

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

THEOLOGY OF MISSIONS

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by

Faith C. Bays

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I. INTRODUCTION

To begin this research on the Theology of Missions, I think it would be pertinent to define Theology. Millard J. Erickson, the author of *Christian Theology* states, "Theology in a Christian context is a discipline of study that seeks to understand the God revealed in the Bible and to provide a Christian understanding of reality."¹ Therefore, I would say that theology has practical value in providing an understanding of God's purpose and goal of the Christian ministry of missions. Since the topic has missions and not the word mission, this study will give the specific work of the church and agencies in reaching people for Christ by crossing cross-cultural boundaries. If one would consider the text of Matthew 28:19-20, what we call the Great Commission, Jesus is sending the disciples to teach all nations. The Commission picks up again in Acts 1:8 when Jesus shares that the disciples will tell the Gospel everywhere beginning in their home, Jerusalem. The specific ministry of missions should be undertaken before the broader outlook of the world is considered. Before God established the outreach of strangers and

¹ Millard J. Erickson. *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2013), 3.

foreigners for the Israelites by giving them cities of refuges for these persons, (Numbers 35:15), he established provisions for the poor among themselves so that they would always be provided for, (Leviticus 25:35). These are very weighty matters that takes a Hebrew priest to explain. I will only share what happened and where it can be found. The early church also started an outreach among themselves by giving their finances to the apostles, to provide for the new Christian converts. Luke recorded that everyone shared everything they had. They sold their possessions and shared the proceeds with the needy, (Acts 2:44-47 and Acts 4:34-37). This research on the Theology of Missions will prove that the Old and New Testament has contexts that shows the nature of God in missions, it will prove that there is a relationship of missions theology among the Godhead and the church, it will prove two key motifs of mission theology and finally I will prove the relationship of mission theology among missionaries, church leaders, and lay people.

II. A SURVEY OF MISSIONS IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT

A. OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

The whole bible is the mandate for world evangelization (mission). This mandate is found in the creation of God, in the character of God, in the promises of God, in the Christ of God, in the Spirit of God, and in the Church of God.² God had a plan, even in creation to fulfill a missionary

² Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne. *Perspectives*. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library Publishers, 2009), 22.

mandate on the earth. He thought to make for himself a holy family who will care and provide for the presence in his new world. Paul declared in Ephesians 1:4, "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love."³ To begin the mission after the creation he chose a man named Abraham. The call of Abraham in Genesis 12 to become the father of a people of God's special choosing, led to the blessing of all nations. In fulfilling the mission for the world God chose the nation of Israel to be the one to carry out his universal mission.⁴ He gives in the Old Testament to Israel four covenants that reveals his missionary mandate. The first covenant was with Abraham, called the Abrahamic Covenant. In this covenant, found in Genesis 12:1-3, God tells Abraham to leave his country and go to the land that I will show you. I will cause you to become the father of a great nation; I will bless you and make you a blessing to others. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you. The mission began in the Old Testament with the Abrahamic Covenant. The next covenant to continue the mission was the Mosaic Covenant, found in Exodus 19:5-6. God tells Israel if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the nations of the earth; for all the earth belongs to me. After the Mosaic Covenant was the Davidic Covenant. The Davidic Covenant is found in 2 Samuel 7:12-16. God tells David when

³ Ephesians 1:4 KJV

⁴ Craig Ott, A. Moreau, Stephen J. Strauss and Timothy C. Tennent. *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2010), 60.

