BOOKS I HAVE READ: A HYBRID WORLD

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A quick look at an interesting book.
Category: Observations

Many missiologists like nothing more than dividing people up into clearly identifiable groups; Bible-less peoples, unreached people groups and so on. The problem, as A Hybrid World: Diaspora, Hybridity, and Missio Dei demonstrates, is that people tend not to stick in clearly defined boxes. They marry people from other groups, they move around the world and generally live in rather messy and confused societies.

It's always difficult to tell how long a book is when you read it on a Kindle. According to Amazon, this one has 258 pages in the print edition, but my suspicion is that this is a large format as it takes quite a while to read the whole thing. The book emerges from a consultation of church and mission leaders discussing hybridity and the mission of God. There are 17 chapters by different authors covering a wide range of topics. As with edited books, the quality of the different contributions varies; though other readers might find different things helpful. It will currently set you back about Â£9 on Amazon, though I suspect that I bought it at a time when it was on offer (I have a large backlog of mission books to read, so I can't remember when I got this one). The style is academic-light. There are reams of footnotes and references, but very few of the papers are hard work to read.

Essentially, the book can be summarised by saying that people's identities are complicated and this should effect our missiology. Migration, intermarriage and other phenomena mean that people don't neatly sit inside identifiable boxes, For example, it has been found that children who grow up in diaspora communities may have three different identities; their parent's home culture, the host culture that they grow up in and a global diaspora community which consists of people from all sorts of different backgrounds. Who should read this book? I reckon that it should be compulsory reading for anyone who writes and researches about people groups in mission, it would also be very helpful to those looking at urban mission across the globe.

The various papers develop this theme looking at Latinos in North America, Chinese communities in the Philippines, Germans in Canada and a wide range of other contexts. It's hard to capture a book like this in a short review, so I'll give some quotes that capture some of the threads that run through the book.

The reality of diaspora and hybrid communities:

> *all civilizations and peoples reflect some degree of hybridity and none can legitimately claim racial or cultural purity.*

> *Latinos vary in culture when it comes to their countries of origin. However, they are all labeled as â€œHispanicâ€ in the United States.*

> *Hybrids suffer from a perpetual cultural jetlag, a sense of disorientation of being in one place while feeling they are somewhere else, as they daily traverse between different worlds many times. Any untimely act or word can have disastrous long-term consequences from which it is nearly impossible to recover from.*

> *A family is not necessarily parents and children settled in one place. Moves uproot millions. This is our reality in the twenty-first century. So churches must adapt their teaching and services to bless mobile families as well as established ones.*

Diaspora and Hybridity in the Bible

The significance of a hybridity-mission reading of Matthewâ€™s genealogy goes beyond biblical studies and should impact how the church thinks about mission to the â€œotherâ€ in a pluralistic setting.

> *For Matthew, Jesus was a quintessential Jew as the son of Abraham, and royal heir as the son of David, but he is also of mixed race and Gentile heritage himself, which suggests that God had always intended Gentiles to be included in his plan and people.*

> *Moses was a fourth generation Hebrew on his fathersâ€™ side and third generation on his mothersâ€™ side, who was born and raised in Egypt and struggled between being a Hebrew and Egyptian.*

> *Likewise, the Apostle Paul was a diaspora Jew who grew up in Tarsus, probably a second or third generation Jew in the province of Cilicia in the southeastern region of Asia Minor… He was a Hellenized Jew well-versed in Greek literature and philosophies He was born a Roman citizen with distinct privilege and prestige in the Romanized world.*

Challenges of Hybridity and Diaspora to Current Missiology

> *Rather, it is past time to move beyond futile attempts to categorize the world and thus pretend to understand it.*

> *Missiology fell sway to the never-ending quest of the colonial, neocolonial, and now global order to define and identify race, ethnicity, general publics, resistant populations, Twitter audiences, Facebook followers, niche markets, E2s, windows, UPGs, and other â€œcertainties.â€*

> *Newer ideas in linguistics, such as â€œlanguage ideologyâ€ and â€œlanguage registers,â€ should force us to inquire of the people themselves about translations rather than deciding for others how they will hear the gospel.*

> *Even if the hybridity of races, cultures and languages is not a new phenomenon, its missiological focus is still in its infancy.*

> *When we consider activity at these fronts, what is disconcerting is that the church remains slow to adapt or respond there. The church has little influence at frontiers of change and innovation. At times, it remains unaware and ignorant. At other times, it remains resistant and reactionary. Otherwise, it remains silent and absent. Yet, it is a matter of missional imperative and pastoral responsibility that the church serves to, through, beyond, and with the peoples on the move at new hybridizing worlds and frontiers.*

> *The hybrid nature of the Chinese Filipinos enables us to realize that in reaching the Chinese in the Philippines, we cannot simply use one style or one method of evangelism for all of them.*

> *we cannot assume that the forms of Christian faithfulness which shaped Godliness in our*

> *previous home will effectively shape Godliness in our new home. A new context requires (re)new(ed) contextualization. This does not denigrate the impressive pedigree of first-generation traditions.*

Challenges to Western Theology and Ideas

> *We live in a world where many believe that Western theology is the theology while every other theology is a contextual theology whose very orthodoxy has to be measured against that of the West.*

> *Western theological leadership of a predominantly non-Western church is an incongruity.*

> *Any theology that is not talking to other theologies in the world will become irrelevant in the near future.*

â€œWesternâ€™â€ church culture and tradition needs critical reformation as much as majority-world culture does.

Just one short warning. One of the essays refers to "doing the *missio Dei*" and "fulfilling the *missio Dei*". Given that the *missio Dei* is by definition something that God does, not us (we participate in his work), I found this unfortunate.