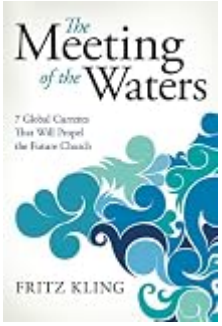
BOOKS I HAVE READ: THE MEETING OF THE WATERS

Posted on July 24, 2013 by Eddie

Categories: Church: World, Mission, Reviews



Â OK, let's get the important stuff out of the way. Currently,Â The Meeting of the Waters: 7 Global Currents That Will Propel the Future ChurchÂ is available for Kindle for Â£1.99 (it was free until yesterday). At that price it is an absolute steal and if you are involved in Church or mission leadership you should buy it. Do it now.

Right, now that's dealt with, what about the book?

From 2006-2007 the author, Fritz Kling (who is apparently famous, though I've not heard of him) was involved in an exercise called the "Global Church Listening Tour". This consisted of asking 191 church leaders in 15 countries questions about the future of the Church. The book emerges from that "Tour" and highlights seven major themes; these are:

- **Mercy**: The church must address the physical and material needs of humanity, not just their spiritual needs.
- **Mutuality**: The church in the developed world must interact with the majority world as peers, not as patrons who seek to control the use of their patronage.
- **Migration**: The church must minister to populations that are increasingly multinational, multiracial, and multiethnic.
- **Monoculture**: The church must realize that globalization is making local cultures increasingly similar to one another, and this face presents both challenges and opportunities.
- **Machines**: The church must utilize technology (especially computers) to accomplish its mission.
- **Mediation**: The church must take the lead in making peace and resolving the conflicts that increasingly characterize global culture.
- **Memory**: The church must take into account the fact that memory (especially of tragedy and oppression) shapes the way that people respond to the gospel.

For the most part, this is a very helpful and informative analysis. I do, however have a number of slight reservations. For the most part the book describes the trends that it highlights without a great deal of critical engagement. The weakest part is the chapter on Monoculture, which really never gets to grips with the issues in a thought through or theologically balanced manner. It's obvious that the author has never readÂ Beyond Empire:Postcolonialism & Mission in a Global Context, but he should.

However, that being said, this is still a worthwhile book. I particularly enjoyed the section on mutuality, which chimed with a number of my recent blog posts. I'll close with a quote:

For generations, outside Christians ably spearheaded evangelism and church-planting ministries in countries around the world. Now, however, indigenous Christians have been empowered by education, travel, and access, and they are confidently taking charge. For instance, we asked Listening Tour interviewees whether it was appropriate for outside missionaries to evangelise and plant churches in their country, and the responses were consistent;

- *"No, evangelism is a strength of the Ecuadoran church."*
- *"No, outsiders should no longer be the primary evangelists to Africa."*
- *"Only if done with Ugandans."*
- *"No, enough Guatamalans are planting churches."*
- *"No, its better for the Nepalese to do this."*
- *"Maybe if it's combined with a local church or group. But we need Brazilian leadership."*
- *"Indians should probably plant their own churches."*

Along with increased confidence, some respondents also showed levels of resentment and indignation about past relationships. A very prominent African pastor pointed out that, not only is the need decreasing for outside missionariesÂ toÂ Africa, but wealthier countries now need missionariesÂ fromÂ Africa to steer them away from increasingly materialistic and secular cultural leanings.

Mutuality may be the single most Current for understanding how to support, work with, and pray for Christian movements around the world. Unfortunately, practising mutuality does not come easily to people of wealth, including this American. People with money and power easily become blind to resources that Christians from other countries bring to the table. True mutuality among players from different corners of the globe is, in fact, quite rare. The urge to "go it alone" is powerful. Collaboration, and the mutuality it fosters is expensive in terms of time, energy, and moneyâ€¦ and ego.