BOOKS I HAVE READ: ABIDE AND GO

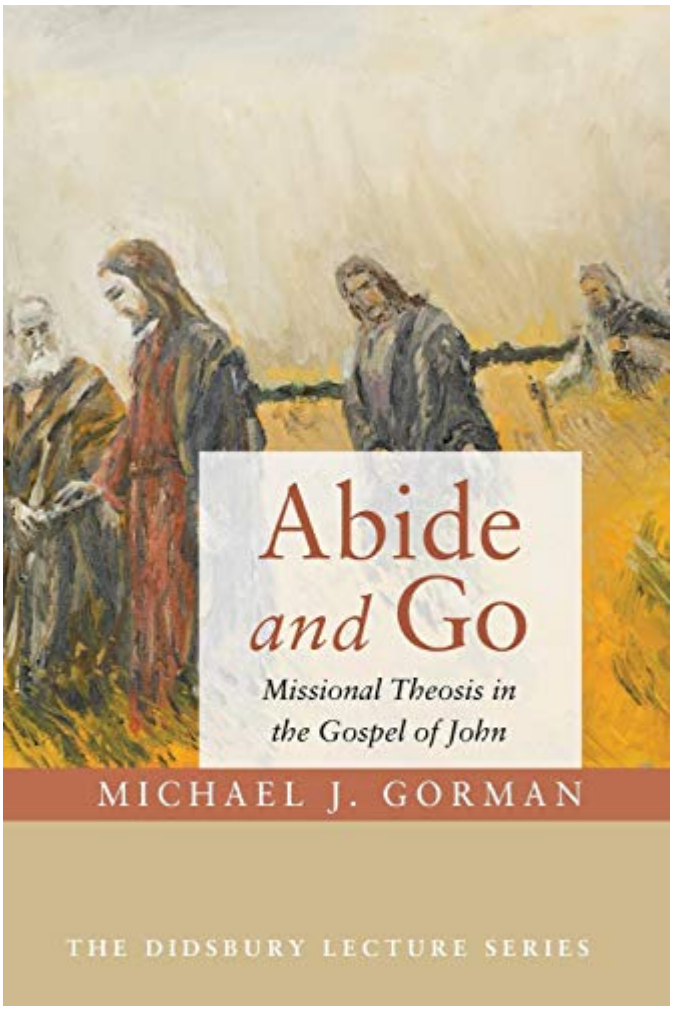
Posted on December 13, 2019 by Eddie

The central thesis of this book has been the following: Johannine spirituality fundamentally consists in the mutual indwelling of the Triune God (Father, Son, and Spirit) and Jesusâ€™ disciples such that disciples participate in the divine love and life, and therefore in the life-giving mission of God, thereby both demonstrating their likeness to God as Godâ€™s children and becoming more and more like God as they become like his Son by the work of the Spirit. This spirituality can be summarized in the phrase â€œabide and go,â€ based on John 15.

Category: Observations

If you are looking for a challenging read about spirituality and mission in John's Gospel then look no further than Abide and Go: Missional Theosis in the Gospel of John (The Didsbury Lecture Series)Â by Michael J. Gorman. However, if you are looking for an easy page-turner, then this is probably not for you.

The book is a medium format paperback of just over 250 pages including lots of notes and it will set you back Â£25 for the paperback, far more for a hardback and around Â£8 for the Kindle version. If you don't have a Kindle, get your library to order you a copy. The style of this book is academic and rigorous to the point of repetition, reflecting its origin as a series of lectures. The bottom line is that it is very good and thought-provoking, but it is hard work.



The argument is developed over seven chapters.

The first chapter sets out Gorman's thesis that John presents an approach to spirituality which involves simultaneously being drawn together in Christ and being sent out into the world; the "abide and go" of the book's title. He terms thisÂ *missional-theosis.Â* Theosis is a term which means becoming like God and could sound rather dodgy to Protestant ears. When the Bible calls us to be loving, holy and truthful it is calling us to be like God, if someone wants to wrap a Greek term such asÂ *theosis* around this, it's fine by me. Some of the themes in Gorman's earlier work, Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission (The Gospel and Our Culture Series (GOCS))Â are repeated here.

Chapters 2-5 are exegetical, examining the text of John in some detail to see how the notion of missional-theosis plays out. I found the chapters dealing with John 17 (ch. 4) and John 20 and 21 (ch. 5) to be the most enlightening. In his exegetical work, Gorman engages with a wide range of authors, including those who suggest that far from being missional in its orientation, John's Gospel has a sectarian approach, focusing purely on the community that it serves. Suffice it to say, Gorman does not agree with this approach.

