

will have to deal honestly and explicitly with the biblical, theological, and pastoral issues surrounding such a universalism. Any work which enables the Christianity community to be more honest and more discerning is surely to be welcomed.

Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2006. (581pp.) [ISBN 0830825711]

This volume is a culmination of Chris Wright's long standing work in the matrix of mission studies, biblical studies and hermeneutics. Having already appreciated his work on Old Testament ethics in *Living as the People of God*, his exposition of the justice dimensions of the book of Deuteronomy in the NIBCommentary series, and his contribution to hermeneutics and mission in various shorter occasional pieces, I approached this volume with some anticipation. And I was not disappointed.

I feel comfortable with this book. I know what it's about and so I like it. By that I do not mean that it is bland and unchallenging; nor do I mean that I have already thought the thoughts of the author. What I am saying is that this book connects with my own struggles and questions about the nature and purpose of the Old Testament, and the connection between mission and Scripture. It opens up paths in directions that instinctively I want to be going in, but which I either could not have found on my own or would have taken much longer to find without this guide.

To my mind the key strength of this book is the way it demonstrates the missional nature of God, and that that nature is founded in the witness of the Old Testament. It does so in a manner that transcends the usual approach to studies on mission in the Old Testament. Such approaches generally amount to one of two things. On one hand, they may simply reject the notion of the Old Testament having much to say about mission at all, as is characteristic of the work of Schnabel, or they may treat it as a short prologue (some prologue) to the main thing, which is the New Testament and the age of the church; such is the approach of the otherwise enduringly excellent work of David Bosch. On the other hand, the attempt to find mission in the Old Testament may be little more than ingenious exegesis of the material in the service

of demonstrating that things went on in the Old Testament that, with the use of some smoke and mirrors, can be made to look remarkably like twentieth century Protestant evangelical voluntary missionary societies. Wright argues that this is not the point and goal at all of the Old Testament Scriptures. And it is just as well the Old Testament is much more than an apology for the voluntary missionary society, worthy as such organizations are, because there is very little of that in the Old Testament itself. At the same time, it is sobering to reflect on how recent, how unique to a particular set of world conditions, and probably ultimately how brief their appearance in the broad sweep of the history of God and God's church, contemporary Protestant evangelical understandings of mission are and will be. It is just as well that the Old Testament paints on a much bigger canvas. Wright projects that painting for his readers with the concept that the Old Testament is about God, and then shows how the portrait of God that emerges in its pages is of a fundamentally missional character. It is no accident that this volume feels more like systematic theology than biblical studies at some points. Incidentally, in that respect it is a welcome encouragement to dialogue between the two disciplines as well as an illustration of the mission imperative as an integrating factor in theological reflection. The emergence of the *missio Dei* is a critical result of this focus on the character of God. God is a missional God and God's people are formed to be engaged in God's mission.

Wright looks at this character from a variety of angles in unpacking what the *missio Dei* might look like. I can only mention several that were highlights for me; other readers will have other favourites. The ontological discussion around the notion of 'the other gods,' what we do about demons, the possibility of human construction of other gods, and the nature of idolatry, is very valuable. Similarly the question of care of creation and the related concept of mission as building God's temple is persuasively argued for an evangelical audience. I appreciated also the accompanying work on eschatology and ecology, which caused me to reflect on the poverty stricken nature of so much contemporary Christian practice and understanding in this area. Not unexpectedly there is much valuable ethical material, and the extended treatment of the case of HIV/AIDS as a missional issue is moving and motivating. And there is a nice comment on the interaction of trajectories of universality and particularity alongside each other, as well as an (inevitably inconclusive) reflection on the line between cultural

relevance and theological syncretism. Wright's illustration of that issue is limited to a few examples in a way that asks readers to consider their own struggles with the issue.

While I welcome the substantive thesis of the book and most of its applications, I was left with some questions. Some of these relate to what the author says, and some, I confess, reflect the annoying habit of reviewers complaining about the absence of what they would have included were they writing the book. In the whole matter of gods and demons and idols I was waiting for a more extended interaction with Walter Wink's conceptualization of principalities and powers, but this did not occur. I still wonder how Wright would relate his work to the more structural and depersonalised understanding of evil adopted by Wink. The question of evangelism vis a vis mission as presented in this book also leaves a sense of incompleteness. Wright has a strong section on what he calls the ultimacy of evangelism in mission. At the same times he brings a strong apologetic in the Lausanne tradition that mission and salvation operate on a much broader front than evangelism alone. In my mind, a paradoxical tension remains between the ultimacy of evangelism and the pervasive nature of the *missio Dei*. To be fair to Wright, he probably reflects an ongoing struggle in the tradition to which most readers of this book will probably belong. As part of an excellent treatment of the nations Wright makes the point that the *ethnoi* should not be equated with the nation-states of today. In a day when globalisation and tribalisation struggle paradoxically with each other, I would like to have heard more on the contemporary missional response to that biblical fact.

But these are minor quibbles, and in any case not so much quibbles as challenges to further investigation. Mostly Wright evinces a magnificent grasp of the inexhaustible topic of the character of a missional God and its application to the twenty-first century. It is the nature of the case that there will always be more to say and investigate. That is Wright's challenge to his readers.

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