

Best Books on Mission

Colleagues,

Last Friday was the Feast of the Epiphany. Blessed be the ears that got to listen once again to the great account of wise ones drawn from the nations to the worship of Christ. Blessed too be the minds that made connections with prophetic promise on the one hand and apostolic vocation on the other, the latter laid out in Matthew's final chapter where Christ dispatches some not-so-wise ones (28:17) to head for the nations with good news to tell.

For your editors, Epiphany is a grand excuse to return again to one of Thursday Theology's central concerns during the many years of Ed Schroeder's stewardship. Ed worked hard and persistently to make us think about the Church's mission and to embrace it as our own compelling vocation. Others are busy too, of course, with that same sort of work. We'd like you to hear from a few of them.

First on the list is Richard Gahl. Dick is a retired pastor and church executive who continues to be the ranking Lutheran expert in my neck of the woods (Greater Cleveland; Northeastern Ohio) on matters missiological. If you attended the Crossings Conference in 2010 you may have met him or, better still, found your way to his workshop presentation. Getting to know him as a good friend and trusted advisor has been one of the Lord's better gifts to this pastor in recent years. I asked Dick a couple of months ago if he might have something to contribute to Thursday Theology especially on the subject of mission. He sent along the following list of books he'd recommend to anyone who wants to catch up on the best and latest that the scholars and thinkers are saying these days. You'll want to add some, we're guessing, to your Amazon wish list.

Peace and Joy,
Jerry Burce, for the editors

This annotated bibliography of recent mission studies grows out of a twenty-five year service as mission executive for the Ohio District LCMS. Over the years Vicedom, Bosch, Newbigin and a host of others have fueled my passion for the renewal of the mission of the church. We even started calling district congregations "mission outposts." The response from one pastor was telling. "We are not a mission congregation." Of course, he only thought of mission as receiving financial support, not God's mission in which the people of God are called to participate. Mission is much like a vision that is continually pursued. We live it, teach it, proclaim it. One of my current interests is including mission in Sunday proclamation-not just stories of what is happening, but encouragement and support for doing it as a congregation and as members of the congregation. The works of Lincoln and Ware in this list are invaluable for that effort.

1. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*, Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL. 2006. Wright has written this book to develop an approach to biblical hermeneutics that sees the mission of God and the participation in it of God's people as a framework in which to read the whole Bible. He begins with the teaching of Jesus on the journey to Emmaus where the Lord took his travelling companions through the scriptures to understand what was happening with the crucifixion and resurrection. With a solid background as an OT professor, Wright sets forth the roots of mission clearly and creatively. His working with Isaiah, care of creation, and covenant are thoroughly enriching.

2. Christopher J.H. Wright, *A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI. 2010. A reworking of the *Mission of God* in shorter chapters for group study. Hits all the main points. Lutherans may wish to do a rewrite of Chapter 14, *People who Praise and Pray*, to include essential sacramental elements.
3. Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission* (2 volumes), Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL 2004. One reviewer suggested many will use this 1600+ page work as reference encyclopedia. Look up a topic and mine the comments. This reviewer was fascinated with the detail of the Galilee mission in Luke 10: 36 teams spending 3 days in each town or village could cover 150 such places in six weeks. Later information details participation of bishops of new churches at the ecumenical councils-begun with the mission of the 72, strengthened in Galilee by the apostles, grown into important mission bases. The subjects are manifold. A big read, worth every page.
4. Craig Van Gelder & Dwight Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective, Missional Trends and Shaping the Conversation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI. 2011. Luther Seminary continues the work of the *Gospel and Our Culture Network* from the 90's that came to the U.S. to unfold the significant work of Leslie Newbigin. This is the latest of a very important series reporting on annual events hosted by the seminary. The first chapter of this book is an excellent historical review of the missional conversation in the US.
5. Alan J. Roxburgh & M. Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church, What it is, Why it Matters, How to Become One*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI. 2009. Allelon is another group of missional thinkers and writers well-worth paying attention to. Roxburgh, an Anglican and a prolific writer in the Allelon group, spends considerable time on

the lecture circuit well beyond the US and Canada. His work is both provocative and practical. Other Roxburgh titles worth noting: *Missional, Joining God in the Neighborhood* (2011), *Missional Map Making, Skills for Leading in Times of Transition* (2010).

6. Klaus Detlev Schulz, *Mission from the Cross, The Lutheran Theology of Mission*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO. 2009. Well thought out from a systematic point of view. If there is a weakness, it is the assumption that readers are able to fill in biblical background. I confess to being uncomfortable with the presumption of the subtitle, *THE Lutheran Theology of Mission*.
7. Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St. John, Black's New Testament Commentary*, Hendrickson Publishing, Peabody, MA. 2006. Lincoln contends that John is a mission instruction manual for the NT church. In effect Lincoln works backwards from 20:30-31 and traces the instructional process from the prologue through chapter 31. He notes the extensive and interchangeable use (42 times) of "pempo" and apostello. My gleanings about mission fill ten pages. Refreshing. Inspiring.
8. James P. Ware, *Paul and the Mission of the Church, Philippians in Ancient Jewish Context*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI. 2011. This is a last-minute addition to the top seven. Ware does an impressive job of highlighting the inclusion of the nations in the end time vision of mission in the OT. This understanding welcomed the proselyte but did not actively seek them. He then demonstrates from Phil 2 the new understanding that the end times has taken place necessitating an intentional outreach to all people. An extensive eight-page presentation of "epecho" as "setting forth" grounds every participant in the NT church in reaching out to others. This completely overturns the position of Lutheran

Orthodoxy that the Great Commission did not devolve to the church beyond the apostles. Breakthrough theology for mission.

In the Thursday Theology pipeline-

January 19 through February 2: Rev. Paul Jaster's three-part tour through the Gospel of Mark

February 9: A wrap-up report on the Fourth International Crossings Conference, by Cathy Lessmann