

## **Missional Theology - Chapter 5**

### **Missional Solidarity**

In the midst of proclaiming the polyphonic (many voiced) character of the one faith, scripture also extols the concept of unity or solidarity. A commitment to plurality and difference allows for a healthy freedom of expression that is important for true harmony. However, one of the great dangers of the freedom engendered by plurality is that it easily becomes the basis for discord and hostility as each asserts their freedom over against others.

Paul warns about this in his letter to the churches in Galatia (5:13-15): “For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.”

In response to the danger of plurality and freedom turning into strife and violence, both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament promote the goodness and importance of unity.

John 17:20-23: “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

The sort of unity that we often imagine is a community in full agreement around a universal theology and/or common liturgy. It is also suggested, implicitly by some and explicitly by others, that the church cannot manifest this unity apart from such a common theological expression. The danger here is equating unity with uniformity.

Missional theology maintains a conception of unity that affirms the value of multiplicity and also connects it directly with the mission of God as a necessary component of living God’s love in the world. From this perspective, we should not expect agreement and commonality on matters of theology and biblical interpretation.

Andrew Walls and five case studies concerning historic Christian faith: In exploring the multiplicity of Christian expression, Walls asks what conclusions we might draw from the observations concerning the diverse communities, beliefs, and practices that constitute historic Christianity. “It is not simply that these five groups of humans, all claiming to be Christians, appear to be concerned about different things; the concerns of one group appear suspect or even repellent to another.”

Walls answers in the affirmative and mentions two aspects that have shaped the common Christian tradition, a historical connection rooted in the proclamation of the Gospel and an essential continuity. “There is, in all the wild profusion of the varying statements of these differing groups, one theme which is as unvarying as the language which expresses it is various; that the person of Jesus called the Christ has ultimate significance.”

Walls suggests that the history of Christianity has always been a struggle between two opposing tendencies that have been part of the missionary expansion of the church and its witness and that find their basis in the very substance of the gospel itself. He refers to these as the “indigenizing” principle and the “pilgrim” principle.

## **Missional Christology**

### **The Presence of Christ, the Work of the Spirit, and the Way of Love**

“The circle of the Christian tradition has an unusually wide circumference without ceasing to have a single, unifying center. It is Christ’s living presence that unites a diverse tradition, yet that single presence is experienced in richly different ways. Christ’s presence is experienced sacramentally by the liturgical traditions, spiritually by the charismatic traditions, as morally inspiring by the liberal traditions, as ground of social experiment by the pietistic traditions, as doctrinal teacher by the scholastic traditions, as sanctifying power of persons and society by the Greek Orthodox tradition, as grace perfecting nature by the Roman Catholic tradition, and as word of Scripture by the evangelical tradition. All of these traditions and the periods of their hegemony have experienced the living and risen Christ in spectacularly varied ways. But nothing else than the living Christ forms the center of this wide circumference.”—Tom Oden

Christian Solidarity: The living presence of Christ and shared participation in his mission. “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”