POST-CHRISTENDOM

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Category: Reviews

I've just finished reading Post-Christendom by Stuart Murray. It's well worth a look if you are interested in the state of the Church in the UK. The publisher's blurb says

> *Drawing on insights from the early Christians, dissident movements and the world church, this book challenges conventional ways of thinking. For those who dare to imagine new ways of following Jesus on the margins, it invites a realistic and hopeful response to challenges and opportunities awaiting us in the twenty-first century.*

Publishers are paid to say nice things about books, but in this case they are right. Murray starts from the standpoint that Christendom, the strong overlap and co-identification of the Church with the political and social power of the state which occured when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire was not a good thing. His view is that over the years the Church has traded life and effectiveness for power and prestige. However, Christendom is in its death throes and the Church is losing much of the influence that it once held in Western Countries. Murray encourages us to grasp this new opportunity and to once again find the authentic, prophetic voice of the Gospel and to rediscover the true life of the Christian community, unencumbered by the trappings of state and tradition.

In some ways, this book comes to similar conclusions as The Shaping of Things to Come, which I reviewed for Facing the Challenge, but Murray takes a broader look at the issues and is less proscriptive in his solutions for the life of the Church. I very much appreciated that a lot of the argument in the book is presented in bullet points, making it easy to follow where he is going. Most chapters end with a series of discussion questions - I'd love to have some of those discussions if anyone is interested.

Murray gives less attention than I would have wished to the influence of Christendom thinking and attitudes on world mission - but you can't have everything, and I am distinctly biased. All in all, it's a good book and worth buying.

This issue of Christendom and world mission is high on my agenda this week because I'm due to give a seminar on the subject next week at a translator training course. I am convinced that Bible Translation, by valuing the local culture and promoting autonomy of the national church apart from the influence of expat missionaries, has the potential to be one of the least colonial/christendom aspects of modern missions. The role of the Bible translator is to give the local church the tools they need for growth and development on their own, not to stick around and lead the Church. When I get my seminar sorted out, I may post it here so that others can download it.