



## A SHORT COURSE ON WORLD MISSION

# Session Three. Global–Local–Glocal

Aim: to explore the interconnectedness that reflects the life of our Trinitarian God as essential to our understanding of global mission thinking and practice

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Opening prayer  
Two statements about mission  
Rublev's icon  
Closing prayer

### **Handouts to accompany this session:**

Opening prayer  
Two statements about mission  
Rublev's icon  
Statement of USPG's Theological Basis  
Closing prayer

## Worship

*Opening prayer:*

Holy One, we hear your music in the roar of the sea,  
In the song of a people,  
In the quiet breeze rustling through the trees.

**We thank you God:  
That you so love our world.**

Holy One, we sense your power in the flickering of fire,  
In the yearning of our spirits,  
In the dispelling of shadows.

**We thank you God:  
That you so love our world.**

Holy One, we feel your caress in the gift of our humanity,  
In our desire to be whole,  
In the blessing of peace.

**We thank you God:  
That you so love our world.**

*Clare Amos*

## Starting out

Glocal – the word that appears in this session’s title – is a new word for many of us. As you might guess it conflates the two words ‘global’ and ‘local’. The point of doing this is to suggest that in the world of the twenty-first century the two cannot be separated. The global and the local affect each other. A phrase often associated with the word glocal is ‘Think globally, act locally’. Or, to adapt John Wesley’s famous saying (on which the title for this course is based), we need to ensure that ‘The world is *in* my parish’. Actually that is fairly close to a proper understanding of what it means to be *catholic* – though catholic may be one of the least understood words in the Christian vocabulary!

Max Warren, the famous Anglican thinker on mission, once commented: ‘You need the whole world to understand the whole gospel.’ Explore this statement and ask what Warren’s dictum might mean in your context. You might also wish to build on the insights offered in Session Two about how contextualisation and enculturation are at the heart of Christianity. Perhaps you could share with the group a selection of pictures of Jesus or the cross or biblical scenes from around the world – and invite people to reflect on what new or fresh insights each of the images offer.

For images, you could use *The Christ We Share* pack, produced by USPG, CMS and the Methodist Church. Alternatively, there are two helpful books by Janet Hodgson, a former USPG staff worker, *The Faith we Share* (Inspire) and *Making the Sign of the Cross* (Canterbury Press). A further option would be to download images from the internet. Useful websites to trawl for non-European or non-traditional images of Jesus/biblical scenes are [www.asianchristianart.org](http://www.asianchristianart.org), <http://mattstone.blogs.com> and [www.textweek.com/art/art.htm](http://www.textweek.com/art/art.htm)

## Thinking it through

Look at the following two statements about mission:

- 'Mission is the overflow of our delight in God, because mission is the overflow of God's delight in being God.' (*John Piper*)
- 'Christian mission is offering the hospitality of the face of Christ.' (*David Ford*)

Invite people to give their reaction to these statements. Make a note of the comments, but do not discuss them in detail at this stage.

In Session One we began to explore the importance of the concept of *missio dei* (the mission of God) in modern thinking about mission. It was also suggested that using the phrase 'the mission of God' necessitate exploring the nature of the God whose mission it is. Linked to this, it is worth noting that in recent years the belief in God as 'Trinity' has become influential in mission thinking. So, in this session, we will be focusing on the Trinitarian nature of God, and the insights this offers for our thinking about mission. While we do this we will be also holding in our minds the insights gained in Session Two about the 'barrier-breaking' nature of mission – how might this link with the word 'overflow' in John Piper's comment above?

Although drawing on ancient roots from the thinking of the church fathers, in the modern era it was at a landmark meeting of the International Missionary Council held at Willingen, Germany, in 1952 that the importance of a Trinitarian basis for mission was first stated. It was also at this same conference that the concept of *missio dei* became really influential. The report of the Willingen conference refers to the Trinity in this way: 'The missionary movement of which we are a part has its source in the Triune God himself. Out of the depths of his love for us, the Father has sent forth his own beloved Son to reconcile all things to himself... We who have been chosen in Christ... are committed to full participation in his redeeming mission. There is no participation in Christ without participation in his mission to the world. That by which the Church receives its existence is that by which it is also given its world mission'<sup>1</sup>

A decade or so later similar views were echoed by *Ad Gentes*, the decree on missions promulgated at the Second Vatican Council: 'The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father... This decree, however, flows from the "fount-like love" or charity of God the Father who, being the "principle without principle" from whom the Son is begotten and Holy Spirit proceeds through the Son of God.'<sup>2</sup>

