BOOKS I HAVE READ: SUMMONED FROM THE MARGIN

Posted on July 27, 2015 by Eddie

An excellent and thought provoking autobiography that is well worth a read.
Category: Reviews

Quite simply, this is a delightful book. It takes you on a journey from Sanneh's childhood in a Muslim family in Gambia to his role as professor of World Christianity at Yale with good humour, profound insight and a lot of good grace.

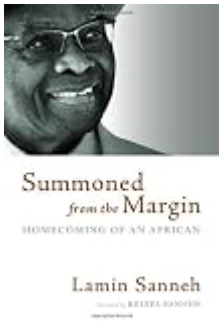
Sanneh is undoubtedly one of the most important theologians of our generation. If you have not read at least, Whose Religion is Christianity?: The Gospel Beyond the WestÂ and preferablyÂ Translating The Message: The Missionary Impact on CultureÂ you have some catching up to do.

InÂ Summoned from the Margin, Sanneh tells his life story; and an extraordinary story it is. At one level it is simply a fascinating story of one man's journey from rural Africa to the academic heights in the USA. If this was all the book was, it would be worth a read. I loved the evocations of his African childhood and his struggle to get a good education. The passage where he had to blag coal to keep his family warm during one of the interminable winter miners' strikes in 1970s Scotland gave a rather odd link to my own childhood and brought a big smile to my face. The book is full of fascinating glimpses like this.

However, what really sets the book apart is Sanneh's reflection on his experiences. He doesn't just tell his story, he explores its significance as it goes. His struggle as a young Muslim irresistibly drawn to the person of Jesus Christ is thoughtfully laid out, as is his bemusement at the competing Christian denominations who were reluctant to accept this young convert and tried to pass him off to other churches.

The racial minefield of the Southern US in the 1960s is presented in a fascinating way. As a black African, Sanneh was looked down upon both by whites and by African Americans. Yet he never comes across as angry or bitter.

The main substance of the book lies around the theme of the contrast between Islam and Christianity, in particular their relationship to language and culture. In the current world, we need to understand Islam more than ever and Sanneh's is a voice we need to hear.



Coming to Christianity from Islam, he has some interesting reflections on the divisions within Christianity. While I don't agree with all of the decisions he has made, he makes a number of points that we need to listen to.

All in all, this is an excellent (if a tad overpriced) book. If you are interested in Islamics, West Africa or World Christianity, then it has to be on your reading list, it's as simple as that. If you enjoy well

written, thoughtful and slightly out of the ordinary biographies, you might well want to give this one a go.

Can anyone name both of the other books (both, not just one) in the picture that goes with this post on the front page of the blog?