

# Why Not Read a Book about Mission this Summer?



## Missiologists talk about the books they would like to recommend

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Compiler: Dr Jonathan Ingleby, Editor of Encounters.

Summer is supposedly a great time for reading, so we thought we would ask some of the experts in the field what they had been reading recently, and what they thought you would enjoy reading too.

### Colin Bulley

Since beginning teaching an MA course on Prosperity Theology three years ago, I have been surprised both by how widespread it is (most of my overseas students have first- or close second-hand experience of it) and by how much heat it can generate rather than light. Hence my pleasure in finding and recommending **Andrew Perriman** (ed.), *Faith, Health & Prosperity: A Report on 'Word of Faith' and 'Positive Confession' Theologies* by **The Evangelical Alliance (UK) Commission on Unity and Truth among Evangelicals** (Paternoster). This book describes Prosperity Theology accurately and critiques it positively (what we can learn from it) as well as negatively. It also has some interesting ideas on whether there are two biblical modes of discipleship relating to wealth, a 'discipleship of the road' and 'a settled discipleship of home and workplace' (p.226).

A second book on this subject that I have found very helpful is **Robert Bowman's** *The Word-Faith Controversy: Understanding the Health and Wealth Gospel* (Baker Books). This has the same positive characteristics as Perriman's book and is particularly good on the movement's disputed origins, especially the purported cultic ones. It is written, as one might expect, from an American and more conservative theological viewpoint than Perriman's.

### Rob Cook

At first we in the West thought we were the theological players and the two-thirds world could watch and learn. Then we realized that they also had some decent players and our job was therefore to referee. **J. Parratt** (ed.), *Third World Theologies* (Cambridge), written largely by indigenous practitioners, decisively demonstrates that we are all in the game together. It is also salutary to learn that a ubiquitous theme is the struggle to overcome the shadow of colonialism and to find an authentic ethnic theological voice. But when does contextualization become syncretism? And who decides?

A lighter but equally enticing book is **W. Johnston's** *Mystical Journey: an autobiography* (Orbis) by a Jesuit missionary to Japan who has spent his life exploring contemplative prayer and attempting to relate it to Eastern mysticism, particularly Zen Buddhism. It is a fascinating insider's account of the massive shift of policy and attitude to other faiths pre- and post-Vatican II and Johnston's conclusion interested me that although there is much overlap of technique and experience between the Zen and Catholic forms of mysticism, the latter remains distinctive in progressing through the void of 'the cloud of unknowing' driven on by 'the dart of love'; the Christian psychonauts insist that the Great Mystery is gracious. Finally, there is **Keith Ward's** *Is Religion Dangerous?* (Lion). I am so pleased that as Ward moves into retirement he is becoming even more prolific. He has been duelling with Richard Dawkins for decades and here he meets the objection that religion is not only false but also downright dangerous. He readily admits that atrocities were and are perpetrated in the name of God but points out that most of the carnage of the twentieth century was either non-

religiously motivated (e.g. the two World Wars) or came out of militant atheism (e.g. the state murders in Russia, China, North Korea and Cambodia). The difference is that religions, unlike Nazism and Communism, contain internal moral checks to counteract rogue elements. Political systems and religions can be dangerous, Ward argues, but it would be just as absurd to conclude that one should therefore ban all religions as to call for a ban on all politics. Typically Ward is bristling with insights and sharp argumentation and I can only whet your appetite with one or two of them.

### Philip Fountain

My reading over the past year has largely focused on the intersections between religion and development; an area that is fast becoming a hot topic within the field of development studies. Three books published recently were particularly thought provoking. **Erica Bornstein's *The Spirit of Development*** (Routledge) is a provocative analysis of the work of World Vision and the World Council of Churches in Zimbabwe. Bornstein perceives an 'enchanted development' in which the worlds of economics/development and spirituality/faith are intimately intertwined. **Kathleen Nadeau's** study of base ecclesial communities in the Philippines in ***Liberation Theology in the Philippines*** (Praeger/Greenwood) offers a critical analysis of the limits of grassroots work by faith actors in the face of wider systemic barriers to poverty eradication. **Laurie Occhipinti's *Acting on Faith*** (Lexington Books) traces religiously inflected idioms of development and the ways these are practised in the relationship of two small Roman Catholic development agencies and rural Argentinean communities. Of the specifically Christian books in this area, I greatly enjoyed ***Development to a Different Drummer*** edited by **Yoder, Redekop and Jantzi** (Good Books). This collection of reflections on North American Anabaptist perspectives of development exhibited a greater sense of self-reflexivity and critique than is generally found among faith-informed texts on development.

