MISSION IS... INTERLUDE - A METAPHOR

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It is not just the actual content of the Bible that can inform our view of mission, but the fact that the Bible exists at all and its nature as a combined divine and human product speaks of how God is at work in our world.
Category: Observations

In the previous post in this series, I took a quick trip through Scripture in order to highlight some of the passages that show God as the prime mover in mission. One significant feature of these passages is the way in which God co-opted humanity into his work. He appoints Adam to care for the garden, chooses Abraham and his descendants to be his people on earth and then commissions Jesus' disciples to carry out his work. We will return to this in a later post, but for now I'd just like to take a slight detour.

The Bible shows us that God seeks to work in *partnership* with humanity in his rule over the earth. I realise that *partnership* is an inadequate word to describe this relationship, but in the absence of something better, it will do for the moment. However, it is not just the case that the Bible reveals this *partnership,* the Bible, itself, emerges from it.

As Evangelicals, we tend to highlight the fact that we believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God. However, the Bible is also very much a human product. God inspired the writers of Scripture giving us a book which is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). Although Paul doesn't say so, the Bible is also a brutally honest book, displaying the faults and failings of its authors in a way that is very rare for any religious text. Not only that, but for a book which was written by many different authors over hundreds of years and in three languages, it displays an incredible consistency; with one, clear, overarching narrative amongst the many different narrative threads. The divine origin of the Bible is clear to those who look for it.

However, the human side of Scripture is also clear. The different authors write in different styles and for different purposes. Even in English translation, it is possible to distinguish between the styles of three contemporaries such as Luke, John and Paul, while, say, Leviticus is very, very different to all three. Even the process of writing was different:

> *Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us,Â just as they were handed down to us by those who from the firstÂ were eyewitnessesÂ and servants of the word.Â With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly accountÂ for you, most excellentTheophilus,Â so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.*
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> *Luke 1:1-4*

> *He who was seated on the throneÂ said, â€œI am making everything new!â€ Then he said, â€œWrite this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.â€*
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> *Revelation 22:5*

Luke carefully researched his Gospel, interviewing people and reading whatever sources were available to him and then organising his material into an orderly account. John, on the other hand, was told to write down what he saw in a vision. Diverse human experience is reflected in the production of the Bible. It is the inspired word of God, but it is also the product of real human authors. A *partnership*, if you like.

We are still laying the foundations for a description of what mission is, but this notion of a *partnership* between God and humanity is clearly an important concept. In terms of their origin and nature, there are distinct similarities between the Bible and mission.

Let's push this just a little bit further.

The previous post gave a very brief overview of the way in which the Bible tells the story of this *partnership* between God and humanity. The Bible tells the **story** of mission.

Secondly, the Bible emerges from this story. It is written by people who (inspired by God) recount their experiences of God's interaction with them or with their wider society. The Bible is the **product** of mission.

However, the story of God's interaction with humanity did not come to a close with the canon of Scripture. God is still active, still drawing people to himself and still speaking to them. In most cases, the way that he does this is through the Bible. The Bible is the **tool** of mission.

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