BOOKS I HAVE READ: MODELS OF CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

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Category: Reviews

> *But, my child, let me give you some further advice: Be careful, for writing books is endless, and much study wears you out.*

Friends keep posting quiz things on Facebook which ask things like "how many of these classic novels have you read?". In my case the answer is generally, most of them, but not the Jane Austen ones. Thankfully, no one seems to have come across a list like that of mission theology books; my 'to read' pile is already far too big. One of the problems is that I keep coming across classic texts that I really should have read, but haven't. Which brings me toÂ Models Of Contextual Theology (Faith and Cultures Series)Â by Stephen Bevans. I really should have read it years ago, but I was probably distracted by a murder mysteryÂ or something.

The central concern of the book is how theology is developed in different cultural settings. All theology emerges out of an intellectual and cultural tradition which shapes it; even though we might be unaware of our own tradition. Bevans looks at six different models for holding Scripture and culture in tension. His concern is not so much what should be done, as what is being done in different situations. Though he is a Catholic, Bevans draws on a wide range of writers, including a number of well-known Evangelicals.

The first section of the book effectively sets out the thesis for the following section in which he elaborates six different models of mission. Each chapter helpfully follows the same format. A brief introduction to the model in question is followed by a Sketch of the Model including an overview of the terminology and presuppositions of the model followed by a critique of the strengths and weaknesses. The second part of each chapter consists of two examples of people who have worked with the model; these are generally drawn from different churchmanship or geography.

There is a short summary of each model at the end of the book, which contains a helpful analogy drawn from gardening:

- **Translation Model**:Â *bring seeds, plant in the native ground.*
- **Anthropological Model**:Â *seeds are already in the ground; just need to be watered to sprout.*
- **Praxis Model**:Â *garden needs to be constantly weeded; the work never ends; practice makes a better gardener.*
- **Synthetic Model**:Â *cross-pollination*
- **Transcendental Model**:Â *if I cultivate my garden, another will be inspired to cultivate his or hers.*
- **Countercultural Model**:Â *the soil needs weeding and fertilising so that the seeds can be planted.*

Evangelical missiology tends towards the first and last of these models (translation and countercultural), both of which lay a higher stress on revelation than on the cultural context. Nevertheless, there are things to be learned from each of the other models, even though I would be hesitant to advocate for them to be used alone. For example, there are aspects of the

anthropological model found in Richardson'sÂ *redemptive analogies*, and there is a good deal of the praxis model in the current emphasis on justice and reconciliation in mission.

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