

Tennent, Timothy. *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel, 2010. Kindle E-book.

Timothy Tennent's *Invitation to World Missions* offers a "Trinitarian missiology" that aims to "bridge the gap between a practical-oriented textbook" and more theoretical theologies of mission (Kindle, Loc 36–37). Tennent draws upon his own personal experience as a missionary to India and as an academic, formerly teaching at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and now serving as President of Asbury Seminary. He completed his Ph.D studies under Andrew Walls at the University of Edinburgh. Previously, he has written other works, including *Theology in the Context of World Christianity* (Zondervan, 2007) and *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable* (Baker, 2002). This book divides into four parts. The first introduces the theoretical framework for his missiology. Part Two develops the idea of God the Father as the "source and goal" of missions. Part Three elucidates some implications that Christology has on missiology. Part Four explores the idea of the Holy Spirit as God's "empowering presence" for the church in the world.

Tennent helpfully opens the book by surveying the context of present missiological discussions. Cultural pluralism and the shift of Christianity to the Majority World demand a change in the way theological students critique culture and relate the gospel to problems in the world (Ch. 1, loc 162–66). In addition, postmodernism's deconstruction of a generally accepted grand narrative undermines a basic principle that enabled Christendom to survive for hundreds of years. Tennent accurately reviews a number of problematic responses to this new context (loc 176–245). In short, if Christianity claims to speak a universal, global truth, then Tennent believes that Christians must assert a more robust missiology, rooted in the entire canon and relevant to

the countless circumstances people face everyday. Therefore, his introduction rightly orients the topic of missions within a teleological (cf. 2137) and contextually sensitive framework.

Tennent's theology of missions is grounded in God's design and intention for creation ultimately resulting in *missio dei*, God's own mission in the world expressed in the sending of the Son and the Spirit. In this way, Tennent correctly roots missions within the sphere of Theology, not simply ecclesiology or anthropology. A fruit of this approach is that missions encompasses more than individual salvation (568–90). Consequently, by reexamining God's mission through the church, Tennent improves upon impoverished, "privatized" views of the gospel that separate soteriology, ecclesiology, and pneumatology (584–85). He is able to succinctly diagnose a basic problem with much evangelical thinking, "We see ourselves as commissioned to *tell* the story, but we don't see ourselves as intrinsically *part* of the story" (590). He concludes that the divine mission "is made public and concrete on the plain of human history" (762). This creational, historical perspective directs Tennent's missiological/theological method.

*Invitation to World Missions* shows how the Trinity legitimately informs mission thinking. Christianity affirms the one true God reveals himself through the incarnation of Christ and the Spirit "empowers the church for witness," to be foretaste of God's new creation (957). Therefore, Tennent's proposal redraws the line between theology and missiology and reshapes contours of inter-religious dialogue (cf. 2363ff). Since God the Father is the "source" and "sender" of missions, missiologists cannot be content with a few select passages (e.g. Matt 28:18–20; Acts 1:8). The Old Testament elucidates God's purpose for Israel, "that they would be a blessing to the nations" (1251; cf. Ps 67:1–2). However, it is also at this point that book has weakness. Tennent scantily draws upon the Old Testament and specifically the people of Israel as

a foundation for missiological *practice*. His commentary in Chapters 4 and 5 seem to run parallel, lacking synthesis. This is in contrast of other works, like Goheen's *A Light to the Nations*.

Tennent is especially sensitive to culture. Chapter 6 is one the best chapters in the book; he there lays out a theology of culture. He reminds the reader, “Christians affirm that God has revealed Himself within the context of human culture” thus “validat[ing] the sanctity of human culture” (1870–71, 1955–56). In this sense, Tennent argues, “The New Creation should be understood as a final culture” such that “as Christians, our *primary cultural identity is in the New Creation*” (2053–58). As such, Tennent guards the church from withdrawing from the world while equipping her to in essence embody a distinct culture (2088). Salvation can be understood in terms of new creation; the cultural mandate becomes “part and parcel to our evangelistic mandate” (2075).

The book stresses the importance of appreciating history since is the essential medium of true Christianity and a resource for developing practical missiology. Tennent believes that any Christian apologetic and dialogue with other religions must not compromises the historical nature of the Christian faith, including “a historical *telos*, an eschatological goal, to which all of history is moving” (2281). Christian truth claims to be normative. Doctrines like the incarnation provide the model by which the Church carries out her mission in the world of time and space. Therefore, Tennent’s review of mission history draws lessons for wise missiological practice. For instance, he especially highlights the significance of William Carey in spurring the creation of mission societies. Practical structures had to be established to put theology into practice (2875–3004; 5001–5162).

