (2004: 173–174). Also see Bourdeau (1960: 11–12), Jongeneel (1995: 59), Seumois (1952: 60f), Verkuyt (1978: 2), and Clossey (2008: 12–15).

²On the history of the study of mission, see the following Bevans and Schroeder (2004: 221), Bourdeau (1960), Jongeneel (1995: 15–70), Kasdorf (1988), Luzbetak (1988: 12–17), Müller (1987), Schmidlin (1931: 1ff), Seumois (1952: 61ff and 1973), and Verkuyt (1978: 1–6, 26–28). Though now outdated, the most complete single work on the history of missiological education, especially among Protestants, remains Myklebust (1957), discussed in Hogg (1987). More recently, see Skreslet (2006) and the impressive website <http://digilib.bu.edu/mission>.

call 'sexuality' is linked to the emergence of new structures of knowledge, and especially to a new style of reasoning and the concepts employed within it" (2001: xiii). What Davidson does with sexuality, this paper does more modestly with mission and missiology. It presents a limited genealogical and comparative investigation of these two transformations—the appearance of a new use of *missio* and the emergence of missiology. I seek to appreciate their implications for what Davidson calls "the emergence of new structures of knowledge," as well as "a new style of reasoning."

Though separated by three centuries and connected to different historical currents, these two theological innovations share certain obvious commonalities. First, both appeared as European Christians came to terms with profoundly new global circumstances—exploration and trade outside the Mediterranean leading to the awareness of the Americas, on the one hand, and European colonial expansion in the nineteenth century, on the other hand. Their emergence and proliferation reflect those circumstances. Second, both represent Christian examples of what historian of Japanese religions Thomas Kasulis has called *metapraxis*: the explaining or defending of religious practices through theological or philosophical arguments (1992, 1993, 2004). Kasulis argues that one of the persistent challenges for a religious tradition lies in integrating convictions about reality (or metaphysics) with beliefs about the religious practices of adherents, or *metapraxis*, so that, as Clifford Geertz once influentially put it, religion coherently offers both a "model of" and "model for" reality (Geertz 1973: 93–95). *Missio* and missiology exemplify *metapraxis*, for through them Christians discursively coordinated their practices with their beliefs about God and reality.

Comparing the appearances of *missio* and missiology in these two ways—in relation to broader historical currents and as *metapraxis*—yields three important and interrelated dividends. First, this historical perspective helps explain *missio*'s rapid proliferation in Christian discourse in the early modern period. The term mission, it will be shown, helped European Christians discursively and theologically appropriate the New World, implicitly articulating Europe's sense of itself by linking the new geographical understanding rooted in the move outside the Mediterranean Sea and the unanticipated awareness of the Americas with an evangelical imperative. It is commonly recognized that the practices of Christian mission often overlapped with European colonialism (Christensen and Hutchison 1982; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1997; Robert 2008). The point here is that *missio* was more than a set of practices. Ignatius's new use of the term was a crucial discursive

breakthrough by which Europe named and assimilated the rest of the world, while in the process naming itself anew as a self-conscious entity. This paper thus explains the fast and far-reaching reception of *missio* by foregrounding what might be called its discursive performative³ capacity—that is, its new way of naming Europe’s sense of itself and others—in theological and broader European discourse.

But that capacity became explicit in discourse only with the advent of missiology, and thus this comparative exercise also yields insight into both the timing of the discipline’s emergence and the rhetorical structure of its earliest texts. The first missiological works make explicit how *missio* worked in Christian discourse, for their language and organization display the performative capacity inherent in *missio*. The new discipline unveils what Pierre Bourdieu might have identified as the formation of a social and linguistic field, a field implicitly inaugurated in theological discourse three centuries earlier by Ignatius (Hanks 2005). The historical focus of this paper suggests that the comprehensive structural dualism of early missiology was not merely an artifact of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century intellectual currents. Such dualism also reveals the way *missio* operates as a discourse, making apparent its performative capacity and displaying why people had so eagerly embraced the term.

At the same time, however, missiology appeared at a particular point when Christian missionary work needed new forms of legitimation in the face of criticism. By noting that timing, this comparison yields a third dividend by drawing attention to the way religious language works more generally. In particular, it invites a differentiation and deepening of Kasulis’s notion of metapraxis, particularly in understanding how metapraxis can operate in what I call here *implicit* and *explicit* modes. What *missio* did implicitly by linking Christian evangelization with divine outreach became explicit in the discipline of missiology, when early missiologists carried out theological and philosophical elaboration designed to legitimate the practice for new audiences.

³Unlike those who examine a variety of linguistic or ritual processes in order to elaborate the category of performance (Austin 1962; Bell 1992, 1997), I here use the term “discursive performative” in a less formal way to describe the relationships and identities created by language understood as a discourse. Literary critic Susan Castillo has used the term in a similar way in her recent study of the way writing worked in the New World to “perform America,” as her subtitle has it. Though Castillo ignores mission *per se*, she devotes one chapter to religious discourse (2006: 20–80). As two recent overviews of linguistic and semiotic anthropology show (Silverstein 2006; Mertz 2007), contemporary theories of language and metaphor stress the socially embedded nature of linguistic use, thus moving linguistic studies of culture away from discussions of the *langue-parole* distinction of de Saussure into a performative direction, often relying on the ideas of C. S. Peirce.

Changes in metapraxis from the implicit to more explicit modes in this case reflected new circumstances that led to new needs and bases for legitimation. Such changes probably have likewise effected similar alterations in metapraxis elsewhere in the history of religions.