you die I will raise up one of your descendants, and I will make his kingdom strong. He is the one who will build a house --- a temple --- for my name. And I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. If he sins, I will use nations to punish him. But my unfailing love shall not depart from him. Your dynasty and your kingdom will continue for all times and your throne will be forever. After this covenant God made a Prophetic Covenant with Israel. The last and final covenant to fulfill the missionary mandate in the Old Testament, which will extend into the New Testament with the coming of Christ. The Prophetic Covenant is found in Jeremiah 32:37-42. God tells Jeremiah I will surely bring my people back again from all the countries they are scattered. They will live in peace and safety in Jerusalem. I will give them one heart and one mind to worship me forever. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them. I will never stop doing them good and will faithfully replant them in Jerusalem. I the Lord have spoken. So, the planter will be replanted in the homeland to fulfill the Biblical missional mandate. Micah 4:1-5 NLT: "In the last day, the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem will become the most important place on earth. People from all over the world will go there to worship. Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Israel. There he will teach us his ways, so that we may obey him." For in those days the Lord's teaching and his word will go out from Jerusalem...Even though the nations around us worship idols, we will follow the Lord our God forever.⁵

⁵ Micah 4:1-5 NLT

B. NEW TESTAMENT SURVEY

Through Jesus the four covenants, beginning with the Abrahamic promise of blessing to all the families of the earth comes to fulfillment. The completion of Christ work of redemption, the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the birth of the church are all aspects of the New Testament depiction of missions.⁶ Galatians 3:13-16 states, "Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law, when he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrong doings. Through the work of Christ, God has blessed the Gentiles with the same blessing he promised to Abraham, and we Christians receive the promise by the Holy Spirit, through faith...God gave the promise to Abraham and to his child...not children which would involve many descendants. But the promise was to his child --- and that of course would be Jesus Christ. So, John 3:16 reveals how God decided to incarnately become one of us to fulfill his missionary mandate of the Bible in the New Testament. God so loved us that he gave his son to the world, incarnately, to redeem all who would accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. This is seemingly a Particular Plan of God for Jesus did not include all, but he said whosoever. In revealing the Particular Plan to his disciples Jesus tells them in Matthew 13:11, I will share a mystery of the kingdom with you. He gives them the parable of the sower, the one seasoning the world to fulfill the Commission of Matthew 28:19-20. Jesus says in Matthew 13, when you are seasoning the world, the mystery is that some seed will

⁶ Ott et al. *Encountering Theology of Mission...* p.95.

fall on the wayside, which means those who hear the good news about the kingdom and do not understand it, then the evil one comes and snatches the seed away from their heart. The stony places represent those who hear the message and receive it with joy. But like young plants in such soil, their roots do not go very deep. At first, they get along fine; but they wilt as soon as they have problems or are persecuted because they believe the word. The thorny ground represents those who hear and accept the good news, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the cares of this life and the lure of wealth, so no crop is produced. The good soil represents the hearts of those who truly accept God's message and produce a huge harvest --- thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted. Jesus shared this parable to show the mystery of missions in the New Testament. He also said if the salt loses its flavor, it is no good. It should be thrown out.

III. THE NATURE OF GOD AND MISSIONS

There are various attributes of God. People often talk about love as the main character of God in the Bible and it may be. John 3:16 is very hard not to share to someone who is lost and is worshipping idols. God's attribute goes a little deeper because in missions there are uncivilized conditions the way they are because they have rejected God. These countries deserve justice for the lives they have taken in war and assassinations. The reason God does not immediately destroy is not because of love. In Psalm 7:11 David says that God is angry with the wicked every day, and in Psalm 2, the psalmist says to kiss the Son, lest he be angry and ye perish from the way,

when his wrath is kindled. So, the only thing that can help these wicked nations is the attribute of God that is Mercy. In the Bible Mercy is shown in many instances blocking the justice of God, not because of the love God has for people, but because people change.⁷ Erickson in *Christian Theology* believes that God does not change, but people change, and this evokes the nature of Mercy in God. John Piper in *Let the Nations be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* shares that one of the cause of missions is the nature of God's Mercy. Piper believes that the glory God seeks to magnify is supremely the glory of his Mercy.⁸ Romans 15:8-10 NLT states: "Remember that Christ came as a servant to the Jews to show that God is true to the promises he made to their ancestors. And he came so the Gentiles might also give glory to God for his Mercies to them. That is what the Psalmist meant when he wrote "I will praise you among the Gentiles, I will sing praises to your name." And in another place, it is written "Rejoice, O you Gentiles, along with his people, the Jews."⁹ If we have no zeal for the glory of God, our Mercy become superficial, man-centered human improvement with no eternal significance. And if our zeal for the glory of God is not reveling in his Mercy, then our so-called zeal in spite of all its protests, is out of touch with God and hypocritical.¹⁰ Matthew 9:13 NLT

⁷ Millard J. Erickson. *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2013), 250.

