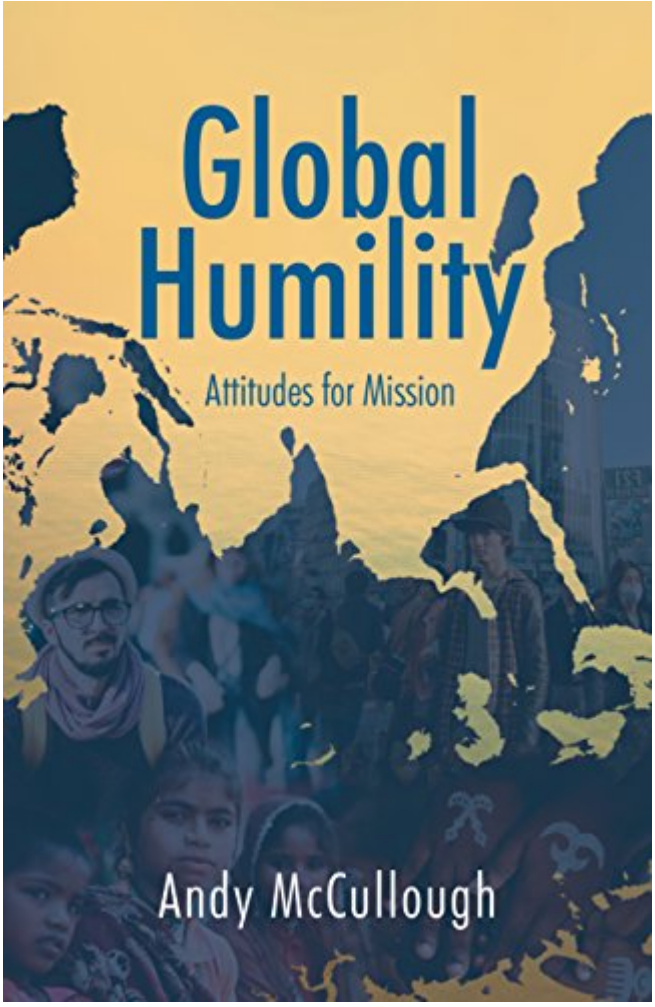
BOOKS I HAVE READ: GLOBAL HUMILITY

Posted on August 21, 2018 by Eddie

If you do the job I do, or train others to do that job, then you should put this on your reading list.
Category: Observations

If you want to save yourself reading a few hundred words, the headline is thatÂ Global Humility: Attitudes for MissionÂ by Andy McCoullough is good, very good.



I've not actually seen a print copy of the book as I read it on a Kindle, but it looks to be a normal format paperback with just over 270 pages (including an extensive bibliography and chapter endnotes) and will set you back about a tenner on Kindle and a little more for a print copy. One of the great strengths of this book is that it presents complex issues in a straightforward and accessible way while providing references and notes that will allow people to go deeper if they want.

The book is made up of six sections:

- Moral Humility, (Thinking About Sin),
- Public Humility, (Thinking About the World),
- Semantic Humility, (Thinking About Language),
- Intercultural Humility, (Thinking About Differences),
- Incarnational Humility, (Thinking about Mission),
- Theological Humility, (Thinking about Thinking).

Each section consists of a short introduction followed by a number of chapters which explore the theme in more detail. The section titles are pretty much self-explanatory, so I won't go into detail about each of them. The overall tone of the book is set by an encounter with a Lebanese Christian explaining what sort of missionaries they want to see coming to their community:

> *It's all about attitude. They must be prepared to learn good Arabic - that takes several years of hard work. They must live among us, not separate from us. They must come to serve, not tot judge; to learn, not to dictate; to be amonts, not above. They will come and bo, but the Lebanese church continues.* ***They must contribute to our story, not inflict their own.Â*** *(Emphasis mine.)*

McCullough then goes on to add in his own words:

> *... there is a particular perspective, a certain capacity, without which entering a new culture to bring the gospel is impossible. The requisite capacity is an ability to handle grey (anyone crossing cultures quickly learns that not everything is black and white and that categories from before cannot be used), an appreciation of diversity, an honouring of others. I am calling thisÂ Global Humility.*