One might read my argument as primarily proposing that *mission* and missiology were both part of the same phenomenon: the process whereby European Christians appropriated and then defended their domination of non-Europeans. My aim here, however, is not to demonstrate that historical point, obvious though it might seem. Nor I do not think of these two changes in religious discourse as substantially the same. Instead of presenting comprehensive historical genealogies of these transformations to show their commonalities, I here try to situate them in relation to different sorts of trajectories—linguistic, historical, theological—that thereby help illuminate each of the changes, and also shed light on how religious language works more generally. *Missio* reinforced various historical factors that helped establish the normative European subject, while the rhetorical structure of early missiology unfolded the implicit self-understanding that *missio* helped inaugurate. The relationship between the two suggests that the move from an implicit metapraxis to a more explicit mode of metapraxis is a mark of important historical changes.

The paper concludes with a brief discussion of the implications deriving from this historical exercise for understanding Christian mission, in both scholarship and practice.

IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA AND *MISSIO*

Compared with some of his other achievements, Ignatius of Loyola's innovative use of the term "mission" (Latin, *missio*; Spanish, *misión*; Portuguese *missão*) has received remarkably little analysis.⁴ The lack of attention given this innovation belies its historical importance. The term swiftly became, and continues to be, ubiquitous in Christian—and broader—discourse. As striking in retrospect as the rapid reception of the term is Ignatius's own failure to explain his apparently novel use of it. Christians had been sending representatives to non-Christian places and peoples in order to make converts for a millennium and a half,

⁴An article by historian John O'Malley (1994) represents an exception, but it emphasizes the implications of Ignatius's innovation for the Jesuits instead of the wider background and broader consequences of the deployment of *missio*. See also the brief mention in O'Malley (2006: xxiv–xxv). A slightly more extended treatment appeared recently in Luke Clossey's study of early Jesuit missions (2008: 12–15), relying largely on Broggio (2004: 33–77).

since the first century of the common era. But no one referred to this activity as "mission."

Because Ignatius never formally explains the shift in vocabulary attributed to him, historical analysis can only "point to certain congruencies, nothing more" (O'Malley 1994: 4) in trying to account for his innovation. Yet, the congruencies are revealing. The absence of explanation suggests that Ignatius used *missio* in a way he thought intelligible. Certainly, the word and its cognates existed, commonly referring to the generic notion of sending and being sent. As noted above, *missio* also featured in Christian Trinitarian reflection on the relationship between the three persons constituting one God, to describe the way Jesus and the Holy Spirit are sent on mission by the Father.⁵ This Trinitarian usage claimed inspiration from the Bible. In various forms the Latin verb *mittere* (to send) appears in the Vulgate Bible, as a translation of the Greek verbs *apostellein* and *pempein*, most prominently in Jesus' words to his disciples, "As the Father has sent (*misit*) me, so I send (*mitto*) you" (John 20:21).

His writings suggest that Ignatius's own spiritual journey and his Christological vision for his religious order encouraged a personal appropriation of the term. Affected by the spiritual currents of his day and his own prayer, Ignatius interpreted this text in a very literal way: the Society of Jesus was to do Christ's work in obedience to God's will because they were sent, just as Jesus was, from God the Father.⁶ The nature of that obedience emerges with particular clarity in light of a distinctive ecclesiastical context for Ignatius's use of mission—in relation to the *votum de missionibus*, the vow of mission, a fourth vow (along with poverty, chastity, and obedience) taken by some Jesuits. This vow linked *missio* to the role of the Pope in relation to the Society of Jesus. Although the vow was made to God, it promised obedience to the bishop of Rome. In Ignatius's eyes, this vow was essential to Jesuit identity, distinguishing them from mendicant and monastic orders by emphasizing their centralization and their willingness to be mobile in following God's will, interpreted through papal mandate.⁷

⁵I ignore here the vexed question of the *filioque*, the dispute between Orthodox Christians and most western Christians over whether the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, or from the Son only.

⁶On the origins of the Jesuits and the role of the concept of mission in their early founding, Ignatius's own writings are indispensable (1959, 1970, 1991), but other important sources include the following: de Guibert (1964), Meissner (1992), O'Malley (1983, 1993), Dupré (1993: 224–226), and Conwell (1997).

⁷For more on the fourth vow, see O'Malley (1983, 1993: 6, 298–300). On debates at the Vatican about the vow, showing its innovative nature in Catholic self-understanding, see O'Malley (1993:

By labeling Jesuit apostolic activity “mission,” Ignatius defended an existing Christian practice by relation to divine activity, implicitly carrying out what Thomas Kasulis has called metapraxis, a “philosophical theory about the nature of a particular [religious] praxis.” Developed in relation to his own work on Japanese religious rituals, Kasulis argues that metapraxis “arises from within the praxis itself for the sake of the people involved in that praxis.” He continues, “[Metapraxis] justifies their [the practitioners’] activity at least to themselves and possibly to some outsiders.”⁸ Given its prior Trinitarian background, *missio* in Ignatius’s use operates as metapraxis because it connects the actions of believers with the nature of God or reality, correlating human activity with God’s own. It allows believers to say to themselves: “We do this because God is like this,” relating religious practice to divine ontology, or in Clifford Geertz’s terms, connecting ethos and world-view (1973: 126ff). Mission became the work the Jesuits did, work on which they were sent in the same way Jesus was sent by God the Father. Their obedience resembled Christ’s own.

Ignatius’s use of *missio*, however, was an implicit metapraxis that lacked the philosophical elaboration that Kasulis presumes is a typical feature of metapraxis. That implicit nature allowed “mission” to adopt a range of meanings and connotations as it moved across what linguists call the “lexicon-encyclopedia interface” (Peeters 2000), that is, from initial Ignatian appearance into broader use. O’Malley notes that “as time went on, ‘missions’ became for a while an almost distinctively Jesuit word” (2006: xxv; also Clossey 2008: 14), but early Jesuit usage of mission was not formalized or univocal. Its primary meaning was often simply all apostolic labor (de Guibert 1964: 149). Other terms semantically related to “undertaking,” “sending,” or “work” were often substituted for it (Ignatius of Loyola 1970: 269ff).