⁸ John Piper. *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 75.

⁹ Romans 15:8-10 NLT

¹⁰ Piper. *Let the Nations Be Glad!..p. 78.*

states: ..."Now go and learn the meaning of this scripture, I want you to be merciful, I do not want your sacrifices. For I have come to call sinners, not those who think they are already good enough."¹¹ A servant spirit and a heart of Mercy motivate world missions.¹²

IV. THE RELATIONSHIP OF MISSIONS IN THEOLOGY

A. TRINITY

The triune God in his very being as Spirit, light and love is an outgoing God, a missionary God, ever sending himself in benevolent relations to mankind, ever searching in love to bestow himself in blessings upon mankind, and ever spending himself in great sacrifice to make man's salvation possible. Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are cooperating and coordinating to bring man back from his sinful, wandering and blundering, and restore man to his pristine state, purpose, destiny and glory. Our God is, indeed, the Trinity God of our salvation.¹³ Having already discussed the nature of the Father in missions let us now turn our attention toward the Son and the Holy Spirit in missions. Paul gives three reasons why Christ humbled himself as a servant and came into the world on that first great missionary journey from heaven to earth:

- First, "Christ became a servant ...to show God's truthfulness."
- Second, he came "in order to confirm [God's] promises."

¹¹ Matthew 9:13 NLT

¹² Piper. *Let the Nations Be Glad!* p.76.

¹³ George W. Peters. *A Biblical Theology of Missions*. (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1995), 28.

- Third, he came “in order that the [nations] might glorify God for his Mercy.”¹⁴

In other words, Christ was on a mission to magnify God. When he accomplished his mission, he sent his followers into the world to spread the good news that their sins have been atoned. They can receive forgiveness and like Israel can be a part of God’s family and God’s friend. After Pentecost the Holy Spirit progressively unfolded the missionary dynamic and ideas which Christ boldly proclaimed and fashioned the disciples into flaming, irresistible and unconquerable missionaries throughout the Roman Empire and beyond its borders.¹⁵ Acts 1:8 states: “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and you shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”¹⁶

B. ECCLESIOLOGY

One definition of the ideal church is it is the temple of God indwelt by the Holy Spirit, constituting a brotherhood in the household of God, a peculiar people to serve a unique purpose of God in this age with a blessed hope of occupying a unique position with the Lord in the ages to come.¹⁷ The church is God’s agent upon earth to carryout the plans of restoring the

¹⁴ Piper. *Let the Nations Be Glad!...* p.76

¹⁵ Peters. *A Biblical Theology of Missions.* p. 33.

¹⁶ Acts 1:8 KJV.

¹⁷ Peters. *A Biblical Theology of Mission.* p.142.

peaceful conditions before the fall of man in Genesis. Without this royal priesthood (1Peter 2:9) interceding in behalf of the world and going into some civilized and some uncivilized nations the command of the Great Commission would not be fulfilled. Currently the Church is not undergoing many persecutions as its infancy because Jesus saw the future of the Church as doing greater works than what he did (John 14:13). The media as well as modern day transportation, and books have done wonders in showing how modern advances in the world can be used by the Church to promote missions in the world. Face book and Twitter do a lot in advancing the kingdom of God on earth too because messages can be uploaded on the social media to share the Gospel to those who are lost. So, the work of the church is great in this modern time. Samuel Zwemer, an outstanding evangelical leader said, "Does it really matters how many dies or how much money we spend in opening closed doors if we really believe that missions are warfare and that the king's glory is at stake?"¹⁸ I'm reminded of the story of Chicken Little a very famous nursery story for children. She found a seed and wanted to know who would help her to plant the seed. No one wanted to help. So, she planted the seed herself. Next, she asked who will help me water and take care of the plant. No one wanted to help so she took care of the plant herself. Next, she asked who will help me to turn the plant harvested into flour to make bread? No one wanted to help her. Next, she asked now that I have baked the bread who wants to help eat it? Everyone wanted some bread, but Chicken Little said you didn't help me

