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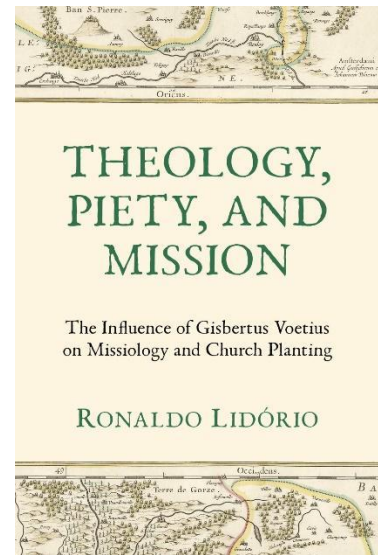
‘Theology, Piety, and Mission: The Influence of Gisbertus Voetius on Missiology and Church Planting’ by Ronaldo Lidorio

Review by Charles R. Biggs (RHM, Presbytery of the Mid Atlantic)

Loved in Christ and Called and Sent to Love in Christ. Missionary forefather and faithful church planter Gisbertus Voetius argued that the crux of missions is not the lost, but God and His glory. From God’s eternal decree in saving a people, to God’s promises in the future, and through God’s missionary mandate in the present, God is glorified in His electing love (pg. 31, cf. Eph. 1:3-14). Voetius challenges all church planters to consider that the greatest missionary challenge is not church planting, but love (pg. 54). True love is learned and expressed in our seeking to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. As recipients of His love in Christ, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit as those “called and sent” to collaborate with our Triune God in His loving mission of seeking and saving the lost.

Gisbertus Voetius. Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676) has sometimes been called the “John Owen” of the Dutch Further Reformation. His commitment to godliness, scholarship, his love for the church, and his voluminous writings testify to this. Many lovers of the history of the Reformation may remember that Voetius was an influential participant of the Synod of Dort (1618-19). His whole life was given to earnestly confessing sound doctrine that would lead to deeply affectionate and humble hearts for God and others. Voetius lived out the sweet substance we discover and confess in the Canons of Dort, II.5, that says: *“Moreover the promise of the gospel is, that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified, shall not perish, but have everlasting life. Which promise ought to be announced and proposed, promiscuously and indiscriminately, to all nations and men to whom God, in His good pleasure, hath sent the gospel, with the command to repent and believe.”*

The Triune God is on Mission for His Glory. As a follower of John Calvin, Voetius emphasized the biblical teaching of the sovereignty of God in redemption. In his pursuit of wedding theological truth to piety, or a godly life, he also desired for one’s missiology to be thoroughly God centered and Trinitarian. Lidorio wrote, *“If we see mission as theocentric and Trinitarian, we understand that the mission of the church is...submissive to God’s mission. The church is called by God to collaborate with His mission according to His plan”* (pg. 61). The church’s call by our Triune God is to be called to Himself by the Spirit for a godly life and then sent on mission to make known the goodness and grace of God found in Christ. He summarized this teaching of missions and piety with the Latin phrase *vocatio et missio*, or “called and sent.” Calling and sending are “simultaneous acts” of the Triune God (pg. 26, cf. John 17:17-18, 20:21-23). To confidently and faithfully fulfill our calling as His church is to live in light of God’s sovereign decree, which reveals His purpose and plan to save His people and to remind them of their aim to glorify God and enjoy Him forever knowing that the “Lord knows those who are His” (2 Tim. 2:19). His three-part goal in missions was conversion, church-planting, and glorification (pg. 48). The church was sent into the world by the Spirit with the goal of conversion. This gathering of the converted would lead to worship and fellowship in local bodies of churches. What a thrill and privilege it is to church plant and evangelize with



the confidence that our God is with us, and that He will establish places where He can be worshiped and glorified in Christ!

Four Principles of a Theology of Missions. Voetius' theology of missions was born out of four basic principles: (1) Practical Theology/Piety: All theology should be practiced, leading to a godly life. True theology is transformative and relational. The truth transforms us and causes us to relationally know the Father through the Son in the Spirit more fully (cf. Eph. 3:17-19; John 17:3). This leads to zeal and compassion for the lost. (2) The Decrees of God: The church can be confident in the preaching and teaching of the gospel in missions because God decrees that all sinners may be saved through Jesus Christ in the power of His Spirit. The biblical teaching of predestination should bring confidence to preachers, church planters and evangelists. (3) Ecclesiology: The church is "called and sent". This is what characterizes her benefits and blessings of salvation. (4) Soli Deo Gloria: All missions are done for the glory of God alone. He is glorified when sinners are saved and churches are planted.

The most useful and practical part of the book is the last chapter on *'Theological Principles for Church Planting'*. In fact, though the whole book is outstanding, this has already been a chapter that I have re-read and reflected upon the most. Lidorio lists these 10 principles for evangelism:

1. Glorify God: We exist for God's glory and this is where we find fulfillment and full joy; 2. Depend on God: We are creatures, and we seek to live more dependent upon the strength and grace of our God in Christ; 3. Pray: The power and passion in church planting and evangelism comes from our prayers to God; God hears our prayers; 4. Serve God: We collaborate in mission with the Triune God as His servants; 5. Proclaim Christ: Christ in His Person and Work is central to our powerful proclamation and witness to the Gospel; 6. Invest in People: Our Triune God is seeking a people, sheep of His pasture to love and care for; 7. Cultivate a Compassionate Heart:

The Holy Spirit makes us compassionate like Jesus Christ our Lord; 8. Gather People for Worship Services: The heart of missions is the Triune God gathering worshipers in Spirit and truth; 9. Hold a Clear Ecclesiology (a congregation's doctrine, public worship, prayer, governance, etc.); 10. Guard Your Heart: Let our hearts continue to be transformed and humbled and confident in and through the same Gospel we are called to make known.

Historically, this book by Lidorio is useful in reminding us how faithful John Calvin and his followers like Voetius were in missions and church planting and for us to seek to be true and faithful heirs of them. Theologically, this book can remind us of the importance of every truth we learn about God is for the purpose of knowing God better and becoming more like Christ in holiness and humble obedience. Confessionally, this book guides us in discovering great wisdom for church planting and evangelism in our confessions and catechisms of the Reformation.

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"TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, UNLESS A GRAIN OF WHEAT FALLS INTO THE EARTH AND DIES, IT REMAINS ALONE; BUT IF IT DIES, IT BEARS MUCH FRUIT...AND I, WHEN I AM LIFTED UP FROM THE EARTH, WILL DRAW ALL PEOPLE TO MYSELF." - JOHN 12:24, 32