

Book Review

MissionShift: Global Mission Issues in the Third Millennium

David J. Hesselgrave and Ed Stetzer, eds.

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“Missions in crisis” accurately describes the missiological landscape as God’s apostolic/missionary people enter the third millennium, although Eric S. Fife and Arthur F. Glasser first published the phrase in 1961.¹ With the phenomenal spread² of the gospel, the growth of the Church, and the development of missions theory and praxis significant missiological advances have occurred during the past fifty years. However, divergent and often contradictory views of what constitutes mission, missions, missions theory, and missional activities collide, divide, and confuse people who seek to obey God’s call to missions.

MissionShift attempts to understand the shifts in missions by inviting leading missiologists to identify and interact with the various movements. This conversation on contemporary issues in missions is organized around anchoring essays by three recognized evangelical missiologists.

Charles Van Engen reviews the historical aspects of missions in order to set the context and clarify the language by offering a definition and description of “mission.” He analyzes the “present” of missions through the changing perceptions of contextualization by the late Paul G. Hiebert. Ralph D. Winter, who also passed to his eternal reward prior to this publication, addresses the “future” of

missions through his own unique lenses and passions.

Several of the respondents to Van Engen seem more concerned with their own missiological agendas than interacting with his essay. However, Stetzer’s concluding chapter to this section offered balance and insight to missiological definitions and the relationship between biblical authority and contextual thinking.

This transitioned nicely to Hiebert’s anchoring chapter on “The Gospel in Human Contexts,” which provides a concise summary of the major perspectives on contextualization, sheds light on and centers on the most critical contemporary missiological debate.

Most of the respondents build on Hiebert’s work. Geisler, however, takes Hiebert and contextualization to task. Ultimately, it appears that Geisler defines truth and theology through his own cultural lenses, thereby supporting Hiebert’s point.

Ever the provocateur, Winter’s anchoring chapter entitled, “The Future of Evangelicals in Mission,” rehearses evangelical history in order to challenge the Church to engage human needs as a pre-evangelism strategy. The respondents, Scott Moreau and Mark Terry, enumerate contemporary issues and describe future trends in missions. Little’s

eye-opening response to Winter affirms the need for holism in missions, but he rejects Winter's challenge and prioritizes the eternal over the temporary.

In the concluding chapter of each section, Stetzer does a masterful job of bringing the various threads of thought together. The concluding chapter by co-editor and renowned missiologist, David J. Hesselgrave, provides a brief narrative of both his and Donald McGavran's missiological pilgrimages as a backdrop for offering three keys to "resolving the dilemma facing twenty-first century evangelical mission/missiology" and critiquing the anchor chapters and respondents. These three keys include: (1) differentiating between missiology as science and task, (2) recognizing Scripture as the standard of measurement, and (3) harnessing the potential of discussion and dialogue. The editors conclude that evangelical missions has a future as long as the Church continues to adhere to the Truth of Scripture, engages one another in dialogue, and communicates the gospel to the world.

This book addresses the dynamic nature of the missions enterprise, the tension between the eternal of the gospel and the Kingdom of God, and the various means and forms by which the eternal is expressed in the temporary. Effectiveness in missions and missiology requires God's people, including missiologists, to reflect on the meaning of

missions even as they engage in giving witness to an ever-changing world in the power of the Spirit. They must not only ask, "What is our task or mission?" but also "Where does the power for mission come from?"

These questions bring to light a weakness in this conversation. While Moreau notes the increase in majority world missions, and Terry emphasizes the growth of Pentecostalism, these voices were either under-represented or totally neglected. Their inclusion would have likely underscored the relationship between pneumatology and missions as critical to missiological contextualization, missiology, and missional praxis. Contemporary missiologists need to be prayer-saturated scholar-practitioners whose missiological reflection and praxis emerge as directed and empowered by the Spirit as they engage the Word, the community of faith, and the world.

God's apostolic/missionary people must be scholar-practitioners who rely on the Spirit because although there is one Lord, one faith, one gospel, no singular "mission" exists—but rather multiple missions for the various individuals and communities that constitute God's apostolic/missionary people. The Spirit guides into all Truth, brings unity, and empowers the apostolic/missionary people of God to live under the rule of the resurrected Christ—giving witness to the world until He comes.

¹Eric S. Fife, and Arthur F. Glasser, *Missions in Crisis: Rethinking Missionary Strategy*. Chicago, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1961.