¹⁸ Winter and Hawthorne. *Perspectives*. p.329.

plant, water, harvest or bake the grain, I will not give you any to eat. I will eat it myself. God has not called the Church to just be saved, but God has called the church to go into all the world and teach all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to obey all the commands of Jesus and remember that Jesus is with you and see whether or not you are working on the battlefield. Remember the words of the Savior's brother: "Faith without works is dead."

V. KEY MOTIFS OF MISSIONS THEOLOGY

A. THE KINGDOM OF GOD

David Brainerd, the missionary to the Indians in New Jersey in the 1740s, was sustained by this confidence while he was about to die and that is that God's Kingdom will come into the world. These are his words seven days before he died in 1747:

Friday, October 2, my soul was this day, at turns, sweetly set on God: I longed to be
 "with him" that I might "behold his glory" ...Oh, that his Kingdom might come in
 the world; that they might all love and glorify him for what he is in himself; and
 that the blessed Redeemer might "see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied."
 Oh, come Lord Jesus, come quickly! Amen".¹⁹

Because there is a lack of enthusiasm for the Kingdom there is only a small number of Christians fighting the hosts of darkness although there are millions of Christians.²⁰ Well, may be true the parable of Jesus recorded in Matthew 7:13-14 which states that you can enter God's Kingdom only

¹⁹ Piper. *Let the Nations Be Glad!...* p.86.

²⁰ Ibid.

through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad and its gate is wide for many who choose the easy way. But the gateway to life is small, and the road is narrow, and only a few ever find it. Unlike David Brainerd, few want to see the Kingdom of God because it is a narrow pathway. It is a path where you will have to carry the cross. In Matt. 11:28-27, Jesus shares, come to me all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke fits perfectly, and the burden I give you is light. How sad it is that many persons choose the easy way out, the Broadway road because they feel like to be a Christian is not glamorous, exciting or magical. Many prefer riches that will perish because of thieves, rather than enduring for the riches of the Kingdom of God, (Matt. 6:19-20). The Kingdom of God can be thought of in qualitative terms: (a). the rule of God in the hearts of men (b). the rule of God in the Church (c). the rule of God in the world.²¹ How nice it would be to see the Paradise of God once more on earth.

B. SHALOM

In 1 Timothy 2:1-4 Paul tells Timothy, I urge you, first, to pray for all people. As you make your requests, plead for God's Mercy upon them, and give thanks. Pray this way for kings and all other who are in authority, so that we can live in peace and quietness, in godliness and dignity. This is good and pleases God our Savior, for he wants everyone to be saved and to

²¹ Peters. *A Biblical Theology of Missions*. p.28.

understand the truth. When Paul tells us to pray for peace in 1 Timothy 2, it is because God desires all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth, he is not picturing prayer as a kind of harmless domestic intercom for increasing our civilian conveniences. God aims to save people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. But one of the greatest obstacles to victory is when people are swept up into social, political, and militaristic conflicts that draw away their attention, time, energy and creativity from the real battle of the universe.²² This reminds me of the incident in the Bible that Matthew shares in his gospel, the 14th chapter. Jesus had just performed a miracle by feeding five thousand persons with five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus made the disciples to get back into the boat and cross to the other side of the lake while he sent the people home. Afterwards Jesus went up into the hills by himself to pray. Night fell while he was there alone. Around three o'clock in the morning Jesus came to the disciples walking on the water. When the disciples saw him, they screamed in terror thinking he was a ghost. Jesus told them, "Do not be afraid, it is I." Peter said, "Lord, if it is really you tell me to come to you by walking on the water". Jesus told Peter, alright come. Peter went over the side of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. As long as Peter was looking at Jesus, he was walking on the water, but suddenly Peter looked around at the high waves and became afraid. He took his eyes off Jesus. Peter started to sink. Jesus reached out and saved Peter. Jesus asked Peter "Why did you doubt?" to have peace while working in missions