### Andrew Gammie

Though it is not within my last year's reading, it may be relevant to mention a book that had a profound influence on me regarding enculturation of the gospel message. It is probably seen as one of the 'classics' - I don't know - but it may be beneficial to others, even though perhaps out of date. ***Christianity Rediscovered*** (SCM) by **Vincent Donovan** issues a challenge to understand your field before bringing models of mission to it. Even if seen as rather old now, it is salutary to realise how long the process of challenging conventional mission activity has been going on in the modern era. Perhaps another element of refreshment about the perspective is that it comes from outside the evangelical tradition.

### Jim Harries

***When Charity Destroys Dignity*** (Authorhouse) by **Glenn Schwartz** is a drawing together of decades of practical experience in countering mission 'dependency', especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. **David Maranz's** book ***African Friends and Money Matters*** is a MUST for someone who intends to minister in Sub-Saharan Africa, to begin to get an idea of how people approach the important topic of money. **Lamin Sanneh's** book ***Translating the Message*** (Orbis) begins to direct us to vital issues regarding mission and translation, as pertinent today as ever.

### **Alison Hull**

My first choice is ***To Give or not to Give*** (STL) by **John Rowell**, which is talking about the support that should be given by the West to missions. John Rowell argues that increasingly modern mission theory holds that indigenous churches can only be healthy if they are self-supporting. But this tends to mean that western Christians are becoming less and less inclined to give generously. What should westerners give in support of global evangelism? What reflects God's heart best? My second choice is ***One Cross, One Way, Many Journeys*** (Authentic) by **David Greenlee**. What does conversion mean globally? Conversion is at the heart of the Christian experience, but is it a process or a crisis event? With anti-conversion sentiment running high in Asia and in the Islamic world, what does conversion mean in a global context in the twenty first century? This book provides some answers. Thirdly, ***Innovation in Mission*** (Authentic) by **Jim Reapsome** and **Jon Hirst** gives a forum for missionaries to come together to describe innovations in their area of expertise from around the world. We live in a changing world, but is the way we do mission changing as fast? This book brings together creative international practitioners to describe new ways of doing mission, across the globe.

### **Jonathan Ingleby**

The best book about mission I have read recently is **Robert Fisk's *The Great War for Civilisation*** (Harper) which you might argue is not about mission in the strict sense at all. Nevertheless for those involved in mission (especially in the Middle East) it is a terrific read. I also profited by **Lamin Sanneh's *Whose Religion is Christianity?*** (Eerdmans). The question and answer format is annoying, but it seems vital to me that we listen to people from the Global South that are critical of Western Christianity and who believe that 'world Christianity' is the way ahead.

### **Simon Steer**

***The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South*** (OUP) by **Philip Jenkins** is a fascinating sequel to *The Next Christendom*. It describes and analyses the dynamic ways in which the Bible is appropriated, particularly in Africa and Asia, and suggests that 'northern' Christians have much to learn (although not uncritically) from the directness of 'southern' approaches to scripture. It can be unsettling but hugely beneficial to look again at a Bible we thought we knew.

### **Darrell Jackson**

There is only one book I want to recommend and that is **Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead*** (Virago). This is a rare book. Towards the end of his life, the Reverend John Ames begins a letter to his young son. Set in small town America of 1956, Ames is an average preacher, a reasonable theologian, a man of honour, and a good pastor. What sets his character aside from other literary portrayals of pastors or priests is his profound understanding and experience of grace, 'Grace is not so poor a thing that it cannot present itself in any number of ways,' he writes to his son. The book is written without chapters, as one would expect of a letter. It is the most precious gift that seventy year old Ames' could give to his seven year old son. With so little time to nurture his child and concerned to leave a legacy of the father he might have been, Ames succeeds in being the father he might have been. Books about priests and pastors often fail to understand the motivation for Christian ministry, or misrepresent and distort it. Marilynne Robinson is guilty of neither. Ames is utterly believable and described flawlessly. In his sixties he marries a member of his congregation who bears him a son. Through his letter, the son is introduced to Ames's own father, an eccentric

pioneer preacher, and the family of the Presbyterian minister in town, the Boughtons. The minister's son, Jack Boughton, is everything Ames is not. He is dissolute, has a common-law wife, is an atheist, and is something of Ames's nemesis. Despite this, as Ames and Boughton part for the last time, Ames spontaneously blesses Jack. This paternal response is characteristic of Ames' letter. It is the assurance his own son will one day require; the assurance that a father's love, through every possible turn of life, proceeds only as a consequence of grace. Every time I read this book I am moved and humbled by its spiritual vision. It's the literary equivalent of sitting in utter silence watching the sun rise or set. On each page there are gems to be discovered. As a minister and as a father, watching my own one year old son grow up, I can only pray that I will approach something of the stature of the Reverend John Ames. The book won the 2005 Pulitzer Prize and National Book Critics Award and deserved it.

