BOOKS I HAVE READ: DEMONOLOGY FOR THE GLOBAL CHURCH

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If you are ministering in a cross-cultural context, either overseas or in a multicultural congregation in the UK, then you should/must read this book.
Category: Observations

Many years ago, when we were living in Kouya country, the village chief died. Part of the funeral ritual involved some of the men village dancing round the village at night with a sacred mask. The accompanied the dance by whirling a palm branch around creating an eerie sound. It's hard to explain the experience, but you could feel the presence of evil (not all Kouya masked dances were like this one). You could sense malevolence in the air and it was not at all pleasant. It was a very clear demonstration of the works of the evil one and something that I will never forget. However, in terms of impacting my Christian life, the normal day to day temptations to selfishness and hypocrisy have been far more effective whiles of the devil than that one off encounter.

Our understanding of demons and how they act has to take all of these aspects into account. Scott MacDonald's Demonology for the Global Church: A Biblical Approach in a Multicultural Age does a great job of covering the breadth of human experience and the Bible's witness on this subject.

It is a medium format paperback of 150 pages, written in a semi-academic style. It won't stretch any regular reader and there are references and footnotes for those who want to follow things up. The paperback will set you back about Â£14, with the Kindle version less than half of this.

There are three things which I found particularly striking about this book. The first is that MacDonald refuses to be driven either by scepticism or sensationalism (approaches which dominate much of the literature on this subject) and builds his approach from Scripture. In doing so, he provides an excellent framework which is useful across cultural boundaries.

On a slightly theoretical note, I was struck by how little the Bible has to say about the origins or nature of demons. However, there is a great deal said about their activities and actions. We know them for what they do and say, rather than for a detailed understanding of who and what they are.

The third point is the way in which MacDonald demonstrates that demonology can and should impact the way in which we view other aspects of theology. He gives a good deal of space over to considering the doctrine of salvation. He points out that we are saved from a world which is blinded by Satan, that we are being saved through our ongoing sanctification, which involves a struggle with demonic powers and that ultimately, we will be saved when Christ comes to crush our adversary. In our context, we tend to focus on salvation as forgiveness for sin and we rarely mention victory over Satan as an aspect of salvation - something my Kouya friends put front and centre in their thinking. Now, this might appear as nothing more than a theological curiosity, but it reflects the way in which our rational Western approach limits our theological imagination and causes us to miss out on

important concepts.

So, who should read this book? I'm tempted to say that anyone involved in Christian leadership should do so, but I recognise the pressures on pastors and teachers and the size of their to-read book piles. However, if you are ministering in a cross-cultural context, either overseas or in a multicultural congregation in the UK, then you should/must read it. This book is valuable not just as a good introduction to an important topic, but it will also help you get a fully biblical breadth to your theology, unconstrained by your own cultural background.

I put some quotes from the book in an earlier post, so I won't give my usual series of quotes here.