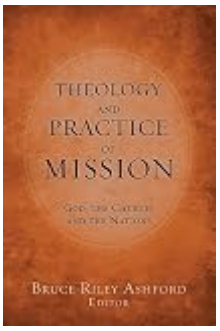
BOOKS I HAVE READ: THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF MISSIONS

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It's no longer cheap on Kindle, but this is a book that is well worth getting hold of!
Category: Reviews

I must admit that I boughtÂ Theology and Practice of Mission: God, the Church, and the NationsÂ purely on the grounds that it was very cheap on Kindle. The price is no longer reduced, but I'd still urge any student of mission to think about getting hold of a copy.



Because I haven't seen a print copy, I don't know what format it is, but according to the details it is 355 pages long. It certainly took a long time to read it on my Kindle. It is a multi-author work and I've not heard of any of the authors, but the standard is generally high and there are copious footnotes and references. Overall, I'd suggest that it is aimed at a general audience. You need some background in theology and mission studies to get the best out of it, but it certainly isn't just for the specialists.

The book consists of 18 chapters divided into four sections.

Section One sets out a theological paradigm for mission. Two issues are highlighted, the mission of God and the way in which mission needs to be based on the whole of Scripture, not just a few key verses.

Section Two looks at a number of current issues in mission such as church planting, evangelism/social responsibility and shows how looking at them in the light of the issues raised in section one helps to resolve some of the tensions that emerge in a lot of mission discussions.

Section Three has a more practical orientation and looks at issues surrounding cross cultural mission and how we should go about doing it..

The final section is effectively a series of challenges to mission scholars, pastors and theologians which aim to get people thinking about the key issues.

This is a good book, one that is well worth getting hold of and referring to regularly. However, it does have a number of weaknesses.

The first thing I'd note is that the book views the story of the Bible in four acts: creation, fall, redemption and restoration. The problem with this is that it misses out the whole of the story of Israel, which just happens to be the majority of the Bible. Effectively, the model leaps from Genesis 3 to Matthew 1 without touching the ground in between. Some of the essays do attempt to engage with the Bible, but I fear that the overall model that the book follows suffers from the sort of evangelical reductionism that the book addresses elsewhere.

Secondly, it is awfully repetitive. Without tight editing, multiple author books can end up completely disparate or mind-numbingly repetitive. This book suffers from the latter problem. I would strongly recommend not trying to read the book in a couple of long sittings as I did. It is one to dip in and out of, or to refer to when you want to look at a specific issue. There is a wealth of good material here,

but it is hard work!

However, despite these weaknesses, I still strongly recommend this book. The main thrust of it is that our theology of mission must be rooted in the character and actions of the triune God and that our theology must shape our actions. This is absolutely key. Wherever you go in mission circles, you can hear people talking about "the mission of God" or the "missio Dei", but in practical terms it makes no difference to what they do. This book makes a clear case that if we are to talk about "God's mission", then it should change our attitudes and practice and that God himself, and not people should be our focus. This means we will do things differently.

> *The ultimate goal of the mission of God is the glory of God. Therefore, as the church participates in the mission of God, it must remain resolutely God-focused. The message it proclaims must be a message about the character and deeds of God and not be reduced to a mechanistic formula for escaping hell. All that it does must be done as a form of worship to God. The way in which the church goes about its mission must glorify God as much as the message itself. He must be the churchâ€™s all-consuming passion.*

> *...Indeed, one of the most significant challenges facing churches, agencies, and missionaries today is the imperative to allow Christian doctrine to shape their actual ministry practices. Although our evangelical churches have declared their belief that the Christian Scriptures are ipsissima verba Dei, the very words of God, our declaration is not always consistent with our actions. In reality, we sometimes ignore Scripture when forming our strategies, methods, and practices. It is as if we are saying that what we believe about God is important, but how we practice those beliefs is not.*

A few other random quotes to whet your appetite:

> *Jesus said to go to the nations, win them and baptize them, make disciples of them, and teach them everything he commanded us. No part of that is optional. There is not an easier Great Commission for the hard places, hard hearts, or hard heads.*

> *Godâ€™s mission. Finally, and this point will be expanded upon at a later time, mission finds its origin in God. Mission is God-centered, being rooted in Godâ€™s gracious will to glorify himself. Mission is defined by God. It is organized, energized, and directed by God. Ultimately, it is accomplished by God. The church cannot understand its mission apart from the mission of God.*

> *The question is not whether God will accomplish his mission. The knowledge of his glory will*

> *cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. Every tongue, tribe, people and nation will be represented among the redeemed before Godâ€™s throne. The question is whether we will know the joy of obedience and participation. Not everyone is called to move overseas, learn another language, and plant a church in a foreign country, but all redeemed humanity has a part to play.*

> *Although the two are not synonymous, the churchâ€™s mission is framed by Godâ€™s mission, seen upon the backdrop of Godâ€™s mission, and understood in the light of Godâ€™s mission. The church takes its cues from God himself and therefore is committed to his mission, seeking to increase his renown, proclaim his gospel, advance his church, and bear witness to the truth of his Word.*