

missio Dei – the sent and sending God

I first heard the expression ***missio Dei*** at a conference we held in Southampton in 2008 with author and missiologist, Mike Frost. It is a theological term that literally translates as the "sending of God." It was first coined by a German theologian, Karl Hartenstein, in 1934.

The concept of *mission Dei* is that mission is not primarily an activity of the church but rather an attribute of God. God is a missionary God. He is both the sent and sending God.

The Father sends the Son,
The Father and the Son send the Spirit,
The Father and Son and the Spirit send the church into the world.

Mission comes first from the heart of God and we are caught up in it rather than initiating it. Mission is primarily the work of God and we participate with God in what He is doing.

Jurgen Moltmann, in his book, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* writes, "It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfil in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church."

missio Dei sees our mission as stemming from the Triune God. God is continually reaching beyond Himself, reaching out, looking for ways to demonstrate His love. It is that flow that God calls us to share in.

David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, writes, 'Our mission has not life of its own: only in the hands of the sending God can it truly be called mission. Not least since the missionary initiative comes from God alone. Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission. There is church because there is mission, not vice versa. To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love.'

God's mission is the salvation of humankind and the restoration of creation. This is the grand narrative, the big story. God is in pursuit of a people on earth among whom He can dwell. This is the story that begins in the Garden of Eden in Genesis and culminates in the city of God coming down to earth in the book of Revelation. It is this mission that we are called to share in. Every time we proclaim the good news about Jesus, we feed a hungry person, we pray for healing, we counsel a married couple towards reconciliation, we speak up on behalf of the weak or vulnerable, we raise money to establish an orphanage overseas, we see unjust laws overturned or smile at a neighbour. Every time we bring a bit more of heaven onto the earth we participate in God's mission. We must learn to ask the questions, *what is God up to?* and, *how can we get involved?*

Over the past few years we have found ourselves involved in areas of mission that we stumbled into rather than strategised our way into. We run a project for the homeless that began 18 months ago when 20 homeless guys turned up at our building one Sunday afternoon. Now we feed up to 100 people every week, we have a team of 40 volunteers, many of whom are not yet Christian, and last Sunday we baptised one of the guys who has come to Christ through this work. 3 years ago we were approached by a local church working on a deprived inner city estate asking for help. We sent down worship leaders and speakers and eventually we sent a couple to lead that community. When we were approached by the church they had 8 people in the congregation. Today more than 70 people gather each Sunday and they are engaging in all sorts of community outreach.

We are learning that God is more committed to mission than we could ever be because it is His nature, it is who He is. We simply need to be able to see what He is doing and willing to participate with Him.

Many years ago I heard John Wimber preach on the verse in John 5:19, *'the Son can do nothing by himself; he can only do what he sees the Father doing'* in the context of praying for healing. It was revelation then as I learned to pray for individuals and it continues to be revelation today as we are seeking to engage with the *sent and sending God* in His mission in our city.

Billy Kennedy

June 2009