Missio’s meanings evolved in the centuries that followed, sometimes specifying preaching tours in Europe’s countryside parishes and attempts by Catholics to recapture parts of Europe lost to Protestantism, with mission in the Old World sometimes considered carried out in “*otras indias*” or “*Indie di qua*” (Prosperi 1995: 179; Broggio 2004: 58–59). It also remained a synonym for any undertaking

35, 126–127). Such centralizing efforts are not surprising given the Jesuits’ origins within a Spain that was itself centralizing and bureaucratizing its form of governance (Kagan 1992; Silverblatt 2004; Elliott 2006). For an overview of recent studies of Jesuit mission prior to their suppression in 1773, see Ditchfield (2007).

⁸Kasulis (1992: 174, 179). For further discussions of the notion of metapraxis in relation to Japanese religions, see Kasulis (1993: 310; 2004: 94f).

or task, especially one carried out under church (Catholic and, increasingly, Protestant) auspices. Yet its extra-European connotations developed quite prominently. Certain theologians—and very influentially the Vatican’s mission-directing agency Propaganda Fide after its founding in 1622—differentiated mission *ad gentes* (to the nations) from other forms of apostolic service. Increasingly, *missio*’s first referent became apostolic service outside of Europe.⁹

Even if theological and spiritual considerations shaped Ignatius’s first deployment of mission, and though mission increasingly meant evangelization abroad, a prior novel use of the word linked to geopolitical changes before Ignatius also likely played a decisive role in his innovation. In the fifteenth century, the Portuguese began to use the term *missão* to name an overseas political and military post to which a royal agent was sent.¹⁰ This new use appeared in the fifteenth century during the expansion of Portuguese exploration and trade into the Atlantic, southward down the western African coast and, eventually, around Africa to Asia. This period marks a shift in Europe’s attention, so that the longtime—and indeed ongoing¹¹—focus on Jerusalem that marked the Crusades was joined with expansion westward through the straits of Gibraltar and to the Americas. *Missão* thus began to name an overseas diplomatic post as Portugal became a global empire. A similar Spanish usage of *misión* soon followed the Portuguese, as Spain established a second global empire emanating from Iberia.

The temporal proximity of these two new uses—one geo-political, and Ignatius’s, which was theological¹²—suggests that they are related to each other. Both depended on the move outside of the Mediterranean as a necessary, if not sufficient, precondition for their new deployment. *Missio* described Iberian expansion west and south, particularly the sending of agents of the home country to an overseas location outside the Mediterranean. “Missions” were posts marking Portuguese and Spanish expansion through the straits of Gibraltar, down the coast of Africa and then toward Asia and the Americas. “Missions” later were similar moves by Jesuits, especially under the

⁹See the following: Seumois (1952: 60ff, especially 63–65, and 1973), Bourdeau (1960), Prosperi (1995: 178ff), Châtellier (1997), Broggio (2004: 79–196, 245–297), Clossey (2008: 12–15), Murphy (2008: 78–84).

¹⁰Clancy (1976: 99). For more on the immediate background of the new usage of mission, see the following: Bourdeau (1960), Prosperi (1992), Abulafia (2008), and Chambers (2008).

¹¹I thank an anonymous reviewer for alerting me to ongoing Iberian fascination with the Holy Land after the Columbian expeditions.

¹²That Ignatius’s use was influenced by his own military background, as a helpful reviewer noted, is also quite possible.

direction of the Pope, and increasingly similar apostolic ventures by other religious orders from Europe. After Ignatius's innovation, mission quickly became a dominant trope in Christian discourse, and has remained so ever since.

THE APPEARANCE OF MISSIOLOGY

More than 300 years after Ignatius, the study of *missio* appeared in Christian theology as a distinctive academic discipline. What eventually became known as missiology, "the systematized study of the mission of the [Christian] Church and of the ways in which its mission is carried out" (Hoffman 1967: 900), began as a distinct and institutionalized area of theological study in the mid-nineteenth century, occurring first among Protestant Christians in Europe. Many designate Gustav Warneck (1834–1910) as the founder of missiology in a formal sense and his multi-volume *Evangelische Missionslehre* (1897–1903) is recognized as the first systematic missiological tract. Early Catholic *Missionswissenschaft* modeled itself on the work of the Protestant Warneck, though it did so while marking its own distinctiveness with predictable polemic.¹³

Two factors situate the emergence of the science of missiology as an institutionalized venture within theology. In the first place, the later nineteenth century witnessed doubts from various sides about the value of missionary activity, and proponents of Christian mission recognized the need to legitimate the enterprise. Contrary to popular misconceptions that link colonialists and Christian missionaries in a mutually self-interested partnership, proponents of mission in fact faced challenges from various corners as Europe's political and economic reach expanded into Africa and elsewhere during the nineteenth century. Thus one of Warneck's earliest writings defended the role of missions in the process of colonization, with the title *What Obligations Do Our Colonies Lay Upon Us? An Appeal to the German Christian Conscience* (1885).¹⁴ This work was part of a larger trend, in which missionaries and their supporters had to defend themselves against a number of critics beginning in the later nineteenth century. In many places,

¹³Warneck's forerunners included Alexander Duff, who held the first academic position in what retrospectively can be seen as missiology, in "evangelistic theology" at Edinburgh in 1867 (Walls 1996). For discussions of the scope of missiology, see the following: Scherer (1987), Kasdorf (1988), Jongeneel (1995: 58–171; 1998), Seumois (1952: 61–107).

¹⁴My translation of *Welche Pflichten legen uns unsere Kolonien auf? Eine Appell an das christliche Deutsche Gewissen*.

