

## INTRODUCTION TO MISSIOLOGY

In general, the word *mission* (singular) is used differently than the word *missions* (plural). The term in singular indicates first and foremost the *Missio Dei*. Literally *Missio Dei* means *the sending of God*. Of course no one can send God but He Himself. It is the self-revelation of God as the One who loves the world, His involvement in and with the world.

The Church has the privilege to participate at His mission. The term in plural indicates *missiones ecclesiae*, i.e. particular forms, referring to places or needs to participate at the *Missio Dei*.

Although the words *mission* and *evangelisation* often are used indistinctly, they have a different meaning. *Evangelisation* indicates the action that we realize as a result of the *mission*. The noun derives from the Greek verb *εὐαγγελίζειν*, which means *proclaim the good news*. It is used as a noun since the 19th century and nowadays it is a common word in magisterial documents and in theology in general.

Another word with Greek origins that fits well into this context is *apostle*. *ἀπόστολος* means literally *one who is sent away*. Like every missionary, the apostles had a mandate. They were sent away to convey the message of the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and Jesus himself sent them away.

*Missiology* can easily be described as the intentional and ongoing theological study or reflection of God's mission and the church's missionary activity, which includes the history, the character and purpose of missionary work. It is a word formed by already known elements: *mission* + *logy*. The suffix *logy* (Greek *λογία*, from *λέγω* speak, tell, etc.) denotes the study of something, or the branch of knowledge of a discipline.

### ● MISSIOLOGY AS A MULTIDISCIPLINARY SCIENCE

Missiology is a multidisciplinary science. What does that mean? Theology is a specific science. It is an area of study where a student can focus his or her attention, becoming proficient in that science. So is History, Anthropology, Psychology and Philosophy. Each of them is an area of

academic concentration.

Missiology is also a specialized field of study. But it is a combination of several fields of study, or disciplines. The student of missiology must be prepared to spend the time and exert the energy necessary to become proficient in more than one area of study.

There are different schemes and figures that try to describe the multidisciplinary character of missiology. Here only two of them:

Figure 1

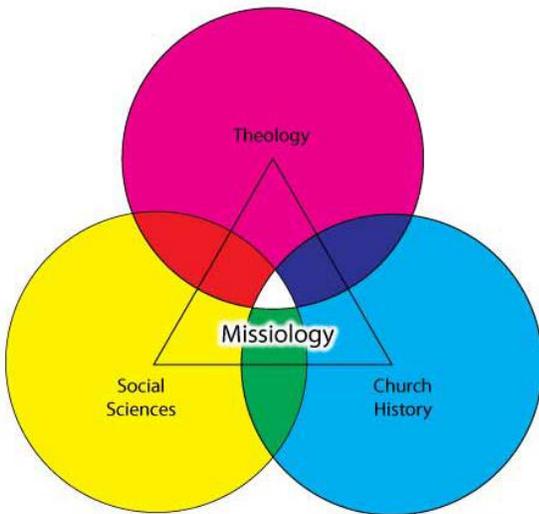


Figure 2



These two figures do not have the intention to express that Missiology is at the center of all these studies, but they intend to show that Missiology is influenced - somehow dependent - by other disciplines. We will find elements of these and other disciplines in Missiology. The figure 2, designed by Edward C. Pentecost, shows clearly the special position of Theology in Missiology. All disciplines that are present in Missiology are conditioned by Theology, by the concept of God.

## THE BEGINNINGS OF MISSIOLOGY

Missiology is a relative newcomer to the circle of theological disciplines. The first to mention the

concept was Johann Traugott Leberecht Danz (1769-1851), a Lutheran church historian and theologian from Germany. It is true that since the time of the great Franciscan scholar, poet, philosopher and missionary Ramon Lull (1236-135) at least, mission had been subject to scientific analysis in various forms. Lull initiated a missionary formation in Arabic language in Palma de Mallorca (Balearic Island of Spain) in 1276 and in Paris (France) in 1285.

Mission had been subject to scientific analysis in various forms, and there were Protestant mission theorists as far back as the Dutch colonial mission in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. As early as 1800 Johann Friedrich Flatt (1759-1821), a Protestant theologian and philosopher from Germany gave a course of lectures on mission in Tübingen (Germany), but this experiment remained unnoticed and for some time was not followed up.

Then, in 1836, the Presbyterian Princeton Theological Seminary (USA) inaugurated a chair of *Pastoral Theology and Missionary Instruction* and appointed Charles Breckenridge as professor but after he withdrew in 1839 it was dropped again. Beckenridge was the first person to be appointed specifically to teach missionary instruction, although he was, at the same time, professor of pastoral theology.

Alexander Duff (1806-1878), who had been a missionary of the Church of Scotland in India for three decades, was appointed to the newly-created chair of *Evangelistic Theology* at New College in Edinburgh (Scotland) and thus became the first professor of missions in Christianity. Duff's very appointment was controversial – not that his qualifications were questioned but it was doubtful whether a competent successor could later be found for such an *abnormal* subject. As a matter of fact Duff's professorship, having been demoted to a lecturership, was totally abolished in 1909.

It was due to indefatigable efforts of the Protestant theologian Gustav Warneck (1834-1910) – who taught at the University of Halle (Germany) – that missiology was eventually established as a discipline in its own right, not just as a guest but as having the right of domicile in theology, as Warneck himself put it.

Warneck's monumental contribution elicited responses not only in Protestant but also in Catholic

circles. The founding of the first chair of missiology at a Catholic institution – in 1910, at the University of Münster (Germany) – was undoubtedly influenced by developments in Protestantism and, more specifically, by Warneck's contribution.

The first incumbent of the chair, Josef Schmidlin, freely acknowledged his indebtedness to Warneck, while at the same time always emphasizing the differences between him and Warneck. The examples of Warneck and Schmidlin were soon followed elsewhere, particularly because of the tremendous impact the 1910 *World Missionary Conference* of Edinburgh had. In the course of time, some chairs of missiology were converted into chairs for world Christianity, comparative theology, ecumenical theology, and the like; however, many new chairs –specifically for missiology – have been established, not only in the West but worldwide, particularly in Africa and Asia, so there are more missiology chairs and departments today than there have ever been.