Chapter 6 takes an overview of the Gospel as a whole and develops the theme of love for our enemies. The final chapter is by way of a summary and gives a number of examples of groups which the author says are putting these principles into practice. I was less convinced by this section, it seems to me that the groups that were described were strong on theosis, but not so much on missional (at least if verbal proclamation is seen as essential to mission).

Who should read this book? If you've enjoyed Gorman's earlier work, then you will find this helpful. Certainly, anyone who is considering preaching a series of sermons on John's Gospel in the near future cannot afford to ignore this book.

As always, a selection of quotes to close.

> *In this book I reflect on reading the Gospel of John missionally. Specifically, I will argue that the Fourth Gospel is a missional gospel with a missional spirituality, and that these two aspects of the Gospel have profound relevance for the contemporary church.*

> *As I have written elsewhere, the term missio Dei summarizes the conviction that the Scriptures of both Testaments bear witness to a God who, as creator and redeemer of the world, is already on a mission. Indeed, God is by nature a missional God, who is seeking not just to save â€œsoulsâ€ to take to heaven some day, but to restore and save the created order: individuals, communities, nations, the environment, the world, the cosmos. This God calls the people of God assembled in the name of Christâ€"who was the incarnation of the divine missionâ€"to participate in this missio Dei, to discern what God is up to in the world, and to join in.*

> *Both the Gospel and 1Â John suggest that being Godâ€™s children, for John, means acting in a Godlike way, which includes acting missionally like God the Father. And, as we will see momentarily, the gift of the Spirit makes such family resemblance possible for disciples in at least one concrete dimension of mission.*

Such an understanding of mission does not, however, allow the community to remain focused on itself and become a kind of sectarian entity, a â€œholy huddle,â€ to use once again the colloquial term. Rather, this sense of mission understands the missio Dei to be â€œformationalâ€ as well as â€œmissionary,â€ or (better yet) centripetal (spiraling inward) as well as centrifugal (spiraling outward). Thus, part of the mission of the church is to attend to itself even as it attends to the world.

Christian mission, then, is both centripetal and centrifugal. It means â€œabide and goâ€: abide in the community, and go into the world. This is a seamless garment of participation in a love that sweeps us into the life of God, who loves the worldâ€"and does so through disciples of Jesus, who are sent into that world just as the Son was sent.

John 3:1â€"4:54 portrays three individuals who encounter Jesus, illustrating the Sonâ€™s offer of life to all and various responses to him. The three include a Jew, the Pharisee Nicodemus (3:1â€“21); an unnamed Samaritan woman (4:1â€“42); and an unnamed â€œroyal officialâ€ (basilikosâ€"4:46, 49). The overall flow of the narrative in this section of the gospelâ€"from Jew to â€œhalf-Jewâ€ (Samaritan) to royal officialâ€"strongly suggests that this royal official should be understood as a non-Jew: a gentile, or at least a gentile sympathizer and hence functionally a gentile (4:46â€“54). These three figuresâ€"a Jew, a half-Jew, and a non-Jew (gentile/gentile sympathizer)â€"together symbolize and emphasize the universality of Jesusâ€™ mission mentioned in 1:10â€“12 and the universal scope of Godâ€™s love noted in 3:16.534 Together they illustrate that Jesus is â€œthe Savior of the worldâ€ (4:42). Moreover, the two unnamed figures also represent Israelâ€™s enemies: the Samaritans and the Romans.

The claim that Jesus â€œhad to go through Samariaâ€ (4:4) on his way back to Galilee from Judea is incorrect with respect to itinerary, for there were other possible routes.538 The claim is a theological one; the necessity is related to Godâ€™s plan and Jesusâ€™ mission.539 Jesus has to travel into Samaria, not merely because his mission is to the world, but also because God loves the world that opposes God, and this divine enemy-love is incarnate in Jesus. Furthermore, implicitly, God in Jesus is also reconciling human enemies to one another, represented by Jews and Samaritans and by their coming together to worship the one Father in (the) Spirit and the Truth, Jesus (4:23; cf. 14:6).

The central thesis of this book has been the following: Johannine spirituality fundamentally consists in the mutual indwelling of the Triune God (Father, Son, and Spirit) and Jesusâ€™ disciples such that disciples participate in the divine love and life, and therefore in the life-giving mission of God, thereby both demonstrating their likeness to God as Godâ€™s children and becoming more and more like God as they become like his Son by the work of the Spirit. This spirituality can be summarized in the phrase â€œabide and go,â€ based on John 15.