BOOKS I HAVE READ: MISSIONSHIFT

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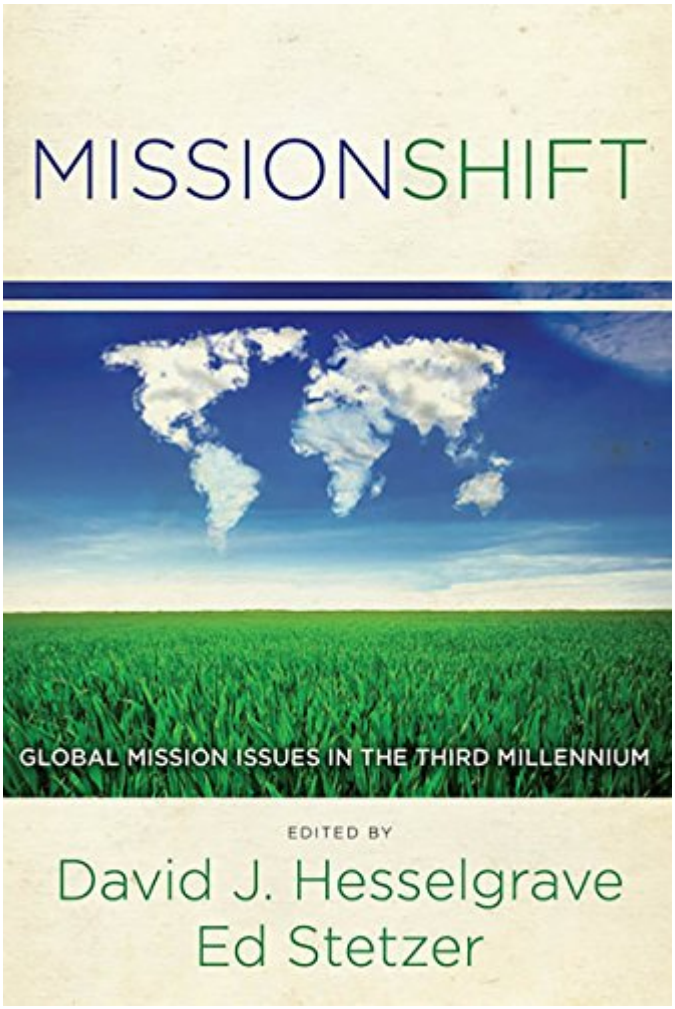
I no longer want to read what Americans (or Brits...) think about the reality for believers in other parts of the world. The time for books like this passed a generation ago, now we need to hear the voice of the world church.
Category: Reviews

This review is going to be different to most of those I write on Kouyanet. Rather than talk about the content ofÂ MissionShift, which is actually quite good, I'm going to focus on why I think that this is a profoundly bad book.

First things first, it is a medium format paperback of 300 pages including references and indices. If you get it on Kindle, it will set you back about eleven quid, more if you want a paper copy.

The book consists of three main essays, with responses to each one by a number of scholars. The first essay, by Charles Van Engen, looks at the past of mission, the second looks at the present of mission and is written by Paul Hiebert and the last one by Ralph Winter looks at... I'll let you guess.

As I said, the content is quite good. I'd particularly highlight Andreas KÃ¶stenberger's response to Van Engen's essay (I might even blog on this in the near future). However, while the content is good, it is hardly original. There is not much here that you can't read elsewhere. The debate over contextualisation which is inspired by Hiebert's essay has been played out in much more detail online and in a variety of journals.



To be frank, if you want to read about the past, present and future of mission you shouldn't buy this book, you should readÂ Transforming Mission.

One point which should be made is that the essays by Hiebert and Winter are among the last things that each of them wrote at the end of long and distinguished careers as missionary thinkers and

writers. Mission nerds will probably want to buy the book for that alone (are there any mission nerds?).

So, why do I think this is a bad book? Simple; the subtitle is Global Mission Issues in the Third Millenium - note the word Global - yet every one of the authors is either from the United States or works there. ***Global?***

This might (just) have been acceptable in 1950 but this book was published in 2010. The notionÂ of a multi-author book on global issues in which all of the authors have roots in one country is as laughable as it is offensive. This is nothing to do with the fact that the authors are American, I'd be just as botheredÂ if they were all British, Slovenian or Thai.

The church is a global phenomenon; we know this because some of the authors of this book have been pointing it out for years. Mission is polycentric; from everywhere to everywhere. Writers from Latin America and Asia, in particular, have been making a significant contribution to mission thought for decades now. You simply cannot write about the future of mission without including voices from those parts of the world.

The discussion format of this book, essays and responses is interesting. You get to see a variety of views; some slight disagreements and one or two full-blown arguments. However, though it gives the impression of representing aÂ wide spectrum of viewpoints, all of the authors come from the same Western, university tradition. The arguments are rooted in mission experience, but they are essentially ivory-tower discussions, distanced from the messy global reality of mission.

Many of the points raised are important and the discussions touch on issues which we need to know about, but they are undermined by the monochromatic background of the writers.

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