AN OVERVIEW OF MISSIOLOGY

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Category: Observations

I have been following the launch of the Union Theology website with interest over the past couple of weeks and today, I finally had a chance to glance at it. From the quick look that I've taken, it seems to be a very worthwhile resource. Those who are students of theology either by profession or interest should bookmark it in their browser.

I was a little disappointed, though not surprised to see that there is no section in the resources section devoted to mission. However, I did a quick search and came up with some interesting articles. The one I'd like to highlight here is by David Miller and simply entitled MissiologyÂ and is an interesting, though somewhat flawed overview of the subject.

The article gives a quick tour of various aspects of missiology along the following lines:

- About the discipline
- Key Current Issues in Missiology
    - What is mission
    - Paradigm shift in mission
    - *missio Dei*
    - Dialogue and the relation with other religions
    - Contextualisation
    - Evangelism, development and transformation
    - Pentecostalism and the growth of non-Western Christianity
    - Mission and the Western World
    - Particular evangelical discussions
    - Missiology's contribution to theology
- Key Books

I would highlight the section on Contextualisation as being particularly helpful (especially coming from a Reformed source).

> *Evangelicals are often cautious about contextualisation and contextual expressions of theology. This is partly because these have often emerged from liberal churches which place less emphasis on the authority of Scripture, and which are more willing to adopt local resources from a culture's pre-Christian or non-Christian tradition. It is, however, partly because Western evangelicals are also culturally blinkered. We assume that our own expressions of Christian faith and practice are somehow "pure" and untainted by our culture, but, as Bosch and others have demonstrated, Western evangelicalism is strongly influenced by modernity and the Enlightenment. Increasingly, evangelicals involved in mission both as missiologists and as practitioners have embraced the concept of contextualisation, seeing it as vital to enable Christianity to be expressed in culturally appropriate forms, and to be freed from its image as a western religion.Â*

Less helpful is the section on the growth of non-Western Christianity. It's not that there is anything particularly wrong here, it is simply too short, not doing justice to the theme and leaving the article unbalanced.

Where I would take more issue with the article is in its treatment of *missio Dei,Â* which is rather outdated and does not reflect the current state of Evangelical or wider mission thinking on theÂ *missio Dei.Â* He writes:

> *Evangelicals are right to be critical of this approach (and their concerns are also heldÂ by other conservative Christians), because it often ignores the issues of human fallen-ness, the call for repentance which accompanied Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom, the NT emphasis on the Lordship of Christ, and the whole eschatological dimension of Scripture.*

The problem is that Miller identifiesÂ *missio Dei* thinking with one, rather narrow, approach to mission theology and does not acknowledge that Evangelical and other Conservative missiologists have taken up the theme within a much more biblically based framework (you can find a list of kouyanet posts on *missio Dei* here). This reveals a problem with Miller's paper and perhaps a deeper problem for the Union site if they wish to be a repository of information for students and scholars; it is impossible to tell when the paper was written.

My suspicion is that this paper is at least ten years old. This is reflected by the writing onÂ *missio Dei*, but also by the bibliography which doesn't cite any book published after 2001. No article giving an overview of missiology which was written afterÂ 2010 could be considered complete without a reference to Chris Wright'sÂ The mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand NarrativeÂ and there are a number of other key works which are missing from Miller'sÂ list - take a look at my selectionÂ of mission books.

I'm not sure how typical this article is of the rest of the Union Theology site, but it would be helpful if the curators could date things so that they can be read in appropriate context. In the meantime, I'd modestly suggest that kouyanet is a better place to get an overview of missiological thinking.