BOOKS I HAVE READ: THE CHURCH ON MISSION

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It is one thing to believe that all people should be reached with the gospel. It is quite another thing to truly embrace a diversity in one's own local church: from a review of a fascinating book.
Category: Observations

Whether you are a church planter, a cross-cultural missionary or a seminary student, if you are interested in studying and understanding mission then Church on MissionÂ by Craig Ott should be on your reading list. Subtitled A Biblical Cision for Transformation among All People, this book gives a short, sharp biblical overview of what mission is all about and is well worth a careful read.

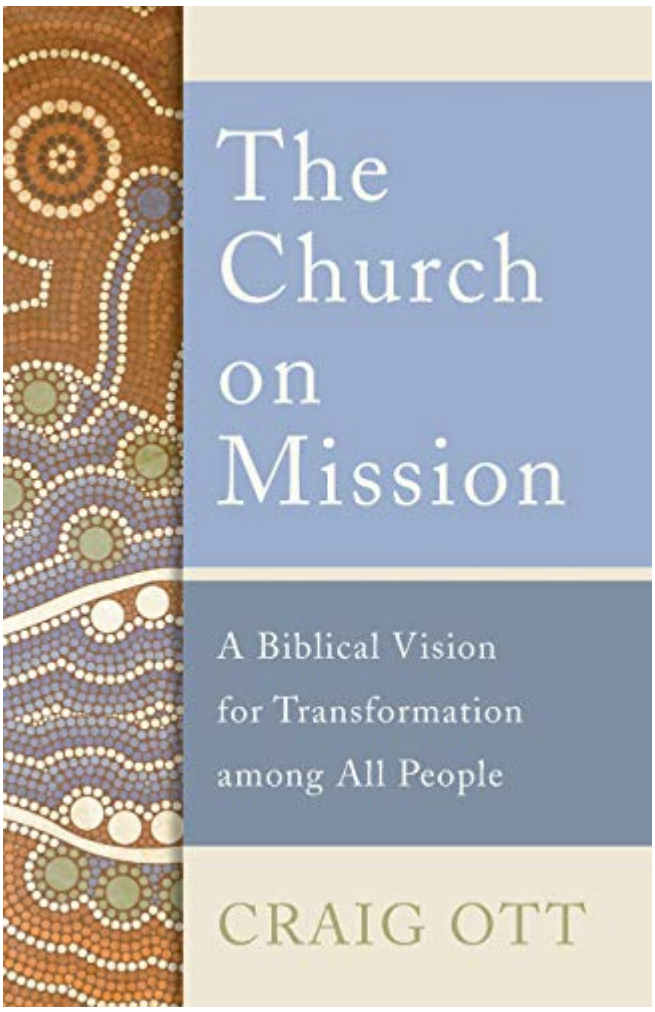
The book is a small format paperback of 131 pages. Each of the six chapters has two or three pages of notes and references, and there is an index and a list of biblical passages cited at the end. The book originated as a series of lectures and (as is often the case) the transfer to written format isn't always smooth and the book can be quite hard work at times. This is an excellent book, but it isn't a page-turner.

The book consists of six chapters which started life as lectures to the staff of an American denominational mission agency in Europe. The lectures unpack the denomination's mission statement which is

> *... to glorify God by multiplying transformational churches among all peoples.*

Which isn't a bad mission statement in my view.

Chapter 1: Transformation to God's Glory



This chapter points out that "the church is not at liberty to define its mission for itself". Mission statements can be developed in different ways, but ultimately, the church's mission is defined by Scripture. To this end, Ott unpacks biblical teaching on "transformation" and then helpfully shows that God's glory is both the source and the endpoint of the church's transformation.

Chapter 2: Transformational Communities

The opening few sentences of this chapter describe where it goes: " If transformation is the dynamic of our mission, and God's glory is both the source and goal of our mission, then the church in the power of the Spirit is God's primary instrument of mission in this age. The church is the only institution on earth entrusted with the message of transformation - the gospel - and the only community that is a living demonstration of that transformation."

Chapter Three: Transformation and the Word of God

This chapter sets out the centrality of careful, contextual and theological reading and teaching of Scripture to the work of mission.

Chapter Four: Transformational Influence

Focussing particularly on Jesus' teaching, this chapter unpacks the role of the church as salt and light in the wider world. While never losing sight of the importance of pointing people to Christ, this chapter is a helpful corrective to those who see mission as nothing more than preaching or evangelism. It's worth the price of the book on its own.

Chapter Five: Transformation for All People

This is the bit that touches on my interests and I'll put a few quotes from this chapter at the end of this short review. Ott, very helpfully, points out that the church is to reach out to all nations, but must also be a place where all nations are welcome. Our outward thrust in mission and evangelism must be matched by a welcome for believers from all languages and nations.

Chapter Six: Transformation Through Multiplication

The final chapter looks at the issue of multiplication and tackles the thorny question of numerical versus spiritual growth.

This is just a brief outline of a very good book. Who should read it? Well, in a sense, I'd say that any church leader or missionary should read it, but being realistic, I'd say that anyone who is actively involved in Church planting or supporting a church plant, must read it. It could be that they have thought through all of the issues in this book (though, I doubt it), but there are very few places where you will find this depth of biblical teaching on the subject all in one place.

As promised, a few quotes from chapter 5:

> *First, we are to reach all people with the gospel. Every person on planet Earth should have the opportunity to become a follower of Christ and a member of a local community of believers. This will mean sending gospel messengers to people everywhere, crossing cultural, religious, linguistic and geographic boundaries, evangelizing, baptizing, discipling and planting transformational churches among them.*
>
> *Second, every local church should welcome and embrace all people. Just as God's grace is equally extended to all people regardless of race, ethnicity, economic status, educational level, or social standing, so each local expression of the body should reflect something of that diversity.*

> *It is one thing to believe that all people should be reached with the gospel. It is quite another thing to truly embrace a diversity in one's own local church.*

> *Disunity undermines the credibility of the church and discredits our witness. If we are concerned about evangelism, we must be concerned about unity. Unity in the body of Christ is*

> *not a nicety or a bonus for otherwise contentious people; it is of crucial importance. Neither is it a gloss over deep-seated animosities or tensions. Rather, the unity in view is nothing less than the unity of Jesus and his Heavenly Father, the unity of the Godhead. This unity goes beyond the mere absence of conflict; it entails acceptance, openness, and embrace.*