

THE POST-COVID THEOLOGY PROJECT

Missiology Group





What do we mean by Mission?

Ben Aldous, Will Foulger, Harvey Kwiyani and Jenny Sinclair reflect on 'mission' in the scope of this project.

How does God engage with the world? What does God want of us?

“ **The *Missio Dei* is the total vision for the transformation of the whole of reality...of mission as bringing back the whole universe into reconciled relationship with God.** ”

John Corrie

To achieve the transformation of reality, God needs everyone.

The *Missio Dei* starts not with the church but rather in God - in the life of God the Father, the person of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, who live together in relationship - always giving, loving and pouring themselves out for one another. God invites all His people into a community of communion:

the relational life of the Godhead - in order to transform the world.

The *Missio Dei* reminds us that the church is called to join in with this mission of God. Therefore, the church must be subordinate, and exist for others: selfless, outpouring, outward-facing. Mission must be Christ-shaped. We know him as the one who did not hold on to his power, but gave himself up for the sake of the world. It is not the church that has a mission but the God of mission who has a church. The church is the sent one, not the sender. Too often, we get this the wrong way round.

Wherever we see the primacy of the self-asserted over the primacy of God, whether in the missionary imperialism of the past, or when the church itself relegates God to a supporting role in 'mission', we see exclusion, violence and death: physical, social and spiritual. This tendency to assert that we know better than God was particularly evident in our colonial history:

“ Implicit in the philosophy of colonization and the Western missionary movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was the assumption that other cultures were inferior to theirs. ”

Esther Mombo

Missionary imperialism is a tendency that comes with hubris, and today's forms, such as the dominance of money power or state power, or the ideologies of secular humanism, are again wreaking violence, dehumanising, dividing and degrading human life.

We also acknowledge that mission has been 'inward' rather than outward; that the church has not always fulfilled her calling to give herself away for the sake of the world but has instead sought to shore up her own influence and power. We agree with David Bosch that mission cannot be 'a means of reconquering lost ecclesial influence.'

We acknowledge therefore, that 'mission' has difficult connotations, not only in terms of church history but also in its political associations. Some would prefer not to use it.

However, if we understand the *Missio Dei* then we have a way of reframing 'mission' that is true to God's intentions and which is not overly burdened by the past.

God wants to transform the world.

The *Missio Dei* necessarily involves the whole people of God, requiring the church to engage across all cultural, racial, social, political and economic differences, indeed:

“ Crossing cultural boundaries has been the life blood of historic Christianity. It is also noteworthy that most of the energy for the frontier crossing has come from the periphery rather than from the centre. ”

Andrew Walls

What we mean by mission therefore, is rooted in the radically inclusive relational life of the Godhead, the *Missio Dei*, which calls every human person - across all classes, cultures and ethnicities - into God's great creative participation.

Indeed if some are missing, the mission is incomplete.

We therefore must adopt an attitude of listening to wherever God is at work, and ask Him always "Lord, keep us true to You, and lead us together in Your mission to transform the world."

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