European colonial officials, far from encouraging missionary activity, cautioned missionaries against disrupting local political structures, particularly Islamic ones, through evangelization, and scholars of non-Christian religions also questioned the right to evangelize.¹⁵ The need to defend the Christian missions, occurring in the midst of the so-called era of high imperialism (1880–1920), represents one context for the timing of missiology's appearance.

A second factor situating missiology's appearance lies in the new-found prestige accorded European universities, where the subject appeared as a branch of theology within the sub-discipline of practical or historical theology (Bosch 1991: 489–492). Warneck's placement at the University of Halle in 1896 meant that, as he put it, the new discipline was "not just a guest but [had] the right of domicile [*Hausrecht*] in theology" (ibid.: 491). The earliest positions in the new discipline were held by faculty whose tasks involved the training and preparation of those sent abroad as missionaries.

Warneck's appreciation for the prestige granted missiology by its placement in the university was not lost on those interested in promoting German colonialism, who like other colonial officials in European countries, saw the value of the study of missions. Thus the first Catholic chair of missiology, established at Münster in 1910, came about due to pressure not from other faculty members or the church, but from the Prussian Ministry for Cultural Affairs. The Ministry recognized that missionary activity "increasingly needs theological and scholarly consideration at the universities in more recent times because of the colonial affairs and efforts of the German Empire" (Waldenfels 1982: 75). The university, ever more prestigious, became the locus for the production of knowledge about missionary activity.

Missiologists like Warneck and Joseph Schmidlin (1876–1944), fellow German and first holder of the Catholic chair in missiology at Münster, set themselves several tasks. First, they taught and trained those preparing to go abroad as missionaries. Second, they gathered together historical material, in order to give thorough accounts of past missionary efforts (Warneck 1901; Schmidlin 1933). Third and the most important—in their eyes at least—is that they aimed at the integration of the study of the Christian missions with other aspects of theology. The second and third of these tasks identify early missiology as a self-conscious attempt at metapraxis, one more congruent with Kasulis's notion than Ignatius's earlier innovation with regard to *missio*.

¹⁵See Gensichen (1982), Shenk (1987), Walls (1982: 164–165), and Walls (2002: 147–148, 219).

What Ignatius did implicitly—integrating in a new way an existing Christian practice with Christian metaphysics—early missiologists did explicitly. This entailed defining and describing mission; justifying it in reference to Scripture, systematic theology, and Christian history; and offering guidelines for its practice. Besides publishing substantial histories of the Christian missions, Schmidlin thus joined Warneck in writing a large systematic *Missionslehre*, which sought to describe, defend, and guide missionary practice (Warneck 1897–1903; Schmidlin 1931).

As in the case of the interpretation given for Ignatius's deployment of mission, such historical contextualizing suggests possible reasons why missiology as a science emerged when and where it did. Understood as the self-conscious production of knowledge about the Christian missions, missiology began when the practice of mission needed defending, and universities seemed the right venue for such legitimation.

WHY DID *MISSIO* SPREAD SO RAPIDLY? REREADING EARLY MISSIOLOGY

These two historical innovations share certain commonalities. Both the genesis of missiology and the early modern proliferation of the term mission within Christian discourse occurred in the midst of broad expansions of European colonialism, arguably the two largest such expansions of Europe's reach into the rest of the world. Both also represent examples of Christian metapraxis, the production of theological discourses that defend Christian practices. As examples of metapraxis, both innovations can be declared successful. Mission has become a ubiquitous term both within and outside religious circles, and missiology has achieved a more or less recognized standing within theology.

Three questions can be answered by comparing these two innovations. First, what explains the rapid naturalization of *missio* within Christian language, so that it supplanted other terms for evangelization? Early missiological writings suggest an answer by uncovering the way the word "mission" performs in discourse. Second, why did missiology appear when it did? And third, how and why does metapraxis evolve? The answers to the second and third questions overlap, for missiology appeared when the implicit metapraxis achieved by *missio* no longer sufficed to defend missionary practice, and a more explicit mode was required. Considering the origins of missiology in light of the prior appearance of *missio*, therefore, suggests that metapraxis develops in response to new needs for the legitimation of religious practices.

The Logic of *Missio* Made Explicit: Early Missiology

One striking feature of early texts in missiology is their pervasive dualism. They are organized around a sharp differentiation between those who went on mission—missionaries—and those to whom missionaries were sent. The distinction between what their authors call the “subject” and “object” of Christian mission is the central organizing principle of these works. The three parts of Gustav Warneck’s *Missionslehre* (1897–1903), for instance, break down into an introduction that presents foundations for missionary activity (part one: *Die Begründung der Sendung*), and then the “subjects” of missionary activity (part two, on missionary agencies and personnel: *Die Organe der Sendung*), and the “objects” of that activity (part three, on missionary lands: *Der Betreib der Sendung*; Verkuyl 1978: 26–28). The Catholic Schmidlin’s organization in his comparable work is even more explicit, with separate sections entitled “the missionary subject” and “the missionary object” (Schmidlin 1931).

This organization around subject and object in both of these seminal texts reflects the neo-Kantianism and, later, phenomenology fashionable in the philosophy and theology departments of the universities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It also reveals the performative capacity of the term *missio*, especially its ability to constitute subjects and objects in discourse, and to lend theological legitimation to such discursive performance. With the appearance of the new discipline of missiology, the implicit performative capacity within Ignatius’s term “mission” is made clear.

Early missiology thus helps explain why the term “mission” proliferated so much that it subsumed and nearly replaced all the terms that preceded it. By its dualism *missio* performed differently as a discourse compared with previous terms used to describe evangelizing among non-Christians. It created both subject and object positions by its very articulation. At the same time, it also lent them a spatial orientation reflective of Europe’s self-understanding. “Mission” spread because it related Christian notions of salvation and early modern European geographical awareness, soteriology, and spatiality, in a new and compelling discursive construction.