A number of remarks demonstrate Tennent's effort to overcome conventional dichotomies within missiological discourse. Following Walls, he suggests "translation" may be a more apt way of conceiving of what has been called "contextualization" since it *necessarily* guards against a one sided emphasis on either Scripture/theology or context (3955–70). Furthermore, he distinguished between missions and missiology, the former focusing on practice, the latter reflecting on practice (5658–5706). Furthermore, Tennent breaks from a century's emphasis on the "Three-Self" principles (promoted by Venn and Anderson). He suggests this formulation makes independence the goal of the church and thus missions. Instead, Tennent highlights the value of *interdependence* (4192–97).

On the whole, *Invitation to World Missions* offers an excellent example of how missiology should be shaped by theology. As a result, Tennent demands the reader humbly reexamine past models of missions. For example, he responds to the standard affirmed by many that seminaries in other countries be financially independent of mission agencies. Yet, he counters, "If western seminaries are not self-supporting, then why should we expect seminaries or Bible colleges in economically developing countries to be self-supporting?" (4336). When speaking of the influence of Pentecostals on the global church, he intentionally refrains from criticism about certain excesses with Pentecostalism, despite the fact Tennent himself is Methodist. His explains, "I have neglected the 'mote' in the Pentecostal eye . . . because I am so painfully aware of the 'beam' in my own eye" (4883).

Despite his best efforts, the book does not succeed in mending the conceptual fence between evangelism and social action (4374–4436). He affirms the importance of both claiming, "Once evangelism and social action are conceptualized as two separate spheres, it is inevitable that evangelism is given priority over social action . . ." (4438). Yet, he goes too far in

seemingly collapsing social action *into* evangelism, including the former into “*what* evangelism entails” (4415). Admittedly, “entails” is ambiguous. Perhaps, one might unite the two simply as two expressions of gospel affirmation. That is, evangelism is the *verbal* proclamation of the gospel, whereas social action is the *practical* expression of the gospel. In the same way that words and tone cannot be separated in speaking, so also proclamation and practice.

As a “Trinitarian Missiology,” Tennent rightly tries to correct the ongoing neglect of Protestants (excluding Pentecostal movements) to the work of the Holy Spirit (Part Four). The brevity of this section testifies to the difficulty of the task. (The section on the Spirit has three chapters; six chapters on Christ, four on the Father). However, he does make the typically underemphasized connection between the Spirit, New Creation, and suffering. The Spirit dwells among God’s people, yet also sends them into the world. Similarly, Tennent argues that missions requires both the church (“modalities”) and mission societies (“sodalities”) (4915–5200). Accordingly, Christians should not pit one against the other. Just as the Spirit’s being precedes His doing, so also the church grounds the temporary/contextual function of sodalities. Tennent’s chapter on suffering does not come across *distinctly* rooted in pneumatology, however, the point to be recognized in the discussion is that God is not absent in persecution and hardship. Rather, the Spirit may very well be acting in surprising ways in the midst of his suffering people. Ironically, “Pentecostalism has been far slower in recognizing God’s presence and participation in and through our *suffering*” (his emphasis; 5453).

*Invitation to World Missions* provides a helpful framework for discussing missiological issues. By grounding missiology on the *missio dei*, Tennent ensures that we never leave theological reflection, since missions ceases to be seen as an initiative of the church and better as the church’s faithful following of Christ into the world. In addition, the book rightly shows the

critical importance of ecclesiology, which is not to be sidelined by soteriology. Missionaries do not spawn movements of “private” spirituality but rather “public assemblies” (3958; 4927–38) among every people group in the world. Therefore, missions must be a collaborative work drawing together Christians from every continent, especially those outside the “West.” Tennent’s tone is conciliatory, not inflammatory, in that he does not villainize the “west” versus the “rest.” Instead, the real issue is whether God’s people are “extending the claims and realities of the New Creation into the present order” (5617). Here one sees another feature of Tennent’s holistic approach. He does not limit the connection between missions and eschatology to Matt 24:14 or discussions about a future Tribulation. The type of world God seeks to create was foreshadowed in the Old Testament, from the “cultural mandate” of Gen 1:26–28 to the various laws given to Israel (4441–79). A biblical missiology will draw from the entire Bible. Historically, Tennent suggests, Christian missiology has been a bit parochial; “However, today, missions is *from* everywhere *to* everywhere” (5634–35).

In what ways might the book be expanded and utilized? As a follow up to this work of missiology, it would be helpful for Tennent or others to develop a similar treatment on missions practice. Such a text would draw from around the world, seeking to find ways that the global church is exemplifying the missiology proposed in Tennent’s foundational work. In addition, later editions could better relate social sciences and theology within missiology. Finally, readers would benefit from Tennent offering illustrations of what his “translation” model of contextualization looks like in practice or how it differs from other proposals.