

Theology of Mission and Missional Theologizing: A Paradigm from Paul
Dean Flemming

Response

by

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Dean's essay is vital, considering that one of characteristics of our church is missional. I am impressed by the way he has shown so clearly from the Pauline letters the marriage between mission and theology. As an African in the 21st century church this is a very important concept.

Through the ages Africans were led to believe that their lifestyle and culture were inferior and even sinful in comparison with that of the Western world. Salvation and Christianity came in a neat little package with Western values and a Western way of life. Africans had to change their way of dressing, their names, and even their way of celebrating. Our forefathers, who were not very well educated thought that this was the way things were supposed to be.

However, in the twenty-first century a new generations of African Christians has arisen. These Africans are educated; and they are making an effort to get back to their roots. In other words, they are begging to value their African heritage; and they realize that it is possible to have a meaningful relationship with Christ and live a life of holiness, without losing their identity. This does not mean that they are reverting back to syncretism; but they are beginning to contextualise the message to their life-situations.

Africa is such a rich continent, full of diversity, many languages, tribes, and, of course, cultures. It would be wrong for a ministry of the Word to try to stick to a strict set of rules when it comes to theologizing, when there is so many different kinds of people at so many different places in their lives. This is why flexibility is of such great importance. As the Apostle Paul himself said, "I become all things to all men in order to win some"

The challenge in the whole process is, of course, to contextualise the message, but not compromise it. This has been the downfall in many African independent churches. In their efforts to contextualise, they have become syncretistic. However, we can learn something from them. Just the fact that they are winning so many Africans over to their beliefs is proof enough that Africans through the ages have been looking for the opportunity to worship God in Spirit and in truth **as Africans**. When they are given this opportunity, God is no longer the white man's God; He becomes a personal God who draws near to the African.

Just as in Paul's day, African theologians are faced with the great task of challenging aspects in their socio-cultural world that are contrary to God's word. Concepts like ancestral worship, polygamy, and witchcraft are just a few of the issues that need to be tackled. However, this challenges will not be effective if the African gets the idea that his whole way of life is under attack. This can lead to one of two outcomes: Either Africans will totally

reject the message; or, they will accept it, but continue with their pagan practices behind the backs of their pastors or missionaries.

In a conclusion, I would like to praise the western missionaries and theologians for the great investment they have made in Africa. Today, we have the African Nazarene Theologians because these men and women of God were willing to give of their best for the service of the King. It was only natural for them to write and teach from their own worldview. However, I believe that this is the time to challenge African scholars to get up and begin to write theology and missiology that are contextualized to their situation.