BOOKS I HAVE READ: THEOLOGIES OF MISSION

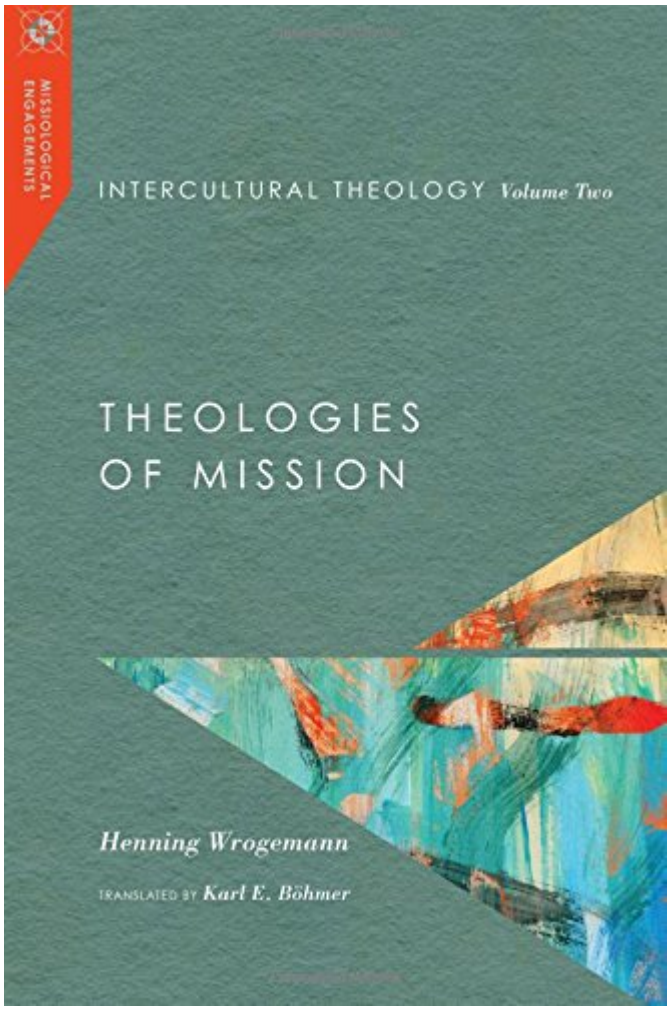
Posted on February 8, 2018 by Eddie

This is probably one of the specialists (and those writing essays), but it's a very good book.
Categories: Observations, Reviews

Henning Wrogemann'sÂ Intercultural Theology, Volume 2: Theologies of Mission (Missiological Engagements)Â isn't the shortest book you will ever read on mission theology (the title is almost as long as some books), but it might well be the most comprehensive. This isn't a book that everyone will want to read, but for those for whom it is of interest, it will well repay the time spent reading it.

This is a medium format hardback of around 450 pages, the last fifty of which consist of a bibliography and indices. The book is aimed at an academic audience and is well supplied with footnotes. It will currently set you back about Â£25 on Amazon. While on the technical side of things, a word of praise must go out to the translator who has done an excellent job of rendering the German original into fluent, English prose. The only thing that gives away that it is a translation rather than an English work is that it refers to the history of German missions more than it does to British or American ones - and that is no bad thing anyway.

The main body of the book consists of three parts, each with 8-10 chapters.



Part 1 Developments in Mission Theology in the Twentieth/Twenty-First Centuries does exactly what it says. The first couple of chapters look at the early days of German mission theology, most of which was new to me. It then moves on to familiar ground looking at the 1910 Edinburgh conference Â and moving through the development of the International Mission Council and the World Council of Churches, taking us to the present day. From an evangelical perspective, the Lausanne movement gets good, if slightly critical, coverage. This section is good, but if you want a history of C20 Mission, you would probably do better to readChristian Mission in the Twentieth CenturyÂ by Timothy Yates (though you would do better to get a second hand copy than pay the exorbitant sums that Amazon are demanding). However, Wrogemann goes on.

Part II Theologies of Mission in the Plural: Confessional and Contextual Profiles looks at the way

that different church confessions look at mission. There are chapters on Roman Catholic mission, Orthodox mission, North American Protestantism, Anglicanism and Pentecostalism. Each chapter is well researched and well thought through. For those areas where I have some degree of expertise or experience, I could find little to argue with, so I feel confident about the contexts that I know less about. For those who have never thought of mission outside of a narrow Evangelical framework, this whole section is very thought-provoking.

Part III Continents, Context, Controversies picks up a number of themes which are both current and controversial in mission theology today. There is a chapter on mission and the poor, another on mission and gender. Conversion and inter-religious dialogue are also given space. In general, Wrogemann avoids coming down on one side or the other with regard to these questions; he lays out what different people say and makes some general remarks, but the book is descriptive, rather than proscriptive in its approach. You can generally discern what the author thinks, but he does not impose his views on the reader.

The book is written from a conciliar, ecumenical perspective but evangelicals would be wrong to write it off because of this. If we are wise and humble, we can learn from the way that others approach the theology of mission, even if we disagree with them on other points.

Normally at this point, I'd put in a few zinger quotes to illustrate how good the book is. In this case, I can't. To be honest, this isn't a book stuffed full of great quotes. It is quiet, scholarly and thoughtful, but it doesn't lend itself to sound bites.

So who should read this? It isn't a page turner that I would recommend to a general audience. I think that scholars and teachers of mission would do well to familiarise themselves with the book and any institute which teaches mission or theology should have a copy on their shelves. I anticipate undergraduates and MA students perusing this book for years to come. They may not sit down and read the whole thing, but there is good material here for essays that I am sure will be well used.

Edit: I did find a great quote when typing up my notes:

> *"The pragmatic-activist trait characterizing much of US-American thought completely eclipses the motif of self-emptying, i.e., of kenotic mission. Christian mission is seen as action, planning, and strategy - not as suffering, waiting, or clinging in faith to a reality that is yet to be revealed. While this mission theology operates on the basis of the Great Commission (Mt 28), it takes little notice of the mission-theological paradigm constituted by the life and suffering of Jesus."*

I am grateful to IVP Academic for providing me with a review copy of this book. To the extent that is possible, I have not allowed their kindness to interfere with my review. If I had thought it was rubbish, I would have said so.Â