THEOLOGY OF MISSION AND MISSION THEOLOGY

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â€œIntuitively the Third World church is making a discovery. Systematic theology is not simply a coherent arrangement of supra-cultural universals. It is a compilation from the Western history of dogma. And that history, in the process of compilation, has lost its missiological thrust. The effect of this process on the Western Churches is similarly destructive of missionâ€ My notes on Chapter 2 of Mike Goheen's excellent book.
Category: Observations

Introduction to Christian Mission Ch.2

This chapter moves from the biblical story to theological reflection on mission.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON MISSION

What does mission mean? What does it signify to have a sense of mission?

These questions reoccur through the book, but at this point will look at three themes.

1. Mission of God and the missional nature of the church
2. Missional dimension and missional intention.
3. Mission and missions.

Mission of God and the Missional Nature of the Church

During the C19 mission was understood to be one task of the church. In the C20 a new understanding emerged. Mission is not a task of the church, it is something essential to its being.

At start of C20, mission was seen as expansion of Christianity from Christian world to the rest. This means that mission takes place overseas. Churches overseas became containers into which mission agencies could place converts.

This separates mission and church; you get churches without mission and agencies that are not churches. Mission is only carried out in non-western cultures.

1930s Kraemer asked what is the essential nature of the church. Hogg observed that the church exists to fulfil a divinely ordained mission. Church must be missionary and mission must be ecclesial.

Concept of missio Dei pushed this further. This came from IMC at Willingen in 1952. The final document asserted, â€œThe missionary movement of which we are a part has its source in the Triune God Himselfâ€ .

- Scripture: Bible is understood as a unified narrative of Godâ€™s saving acts.
- Eschatology: The kingdom is the end goal of history. Churchâ€™s participation in mission involves creation-wide scope of the kingdom.
- Christology: As we carry on the mission of Jesus, need to look at what he did during his ministry, not just concentrate on death and resurrection.
- Soteriology: Salvation is restorative and as wide as creation.
- Pneumatology: The Spirit is a gift of the end-time that brings the powers of the age to come into history.

The mission of the church is rooted in the mission of the Triune God.

- Mission is first and foremost Godâ€™s work.
- Mission is defined in terms of the Trinity. â€œThe Church takes its role in the loving mission of the Father to restore the creation as it is accomplished in the Kingdom mission of the Son and realized to the ends of the earth in the power of the Spirit.â€

Mission is the activity of God. The Father sends the Son and the Father and Son send the Spirit. The son then sends the church.

The terminology of sending is key, but it is not the only biblical metaphor. If we only talk about sending, we ignore Israel. We also need to talk about participation in Godâ€™s mission. By talking about participation we get away from the idea that mission is all about geography.

Hendrikus Berkhoff â€“ the church can be looked at in three ways.

- Institution: structures and activities
- Community: the people and care for them
- In terms of itâ€™s orientation to the world. â€“ its purpose is not just inward.

This last part has not historically been part of theological reflection.

The church can avoid its orientation to the world either be sacralism (getting too religious) or secularization (the opposite).

All of the churchâ€™s missionary activities are rooted in the mission of God.

Missional Dimension and Missional Intention

During the C20 the scope of mission opened up to cover everything the church was doing. Stephen Neil warned that if everything is mission, nothing is mission.

Mission is a dimension of the Churchâ€™s life, but not all activities have a missional intention.

Mission and Missions

Newbiggin distinguishes between mission and missions. Missions are particular enterprises within the mission of the church.

Mission is more than missions, but we need both.

MISSIONAL REFLECTION ON THEOLOGY

Need to look at other themes in theology that shape our understanding of mission. Our understanding and practice of mission will be fundamentally shaped by foundational theological

commitments.

From a Theology of Mission to a Missional Theology

This idea comes from Bosch.

The formation of the church for mission should be the motivating force tht shapes and energizes our theological labours. To detach theology from mission distorts the nature of theology.

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> *Harvey Conn, The Missionary Task of Theology.*

Missional theologies of the third-world present a challenge to the non-missional theologies of the West.

Salvation

What is salvation? What is its scope?

Four misunderstandings which impact the church and mission:

- Salvation reduced to the individual person
- Salvation restricted to otherworldly terms
- Salvation cast primarily in future terms
- Salvation is something God does for us, but not through us.

In the NT, salvation is understood eschatologically; bound up in the coming of the Kingdom and Godâ€™s rule over all of creation.

Soteriological self-centeredness has marginalised the cosmic scope of the biblical story.

Godâ€™s goal is a cosmic, creation-wide, culture-wide renewal

Gospel

The Gospel is a fulfilment of the OT story; it is about the restoration of Godâ€™s rule over his creation, including humanity; it is all-embracing, thus including the whole creation and the entirety of human life.

Eschatology

Salvation and Gospel must be understood in their original eschatological framework.

Need to see eschatology as a whole Bible story thing, not just about the end-times.

The mission of the church is to embody and mediate present salvation in the world until Jesus returns.

Christology

We have concentrated on the divine-human nature of Christ and often overlooked the events of his life as described in the Gospels.

- We miss the importance of the gathered community.
- We miss Jesus radical concern for the poor and marginalised.

Classic theories of the atonement have concentrated on individual salvation but have often disregarded Godâ€™s purpose of creating a new humanity in Christ.

We need a combination of Biblical pictures on atonement to get the whole thing right.

The mission of the historical Jesus is carried on by the exalted Christ, through the Spirit. The Church is linked historically and eschatologically to Jesus.

Jesus is the Creator. Creation and salvation are the work of the same saviour.

Pneumatology

We need to locate the Spirit in the context of eschatology and mission.

- The Spirit is poured out at Pentecost to show that the last days have dawned.
- The Spirit is like a river which flows kingdom salvation out into the world.

Ecclesiology

The church tends to be defined by what happens inside four walls, not by a calling in the world.

Barth: â€œthe church builds itself up for the sake of its mission and in relation to it.â€

The church does not belong to the private role that the enlightenment has assigned it. Our whole lives are restored in Christ and this needs to be reflected by the church engaging in all of life.

HUMANKIND

Human beings are fundamentally:

- Religious
- Communal

Godâ€™s historical purposes were misdirected by human rebellion. Human culture and power now oppress humanity.

God called Abraham (a human being) as his way of addressing this issue.

Scripture

The Bible is the record and tool of Godâ€™s redeeming work. It tells the story of Godâ€™s mission and is used by God to achieve it.

1. The OT was written to equip Godâ€™s people for their missional calling to be a distinctive people. Got gave the law so that Israel could fulfil its calling to be a light to the nations.
2. The NT tells the story of Godâ€™s mission through Israel as it climaxes in Jesus.

This is part of my continuing series making notes onÂ *Â Introducing Christian Mission Today: Scripture, History and IssuesÂ by Mike Goheen.*