

# Vital Ministry Issues: Examining Concerns

## CHAPTER 1

### Missions in Biblical Perspective

George W. Peters

**T**he last command of Christ is not the deep and final ground of the Church's missionary duty," reasoned Robert E. Speer in his Duff Lectures of 1910.<sup>1</sup> He continued by saying:

That duty is authoritatively stated in the words of the great commission, and it is of infinite consequence to have had it so stated by our Lord Himself. But if these particular words had never been spoken by Him, or if, having been spoken, they had not been preserved, the missionary duty of the Church would not be in the least affected. . . . The supreme argument for foreign missions is not any word of Christ's,—it is Christ Himself, and what He reveals and signifies. . . . It is in the very being and character of God that the deepest ground of the missionary enterprise is to be found. We cannot think of God except in terms which necessitate the missionary idea.<sup>2</sup>

Lesslie Newbigin speaks to the same point:

The purpose of the chapters which follow is to show that there are resources for the meeting of these perplexities within the Christian understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to invite the missionary movement to bind to itself afresh the strong Name of the Trinity. We have stated that the present situation of the missionary movement has brought us to the point where the question of the uniqueness and finality of Christ is presented with a new sharpness. We have now to say that this question will not be rightly answered, nor will the question of the relation between what God is doing in the mission of the Church and what he is doing in the secular events of history be rightly answered, except within the framework of a fully and explicitly trinitarian doctrine of God.<sup>3</sup>

The renewal of this emphasis prompted Georg F. Vicedom to entitle his work on the theology of missions as "*Missio Dei*" or "The Mission of God," which is a "radically theological statement of the source, motive and end of missions."<sup>4</sup> It is an affirmation of the Willingen Conference statement that "the missionary movement . . . has its source in the Triune God Himself."<sup>5</sup> Somewhat later Davison asserted, "Mission begins in God. . . . Mission is a divine activity springing directly from God's own nature."<sup>6</sup>

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