'Missionary activity is nothing else and nothing less than an epiphany, or a manifesting of God's decree, and its fulfilment in the world and in world history, in the course of which God, by means of mission, manifestly works out the history of salvation. By the preaching of the word and by the celebration of the sacraments, the centre and summit of which is the most holy Eucharist, he brings about the presence of Christ, the author of salvation.'<sup>3</sup>

However, although the seeds of this approach to mission – which sees mission as derived from the very nature of God – were sown in the 1950s and 1960s, for various reasons, the full implications of the Trinitarian understanding of mission did not become

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<sup>1</sup> Willingen 1952, by John Beattie, in *International Review of Mission*, Vol 41 No 164, p433-443.

<sup>2</sup> *Ad Gentes* 2

<sup>3</sup> *Ad Gentes* 9

clear for the next 30 years or so. It is notable that even the classic book on mission by David Bosch<sup>4</sup> does not really explore where the Trinitarian understanding of mission might lead us. It was only in the late 1980s and 1990s that scholars of mission really began to understand how the inner life of the divine Trinity invited us to a renewed and deeper understanding of the nature of mission.

One helpful way to begin to explore the relationship between God as Trinity and the nature of mission is by reflecting on the beautiful icon of the Trinity (also called the Icon of the Hospitality of Abraham, painted in the fifteenth century by **Andrei Rublev**. Depictions of this icon are widely available online.)

The icon depicts the story, told originally in Genesis 18, of the occasion when Abraham met three divine figures and offered them hospitality. If you read Genesis 18.1-15 you will pick up the mystery of the passage – and in particular how the story shifts back and forth between one divine figure and three. It was partly this ambiguity that led the theologians of the early church, who were seeking biblical precedents for the developing doctrine of the Trinity, to explore the various levels of meaning in this story.

The following reflection is intended as a meditative guide and might be read while people are looking at representations of the icon:

This icon depicts a journey deep into the heart of God, which will change the relationship between God and human beings forever. It is recalling the occasion when Abraham entertained angels unawares: an event that became the biblical byword for hospitality. The writer of Genesis tells the tale with a nice touch of humour – Abraham offers them just a little bread and a little water – but in true Middle Eastern style he then organises an enormous feast. It is a kind of hospitality many who have visited the Middle East have experienced. Remember that this is an old man – almost 100 years – and these strangers have probably disturbed his midday siesta. It is an example of hospitality at its most profligate. So why then is Abraham – and Sarah, his wife – not in the picture? In truth there were and are many representations of the scene in which Abraham did appear. Rublev deliberately omitted the human actors in order to attract our attention to the three divine figures. Even though the Trinity as a doctrine is not there fully formed in our Bibles, but results from the developments of the first few centuries of Christian history, once such a development had occurred Abraham's visitors were seen as foreshadowing the Holy Trinity, and it is this mysterious reality at the heart of the Trinity which Rublev wants to convey to us and even invite us to share in.

If you look carefully you will notice that around the three figures you can inscribe a perfect circle – in the language of icons this is the mark of eternity. Because our eyes are trained initially to focus on the right hand side of a page or picture<sup>5</sup> we instinctively first look upon the angel on the right who, wearing robes of blue and green, represents the Holy Spirit, source of creative life. Rublev seems to be telling us that through the work of the Holy Spirit – vividly displayed in genesis, in creation, in beauty, in seeking for truth – we are gently encouraged to discover more about the nature of God. The gaze of this angel then draws us towards the angel in the centre, inviting us to encounter a figure that depicts the

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<sup>4</sup> Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission, David J. Bosch, Orbis Books, Maryknoll New York 1991.

<sup>5</sup> If anyone can provide some authority for this statement, we'd be pleased to hear from you!

Son. The placement of this figure in the middle of the icon tells us that the person of Jesus Christ is the keystone or gateway into our understanding of God as Trinity. Yet rather than gazing straight at us, this figure too has his head inclined to one side, encouraging us on to look towards the angel on the left. The artistic genius with which Rublev painted the robes of this third figure, with the light blue half hidden, half shining through an outer garment, is startling. We are approaching the mystery of God the Father, whom no one has ever seen, but who is made known to us through the Son. This is the journey we are being invited to make: in the power of the Spirit to accompany the Son, who is the Way, to approach the many mansions (John 14:1-6) of God the Father (notice the house etched in the background, behind the angel on the left). The tenderness of the gaze and sense of inter-relationship between the three figures is profound. Yet the circle does not stop as we reach the third angel. For it encourages us to journey on and to mentally and spiritually position ourselves at the empty place, which seems to have been deliberately left for us at the front of the table. There is a welcome for us too – you and me – in this circle. In the language of iconography, the rectangular table represents the world – that is the place for us; we and the world are caught up in the circle of the divine. The icon also creates a triangular image which has the perspective of creating a plane or horizon which spreads out beyond the place where 'we' are seated to embrace the whole of Creation.

