BOOKS I HAVE READ: MOUNTAINS MOVE

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A short review of an excellent book which should interest any Christians who engage with Muslims
Category: Observations

Steve Bell is a well known author, speaker and thinker on mission, his particular domain is mission to the Islamic world. His latest book, Mountains Move: Achieving Social Cohesion in a Multicultural Society is the product of many years experience in the field. Any Christian whose daily life or ministry causes them to interact with Muslims should buy and read this book.

Mountains Move is a medium format paperback of just under 200 pages and the paperback will set you back around Â£12, with the electronic version something cheaper. There is a good selection of endnotes for those who want to dig into the subject in more detail, but the book itself is aimed at a general reader, rather than the academic world.

The premise of the book is that rapid changes are taking place in western society and divisions are increasingly playing out in public discourse. Bell's particular concern is the the place of Muslims in all of this.

> *I have had a problem for forty years!*
>
> *My problem is the conundrum of why people in all walks of life are more at odds with one another over the presence of Muslims/Islam in the West than any other minority.*
>
> *p. 1*

The book addresses this issue through an extended metaphor of different mountains which have to be traversed in order to arrive at social cohesion.

The mountains that Bell names are:

- Mount Imperial: *Colonialism and the impacts of its legacy on the thinking of Christians and Muslims.*
- Mount Hegemony: *Who is in control politically, financially, militarily and theologically?*
- Mount Ethnos: *Racism as part of human nature and the impacts on church, state and faith organisations.*
- Mount Correct: *Impacts of weaponised political correctness on society, church and other faith groups.*
- Mount Strident: *What sort of society are we becoming?*
- Mount Occlusion: *Faith that is unreformed or progressive and the phenomenon of defection.*

- Mount Mission: *When we are less help and more hinderance, and the battle over interactive styles.*

The final chapter is entitled Grace Pass and it speaks of "the principle of 'grace and truth' in public discourse".

For a book written from an Evangelical perspective, this book is somewhat unusual. It does not hide the fact that the author believes that salvation is only available through Jesus Christ. However, Steve Bell goes to great lengths to help the reader understand something of the realities of Muslim life and beliefs. He regularly debunks myths and generalisations that are not helpful. The fact that he comes from a minority background himself means that he is well positioned to explain something of the experience of Muslims in the UK.

At the same time as helping the reader to understand the Muslim point of view, Bell is also willing to analyse and criticise the way in which professing Christians have interacted with Muslims.

This is not a "how-to" book that advise you how to reach out to your Muslim neighbours. It goes deeper than that, it is the sort of book that you should read before reaching for the 'how-tos'.

While I think that this is an excellent book, it is not without its difficulties. I found the extended metaphor of mountains didn't always cohere as well as I would have liked and the flow from one chapter to another wasn't always smooth. I also have some reservations about to social commentator Jordan Peterson who is quoted with approval in a number of places. Any book which seeks to engage with contemporary culture runs the risk of the culture moving on. Because of this, the chapter on Political Correctness seemed slightly anachronistic in an age where "wokeness" is the more dominant concept (though that will vanish in a year or two).

However, these reservations do not distract from what is an excellent book. I'd strongly encourage anyone who's life, work or ministry brings them into contact with Muslims to read it. I'd also suggest that Muslims who interact with Evangelical Christians would profit from it.

If you want to know more about the book, you can listen to my interview with the author, here.