### **Manoj Jacob**

**Lesslie Newbigin's** book *The Open Secret* (SPCK) gives the reader a refreshing and broader understanding of mission. He notes a change in the understanding of mission from primarily increasing the membership of the church to the doing of God's justice in the world. The expression of mission is looked at from the Kingdom perspective as faith, love and hope in action. Newbigin cannot see a separation of the preaching of the gospel from action for God's justice. He challenges the reader to look at mission with this holistic outlook and this makes the book a 'must read' for anyone who is serious about being involved in God's mission in His way.

### **Jaap Ketelaar**

Two suggestions: (1) **Henry Blackaby**, *Spiritual Leadership – Moving People on to God's Agenda* (Broadman and Holman). In my training of church leaders I really like and use this book a lot, because it covers the most important leadership issues from a perspective that is focused on God's agenda. In that way leaders are being taught to be missionary leaders and that is exactly what I believe they are called to. (2) **Peter Steinke**, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times – Being Calm and Courageous no Matter What* (Alban Institute). Did you ever personally feel insecure when people put the pressure on you? From a psychological and theological angle, Steinke focuses on how you can cope and handle difficult issues in times of anxiousness. A practical 'must read' for the leader for when 'the going gets rough'.

### **Bryan Knell**

*What on Earth is the Church For?* by **David Devenish** (Authentic) is a very important and relevant book for today. David Devenish is a church leader, who appreciates that mission agencies have a great deal of useful expertise and experience, but also wants to see the church at the heart of mission. Many other church leaders will respond positively to what he has to say. Most mission agency leaders need to listen carefully and be prepared to adapt their structures and practices to equip and resource a new generation of missional churches. Over the next ten years we are going to see major changes in the relationship between missional churches and mission agencies. This book opens up the debate. Others from the agency side need to develop the debate, not in a threatened and defensive way, but rejoicing that so many churches want to be missional. My second choice is not a book but a whole series: *Briefings*, written by **Glen Myers** and published by Authentic. Good mission books that church members will read are of paramount importance, particularly as so much good material will never be read by the majority of Christians. In 1998 a series of Briefings was started and I have long felt that they should be promoted much more widely. Recently, the

eleventh and probably the last booklet was produced. These 64-page booklets are attractively produced, easy to read, with good maps, relevant prayer points and incorporating summaries in boxes. The titles are The Arab World, Children in Crisis, The Rim of Fire, Poorest of the Poor?, India, The Silk Road, Nomads, China, Buddhist Worlds, Mughals and the Balkans. They are all excellent. There is relevant historical background and interesting cultural insights, but the core commitment is to get to the heart of each situation and the dynamic of what is happening today.

### David Singh

I would like to recommend my colleague **Damon So's** work: ***Jesus' Revelation of His Father: A Narrative-Conceptual Study of the Trinity with Special Reference to Karl Barth*** (Paternoster). His main topic is the nature of the Trinity. He explores this topic through his serious engagement with the exegetical work of James Dunn and the systematic theology of Karl Barth. The book succeeds in not only presenting a critical commentary on Barth and Dunn but adds the perspective of a Chinese Christian theologian. This is where its fundamental originality lies as it seeks to enable the readers to reformulate an understanding of the role of the Spirit within the Godhead and in human salvation.

