BOOKS I HAVE READ: THE MISSIOLOGY BEHIND THE STORY

Posted on June 13, 2019 by Eddie

A short review of a very good book.
Category: Observations

The blurb on Amazon describes The Missiology behind the Story: Voices from the Arab World (Institute of Middle East Studies)Â as a gift from the Middle East and North African Churches to the rest of the body of Christ. I wouldn't disagree. This is a book about the theology and practice of mission, written out of a particular context, but with universal relevance. It deserves to be widely read and studied.

As is often the case, I read this book on my Kindle, so I have no idea of its format, though as it is a Langham publication, I assume that it will be a medium sized paperback. The description says that it has 196 pages. Currently, it will set you back just over twelve quid for the print copy and less than half of that for the ebook.

This multi-author book is essentially a conversation about important issues. Taking the theme of theÂ *missio Dei* as its basis, the book has ten chapters each of which has a distinct structure. The chapter starts with a broad introduction to the theme under discussion, which is followed by a number of case studies and finally, there is a missiological reflection on the theology and practice which have been discussed in the chapter. It is important to note that each section in the chapter has a different author, so multiple voices speak into each theme.

The ten chapters concern:

1. Evangelism
2. Church Planting
3. Discipleship
4. Relief and Development
5. Engagement in Social Justice
6. Christian-Muslim Dialogue
7. Peacebuilding
8. Media
9. Children and Youth
10. Leadership Formation

The fact that the book is rooted in the Middle East and North Africa brings many of these issues into sharp relief. Missiologists and church planters in the comfortable West may feel that they can ignore some of these issues, but this book shows why they are essential to our understanding of mission.

As someone with no experience or expertise in this part of the world, I found the book hard going at times. There is a lot of detail and it is difficult to keep track of everything. However, the closing missiological reflection in each chapter was always rich and challenging.

Who should read this book? Anyone with an interest in mission in the Middle East and North Africa should give it a read as should anyone who teaches missiology or mission theology. It should certainly be available in Bible College and seminary libraries as undergraduates will find good

background material for essays on the particular subjects that it treats. Equally, anyone who has ever wondered what "missiological reflection" looks like, would be well advised to read this book and find out.

As usual, here are a few out of context quotes that I find interesting or challenging.

> *One observation is that much missional activity was initiated by Westerners. One theme of the twentieth century was the move to the institutions and organizations they formed, adapting and becoming led by indigenous people.*

> *One emerging trend in the twenty-first century is the increasing involvement of those from Muslim backgrounds in missio Dei,*

> *One of the biggest challenges for Protestant mission during this era was that it was firmly and unequivocally identified with the West. By 1910, half of the communicants in congregations in Beirut and Tripoli had emigrated to the West.*

> *This is exactly the gospel that we have received, good news of reconciliation and goodwill towards all the nations, even the nations with whom our countries might have shared a bad history. For it is a mission that goes beyond the political and historical narrative and transcends it to a divine narrative of unconditional love.*

> *From observing the life of Jesus and the experience of many of us in the field, we can confidently say that the most effective evangelism is the one we do outside the church walls.*

> *To say that we are living in extraordinary times is an understatement. We are witnessing how God the Father through Christ and by the Spirit is acting within the Muslim world. The sheer numbers of those who are engaging with, enquiring about, and learning from the Bible about the Christian faith is unprecedented. Many have fully embraced and accepted Jesus as Saviour and Lord â€“ something that has not happened on the present scale since Islam entered into world history in the seventh century.*

> *Godâ€™s amazing work in Lebanon offers numerous lessons for the worldwide churchâ€™s understanding of discipleship, especially as more and more Muslims follow Jesus. Because Lebanon has certain freedoms that no other Muslim-majority country has, Muslims are seen publicly within the walls of traditional, institutional churches.*

> *Our social justice engagement is only as effective as combining it with making Jesus known to those we are called to serve lovingly. Nevertheless, making Jesusâ€™s love known is a huge endeavour, which concerns the whole person for each human being. Therefore, we embrace social justice ministries as a valid means to demonstrate the multifaceted love of God in Christ to our context.*

> *She recounts, somewhat painfully, how churches in Egypt often encourage new converts to sever all ties with their families and Muslim communities, without offering them in return the kind of relational and emotional support they so desperately need. â€œIt is like taking a fish from the sea and putting it in the air or on the ground,â€ she explains mournfully, â€œso it will die. And that is what we feel like when we leave our families; when we leave our Muslim communities.â€*