MISSION IS: FIVEFOLD

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Category: Observations

In the previous post in this series, I included a quote from Hannes Wiher, who reviewed the way in which different scholars see mission starting at different points in the Biblical narrative. I then wrote the following:

> *For my part, I would argue that mission starts at the creation narrative in the book of Genesis. My reasoning for this, is that this is the point at which God first commissions human beings to do things on his behalf.*

This post covers similar material to the previous one, but rather than look at where mission can be considered to start in the Bible, it looks at the different way that the actors in the story can be considered to have a mission. The rest of the post is an extended quote from the early part of Chris Wright's The Mission of God.

> ***God with a mission.*** *The term Missio Dei, "the mission of God" has a long history. It seems to go back to a German missiologist Karl Hartenstein. He coined it as a way of summarising the teacher Karl Barth, "who in a lecture on mission in 1928 head connected mission with the doctrine of the trinity. Barth and Hartenstein want to make clear that mission is grounded in an intratrinitarian movement of God himself and that it expresses the power of God over history, to which the only response is obedience" So the phrase originally meant the "sending of God" - in the sense of the Father's sending of the Son and their sending of the Holy Spirit. All human mission, in this perspective is seen as a participation in and extension of this diving sending...*
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> ***Humanity with a mission.*** *From this theocentric starting point, God with a mission, we can in summary see the other major dimensions of mission flowing through the Bible, which we will explore further in the rest of this book. In its opening chapters we meet humanity with a mission on the planet that has been purposefully prepared for their arrival - the mandate to fill the earth, subdue it and to rule over the rest of creation (Gen. 1:28). This delegated authority within the created order is moderated by the parallel commands in the complementary account "to work... and to take care of" the Garden (Gen. 2:15). The care and keeping of creation is our human mission. The human race exists o the planet with a purpose that flows from the creative purpose of God himself. Out of this understanding of our humanity (which is also teleological, like our doctrine of God) flows our ecological responsibility, our economic activity involving work, productivity, exchange and trade, and the whole cultural mandate. To be human is to have a purposeful role in God's creation...*

Israel with a mission. *Then, against the background of human sin and rebellion in Genesis 3-11, we encounter Israel with a mission, beginning with the call of Abraham in Genesis 12. Israel came into existence as a people with a mission entrusted to them from God for the sake of God's wider purpose of blessing the nations. Israel's election was not a rejection of other nations but was explicitly for the sake of all nations. This universality of God's purpose that nevertheless embraces the particularity of God's chosen means, is a current them and a constant theological challenge (to Israel as much as to contemporary theologians)...*

Jesus with a mission. *Into the midst of this people - saturated with Scriptures, sustained by memory and hope, waiting for God - steps Jesus with a mission. Jesus did not just arrive. He had a very clear conviction that he was sent. The voice of his Father at his baptism combined the identity of the Servant figure in Isaiah (echoing the phraseology of Is 42:1) and that of the Davidic messianic king (echoing the affirmation of Ps 2:7). Both of these dimensions of his identity and role were energised with a sense of mission. The mission of the Servant was both to restore Israel to YHWH and also to be the agent of God's salvation reaching to the ends of the earth (Is49:6). The mission of the Davidic messianic king was both to rule over a deemed Israel, according to the agenda of many prophetic texts, and also to receive the nations and the ends of the earth as his heritage (Ps 2:8).*

Jesus send of mission - the aims, motivation and self-understanding behind his recorded words and actions - has been a matter of intense scholarly discussion. What seems very clear is that Jesus built his own agenda on what he perceived to be the agenda of his Father. Jesus' will was to do his Father's will, he he said. God's mission determined his mission. In Jesus the radically theocentric nature of biblical mission is most clearly focused and modelled. In the obedience of Jesus, even to death, the mission of God reached its climax. For "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ" (2 Cor 5:19).

The church with a mission. *Finally, the biblical narrative introduces us to ourselves as the church with a mission. As Luke 24:45-47 indicates, Jesus entrusted to the church a mission that is directly rooted in his own identity, passion and victory as the crucified and risen Messiah. Jesus immediately followed this text with the words, "You are witnesses" - a mandate repeated in Acts 1:8, "You will be my witnesses". It is almost certain that Luke intends us to hear in this an echo of the same words spoken by YHWH to Israel in Isaiah 43:10-12*

"You are my witnesses," declares the Lord,
"and my servant who I have chosen,
so that you may know and believe me,
and understand that I am he.
Before me, no god was formed,
nor will there be one after me.
I, even I, am the Lord,

> *and apart from me there is no saviour.*
> *I have never revealed and saved and proclaimed -*
> *I, and not some foreign god among you.*
> *You are my witnesses," declares the Lord, "that I am God".*
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> *Israel knew the identity of the true and living God. YHWH; therefore they were entrusted with bearing witness to that in a world of nations and their gods. The disciples now know the true identify of the crucified and risen Jesu, therefore they are entrusted with bearing witness to that to the ends of the earth. The church's mission flows from the identity of God and his Christ. When you know who God is, when you know who Jesus is, witnessing mission is the unavoidable outcome.*
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> *Wright 2003 pp 62-67*

Wright, C.J.H. (2006) *The mission of God: unlocking the Bibleâ€™s grand narrative*. Inter Varsity Press, Nottingham.