The order of their appearance suggests that the new uses of *missio* and its cognates—first, for political purposes by Iberians more generally, and second, for theological reasons by the Iberian Ignatius—were related. “Missions” as political outposts outside the Mediterranean after the passage of Europeans into the Atlantic Ocean set the stage for Ignatius’s use, which then articulated this new geographical and spatial

category in theological terms. The spatiality inherent in the term was decisive for its reception, for earlier terms like “propagation of the faith” and “preaching the gospel” had no spatial connotation.¹⁶ There were older terms that had spatial assumptions—for example, “expanding” or “augmenting” the faith or the church—but these did not establish the same enunciative subject and object positions as mission, and thus did not cohere with Europe’s new awareness implied by the new politico-geographic use of *missio*. This creation of subject and object positions based in a spatial *and* evangelical relationship distinguishes *missio* from other terms used to describe Christian evangelization before Ignatius.

Though the novel nature of the discursive performance performed by the new use of *missio* has been underappreciated, *missio* quickly came to be taken for granted as a natural term for such activity. Thus its role in shaping that activity and the worldview supporting it was ignored. The dualism latent in Ignatius’s original innovation became only explicit when his term “mission” had become naturalized, and when the practice it described was subjected, for the first time, to discipline-bound academic scrutiny in pursuit of legitimation. It took the explicit metapraxis of missiology to show how mission operated in European and Christian discourse.

I believe that *missio* proliferated the way it did in Christian and broader European discourse because it fit in three ways the particular historical circumstances in which it appeared. First, it named Ignatius of Loyola’s self-understanding of his call to obedience to God with a term reflecting the geographic and geopolitical realities of Iberian expansion. Second, it satisfied the drive for coherence that Kasulis sees as ideally connecting metaphysics and metapraxis in every religious tradition. Third, it articulated and then reinforced the logic of Europe’s emerging geo-political self-understanding with an evangelical prerogative. Mission lent theological legitimation to Europe’s sense of itself, reinforcing the spatially conceived discursive subject and object constitution that lay at the basis of Europe’s expansiveness in the early modern period. This sense in turn reinforced the colonial mindset of the next several centuries.

In retrospect, one can see that the encounter with the Americas was a decisive historical experience for this breakthrough in European consciousness so often linked to a specific mode of modernity. Europe’s

¹⁶For a discussion of the consequences for European cartographic practices of the awareness of the Americas see Padrón (2004: 1–44).

self-understanding had long been developed in relation to others from whom it differentiated itself (Brague 2002). Yet, the timing of the appearance of *missio* suggests that a new enhanced form of such consciousness was anticipated by the Iberian expansion through the Straits of Gibraltar into the Atlantic and down the coast of Africa.¹⁷ Once the term was inaugurated, however, the role of the New World in the proliferation of *missio* should not be underestimated. America's newness, though only slowly recognized, eventually had a particularly profound impact on European consciousness. In light of the expansive colonialism begun in the late fifteenth century, *missio*'s enunciative performance of subject and object took shape as an evangelical center-periphery relationship epitomized by the European encounter with the Americas, which were increasingly emphasized in the Jesuit understanding of mission. Only with the colonization of the Americas did *missio* and its cognates enter common usage (Polzer 1976: 4; Clossey 2008: 13).

As Ranajit Guha puts it, awareness of the New World created an "occasion for a comprehensive exercise in discrimination" and inaugurated a plenitude of new names, categorizations, and classifications in the centuries that followed.¹⁸ The encounter, which led to conquest as it unfolded, thus had linguistic as well as political aspects. On the one hand, the Americas came to be a space in European consciousness; on the other hand, Europe came to a new sense of itself. The movement into the west allowed Europe to create itself as the center of the world, with the Americas as an archetypal periphery.¹⁹ *Missio* served as one way, therefore, for Europeans to assimilate the inhabitants of the New World, namely as peripheral others who were recipients of mission,

¹⁷In a recent book, David Abulafia argues that the move into the Atlantic was a precondition for the European "discovery of mankind" understood as a generic humanity (2008).

¹⁸I thank an anonymous reviewer for highlighting the emerging European tendency toward "category-obsession" over the next few centuries.

¹⁹Guha (2002: 8). On America's newness in European self-consciousness, see the following: O'Gorman (1961), Elliott (1970), Hanke (1976), Pagden (1993), Rabasa (1993), Dussel (1995), and Perkinson (2004). J. Z. Smith underscores how slowly that sense of newness grew in Europe, but recognizes its decisiveness (2004: 267ff). For a fascinating study of how the newness of the Americas shaped the biological awareness of Europeans, especially the British, see Parrish (2006). In an even more recent work, Alix Cooper shows how awareness of the Americas led Europeans to explore their own home environments in new ways, thus "inventing the [category of the] indigenous" (A. Cooper 2007).

I thank an anonymous reviewer for the reminder that Christians had long described non-Christians with terms like *paganus* that had spatial connotations, and which implied a center-periphery relationship between Christians and non-Christians. *Missio*, a new term for the process of bringing such people into the faith, drew upon and expanded such prior linguistic assumptions about other people.

while at the same time defining themselves as agents of the center, or those with a mission. Who were the Europeans? They became those with a *missio*. Indeed, in the discursive logic performed by the term, they became “Christ” via Ignatius’s innovation. Who were the Amerindians? They became “non-Christ,” those to whom the *missio* went. *Missio* thus gave a theological rationale as it defined speakers and those spoken about, in the process that Charles Long calls signification (Long 1986). It was a term that subtly classified peoples and places, as those who were sent and those who were sent to, as holy and unholy (Deslandres 1999).

Seen in this light, *missio* constitutes one major trope by which Europeans assimilated other peoples, in particular those of the New World, and in so doing re-invented themselves and others within a clearly positioned discourse. Thus mission belongs to a set of terms—others include primitive, modernity, civilization, and, later, development—which constituted a discursive counterpart to what is often called modern European consciousness, as distinguished from that of other peoples.²⁰ And, like those other terms, it was dependent on differentiating Europeans from those others.

