BOOKS I HAVE READ: THE SYMPHONY OF MISSION

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Category: Observations

Mike Goheen has long been one of my favourite authors on the subject of mission (I've added links to a selection of his books below) and Symphony of MissionÂ certainly doesn't disappoint. This is an absolutely excellent book that deserves to be very widely read indeed.

The book is a medium format paperback of just under 200 pages. While I wouldn't describe the style as popular, it is certainly accessible and you don't have to be a specialist to read it. Personal stories and anecdotes break up the text and illustrate the points that the authors are making. I would raise a slightÂ *caveat* for British readers (especially those of a conservative-evangelical background), some of the ways in which the authors talk about engaging with society sound a bit strange to British ears. Push on through that, get to grips with the context and don't worry about the trendy missional language. Oh, the paperback will cost you fifteen quid and the Kindle version slightly less. It's worth every penny.

This book addresses the vexed question of how we should engage post-Christian, post-modern, post-everything society with the gospel. It doesn't offer a simple answer, much less a silver bullet which will solve all of your problems, what it does is provide a comprehensive framework to guide our engagement, along with some concrete advice about ways in which we can discover our vocation. The subtitle, "Playing your part in God's work in the world" is key.

The book divides roughly into three sections, each of which has three chapters.

The first section looks at what mission is. Chapter one retells the Bible story as the basis of mission, there is nothing particularly new or startling here, but it is, perhaps, the best short summary of the overarching narrative of Scripture that I have come across. The next two chapters look at the practicalities of mission and consider issues such as an incarnational approach and the need to be intentional about our engagement.

To me, the heart of the book lies in the mid-section which considers what the authors term as the three movements of mission (the metaphor of a symphony runs through the whole book);
Â stewardship, service and the spoken word. For my money, the chapter on stewardship gives the best overview of the place of work in the life of the Christian and its importance for mission that I have ever read. This section demonstrates very clearly that mission is not just for the specialist, but that effective witness does take a bit of thought, creativity and application.

The final section is essentially the application bit. It doesn't tell you what you should do, indeed it encourages us to avoid doing the next fashionable thing. What it does do is provide a framework to help individuals and groups consider what it is that God is calling them to be involved in.

So who should read this book? The easy answer is lots of people should read it. It should be of particular interest to individuals and churches who are wrestling with reaching out to their communities with the gospel. That being said, I'm concerned that those who most need to read it - those who think that evangelism consists of inviting people to meetings and then preaching at them

- will be put off by the wholistic approach the book advocates.

As ever, a few quotes:

> *God didn't make a ready-made world. He created the raw material of all good culture and them commissioned humanity to be culture makers. From the soil of creation, humans were invited to make beautiful paintings, sturdy buildings, joyful playgrounds, efficient transportation, delicious recipes, and absorbing games. As they do this work with excellence, they display the majesty of the creator God whose image they bear.*

> *He was the God who multiplied fish for the masses - he was also the human with tilapia in his teeth.*

> *Before we can participateÂ inÂ God's mission, we must know that we are beneficiariesÂ of God's mission. We are not the rescuers; we are the rescued who merely bear witness to others who also need to be rescued.*

> *What could display the inherent goodness of work more clearly than the fact that GodÂ chooses to work and that it's the first thing God reveals about himself in Scripture? Figuratively speaking, when we first encounter the God of the Bible, we see him in work boots and overalls, not a Hawaiian shirt and flip-flops.*

> *While the gospel remains rooted in the events of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, our language, metaphors and methods should be contextualised to explain their significance to the specific audiences we encounter.*