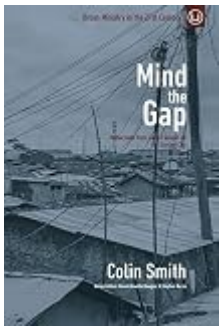
BOOKS I HAVE READ: MIND THE GAP

Posted on October 9, 2015 by Eddie

I enjoyed reading this book, but I have to admit that I find it rather difficult to describe it. It isn't an exposition of Luke's Gospel, it isn't a set of stories about life in 'informal settlements' in Africa and it isn't a theology of the city. Except that it is all three of these...
Category: Observations

Despite the title, this is not a book about the London Underground. The subtitle ofÂ Colin Smith'sÂ Mind the Gap: Reflections from Luke's Gospel on the Divided CityÂ tells you what the book is really about; urban mission.

This is a large format paperback of just under 200 pages and is reasonably priced at under a tenner for the printed version.



I enjoyed reading this book, but I have to admit that I find it rather difficult to describe it. It isn't an exposition of Luke's Gospel, it isn't a set of stories about life in 'informal settlements' in Africa and it isn't a theology of the city. Except that it is all three of these; Luke's Gospel, the author's experiences in Nairobi slums and theological reflection on poverty and urbanisation all bounce off each other in a series of fascinating and informative episodes. I have to admit that I found it difficult to discern an overarching structure to the book; but maybe that's just me and I'm not sure that it matters anyway. The book works as a global whole, not as a set of bullet points or individual arguments.

Who should read it? Scholars of Luke's Gospel should definitely get themselves a copy. It doesn't wrestle with the original text or ask questions about the historicity of Luke, but it does give a fascinating contemporary reading of the Gospel against the background of a particular urban context. Students of urban mission will also want to give this a read. It is more reflective than many other books that I've read on the subject; it doesn't give you a list of five key things that you need to do; but it makes you think!

If I have a gripe with this book, it is that it is rooted in the situation in East Africa. This isn't a bad thing, but I would have liked to see some space being given over to reflecting on how the lessons from Nairobi can be applied to (for example) the post-industrial cities of the North of England. Are there similarities? Differences? What about the growing Asian megacities? There is a rich vein for reflection here; but perhaps the book was already long enough.

If you want a comparison, the nearest thing that I can think of toÂ Mind the GapÂ is Tom Wright's Easter messages to a mining community in Co Durham;Â The Cross and the Colliery. They bothÂ allow contemporary society and the Gospel stories to bounce off each other in a way that allows us to see Gospels and societyÂ in a new light.

As ever, I should mention that I was given a copy of this book by the author. However, I've not allowed a free book or friendship to stand in the way of honest comment.Â