TENNENT CHAPTER 3: A TRINITARIAN FRAMEWORK FOR MISSIONS

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Once missions is linked inseparably to the triune God, then the church recognizes that the ultimate goal of missions can be found only in the New Creation. This does not negate important goals such as planting a church in every people group in the world. However, it does mean that the church must always live in the tension of â€œunfinished business.â€
Category: Observations

If God is Trinity, this resolves many classical debates about unity and diversity, rationality and relationality, the material and spiritual, autonomy and dependenceâ€¦

The mission of the triune God must be the centre of our understanding of mission.

The Father is the Sender, the â€œLord of the harvestâ€ , the incarnate Son is the model embodiment of mission in the world; and the Holy Spirit is the divine, empowering presence for all mission.

GOD THE FATHER: THE SOURCE, INITIATOR AND GOAL OF THE *MISSIO DEI*

Â God the Father as Initiator of Missions

To see God as the sender, liberates the Gospel from the mechanism of transmission. Missionaries did not bring God to Africa; God brought missionaries to Africa! We have to focus on divine initiative, not human activities.

God the Father as the Sender of Missions

God the Father sent his word through the prophets, he sent his son into the world.

From the human perspective, Jesus sends the church, but within the context of the Trinity, it is the Father who is the ultimate source of sending; the one who sent Jesus. (Need to distinguish between the *economic* and *immanent* Trinity).

When we send missionaries, we are not only obeying Christ, we are reflecting the glory of the Father.

History as the Stage for God the Fatherâ€™s Actions

The *Great Commission* needs to be seen within the larger context of the *missio Dei* and as one part of the drama of Godâ€™s unfolding redemptive plan.

Human history is the stage upon which the divine drama unfolds itself.

Cross cultural mission reflects a high view of human life and human cultures.

Missions as an Expression of Godâ€™s Relational, Holy Love

Trinitarian theology provides a way of engaging with post-modern scepticism. The trinity is the seminal relationship that lies behind all relationships. Other religions have nothing to offer of this sort.

One of the great images in eschatology is a feast, where Godâ€™s family gather together to celebrate â€“ a relational activity.

GOD THE SON: THE EMBODIMENT OF THE *MISSIO DEI*

Jesus is not only the messenger of the good news, he is the embodiment of it.

Christian missions in History as a Reflection of the Incarnation

In Jesus we see that the Trinity is not simply some sort of philosophical speculation, it has a reality in space and time.

Likewise, Christian missions happens in particular real-time historical and cultural settings. Missionaries are both bearers of a message and embodiments of the message.

Cross-cultural mission pales in comparison to the gulf traversed by Jesus.

Missions represent countless re-enactments of the incarnation.

Incarnation as Translation

Walls: incarnation is the ultimate act of translation.

Bible has been translated into many languages. There is nothing special about *Koine*. Christianity is the only world religion where its source documents are not in the language of the founder.

The Gospel is not just linguistically translatable, it is culturally translatable, too.

Incarnation and the Global â€˜Ephesians Momentâ€™

Jesus called together a small community which was Jewish, but it swiftly included Gentiles. Ephesians talks of the breaking down of barriers between the two. Diverse cultures are drawn into Jesus community.

As the gospel moves into new cultures and languages, we gain new understanding and blessing. Cross-cultural mission always involves a two way diffusion.

Incarnation and Holistic Mission

It is a tragedy that Christianity has been pushed into the private realm. Evangelicals tended to privatise social responsibility as part of an individualised gospel.

This is changing and evangelicals are becoming socially involved. The holistic ministry of Jesus is a model for our engagement with the world. Jesus embodied both proclamation and social involvement.

GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT: THE EMPOWERING PRESENCE OF THE *MISSIO DEI*

It took a while for the church to fully accept the divinity of the Spirit.

Classical western theology has not really developed a fully Trinitarian view of the Spirit.

God the Spirit Empowers the Church for Witness

OT community was centred on the Temple and priesthood. NT community is sent out into the world. At Pentecost, the Spirit empowered the church.

Cross, resurrection and Pentecost collectively serve to mark the fulfilment of the old covenant. The new order is breaking into the world and must be proclaimed.

The main way the Spirit brings in the New Creation is through empowering the Church.

Catechesis into the Live and Ethos of the Kingdom/New Creation

Jesus says the Spirit will guide us into all truth (Jn 16:13).

The Spirit teaches us and empowers us to live the life of the future in the present.

Suffering and Persecution and the *Missio Dei*

The expectation that Christians would be punished was one of the first casualties of Christendom.

Suffering and persecution form an integral part of Paulâ€™s understanding of witness to the Gospel. It is an ongoing reflection of and participation in the sufferings of Christ.

We have much to learn from emerging missionary movements around the world, where persecution is the norm.

Missionary Witness as a Dynamic Overflow of the Spirit

Mission is a joyous invitation not an onerous command.

None of the missionary calls in Acts draw on the Great Commission passages. We canâ€™t view the Great Commission apart from the resurrection and Pentecost. It is the transforming reality of these two events which pushed the church outwards.

Missions is an extension of the Spiritâ€™s life and work through the church. This:

- Liberates missionaries from an undue emphasis on human strategies that have been articulated in solation from the Spiritâ€™s work.
- Allows us to integrate mission training with important themes such as suffering and persecution.
- Liberates us from the language of completion.

> *However, we must increasingly recognize that the language of â€œcompletionâ€ can be comprehended only when missions is built on the foundation of Christendom, not on the foundation of the Trinity. Through the lens of theÂ missio dei, we no longer isolate soteriology from pneumatology and eschatology. Therefore, even when every person has had an opportunity to hear the gospel, or even if a church is planted in every people group of the world, missions will not be over. Once missions is linked inseparably to the triune God, then the church recognizes that the ultimate goal of missions can be found only in the New Creation. This does not negate important goals such as planting a church in every people group in the world. However,Â Â it does mean that the church must always live in the tension of â€œunfinished business.â€ The mission of the church (missions) is to participate in theÂ missio deiÂ by continuing the mission of Jesus throughout the world until the end of history.*

This post consists of my personal notes taken fromÂ Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century (Invitation to Theological Studies Series)Â by Timothy Tennent. Once you have read all my notes, please buy the book!