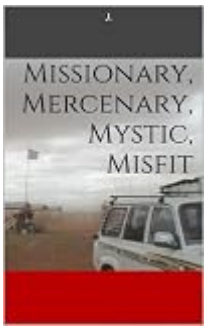
BOOKS I'VE READ: MISSIONARY, MERCENARY, MYSTIC, MISFIT

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Category: Reviews



I've spent a good deal of my life around the fringes of the relief and aid 'industries' and I continue to be fascinated with the way in which development organisations go about their business. Many of the issues they deal with such as sustainability, dependency and donor expectations are ones that I come across in Bible translation and language development work.

For most people, the complications or aid work (or mission work) are rather tedious. They don't want to ask difficult questions they just want to give some money and change a life. They don't want to have to wrestle with complex concepts or to be challenged about whether their money is being used wisely. There are plenty of good books on the subject as well as a plethora of good aid blogs, but the average punter can't be bothered with them. This is whereÂ Missionary, Mercenary, Mystic, MisfitÂ comes in. It isn't a theory book; it's a story. Set in Ethiopia it revolves around the lives of group of aid workers working among refugees.

As a story, it works. It's a pleasing read. Pretty early on, I thought I had the main points of the story sussed out, but I was wrong - which kept me turning the pages to find out what would happen. However, this is a book which can be read on more than one level. It's an entertaining novel; but it also explores some of the more complex and difficult areas of relief and development work.

It raises delicate issues; from the chaos that an aid worker's nomadic life brings to personal relationships, through West Wing level politicking as different agencies compete to run their programmes, Â to the pressures placed on the field by home offices demanding some high profile stories to tell. It doesn't always make comfortable reading. At times the narrative gets a little preachy as the author struggles to make a point, but generally, it does a good job of teaching complex issues by the simple expedient of telling a story.

Not only that, but the narrative has a definite ring of truth about it. Indeed, some of the issues it raises ring uncomfortably true in the Christian mission world too.

Who should read this book? I would say that anyone who has a leading role in an organisation which sends funds overseas for any sort of relief or development work should read it. For some, it won't say anything new, but for others it might open their eyes to issues they have been ignoring for a while. I would also recommend it to anyone who takes a keen passing interest in development issues; for example those who run Tear Fund stalls in churches would benefit from it - though they may be a little shocked!

In the interests of transparency, I should say that I received a free pdf of the book in return for writing this review. However, this has not influenced the content of the review:Â Missionary, Mercenary, Mystic, MisfitÂ is an excellent book and deserves a wide readership.