

MISSION AS MISSIO DEI

In order to create or understand the function of a particular activity (committee, role, etc.) in a specific context or structure (church, congregation, ...) it is necessary to have clarity of the nature its mission (or place in the mission).

Missio Dei, a broad perspective on mission, forms the missional base for any structure.

We begin with the conviction that the mission is God's mission. Mission is "derived from the very nature of God."¹ The two word phrase, **Missio Dei**, describes this understanding of mission. David J. Bosch says it this way. **"In the new image mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary of God. "It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father (sic)² that includes the Church's (Moltman). Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission. The church is there because there is mission, not vice versa."**³

Bosch indicates that a broad spectrum of Christians, including conciliar Protestantism, Eastern Orthodoxy, evangelicals, the Second Vatican Council, have embraced this understanding of mission.

1 Peter 2.9⁴ provides a Biblical model for Missio Dei. It proclaims the church is the one sent, not the sender. "Since God is a missionary God, God's people are a missionary people."⁵ An ecclesiology which emerges from this conviction describes the church as essentially missionary. First, the mission, then the church as the instrument of mission. The church is/was brought into being to do God's mission – There is one mission, and that is God's mission.

Missio Dei provides the basis framework for the structure of any church. For instance:

1. The church is responding to what God did in Jesus Christ to change everything. Lesslie Newbigin reminds us that mission began with an explosion of joy. When the early apostles testified to a New Reality, people around then would ask, "What is going on?" The answer was always what God had done in Jesus Christ, Missio Dei, Newbigin claims. "... the great missionary proclamations in Acts are not given on the unilateral initiative of the apostles but in response to the questions asked by others, questions prompted by the presence of something which calls for explanation."⁶
2. The church, created by God for mission lives its vocation only when it is engaged in mission. Missio Dei implies that a theology of mission precedes a theology of the church. God called the church to do mission. Ecclesiology defines and orders the church for mission.
3. While there is one **Missio dei**, there are many "missions," that one mission assuming as many expressions as there are theological perspectives. Proclaiming one mission, Missio Dei, may place mission in its proper context, but it does not answer the questions about what faithful mission will look like.

1 Bosch, David J. TRANSFORMING MISSION; Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1991, Page 390 ff. Beginning on P. 389 Bosch outlines the concept of Missio Dei, describing it as it developed this past half century, and how it contrasts to previous theological expressions of a mission.

2 Note here: the full understanding of the Trinity is used here. It is not Christ's mission or the Spirit's mission but the mission of the fullness of God. Use of the word "Father" reflects the quote from Moltman in the Bosch text.

3 Bosch, *Ibid*, P.390

4 "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." Nrsv

5 Bosch, *Ibid*., P. 372, Here Bosch identifies that ecclesiology does not precede missionology. He cites Barth and Hoedemaker in describing this theological development.

6 Newbigin, Lesslie, THE GOSPEL IN A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY. Eerdmans/WCC Publications, Grand Rapids, Geneva, p. 117-119 (the quotation is on page 119).