The subject-object and spatial distinctions enacted by *missio* reinforced other polarities based on time, gender, and race that accompanied Europe’s developing self-awareness in relation to others, especially embodied in America. Regarding time, Michael Ryan and Sabine MacCormack show that the category of paganism became a central organizing category not just for people, but temporally. In the wake of Renaissance-era interest in classical antiquity, Europeans saw (or, created) in *los Indios* many of the features of the Romans and Greeks whose works they were reading and admiring, so that the gaze backwards in time and the gaze across the Atlantic overlapped. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European pictorial representations of Amerindian religious phenomena—cities, temples, altars—derived from corresponding contemporary images depicting classical cultures and religions. The reason for the juxtaposition was theological; both groups fit into the category “pagans.” As Ryan says, “what really interested sixteenth- and seventeenth-century [European] observers about

²⁰For discussions of the role of the concept of the primitive in European self-perception, see Kuper (1988), Torgovnik (1990), and Brickman (2003). On the notion of civilization, see Long (1986: 83ff). For a penetrating analysis of the twentieth-century discourse of development and its effect on countries affected by this discourse, see Escobar (1995) and, more recently, Bornstein (2003), which directly compares the languages of Christian mission and development. For particularly sophisticated discussions of the ways, early modern Europeans incorporated new knowledge from overseas in a variety of discourses, see Rubiés (1993, 2007).

exotic peoples was their past, not their present” (MacCormack 1995: Ryan 1981: 531).

Missio also reinforced a dualistic European differentiation associated with gender. The encounter with the New World generated the representation of America as feminized, particularly as virgin territory to be conquered by virile Iberians. This propagated what John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff call “the mytheme of the yielding female,” a regular part of colonialist discourse ever after (1991: 104f). This figure, epitomized in Jan Van der Straet’s engraving of Amerigo Vespucci’s discovery of America, in which a voluptuous naked female reclines on a hammock while a well-dressed European male surveys her, represented the European meeting with the Americas using a gendered symbolic referent.²¹

Finally, *missio*’s implicit dichotomizing coheres very well with the evolving racialization of European self-understanding in the early modern period. James Perkinson argues that the encounter with the Americas served as a crucial transformative moment in the emerging European discourse of race. He shows how the racial notion of whiteness developed from earlier Hebrew–European–Christian categories, so that over time it became a dominant soteriological category. Though the importation of enslaved Africans into the Americas marked the decisive stage by which, as Perkinson puts it, “. . . racialization organized social differentiation by means of soteriological signification,” the European encounter with the New World had prepared the way by bringing to consciousness the salvific possibilities for “savages” (2004: 57–60; 2005: 26ff).

The large claims made here for the term *missio* do not mean that the regrettable consequences of European colonialism can be traced to Ignatius’s innovation as simple cause to effect. This is true for at least three reasons. First, the deployment of *missio* by Ignatius did not mark the beginning of European violence against the Amerindian peoples or other non-Christians. Pogroms against Jews and Crusades against Muslims (and eastern Christians) already had a long pedigree, and the Christian sense of empire had legitimated violent incorporation of others for centuries (Pagden 1995: 29–62). Papal treaties legitimating Iberian conquests around the world predated 1500. And Columbus

²¹The European male is the missionary, soldier, and/or explorer par excellence, with cross, scabbard, and astrolabe all visible; the American female is supine and vulnerable. For more on Van der Straet’s drawing, see Rabasa (1993: 23–48). For a discussion of the first large-scale production of pictorial representations by Europeans of newly discovered places in the early modern period, found in the so-called De Bry collection, see van Groesen (2004).

reached Hispaniola and Cortés ravaged the Aztecs a few decades or so before *missio* named Christian practices of evangelization in foreign lands (or at least appeared in writing with such a meaning). Violence associated with Christian evangelization, even in the Americas, did not depend on the use of the word “mission” (Todorov 1984; Rivera 1992).

Second, the discursive performative implications of mission did not mean that all those who carried it out always acted on those implications. Already by the early sixteenth century, missionaries like Antonio de Montesinos and Bartolomé de Las Casas opposed the exploitation carried out by colonial authorities under the guise of Christian mission. Las Casas and later missionaries like Maurice Leenhardt (1878–1954) maintained and propagated an early Christian contention that the world’s peoples showed evidence of *spermata logou*, “seeds of the Word [of God],” an idea drawn upon by many contemporary missiologists. By their practices and their writings, such missionaries often opposed the performative implications of mission, questioning in their practices the dichotomizing tendency of the term and emphasizing the dignity of those to whom they had been sent.²²

Finally, there are reasons to resist the blunt claim that language causes violence, or other human behavior, in a direct manner. Such an uncritical causal attribution passes over the role of human agents in the acceptance and utilization of words and other symbolic media, so that persons become mere passive recipients who only parrot what they receive. It also suggests that there were no real symbolic or material interests over which conflict took place, the presupposition being that such conflicts are merely constructed by language.²³

Yet, if Ignatius’s use of *missio* neither inaugurated nor mandated Christian European violence against its various others, nonetheless the power of religious discourse in the creation and sustaining of a situation in which violence occurs and is justified is undeniable.²⁴ And *missio* as Ignatius used it became, shortly after its appearance, an important trope

²²On Las Casas, see Hanke (1976), Pagden (1986, 2001), and Gutiérrez (1993). For a recent reconsideration of Las Casas, see Castro (2007). On Leenhardt, who worked as a missionary and anthropologist in New Caledonia, see Leenhardt (1947) and Clifford (1982).

