

Rethinking Vocation and Mission in World Christianity: From Territory to Community

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A theology of mission which is grounded in the realities of World Christianity should forego all conceptions of vocation which are based upon territorial views of mission. When an aspiring missionary perceived to have been called to a certain geographic region or to a specific people group, it signifies a territorial and expansive approach to mission. I explore the connection between a territorial view of mission and deep-seated habits of ontological expansiveness. Venturing into the area of critical race theory, I argue that a territorial view on mission is related to the habits of white privilege. I define ontological expansiveness, one of the manifestations of white privilege, as the pervasive idea of entitlement to move in and out of certain locations as if one possesses the unquestioned right to both enter and leave each and every location.

Having deconstructed expansive and territorial theologies of vocation, I move to the exploration of four markers of adequacy for a reconfigured theology of vocation. I propose the following four dimensions: In the first place, stressing the role of community safeguards one against individual and solipsist ideas of vocation. Moreover, by assigning a hermeneutic role to the community, it enables a narrative approach to vocation in which the individual is embedded in the story of the community. Attention to narrative means a sustained emphasis on “missionary literacy”, a term I have coined to describe the capacity to recognize the story of mission and to find one’s place within this story. The spiritual dimension points, within a Trinitarian framework, to the role of the Spirit in vocational discernment and the human attunement to what to affirm and what to deny with respect to what affirms life and what denies life. Finally, presence with / being “the” poor signifies the epistemological priority of those at the margins of society in their ability to discern aspects of reality that are hidden from those in power.

Finally, I consider the proposal of Robert Schreiter, who argues for a renewed understanding of the *Missio ad Gentes* whereby he argues for *Missio ad Vulnera*, i.e. mission to the wounds. This implies attending to the fractures, injuries and wounds of humanity. The strength of this proposal is that it foregoes a territorial way of framing vocation but instead breaks the old dichotomy between homeland and mission field by pointing to the pervasive wounds of humanity that run across old dichotomies.