### Brian Stanley

I have three recommendations. (1) **Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing in the Bible in the Global South*** (OUP). Philip Jenkins's second major book on contemporary world Christianity is if anything even more noteworthy than his first (*The Next Christendom*). Unlike many studies of non-western theology, it takes very seriously the oral and popular nature of Christian belief in Asia and Africa. It is all about how southern Christians read the Bible with an immediacy that reflects their indifference to the questions raised in the North by the Enlightenment. Scriptural texts which in the North are dissected and discarded on critical grounds are received by Christian communities in the South as God's word of power addressed directly to their ears. For them, the biblical theme of God's grace encountered amidst poverty, oppression and disease, resonates with their everyday experience. (2) **Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000*** (CUP). What role has the Bible played in the construction or refutation of racial theories? Kidd's book is a welcome attempt to address this question. Kidd began his research with the hypothesis that pre-modern European Christian cultures which accepted the Scriptures as the authoritative word of God were predisposed to view humanity as a single biological family and that, conversely, the erosion during the nineteenth century of confidence in the authority of the Bible opened the door to theories of human polygenesis and the crudities of late Victorian and Edwardian racism. Although Kidd reaches the conclusion that the connection between race and theology was not so simple, he never wholly abandons his initial hunch. Along the way he explores discussions of once hotly debated questions such as 'Did Adam have a navel?' or 'Is the red colour of Amerindian peoples a sign of their direct descent from Adam [widely supposed to be red-skinned], or are they rather remnants of the lost ten tribes of Israel?' (3) **Alvyn Austin, *China's Millions: The China Inland Mission and Late Qing Society, 1832-1905*** (Eerdmans). The conservative evangelical tradition is not generally renowned for its veneration of saints. However, James Hudson Taylor's place in evangelical hagiography has been secure ever since the publication in 1911 and 1918 of the two volumes of his biography written by his son, Dr Howard Taylor, and daughter-in-law, Geraldine Guinness. Austin seeks to side-step the aura of sanctity which has enveloped Taylor himself and focus our attention instead on the ordinary women and men, whether foreign missionaries or Chinese evangelists, who staffed his mission and gave their lives (some of them literally) for the implementation of Taylor's vision. Particularly fascinating is his portrayal of the controversial Pastor Hsi

Shengmo and the way in which he took the simple gospel symbolism of the 'wordless book', introduced to China by CIM missionaries in about 1880, and incorporated it into the traditional colour cosmology of Chinese culture.

### Kang-San Tan

Ida Glasser's refreshing book, *The Bible and Other Faiths: Christian Responsibility in a World of Religions* (IVP) stands in the tradition of Kenneth Cragg's approach of taking Islam seriously and more sympathetically; without refraining from the need to engage with Muslim thought and practices from a Christian position. *Early Christian Mission: Jesus and the Twelve - Paul and the Early Church* by Eckhard Schnabel (IVP) is a monumental two volumes (1928 pages!) and the latest New Testament study on "early Christian mission." Although the book focuses on the historical account of how the faith of the early church spread, Schnabel's unique contribution comes from his theological analyses of the early church's missionary endeavours and his ability to relate these insights to contemporary concerns. Alwyn Austin is Assistant Professor of History at Brock University, Ontario, Canada and his parents were CIM missionaries. His book *China's Millions: The China Inland Mission and Lat Qing Society, 1832-1905* (Eerdmans) is a critical study on Hudson Taylor and the CIM and will be a source of debate for those interested in analysing the strengths and weaknesses of CIM. Finally, *A Life of Jesus* (Tuttle Publishing) by Shusaku Endo is a work by someone who is considered to be one of Japan's greatest twentieth century writers, and touted as "the Graham Greene of Japan." *A Life of Jesus* is an attempt to retell the story of Jesus in a Japanese style to a Japanese audience. It is not a biography, nor is it a fictionalised account of Jesus' life. The basic story line is factual but developed into an Asian story form. The final result is captivating, refreshing and brilliant!

### Loun Ling Tan

Chris Wright's *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (IVP), has given me a broad perspective of God's mission and how we should approach the subject, e.g. a holistic missional hermeneutic of the Exodus account, neither over-spiritualising nor de-spiritualising the redemptive act. Also, before reading this book, I had never understood with such depth and clarity the relationship between God's activities in the history of Israel and among the nations. The church today is being confronted with her 'irresistible responsibility' for the rest of the world.

### John Wibberley

I suggest the following: R.J. Berry ed., *When Enough is Enough: a Christian Framework for Environmental Sustainability* (Apollos), which is a collection of essays encompassing theology, climate, creatures, values, economics, agriculture, justice, waste and harmony in creation as intended by Our Creator. It is a book of immediate contemporary practical relevance rooted in the timeless principles of scripture. Also, D. Bingham, *William Wilberforce - The Freedom Fighter* (Trailblazers), an inspiring book for young people with current relevance to this 200th anniversary year of the Act abolishing slavery. It has highly useful endpapers on thinking through the issues raised and on praying accordingly. There is also the much longer, detailed biography by John Pollock, *Wilberforce: God's Statesman* (Kingsway) which is highly recommended for adult readers.

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