

My Personal Theology of Mission

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The place of theology in missions. The mandate for global missions has its primary origin in the Lord of History. Stott states that missions could not be possible apart from the Bible, but the Scriptures themselves are actually the result of God's deeds in time.¹ In the act of creation He set all history in motion, leading to the advent of Man and all divine-human interaction. Scripture catalogs God's actual dealings with man in time from the Fall through the ultimate redemption of all heaven and earth through Christ. Thus the contents of Scripture are utterly dependent on the initiative of the God Who Acts. This includes the redemptive theme of His outreach to all sinful humanity that runs so prominently and persistently throughout the Bible.

Dr. Foltz has stated repeatedly in class (citing an author whose name I unfortunately cannot remember) that "missiology is the mother of all theology."² I understand this to mean that theology (i.e., our own study of the nature and character of God under the tutelage of the Bible and the leading of the Holy Spirit) exists because the God of mission has interacted with His fallen creation with a view towards reconciling all sinful men and women to Himself. In and of itself, this is a true statement. However, given that the Scriptures (which form the basis and body of *both* our theological and missiological understanding) are inextricably and fundamentally linked to the activity of God, I do not agree that theology itself stems solely from missiology. We know that God is a God of mission because we have revelation of his nature and activity. That revelation is wholly dependent upon the initiative of an active Heavenly Father – the One whose deeds

¹ John R. W. Stott, "The Bible in World Evangelization," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, eds. Ralph D. Winters and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1992), A-3.

² Dr. Howard Foltz, Class Lecture, World Christian Perspectives, Fall 2002.

in time reveal to us the love, compassion, and mercy that are uniquely endemic to His own nature and which lie at the very core of biblical mission. Mission itself, therefore, is grounded in the nature and character of a God who is not distant or static, but actively and intimately involved with His creation. Thus it is actually the work of *theology* – the study of God’s nature and character – that guides and informs our very understanding of God as a God of mission. On this basis, it is probably better to speak of theology and missiology as mutually interdependent rather than asserting one’s preeminence over the other.

The scriptural case for global mission. Neither one’s understanding of mission nor the work of mission can exist apart from the Bible. Stott again writes that “the Bible does not just *contain* the gospel; it *is* the gospel. ...God evangelizes through it.”³ In his letter to the Roman church, Paul echoes this sentiment when he says that the proclamation of God’s Word is the means by which faith is aroused; God actually creates faith in the receptive hearts of those who hear the good news of Jesus Christ (Rom 10:17). Thus the relationship between Scripture and mission is indissoluble. The Bible is history, handbook, imperative, and instrument of mission all wrapped into one.

Biblical mission should first be understood as relating to the purpose and plan of a sovereign God. As the result of humanity’s rebellion and sinfulness, people turned from fellowship with God to suppressing the truth of His existence and immanence in unrighteousness (Rom 1:18) – mankind forgot its Creator and Benefactor. In the outworking of God’s redemptive plan, He purposes to be named and glorified by every people

³ Stott, A-6.

group of the world.⁴ The reclamation of the lost souls of the world means the reclamation of the knowledge of God by all who transition from the mire of darkness to the glorious light of Christ. Thus His glory and activity must be proclaimed among all the nations (Ps 96:2-3). As a means to this end, God chose Abraham as a conduit through which His blessing can reach the world (Gen 12). Abraham's posterity, the nation of Israel, is charged with "duty to live as the people of God among the other nations in order to show them his grace, mercy, justice, and liberating power."⁵ The Abrahamic call to bless the nations culminates in the Advent of Christ. The good news of His coming, ministry, death, and resurrection is the message of God's glorious deeds to all peoples, proclaimed by all who have been won to Christ and ransomed out of clutches of Satan.

It is at this point that mission becomes an issue of my own personal response to the missionary purpose and activity of God. The Abrahamic call is renewed every time someone opens their heart to their Savior; all who follow Christ become Abraham's descendants by faith (Gal 3:29). Therefore, as a disciple of Jesus Christ, I bear a responsibility for the blessing of the nations. Jesus is the light of all peoples (Isa 49:6). Since I am part of His body, I share in being a beacon of truth to the world. Thus God's purpose for the nations – first expressed in the call of Abraham, passed on to the commonwealth of Israel, and climactically realized in the coming of the Messiah – is my own personal cause if I am genuinely a disciple of Jesus Christ (Mt 28:18-20). The missions work of the Ancient of Days, who has taken in His service men and women of faith from the time

⁴ Steven C. Hawthorne, "The Story of His Glory," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, eds. Ralph D. Winters and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1992), A-34.

⁵ Johannes Verkuyl, "Biblical Foundation for the Worldwide Mandate," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, eds. Ralph D. Winters and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1992), A-52.

of Abraham forward in order to bless the nations, should find continuity in my life as I faithfully steward the gifts and calling I have received from Him.