²² Piper. *Let the Nations Be Glad!...* p.102.

one must never doubt that Jesus will and can do exceedingly above and beyond all you can ask or think. One must never go outside the eye of the storm but remain in the center where God grants peace and calmness. Keep focused while you work for Jesus. Isaiah 26:3 reminds us that God will keep those in perfect peace, whose minds are stayed on him, because that person trusts God.

VI. MISSIONS THEOLOGY RELATIONSHIPS: MISSIONARY, CHURCH LEADERS, LAY PERSONS

When Jesus turned the rich young ruler away because he was not willing to leave his wealth to follow Jesus, the Lord said, “Only with difficulty will a rich person enter the Kingdom of heaven.” Then Peter, speaking as a kind of missionary who had left his home and business to follow Jesus, said, “See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?” Jesus answered with a mild rebuke of Peter’s sense of sacrifice: Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.”²³ When one thinks of the pastoral epistles, one thinks about two young pastors, church leaders who faced personal as well as physical obstacles that did not help with the promoting of God’s missions work. Paul encouraged Timothy to not be fearful and cowardice by telling him, God has not given the leaders the Spirit of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind, (2 Timothy 1:7). He urges Timothy to stir up his gift. He

²³ Piper. *Let the Nations Be Glad!...* p.83.

tells Titus in chapter 3 to avoid or do not get involved in foolish discussions about genealogies (pedigree) and the Jewish law, for it is a waste of time. Paul was truly a church leader's guide. Many of his instructions to the pastors in these epistles are helpful in not only with church disciplines, but also advising leaders about contentions, quarrels and disagreement among themselves. If we have blind guides, we will have a blind church and a dysfunctional missions's program. Therefore, let us pray that God will strengthen and bless the church leaders with an appropriate vision for missions in the church. Now concerning lay person, some people feel that they must love the lost to share the Gospel. Piper says that it is impossible to love deeply or unfamiliar individuals in a photograph, let alone a nation or a race or something as vague as "all lost people." Don't wait for a feeling of love to share Christ with a stranger. You already love your heavenly Father, and you know that this stranger is created by God, but separated from God, so take the first steps in evangelism because you love God. It is not primarily out of a compassion for humanity that we share our faith or pray for the lost; it is first of all, love for God. The Bible says in Ephesians 6:7-8: "With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free."²⁴ And let's not forget that sheep beget sheep; shepherds does not beget sheep.

VII. CONCLUSION

²⁴ Piper. *Let the Nations Be Glad!...*p. 88.

Piper believes that the ultimate goal of the church is not missions but worship; missions he says exists because worship doesn't. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more; missions is a temporary necessity, but worship abides forever.²⁵ Worship has always been the ultimate purpose of God in the universe; it has always been the fire that fuels our passion to reach people who do not worship the true God through Jesus Christ.²⁶ Be as it may the Biblical mandate of the Theology of Missions in this research has been proven from contexts in the Old and New Testament, from the nature of God, from the Godhead and the Ecclesiology, it has proven two key Motifs of Mission Theology and finally this research has proven that Mission Theology can be found in the relationship of missionaries, church leaders, and lay people. Let us also remember as we continue to investigate the Theology of Missions that our Lord said it is not a church building, leader, missionary or lay person who provide the ultimate mission, if Piper is correct that the ultimate goal of the church is worship, then the true worshipper Jesus say worships in Spirit and truth not deeds.

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²⁵ Ibid., 20.

²⁶ Ibid.

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