# WHOSE MISSION? TAXONOMY OF MISSION 3

*Posted on September 1, 2014 by Eddie*

Whose mission is it anyway; ours or God's?
**Category:** Observations

Is mission something which God has commanded the Church to do, or is it something that God does and which he invites us to participate in?

This element of mission taxonomy is a bit tricky to define as everyone believes that the origin of mission lies with God in some way and that it involves people doing something. However, the seemingly subtle difference between the notion of mission as a command that God gives to the church and mission as an activity of God himself, is actually quite important. Does God have a mission for his church or a church for his mission? (That phrase isn't original and I'm sure someone will be kind enough to remind who said it first.)

**A Mission For the Church**

This approach says that God has given a command to the church to go and make disciples of all nations and we should get on and do it. The stress is laid on the people and bodies who are called to mission; albeit while recognising that they do so in Christ's authority and empowered by the Spirit. But human beings are put at the centre of the picture.

**A Church For His Mission**

This approach starts from the point that God has a mission to restore heaven and earth, through the death of Christ and that he calls the Church to play a part in what he is doing. In terms of what people actually do day to day, there may be very little difference to the Mission for the Church approach, but the focus is on the action of God, rather than the role of the people. Those who like Latin terms, call this approachÂ *missio Dei*Â (for other blog posts on this subject, try here).

**Evaluation**

Those who read Kouyanet regularly, will know that I favour the 'Church for His Mission' way of viewing mission. However,Â I do see some strengths and weaknesses in both approaches.

The main weakness of the 'Mission for His Church' approach is that it focusses on people and ascribes to them things which can only truly be ascribed to God; you can change the world, you can make a difference, you can give the Bible to a people group. This sort of thing is highly motivational, but it is not strictly true. On the other hand, this approach does help to keep churches and individuals focussed on the needs of the wider world.

The 'Church for his Mission' suffers from the opposite strengths and weaknesses. On the plus side, it places God at the centre of mission and helps to balance the sort of motivational, but theologically naive jargon that abounds in the mission world. It also gives a more thorough biblical grounding for mission. However, on the negative side; I fear that this approach risks losing a focus on world mission. We need a bit of history for this. The idea of theÂ *missio Dei*Â as we are using it here, is relatively new in the mission world. It first emerged in the ecumenical mission councils of the World Council of Churches in the post war years. As the idea was developed people began to look at

mission as the sum total of everything that God was doing; in the church, in society and in the wider world. For some, the church became irrelevant to mission or even a hinderance to it, because mission was God's work, not ours. I'm simplifying, but that was the broad progression.

Evangelicals have been much slower to adoptÂ *missio Dei*Â (or 'Church for His Mission, in my terms), but it is slowly becoming more and more mainstream. However, I am concerned, that the same trend may be occurring within the evangelical world as happened in the ecumenical one thirty forty or fifty years earlier. As people talk about 'joining God in his mission', I see a tendency to get involved in things which are local and urgent and a shift away from the slow, painful business of making disciples of all nations. Though I tend to fall on this side of the continuum, I do question whether the notion ofÂ *missio Dei* has been adequately developed and formulated to sustain a viable mission movement.