²³Thus, Jonathan Z. Smith exaggerates when he says, “The ‘conquest of America,’ for all of its frightful human costs, was primarily a *linguistic* event” (Smith 2004: 274, n. 180; italics in original). In his recent *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor considers the dialectical relationship between human action and descriptions of such action, writing, “Just because human practices are the kind of thing which makes sense, certain ‘ideas’ are internal to them; one cannot distinguish the two [i.e., ideas and practices] in order to ask the question, which causes which” (2007: 212).

²⁴The works of Bruce Lincoln make this point clearly, for example Lincoln (2003).

which helped justify the European project to subdue, Christianize, and civilize those they encountered.

Missio, therefore, was no mere descriptive label, neither in Ignatius's decision to employ it to describe Jesuit evangelizing and inspire his followers, nor in the ways it contributed to the European assimilation of the New World into its own world of discourse. To borrow terms from linguistic anthropology, the term, which was already entextualized in various ways before Ignatius's new use, was decontextualized when he employed it anew, and then recontextualized within broader European usage (Mertz 2007: 345–346). In retrospect, with the help of missiology's early texts, we can see why this happened. *Missio* performed discursively to constitute discursive positions of European self and non-European other, to classify Christian practice, and to classify practitioners and those to whom such practitioners were sent.

The perspective offered here attempts to overcome the “genesis amnesia” of the term “mission” (Hanks 2005: 78). There are other Christian theological terms that, like mission, have led to the foundation of academic sub-disciplines. Yet, few have become so normalized in discourse to have also established what Pierre Bourdieu defines as a linguistic field: “a structured space of positions in which the positions and their interrelations are determined by the distribution of different kinds of resources or ‘capital’” (Thompson 1991: 14; Hanks 2005: 72–75). The term mission did this, creating social positions in opposition to one another, namely that of missionaries and of those evangelized. Those wary of mission have historical reasons for their worries, but not only because of the actions of missionaries. The normative distinctions performed by the term itself reinforced European self-aggrandizement and objectification of others that cohered with colonialism.

Shifting Metapraxis and Evolving Needs for Legitimation

If early missiological texts suggest why *missio* proliferated in European language, then comparing Ignatius's innovation and the appearance of missiology as types of metapraxis helps develop a new narrative regarding the origins of missiology by focusing on evolving types of metapraxis. As noted, the two innovations operated in what I call different modes of metapraxis. Mission implicitly linked human and divine activity, justifying the former by reference to the latter, while in early missiology the implicit metapraxis at work in Ignatius's use of mission becomes explicit. But why did such an explicit metapraxis appear when it did? The decisive factor noted above was that missionary practice itself was under suspicion. Articulating in an explicit way the preconceptions within the term mission represented one way to

defend mission, emphasizing Europe's role as source of missionaries and home to the subjects who could redeem colonized peoples.

It is important to recognize, however, that while defending Christian mission on specifically Christian grounds, early missiologists like Schmidlin and Warneck also faced the challenge of defending it against those for whom religious arguments did not suffice. Thus besides finding justification for the missions within sources proper to Christianity itself, such as Scripture and church history, both also appeal to justifications that purport not to depend on acceptance of Christian revelation. They present what retrospectively might be called "non-faith-based" reasons why Christianity stands at the summit of the world's religions, and offer evidence for their faith's superior civilizing capacity.²⁵

Warneck sees in the Ten Commandments, for example, the pinnacle of human ethical reflection, and argues that Christianity completes the best parts already present in the cultures of non-Christians (Warneck 1954: 10f). Schmidlin repeats these claims, and, like Warneck, elaborates the human works of the missionaries, namely schools, agricultural advances, medical care, and the systematization of languages and literatures (Schmidlin 1931: 106ff, 360ff, 401ff). This is metapraxis, therefore, that defends religious practice by reference to nonreligious warrant, and does so mindful of an audience—most of them Christian, but still wary of mission—for whom religious reasons are presumed to be insufficient.

Increasingly, European nationhood served as such a warrant for mission. Already beginning in the late eighteenth century, as Mary Anne Perkins notes, European nations began to develop their own national vocations in relation to the rest of the world, understanding those national identities-cum-vocations as "missions" of various sorts, which were at once religious and humanistic. France, for example, saw itself as having a mission to enlighten but was also the "most Christian" nation; the English offered themselves as a moral beacon as the "New Israel"; Germany strove to represent a universal humanity, but was also the home of "reformers of the Church and warriors of God" (Perkins 1999: 143–174). At the same time, however, that national consciousness did not undo an ongoing, and even deepening, "consciousness of a common European identity" (Perkins 1999: 4).

²⁵They were not the first to do so, as a helpful reviewer noted. Yet, the late nineteenth century saw especially strong challenges to missionary activity, many from Christians, others from non-Christians.

As in the early modern period when the new use of mission appeared, the nineteenth century setting for missiology's emergence was a time when Europe's sense of itself as distinctive developed in relationship to colonial experiences, as well as other historical currents such as the formation of academic disciplines. Marion O'Callaghan observes, "...the period 1835 to 1895 is crucial for understanding the world of today. It is within those sixty years that 'Europe' takes on a particular sense, while otherness becomes more closely defined" (1995: 29). The rhetorical dualism central to early missiological texts displays this self-other dichotomy, and reinforces it with theological underpinnings. But it also invoked such dualism when it appealed to nontheological reasoning to defend mission. Such dualism lent itself to the classificatory impulse to distinguish Europeans from others that historian Frederick Cooper sees as distinctive to nineteenth-century European colonialism (Cooper 2005: 29).

Appreciating the origins of mission as implicit metapraxis thus helps relate the subject-object rhetorical structure of early missiology to the shifting legitimating needs that fostered the new discipline. Missiology developed because mission's defenders needed to show both religious and non-religious reasons to justify their practices. In light of the earlier innovation of *missio*, missiology appeared when new historical circumstances placed the practice of mission in a precarious light, producing new need for its legitimation. In this case, new legitimation generated a theological discipline, missiology.

