

Christology . Every facet of biblical Christology could be tied to mission, in that the biblical plotline that sets out God's mission to redeem from a lost race a vast number from every tongue and tribe and people and nation is focused on Jesus Christ, without whom the missionary plotline would be incoherent.

On the basis of John 20:21, a substantial amount of contemporary mission literature conceives of the task of mission in terms of incarnation (*see* INCARNATIONAL MISSION). The Gospel of John is perhaps the clearest in enunciating the doctrine of incarnation, and here too the resurrected Jesus tells his disciples, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

In general terms (i.e., apart from the meaning of this verse), a link between the incarnation and mission is valuable on two fronts. Christologically, it focuses on the unique humility of the eternal Son in becoming a human being in order to perform his Father's will, accomplish his mission, and rescue God's guilty image bearers from sin and death. Metaphorically, it is a suggestive model of our mission: as the eternal Son entered our world to accomplish his mission, so Christ's disciples in mission must, as it were, "incarnate" themselves into the worlds they are called to serve and evangelize.

On the other hand, it is doubtful that John 20:21 can responsibly be called on to support this emphasis. As Köstenberger has shown in exhaustive exegesis, the analogical argument in that verse draws in a major theme in the Fourth Gospel: the sending of the Son, the sending of the disciples, with entailments in the authority of the "sender" and the obedience of the one sent. John's Gospel does not set forth our going as an "incarnation." The observation is more than a narrow point of picky exegesis: under the guise of the "incarnation" model of Christian mission some now so focus on "presence" and identification with those being served that the proclamatory, kerygmatic, "good news" elements are largely suppressed.

More broadly, the biblical Christology that depicts Christ as both divine and human develops an awareness of the wholeness of Christian mission. This mission is *God's* initiative; it is undertaken with *God's* sovereign authority. Yet this mission signals more than divine presence, more than information graciously provided about this God; it signals the Son's costly adoption of our nature, living our life and dying our death. In this

light, the many chapters of the canonical Gospels that describe Jesus' ministry during the days of his flesh betray a daunting concern for the whole human being. Addressed are questions of health, justice, integrity, marriage, generosity, family, priorities, humility, truth-telling, death, compassion, and much more. Nor is this the exclusive preserve of the Gospels. Elsewhere, for instance, Jesus' identity with the human race not only qualifies him to be our priest and our substitute, but ensures that his own strong cries and tears make him uniquely fitted to empathize with ours, and thus also to save to the uttermost all who come to God by him (Hebrews).

Nevertheless, the wide embrace of Jesus' concerns for broken human beings must never obscure the fact that such concerns are set within a plotline that takes him to the cross. His social and humanitarian passions cannot legitimately be given independent standing. They are tied to the dawning of the kingdom, whose consummation awaits his return, and entry into which is finally secured by the new birth (John 3:3, 5), itself predicated on the cross. The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to *give his life a ransom for many* (Mark 10:45). Moreover, substantial elements in the ethics of Jesus turn on the critical importance of living with eternity's values in view. Thus Christian mission, while properly being wholistic, must focus on the promulgation of the good news that men and women can be accepted by God, both now and forever, because of what God has done in Christ Jesus.

Genuine Christian mission is impossible apart from genuine Christian love, and genuine Christian love is both modeled and impelled by the Father's sending of the Son out of love for this lost world, and by the Son's willing sacrifice on our behalf. If we are all by nature children of wrath (Eph. 2:3), God's love for us is not a function of how lovable we are, but of how loving he is. Insofar as Christians learn to receive that love, and learn to measure their poor love by his great love, so also they begin to learn that the love that impels Christian mission grows from within (cf. 2 Cor. 5:14–15). That is precisely the reason why Paul thought of himself as a debtor to all (Rom. 1:14): always there is the ~~debt~~ of love to be paid, for Christ has paid it for us.

This elementary but fundamental Christology has a direct bearing on Christian mission. This is not sentimentalism, as if the cross of Christ were a symbol of love and nothing more. If Jesus' sacrifice did not in fact aim to achieve something, then far from being an effective example of self-sacrificial love, it reduces to sheer insanity. But in fact it did achieve something: the reconciliation to God their Maker and Redeemer of a vast number of God's image bearers, otherwise lost in pathetic and evil rebellion. In that framework,

Christ's self-sacrifice is the most staggering instance of love conceivable, both the means of our redemption and the model for our living. If that model increasingly constrains Jesus' followers, mission is inevitable.

One of the great Christological themes of the New Testament, especially strong in Hebrews 5:7, pictures Jesus as the high priest par excellence. At one level this theme is associated with the storyline of redemptive history. The Levitical priesthood is displaced by the Melchizedekian, and Jesus' priesthood is of the latter order. But if the Levitical priesthood is rendered obsolete, so also is the law-covenant that bases itself upon this priesthood (Heb. 7:11–12; cf. 8:13). Thus there is a forward movement within the biblical narrative itself.

Nevertheless, the structure of priestly service, complete with tabernacle/temple, articulated in the law-covenant is certainly not obsolete in every respect. It serves as a shadow, a model, a type of the heavenly reality (Heb. 10:1ff.). What is required for a guilty people to be acceptable to and enter the presence of a holy God is depicted in gripping, symbol-laden ritual, which in turn prophetically announces the ultimate fulfillment of the reality to which it points. The priesthood of Jesus is pictured in these transcendent terms. Precisely because it is tied to Melchizedek and not to Levi, however, its relevance is not limited to the people of the Mosaic covenant. It is also in principle open to people from every tribe and tongue.

One of the major strands of New Testament Christology pictures Jesus as the One who emptied himself, humbled himself, served obediently all the way to the ignominy of the cross—and was triumphantly vindicated (e.g. Phil. 2:6–11). The ultimate vindication occurs when Jesus returns at the end of the age. This schema provides a goal, a philosophy of history (with Jesus at the crucial midpoint and returning at the end), a *telos* to which history rushes. Not only is it appointed to us to die and face judgment, but there is a final and irrevocable judgment at the end of the age (Heb. 9:27–28; Acts 17:31; Rev. 22:10–11). History is not simply spinning in circles, nor are we dipping in and out of it in successive cycles of reincarnated existence.

These realities not only lend a certain urgency to the task of mission, they also provide a model: self-denial and willing self-death now, final vindication later. Effective mission can only be sustained when both of these elements prevail.

One of the core Christological confessions is that Jesus is Lord. Regrettably, this may become the merest cliché, with no discernible content to "Jesus" and nothing more than religious sentimentalism connected with "Lord." But in the New Testament, heart-belief in this truth, coupled with oral confession of it, are tied to salvation (Rom. 10:9). To confess that Jesus is Lord is, implicitly, to deny lordship to all others (cf. 1 Cor.

8:4–6; 12:1–3). In the light of Septuagint usage of "Lord," it is also to confess the deity of Jesus Christ. One cannot responsibly confess Jesus as Lord and then deny the uniqueness that he claims for himself and that his earliest followers assigned him. Further, it is a public commitment of covenantal allegiance and loyalty to Jesus and to his teaching (for how can one responsibly call him "Lord! Lord!" and fail to do what he says?), and thus not only to enjoy the salvation he alone graciously gives but also to participate joyfully in his final and GREAT COMMISSION.

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SEE ALSO Uniqueness of Christ.

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