

What Future – Our Church ?!

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3. WHAT MIGHT A MISSIONAL THEOLOGY LOOK LIKE?

God is essentially a missionary God who, in love, reaches out to the world to be in communion / covenant with creation. This is the commitment, intention and hope expressed in Genesis, and then through the history of the people of Israel.

God's missionary being is expressed climactically in Jesus Christ, in whom God reaches out in the most profound and complete way, in order, through the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, to draw the whole of creation into communion with God's own self. In Jesus Christ, sent by God, God has reached out to the world and completed God's own missionary intention, commitment and hope of overcoming the powers of alienation (sin, evil, death) to unite the world to God's self.

The Holy Spirit, sent to the world in love, is the 'Advocate', the 'Paraclete' who engages human life and brings into effect, into human life and history, what has been done in Jesus Christ so that people through the generations become beneficiaries, participants and witnesses to this new reality ... until the end of time when the whole of creation will be taken up into communion with and in the worship of God.

The Church is uniquely the community of people who have the vocation of receiving, embodying, celebrating and witnessing to this new life which the missionary God has achieved in Jesus Christ. The church exists for the sake of glorifying, praising and serving God in the world. The church is sustained in its vocation by Jesus Christ who through the Holy Spirit feeds, teaches and renews the church in faith, hope and love. The means of this are manifold – and include devotional life, worship, fellowship, sacrament, attending to the Scriptures.

Thus , the word 'Church' is best understood as a new way of being in the world which is communal and which embodies and celebrates what God has done in reaching out to the world so profoundly and completely in Jesus Christ. This is the essence of the church; it defines all that the church is called to be and to do. And this is enabled by the Holy Spirit which God has sent into the world. 'Church' then is in the world and of God (*in but not of the world*).

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Radical Implications

1. The Christian Community ('congregation') is a *Missional* Community.

On the word 'Missional': The intention of the distinction between 'missional' and 'missionary' is to say that in common thinking – past and current – *mission* is understood as one aspect of the life of the church (next to worship, pastoral care, teaching). It is about organized activities and programs aimed at involving the church in reaching out to the world and responding to its needs, either 'spiritual' or 'material'. Such mission has included individual conversion of non-believers, responding to human need, involvements in social justice and support for Care organizations.

The word 'missional' has a very different intention; it is used to indicate that the church, in its very essence as a Christian community, is by definition, 'missionary'. It acknowledges that the word 'Mission' is one of the four all-encompassing words to describe the church ... 'One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic' Mission is our essence because in what we are and do, we are recipients and participants in what the missionary God has finally accomplished for the world in God's missionary love in Jesus Christ. This missionary love of God has embraced even hell itself, and invited the world to new life, the life of the Kingdom, a life of communion with God and with one another, a life liberated from sin, from evil and from death.

The implications of this way of understanding 'church' and 'mission' are actually most profound and far-reaching; it challenges almost every presupposition about the church and undermines the familiar ways of understanding and speaking about mission and the church.

2. The missional character and purpose of the Church is true, irrespective of our appearance or phenomenological description (age, numbers, activities, potential, measurable effectiveness, etc) (What implications are there for church life surveys?)
3. Mission is about *Being* – it is a way of life – In our excessively activist culture where 'doing' is everything, this is almost impossible to comprehend.
4. Mission embraces the whole Christian community, not simply those who are described as 'missionaries' or 'church workers' or 'deacons'.
5. Mission embraces all our doing whether as a gathered community or as dispersed community. It is not confined to programs of activity which are measurably 'evangelical' or 'missionary'. It is defined by the baptismal vocation to live our lives in the world in a new way. Therefore, we are at mission in our domestic settings, in our work settings, and so on, as well as when we are gathered as community.
6. Church is in the world – as this new way of life. The 'separation' of church and world is not about 'religious and secular', 'church and state', 'worship and outreach', but it is about a way of living in the world which is strange to the world and an offence to the world because it glorifies God in the world. ... *Note the subtitle of the new book on 'Missional Leadership' ... 'Equipping your church to reach a Changing World', as if the church needs to 'reach' the world.*
7. The event of 'gathered worship' is the climax of our participation in God's mission and is the pinnacle of *evangelism* in the world because at the moment of public communal worship, we are representing to and for and on behalf of the world, what is the common vocation of all creation, namely to glorify God. Therefore, 'worship and mission' constitutes a false and 'un-Christian' dichotomy.
8. There is no such thing as 'working for the church', but only 'being the church' or 'belonging to the church' (by which is meant sharing the unique vocation with that community of people who, through the Holy Spirit, are beneficiaries of and caught up in what the missionary God achieved in Jesus Christ and have the vocation to live the new life brought about in the world by God's missionary achievement in Jesus Christ).
9. Mission and Unity are integrated into the being and vocation of the church and not separate tasks.

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Missional Leadership for a Missional Church

The calling of church leaders is to enable the people of God as a community to respond to and to fulfil their calling. What might this mean and what might be important in responding to this vocation?

Missional leaders are called

- to know, in head and in heart, what the church is as a missional church.
- to serve the community of those who make up the church, to work with and for God's people in enabling them to be faithful. This means that Missional leaders will be committed in love to the church community who bear a unique vocation.
- to help the community to know who they are as church (re-defining the people and redefining 'church') ... this involves community life in which there is a mutuality of learning.
- to help the community make 'gospel' sense of their gathered and dispersed lives in the world.
- to help the community and therefore its members to grow in faith
- to help the community to share their faith in the world

Note that the above things involve us in a long-term commitment with the community; they are not necessarily programmatic, nor are they necessarily measurable or to be measured.

Implications

(Note that all these categories below are artificially separated)

- For Pastoral Care ... Pastoral care will be the development of mutual love in the life of the congregation, providing opportunities where the people can be gathered in such a way that they can share their stories with each other and to have their stories drawn into the overarching story which embraces all separate and separated stories.
- For Teaching Ministry ... Teaching will be about making gospel sense of the whole of the life of the people; it will include the developing of communities of mutual learning
- For 'Mission' ... the re-defining of 'church' and of 'mission' will mean that people will need help in coming to know that and how the whole of their lives are part of the vocation to be church. Opportunities will be needed where people can share the stories and experiences, trials and challenges, learnings and questions, within their domestic or work environments.
- For Worship ... the gathered worship of the people will need to marry the life of the people with the life-giving gospel of Jesus Christ. But worship spreads more broadly – people will need to be encouraged and supported in being devotional in their daily lives; they will need to be reminded that in all aspects of their lives, they are called to be 'church', and that in all things, they belong to the community and are supported in prayer by the community.

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Randall Prior
Professor, Ministry Studies and Missiology
United Faculty of Theology, Melbourne
randall.prior@ctm.uca.edu.au