What remarkable significance is embedded in that gracious act of hospitality once shown by Abraham! The sharing of food becomes the time of revelation. The icon takes Abraham's hospitality as a starting-point but suggests that his readiness to show a welcome to three apparently unknown human beings elicits in return the hospitality that is at the centre of the life of the Holy Trinity. This hospitality of God has no end and it is resonating still through eternity. It is reaching out to us, drawing us in, inviting us too to share in the feast. It is both invitation and awesome responsibility. For what is the menu at this banquet? On the table, and marked out by a gesture from the angel in the centre, is a chalice. In fact this chalice is even echoed and ratified by the chalice shape that can be constructed out of the space between the two angels on the left and right. If you look carefully into the chalice you can see the outline of an animal. There is a hint (Rublev is too subtle to be more direct!) that this is the lamb, offered, as the Book of Revelation puts it, 'before the foundation of the world'. The feast to which we are being called is therefore only provided through the sacrificial and self-giving love which is embedded deep in the heart of God. Rublev's icon thus implicitly alludes to the Eucharist – the central act of Christian worship which also has this hospitality at its heart, in which space is created to participate in the life of God. To join in the Eucharistic community is to share *koinonia* (fellowship) at a very profound level – not just with fellow believers, but in the fellowship of love which is God in trinity – a celebration of who God is, and a gracious invitation to the very heart of God. And at the centre of sharing Eucharistic fellowship is the notion of being caught up in the transforming activity of God. So the Rublev icon invites an exploration of mission as it connects and communicates an experience of church and world that challenges narrowness of definition and breaks down the limitations which we sometimes set for ourselves. Mission is more than evangelism, but seeks transformation of all that has been loved into being by the activity of God. We enter

the divine mystery, with its fellowship of love, as we worship in a fellowship that is diverse yet in communion.

Three in one, in closest harmony  
Circled by love, in tender symmetry  
Offering up the Lamb who is to be  
Life for the world

Angels are they, yet hold in meaning more  
Than angels visiting at Sarah's door:  
God's life itself, ready for us to pour  
Grace on this world.

Help us then this circle now to join,  
Our lives in newborn harmony entwine  
In action mirroring the life divine  
Revealed in our world.

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What then are the implications for how we 'do' mission?

The Rublev icon suggests that looking to the Trinity as the ground for mission goes beyond the insight set out nearly 50 years ago by Willingen/Ad Gentes. Those earlier reflections articulated how our work of mission must be linked to participation in the sending of the Son by the divine Father. But more recent reflection on rooting mission in the life of God as Trinity focuses especially on the internal dynamics of the life of the Trinity as a model of inter-relationship. The Greek word *perichoresis* is often used in relation to the Trinity; it literally means 'around dancing', ie the idea of the three persons of the Trinity dancing intimately around each other in a circle of love. Perichoresis is telling us of the 'reciprocity and exchange in the mutual indwelling of the persons'.<sup>6</sup> The life of the Trinity is 'a dynamic, eternal and unending movement of self-giving'.<sup>7</sup>

The practical implications of this are set out by two Roman Catholic writers, Steve Bevens and Roger Schroeder, whose book, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, can be considered an update of David Bosch's work for the twenty-first century. Bevens and Schroeder tell us: 'The mutual openness of Father and Son, Son and Spirit, Spirit and Father as a model of relationship, the constitutive nature of relationship for personal identity, the inclusion of diversity in community – all these vital truths and practices are rooted in Trinitarian reality and existence.'<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Participating in God: A pastoral doctrine of the Trinity*, Paul Fiddes, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000)

<sup>7</sup> The Church of the Triune God – The Cyprus Agreed Statement of the International Commission for Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue (Anglican Consultative Council, 2006), II.5.

