

“Mission precedes theological reflection. Theological reflection informs missional praxis. The fruit of theological reflection is missional praxis. Theological reflection is birthed out of missional praxis.” While there is validity behind such statements and evidence of a cyclical nature between theology and mission, precedence over against one another seems unnecessary. One should consider what is both theology and mission, and then how they interact with one another. It would be fruitful to view theology and mission being so intertwined as one instead of separate by prioritization.

Theology as J.I. Packer wonderfully describes “is first the activity of thinking and speaking about God (theologizing), and second the product of that activity.”¹ Theology is as much about receiving as it is doing, whereby God’s revelation has ultimate antecedence (e.g., Matthew 11:25-27; 1John 4:10). Theology, or theologizing, is integral with faith, both as a noun (set of beliefs = orthodoxy) and as a verb (act of believing/trusting = orthopraxis).² Christian theology should aim to intimately know God through the Word, prayer, worship, community life, mission, etc. (Acts 2:42-47).³

Sebastian Kim and Kirsteen Kim define “‘Mission’ (derived from the Latin ‘mitto’, ‘I send’) is first and foremost the action of God in sending Jesus Christ into the world in love for its salvation (John 3:16). Jesus’ disciples understand themselves to be sent into the world in the same way (John 20:21-23).”⁴ Christopher Wright sees mission, biblically informed and validated, being

¹ J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1993), xi-xii.

² Alister McGrath writes, “Christian theologians have traditionally made a distinction between faith as *a set of beliefs*, and faith as *an act of believing*.”

Alister E. McGrath, *Theology – The Basics, 4th Ed.* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 1.

³ See also how Christianity and the early church continued to grow throughout the book of Acts: Acts 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20 (summary texts that reflect geographical/church/word of God increasing).

⁴ Sebastian Kim and Kirsteen Kim, *Christianity as a World Religion: An Introduction, 2nd Ed.* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 8-9.

part of our identity as God’s people, whereby it is “at God’s invitation and command, in God’s own mission within the history of God’s world for the redemption of God’s creation.”⁵

It is misleading to assume Martin Kahler’s “Mission is the mother of all theology.” Likewise, Terry Muck’s statement, “that all theology, all theologies, are culturally conditioned,”⁶ places too much emphasis on a missiological or human point of view. While it is true that divine accommodation allows for human language and anthropomorphic understanding, as well as theology taking place within cultural contexts, there are clearly aspects to God’s Word/bible/truth that are supracultural or go beyond culture. Such a dichotomy between mission and theology reflects a Western understanding/compartmentalization, and likely anachronistic given that there is little biblical evidence to see such categories and distinctions (e.g., would the apostle Paul see such distinction?). The bible portrays a more holistic and balanced approach with the gospel (*euangelion*: ‘good news’) that touches upon both theology and mission. Donny Mathis notes the centrality of the gospel throughout the New Testament in the everyday life of the Christian within the church that incorporates both theology and mission, and specifically writes:

This good news about Jesus forms the center of the preaching by the missionaries of the early church... The good news they preached was intimately linked to the promises of the OT and focused on the life and ministry of Jesus, particularly the cross and resurrection... This good news describes events to which all Scripture points and declares that all principalities and powers are defeated once and for all by Jesus the Messiah.⁷

The gospel is both theology and mission wrapped up in one, which is to be incarnationally embodied by Christians just as Jesus (i.e., the Word) became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). The gospel transcends culture and has ultimate ‘translatibility.’

⁵ Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2006), 22-23.

⁶ Terry Muck, “The Missiological Perspective: What Does It Mean to Do Theology Missiologically?” in *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XXXIII, No.1, January 2004.

⁷ Donny Mathis, “Gospel” in *Holman Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2003), Accordance Electronic Ed., par. 7021-7041.