BOOKS I HAVE READ: CHRISTIAN MISSION IN THE MODERN WORLD

Posted on April 8, 2016 by Eddie

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Category: Reviews

Christian Mission in the Modern WorldÂ was originally published in 1975; it consisted of 5 lectures delivered by John Stott at Cambridge University. In 2016, a new version was published, updated and expanded by Chris Wright and it is very good!

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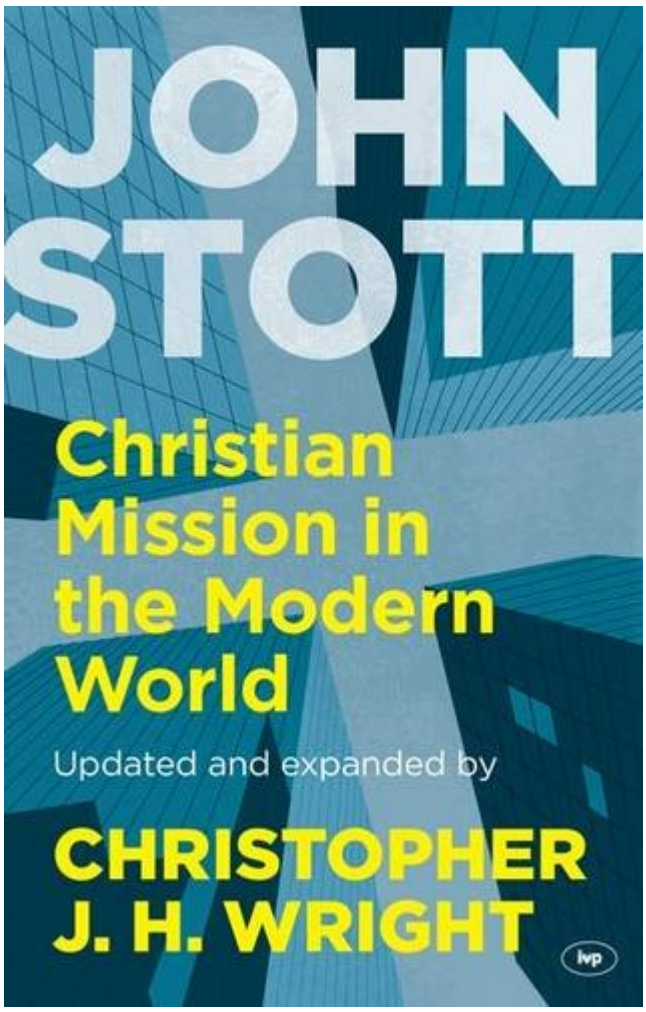
John Stott the former rector of All Souls Langham Place, isÂ well known in the UK as a Bible teacher and writer. Outside of the UK, he is probably better known for his role in founding the Langham Partnership and in particular for playing a key role in the Lausanne Movement. He is widely credited for being a central figure in the development of the 1974 Lausanne Covenant and for his diplomatic role in holding the various factions in the Lausanne Movement together in the early days.

Chris Wright is a missionary scholar and academic who has followed in Stott's footsteps both in the Langham Partnership and as editor of the latest 2010 Lausanne Movement Cape Town Commitment. Together, these two British writers have been at the centre of world mission theology as it has developedÂ over the past 50 years.

The original publication of Christian Mission in the Modern World was a slim volume which included five lectures on the subjects of: mission, evangelism, dialogue, salvation and conversion. The content was scholarly, but not at all difficult to read. I wish I had been privileged to hear the originals. The updated book includes the original lectures, each followed by a reflection on the same subject by Chris Wright. The format works well, though you have to work harder with the updated book than with the original - but there is much more in it, so that is normal.

It is clear both from both the introduction and the content of the book that Chris Wright considered John Stott both as a friend and as someone to look up to. A tone of affection and respect permeates the book, even when Wright disagrees with what Stott originally wrote. It's a masterclass in how to engage critically with another writer.

Writing in 1975, Stott was dealing with the subjects which were current at the time. He takes a hard look at liberation theology, which was just starting to make a mark on the English speaking world. The Lausanne discussion on the place of evangelism and social action gets discussed as do some of the differences between the World Council of Churches and Evangelicals. In his updating of the same themes, Chris Wright gets to grips with contemporary issues such as creation care and insider movements. The contrast gives a fascinating insight into the way that the issues causing concern to Christians have changed over the years, but also models a way in which our theology can address a shifting culture.



For my money, Chris Wright's reflection on mission - his follow up to John Stott's lecture on the same subject - is worth the price of the whole book. It is superb. In his original lecture, Stott went to great pains to explain and defend the Lausanne Covenant's synthesis of evangelism and social action. Wright starts from here and then demonstrates how an understanding of mission as being rooted in the purposes of God as revealed in the whole narrative of ScriptureÂ actually does away with binary labels such as these and also enhances our understanding of the Bible. It is a superb argument, well made and deserves to be widely read.

If I have a concern about this book, it regards its intended audience. I don't think that it is a book which will appeal to the casual reader and I'm not sure that many church leaders would invest the time to read a book like this (though it would do them good if they did). That being said,Â I reckon that this book should be just about compulsory for all mission students and practitioners. People cheerfully throw around terms like "the mission of God" (orÂ *missio Dei*, if they are really cool), but it is important to know that our current views of mission haven't just arrived out of thin air. Getting a historical perspective on things that are currently fashionable is as important in mission studies as in

any other area of life.