This case suggests that it behooves religious scholars, and not just practitioners, to attend to how metapraxis works in its various modes, thus discerning better the subtle "discriminating technologies" in religious language (Palmié 2006: 436). Kasulis has concentrated on metapraxis in an explicit mode, seeing it as a formal philosophical enterprise to be differentiated from mere descriptions of religious practices that lack any explanatory or integrating function (1992: 178-79; 2004: 94). This comparison suggests that Kasulis's notion of metapraxis might be enlarged beyond formal elucidation. Specifically, the move from implicit to explicit modes deserves more attention from scholars, for such a move can point toward new needs for legitimation.

The comparison of these two innovations in Christian discourse is a reminder that religious terms like mission act discursively both inside and outside religious contexts, consciously and unconsciously, almost inevitably. The links between mission and conquest, though woven in practice, were anticipated and reinforced in language. *Missio* represents an implicit metapraxis by Ignatius of Loyola whose

logic became explicit in the discipline of missiology. In between those two, the term, which was likely political before it was implicit metapragmatics, then departed from specifically theological settings and entered broader usage, where it lives today. Appreciating the origins and evolving uses of other religious terms might uncover similar historical processes. Historical epistemology of the sort undertaken here promises to reveal a great deal about the mutations of religious language, both in and out of specifically religious contexts, and shaped by logics both theological and non-theological.

Conclusion: Considering Recent Missiology

The comparison undertaken here draws attention to consequences of the deployment of *missio*, consequences long overlooked or underestimated. It also casts new light on the origins of missiology. The dualism within early missiology helps explain the rapid spread of the term by revealing some of the implications embedded in the deployment of term *missio*. Missiology as explicit metapragmatics arose when the implicit metapragmatics of *missio* no longer sufficed.

Profound ironies arise from this exercise in historical epistemology in light of the world Christian movement today. Ignatius of Loyola's implicit metapragmatics with the word "mission" lent theological legitimation to the discursive self-centering of Europe. In retrospect, however, one can see that the naming of "missionary" activity as such marked the beginning of an historical undertaking that would undo that self-centering role. Christians of the world once colonized by modern Europeans—a process spurred forward in the late fifteenth century and renewed again in the nineteenth century—now outnumber those in Europe, and their vitality far outstrips the one-time "missionary" West (Sanneh 2008). Indeed, as Andrew Walls notes, Western Europe's role as the demographic and ideological center of Christianity had only recently been won when Columbus crossed the Atlantic. Prior to the fifteenth century Christians elsewhere—in Africa, Asia, and eastern Europe—had always outnumbered those of western Europe (Walls 2002: 92f). Thus the appearance of "mission" in language established discursive realities that mission in practice then undermined.

Constructive Christian missiology of the past several decades, across denominational and ideological lines, has implicitly reflected this new self-understanding. By the very titles of their works, missiologists almost invariably invoke newness, using terms denoting the rejection of the past and a welcome to new circumstances. They thus present their

own efforts as converted and free of previous encumbrances.²⁶ Protestant missiology, for example, stresses the holistic approaches to mission deriving from some of the documents of the World Council of Churches, or, in contrast, urges the need for more widespread and unabashed proselytizing, as in some forms of more evangelical or Pentecostal Christianity. Missiology by Catholics underscores the breakthroughs of the Second Vatican Council or later calls for inculturation and dialogue with other religions.

These rhetorical gestures invoking novelty indicate new world circumstances, such as the end of the Cold War and Euro-American world hegemony, or circumstances of post-modernity or post-colonialism, or a broader awareness of the consequences of globalization; novel missiological paradigms are thus presented as responses to the signs of the times. There is a widespread awareness of the historical collusion of missionaries with colonialism and violence, the way a religious mission and a civilizing mission went hand in hand with grave consequences for those evangelized and for the integrity of the message proclaimed. Some missiologists understand the center-periphery polarity inherent in the term mission, and most recognize that the contemporary church has no single center from which mission goes forth, but is constituted by mission at every place it exists.²⁷ Others have even suggested the abandonment of the term mission in favor of supposedly less burdened terms like evangelization, dialogue, or reconciliation.²⁸ Still, missiology as a field has yet to face the implicit performativity at work in the term mission, something that post-colonial theory has foregrounded in its study of similar terminology.²⁹ Perhaps it would be good to begin now. Better late, after all, than never.

²⁶Examples of this tendency include the following, a partial list restricted to books in English: Amaladoss (1990, 1998), Bevans and Schroeder (2004), Boff (1991), Bosch (1991), Cote (1996), Dorr (2000), Engel and Dyrness (2000), Glenny and Smallman (2000), Guthrie (2000), Hirsch (2006), Jenkinson and O'Sullivan (1991), Kasdorf and Müller (1988), Kirk (2006), Luzbetak (1988), Niles (2004), Phillips and Coote (1993), Ramachandra (1997), Scherer and Bevans (1992, 1994, 1999), Schreiter (1994, 2001), Shenk (1999), Smith (2003), Stone (2007), Taylor (2000), Tiplady (2002), and Yohannan (2000). Listing articles with titles indicative of novelty, not to mention non-English texts, would increase this list tenfold.

²⁷For examples of missiological writing that implicitly attends to the link between conquest and *missio*, see Bosch (1991: 228) and Burrows (1993: 244). Citing Bosch's own historical work, Burrows writes, "...[T]he image of mission mediated by history is of a kind of spiritual warfare [so that] mission is viewed as an enterprise where Christ conquers, much as an army on the battlefield."

²⁸See Suess (1994). In their overview of contemporary missiology, Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder argued that mission as prophetic dialogue best synthesizes the wisdom of the discipline at the outset of the twenty-first century (2004).

²⁹Young (2001) shows how postcolonial theory has taken seriously the complex modalities of colonial discourse.

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