My Ministry Gifts, Vision, and Calling

Over the years, multiple spiritual gifts tests have confirmed that I am predominantly gifted as a teacher of God's Word. One of my most sincerely held values is that the teaching and application of Scripture should be handled with the utmost care, reverence, and rigor so as to avoid ministering false doctrine and confusion. Ideas have consequences, and those ideas that do not conform to or oppose the truth will inevitably have deleterious effects on individuals, communities, and even nations. I find that I have a visceral reaction to teachings or systems of thought that do not conform to biblical wisdom, and enjoy analyzing them to find and expose their weaknesses. Apologetics is a favorite pastime and vein of study for me.

In addition, God has also given me artistic gifts. My undergraduate work is in music performance, and I have at various times in my life seriously considered going to art school. The arts reflect a human capacity for creativity that is very much in line with the *imago dei*; the first thing we learn about God in the Bible is that He is a Creator.

My main ministry pursuit will be as a pastor. If I have heard from God correctly, I will begin my pastoral ministry by planting a church in my hometown in Cumberland, MD. Through the example of a pastor who I came to know since coming to Regent, I have been able to see how very important it is for a pastor to genuinely *shepherd* his flock. This involves a tangible, intentional expression of the love, acceptance, and compassion of Christ every day. I have also learned through personal experience that a

church must be a safe place for broken people. Woundedness must be healed in order for Christians to fully embrace the radical demands of discipleship. In order for that healing to occur, a nurturing, non-judgmental environment that is free of careless Christian clichés and shallow pat answers must be fostered within the community of faith.

These three values have contributed in important ways to my personal vision statement:

To bring people to faith and increasing knowledge of the Truth by communicating God's Word with clarity, creativity, and compassion.

Integrating Mission and Personal Vision

Integrating my greater understanding of mission with the ministry vision that God has given me and translating that into a plan of action has been particularly challenging. World Christian Perspectives has shifted my paradigm – it is only recently that I have begun to adopt missions as a personal value.

Dr. Foltz has repeatedly urged those who will engage in church planting not to allow the church plant to be an end in itself.⁶ Rather, harvest should be the goal – not just local harvest, but *global* harvest.⁷ Now that I am armed with a more biblical understanding of mission, I can embrace Dr. Foltz's exhortation and seek God about how the churches I plant here in America can be actively engaged in ministering to the unreached peoples of the world.

My current sense is that a large portion of my life ministry will be based here in America. As a pastor, my ministry efforts will be largely focused within modality struc-

⁶ Dr. Howard Foltz, Class Lecture, Word Christian Perspectives, Fall 2002.

⁷ Ibid.

tures.⁸ In order for a church modality structure to grow on external levels (i.e., winning converts from the immediately surrounding community as well as abroad), internal growth is important.⁹ My concern for faithfully shepherding God’s people as well as binding up the brokenhearted will contribute to the spiritual maturity of the congregation and prepare them to embrace the full demands of Christian discipleship – which includes reaching out to the unreached people of the world. I also intend to ensure that any church I pastor is in active partnership with sodality structures (i.e., mission agencies and training institutes) so that the local church body can take ownership of, participate in, and contribute to the activity of missions in the world.¹⁰

As a pastor, I can also act as a sender and mobilizer of missionaries. The development of senders within an individual church congregation strikes me as a desirable organic structure. An environment must be facilitated where God can move upon the hearts of individuals within the church to “adopt” a missions work that is spawned by the interior modality or an exterior sodality. Senders thereby take an active and personal role in the support of the work of missions by lending logistical and spiritual support to a specific missionary work that is important to them and their values.¹¹

As a teacher of God’s Word, I certainly intend to regularly explain what I have learned this semester from the pulpit. The work of mission is not just for the most hardy and spiritual among us. *Every Christian, everyone* who makes a claim to following the

⁸ Ralph D. Winter, “The Two Structures of God’s Redemptive Mission,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, eds. Ralph D. Winters and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1992), B-50.

⁹ Steven C. Hawthorne, *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: Study Guide*, (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1999), 126.

¹⁰ Winters, B-50.

¹¹ Steven C. Hawthorne, “Serving as Senders,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, eds. Ralph D. Winters and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1992), D-262-271.

Lord of Life, has a truly personal stake in reaching some of the unreached people groups of the world. Christ's global cause ought to be ours, and it ought to be the top organizing, integrating principle in our daily walk with God. I have also thought about short-term missions trips, and how I might partner with sodalities to use my ministry gifts to bless people in other cultures. I do not have a firm sense about how I will minister abroad, but I am seeking the Lord for direction.

As for my artistic gifts, this is something of a mystery to me as well. Every culture has its own brand of poetry, music, and visual arts, which makes fine arts an excellent vehicle for cross-cultural communication of the gospel. At this point, I am still seeking God about exactly how my artistic bent fits into the gift mix and calling that He has given me, but I am now better able to see how He might use these to minister to unreached peoples in the world.