<sup>8</sup> Steve Bevens and Roger Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, Maryknoll, New York; Orbis Books 2004, p294

## What about the Bible?

*Read John 20:19-31 (focusing on 20:19-23)*

In exploring the Rublev icon we have touched upon Genesis 18:1-15 and alluded to John 14:1-6 (see above). It has plausibly been suggested that Rublev may have had this passage from John's Gospel in mind as he created the icon. It would not be surprising because, as the early church sought to develop the doctrine of the Trinity out of the seeds sown in the Bible, it was frequently to the Farewell Discourses<sup>9</sup> of John's Gospel to which they turned to find their roots. So it is appropriate in this section of the course to look more closely at the verses of John's Gospel that constitute an explicit commission for mission.

As with Matthew's Gospel (28:16-20) so too with John: near the end of the Gospel there is a commissioning of the disciples for mission. But it is interesting to compare the two because the commissioning in John's Gospel, focused in 20:19-23, roots mission more deeply in the dynamics of the inner life of the Father and the Son: 'As the Father has sent me... so I send you.' The words echo the pattern established earlier in the Gospel in the Farewell Discourses, particularly 13:20 and 17:18.

There is the same pattern in each: the Father sends the Son, and the Son sends the apostles (literally meaning 'those who are sent'). The form of words implies that this is no mere institutional delegation, but rather that the words, works and person of Jesus (as the Father had sent him) were to be sent by those commissioned or sent out. Just as Jesus' ministry was entirely dependent upon and obedient to the Father, acting in the power of the Spirit (4:34, 5:19) so Jesus breathes the Spirit in this commission (v 22). The mission and life of the church breaks down unless this relationship with Jesus and the Father finds echo in the commission to witness in the power of the same Spirit and in relationship with the same Jesus.

The deliberate parallel with the idea of a New Creation is set out. He breathed on them (20: 22) as God breathes life into Creation. The image denotes that Jesus is personally communicating and committing himself to his disciples in the person of the Spirit.

This has the implication of connecting the mission in which we may be engaged – locally and globally – to the words and works of Jesus as he acts in obedience to the Father and in the power of the Spirit. Those who are sent cannot be more fully equipped for mission. It seems that the first Christians understood that Jesus' resurrection and his subsequent appearances to them, and the gift of the Spirit, were inseparable. The new life in Jesus was the springboard for the new life for Creation, and the mission in which they were engaged was God's own activity in a world aching to be transformed.

Two final brief notes about the wider context of the passage. As with Matthew 28:16-20, doubt is not dismissed. Rather, in the case of Thomas, it leads eventually to a more profound faith: 'My Lord and my God' (20:28). And the passage concludes with John's own mission statement for the writing of his Gospel (20:31) that reminds us that the ultimate purpose of the mission of the Son is that human beings may have life.

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<sup>9</sup> John 13:31 to 17:26.

## **In practical terms**

*The following article appeared in a USPG newsletter to church volunteers, published in March 2009.*

### **What has beef stew got to do with world mission?**

From overseas travel to beef stew: anything that brings Christians closer together helps to further God's mission.

This is the discovery of Ann Lamb, who is the Overseas Mission Secretary at St Collen's Church, Llangollen, and a USPG Church Link.

Ann has travelled overseas many times on mission trips, including trips to Malaysia and Papua New Guinea, and a six-month volunteer placement with USPG in Zambia, where she taught English at a vocational training centre and arts and crafts at primary schools.

As for the beef stew, that refers to the traditional Uruguayan dish that USPG encouraged churches to serve as part of an alternative Harvest supper last year – and it was so tasty we will be encouraging churches to serve it again this year!

'The beef stew was superb!' said Ann. 'The people who came to our Harvest lunch really enjoyed it and many of them wanted to know the recipe. So it was a great success.'

Ann recently visited USPG's offices in London and reflected on her views of mission and her association with USPG.

'I think I have known about USPG all my life – from when it was just SPG!' she said.

'In the early days we took it for granted that everyone was a Christian. But now we need mission in this country as much as elsewhere, so I'm keen to build up the church in Llangollen as much as overseas.

'Both here and overseas, it's all about partnership. Mission is about building up the church with friendship and prayer. Just as in our own church, my experience travelling overseas is that church members really appreciate it when we care for them.'

Ann said she had enjoyed being involved with mission.

'I've got a tremendous amount out of working in mission,' she said. 'You get a much wider vision, you learn to appreciate other cultures and other people, and you begin to feel at one with them. And even if you aren't able to travel you can get these benefits through engaging in mission with USPG.'