And there you have the core of the book, which is worked out in the various themes raised in each section. In truth, there is not a lot that is new here. However, to cover all of the ground in this one book, you would previously have needed to read a small library. Packaging this breadth of material into one book is, in my experience, unique and I cannot recommend it highly enough. If you are involved in leading a church's mission programme in one way or another, then you should read this book, no excuses. It should also appear on the reading list for the first year of any degree or diploma programme which involves training people for cross-cultural mission work and it should most definitely be required reading for any short-courses that set out to train mission workers. I'd even suggest that MA students would get value from reading it, not least because of the extensive references.

That being said, the book is not without its weaknesses. A short book like this one inevitably involves a degree of specialisation and generalisation. The author builds on his extensive experience of living and working in the Middle East but is less sure-footed when describing other parts of the world. I didn't always recognise the statements about Africa as matching my experience and observations, but there are specialist books out there for people who want to study a particular region in more detail. I was a little disappointed that McCullough didn't always follow through his own logic and in a section on Bible translation he seems to suggest that Western experts from outside of the context know than local people about the way in which their language works and how complex concepts should be expressed. However, this is a minor quibble and wouldn't bother most readers who have

not had to live and breath these issues.

I quoted a few sections from the book here and I'll add a few more below to give you a taste of the book. Did I mention that it is very good?

> *It is natural for those from established churches in nations with a long history of Christianity to think that they have a fathering role towards newer churches in newer Christian contexts. The post-colonial cry in many parts of the world, however, would be, â€˜We have grown up much more quickly than you think, and we have much to teach you too!â€™ It is difficult, however, for those who think they are centre to express anything other than (even benevolent) paternalism: â€˜Is the Western Christian academyâ€™s insistence on adhering to one particular method of biblical interpretation a form of hermeneutical neo-colonialism?â€™*

> *From very early on, Christianity had more than one centre. This principle sets Christianity apart from every other world religion. The geographical heartlands of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam are still where they have always been, and the faithful go there on pilgrimage. Not so with Christianity. â€˜Its conception of faith as grounded in the sovereign conscience of the individual was radically new.â€™100 Jerusalem continued to be a centre (intellectual, theological, ecclesial), but other parallel centres emerged, with different emphases: first Antioch, then Ephesus, Rome, Alexandria, and so it has continued.*

> *In our increasingly globalised world, wrestling with the language of honour and shame, even for those not moving cross-culturally, is becoming more and more important. To preach the gospel in our multi-ethnic cities, preaching forgiveness for the guilty is insufficiently good news to satisfy those whose burning question is, â€˜How can I be free from shame?â€™ At the same time, a growing scholarly emphasis on the honour-shame dynamics of the New Testament world are shedding helpful light on otherwise misunderstood passages of Scripture, and this will only increase in the years to come. Honour-shame will continue to be a hugely important area.*

> *I have seen too many blonde college-age girls wearing sleeveless tops on short-term evangelism teams giving out evangelistic literature on the streets in Middle Eastern cities. They may feel that they are giving out â€˜the messageâ€™ as written on the leaflets, but what is being â€˜heardâ€™ by the local men is a very different kind of invitation.*

> *The idea of systematic knowledge is a Greek concept and not specifically a biblical one. It belongs more to the culture of Linear-Active thinkers than to Multi-Actives. An African studying Grudem or Calvin will not find answers to some of his most burning questions: polygamy, ancestors, tribalism. If he is well-grounded in the narrative of Scripture, however, he will be well-positioned to dig for these answers himself.*

> *Many of the questions that we are coming across in the Middle East have no obvious answer in theology grown in the West. So theology needs to be done in context.*

> *If we are honest, Western culture is not best positioned to interpret or appreciate apocalyptic literature. Revelationâ€™s symbols appeal more to imaginative cultures than analytical ones. We struggle with the symbolic, rather than literal, portrayal of reality. Our Western understanding of time makes us want to force Revelation into a sequence whilst its view is more like several CCTV cameras all viewing the same events from various perspectives.*

As you can see, the book provides some simple, well-grounded advice as well as much to ponder over.