'Mission is a thing that unites! It provides an opportunity to look at other countries. I knew nothing about Uruguay until we used USPG's Harvest resources last year. Now I know much more. I think it's important to know how they live in other countries. We might think times are hard here, but it's no comparison to how some other people live.'

She added: 'The people I've met on my travels have tremendous faith and are prepared to give so much in hospitality. They are so grateful that we continue to care about them and pray for them. It's very humbling, but we need their prayers as well, so it is much more a partnership.'

## **The statement of USPG's theological basis**

*Copies of this document are available for handing out to your study group. The document is also available on USPG's website – [www.uspg.org.uk](http://www.uspg.org.uk) – in the About Us section.*

In 2008 USPG adopted a three-part statement as a theological basis for the Society. It draws from both USPG's history and from a wider theological reflection about the nature of mission.

Beginning with a focus on our relationship with God, the document then moves into a reflection on our relationship to Creation, then finally seeks to spell out what it means for USPG to be a consciously *Anglican* world mission agency – 'Anglicans in World Mission' — in the church today.

At several points the statement makes clear how, in our engagement in mission, we need to mirror the inter-relationships and communion or fellowship (*koinonia*) of the life of God as Trinity.

The statement also draws connections between this divine communion and the communion we share – with God and each other – in the Eucharist.

The Eucharist centres around God's people sharing in word and sacrament, and ends with a 'sending out' (missa/mission). It is the nature of this liturgical celebration that provides a pattern of connection for divine activity and human response. As the Father sends, he also nourishes with his own life so that the Body of Christ is filled with the Spirit to live and work in transformation of the whole of Creation.

It is no accident that the concept of companionship (in Latin: *cum pane*, meaning 'those sharing one bread') has been increasingly used in an expression of mission partnership and endeavour (as with USPG's mission personnel, who are now dubbed Mission Companions).

## Putting it together

*The following questions and suggestions for discussion are linked to one or more of the sections above, or invite you to draw connections between them*

1. What have you learned about mission from your exploration of **Rublev's icon**? Does the focus in the icon on 'hospitality' give us new insights about the nature of mission?
2. How can our regular celebration of the Eucharist deepen our understanding of the nature of mission? Conversely, how can our commitment to participation in mission extend our understanding of the Eucharist?
3. 'The Eucharist remakes God's people again and again as a representative priesthood to serve God's mission in all things... The Eucharist does not simply talk about reality but allows the gathered community to make reality' (Chris Burkett). Would you agree with these comments?
4. How does the commitment to *glocality* (thinking globally, acting locally) link to the ideas about the Trinity, inter-relationships and mission that we have explored in this section? How does the story about beef stew demonstrate this in practical terms? Have you any experiences from your engagement with the world church that have helped you to reflect on how our relationships can draw us closer into the life of the divine Trinity?
5. What do you think about the statement of USPG's theological basis? Are there any parts that you find particularly problematic? Do you think it is helpful – or unhelpful – that USPG seeks to stress its Anglican roots and identity?
6. Do you think that John 20:19-23 or Matthew 28:16-20 is more important in providing a biblical warrant for 'mission' today? Or do we need both texts to give an adequate picture? Are there other biblical texts that you think are more important?
7. Bevans and Schroeder comment that linking mission with the Trinity helps to affirm 'the inclusion of diversity in community' (see above). Do you think that expressions of diversity are important? How can people in Britain and Ireland who are seeking to share in God's mission through USPG facilitate such diversity in community?
8. Go back to the three comments given near the beginning of this session:
  - You need the whole world to understand the whole gospel;
  - Mission is the overflow of our delight in God, because mission is the overflow of God's delight in being God;
  - Christian mission is offering the hospitality of the face of Christ.Has what we have explored in this session given you new insights into the meaning of one or more of these statements?

## **Sending out**

*Closing prayer:*

Lord,  
We are communities in communion  
With you,  
Our rainbow-loving,  
Promise-keeping,  
Creating Father God.

We are communities in communion  
With your Son,  
Our companioning brother,  
Faithful friend,  
God-with-us.

We are communities in communion  
With your Spirit,  
Our holy guide,  
Inspiring peace,  
Indwelling joy of God.

Bring us together  
In trust and hope,  
Remembering the marginalised we must represent,  
The needy for whom we can speak,  
The poor with whom we are included.

Bless our coming together  
Open to see you,  
Listening for love's whisper  
Ready to be changed by you,  
As you did yesterday and will do tomorrow,  
For your Glory and your Kingdom.  
Amen

*Helen Van Koevering, USPG Mission Companion (Mozambique)*