

# **BOOK REVIEW: A TIME FOR MISSION: THE CHALLENGE FOR GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Samuel Escobar, the author of *A Time for Mission*, is the President of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, and of the United Bible Societies.<sup>1</sup> Besides holding these portfolios, he is a Professor of Missiology at the Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Pennsylvania, USA.

Being a Peruvian, Escobar acknowledges, in his preface, the role of missionaries in the establishing of the church in Peru, and in his own Christian discipleship. Escobar believes that, since the gospel came to Peruvians through the sharing of the Word of God by missionaries, Peruvians are bound to share the gospel with others.<sup>2</sup>

## **REVIEW**

The rambling style makes it difficult to halt at any point and think. The themes are lightly treated, as in a lecture, so that we cannot get much meat out of it. The reason could be that the book targets a specific audience, those having an exposure to missions, and the trends of missions.

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Escobar, *A Time for Mission: The Challenge for Global Christianity*, Leicester UK: IVP, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Preface.

In the chapter entitled, “We Believe in a Missionary God”, the author establishes the fact that God is actively involved in our human history. In another chapter, entitled “Christ: God’s Best Missionary”, he speaks of Christ as the model for missionaries. However, it is a bit jarring to the ear to call God a missionary God, and Jesus, the greatest missionary, especially in this age, when the word “missionary” could have many connotations. If God is not a missionary God, and if Jesus is not the greatest missionary, does one’s view of God in any way denigrate Him to a lesser degree? Is missionary enterprise the end of all things? This book has the common missiological pitfalls of viewing all things under the broad gaze of the missiologist. However, the book serves to bring to us a broad view of the global church, in its present task of missions, from the observer’s point of view.

The author begins his book with a story of individual Christians, who are living away from their homes, and are now involved in missionary work. They were not missionaries in the traditional sense, who had sensed the call of God, and left their homes, but individuals, whose fortunes led them far away into new, foreign cultures. Now, having found Christ, they cannot sit still, but share the gospel with others, whose culture is different from their own. Mrs Pinto, from Bolivia, living in Germany, shared the life-changing gospel with Jose Antonio, who is from Spain. This is an example of how people of all nations are involved in sharing the gospel, in most unconventional ways.

We are thrilled to observe the movement of Christian missions now – missionaries are going from all nations to all nations. In the 21st century, with its facilities of travel, and the boom of information technology, people are more mobile than in the past, and the burden of sharing the gospel has shifted from the traditional sending churches in the developed world to the churches in the developing world.

From this vantage point, Samuel Escobar goes on to describe the frailty of man, and the glory and power of the gospel, as succinctly put by St Paul as “treasure in jars of clay”.<sup>3</sup> The author points to the fact of similarity between

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

the evangelisation, in cross-cultural context, in the 1st century, and today's situation of evangelism in poorer societies of the world, encompassing many cultures. He argues that the situation is the same. The similarity is striking, in that one would opt for a new perspective of missions, as opposed to the prevalent Eurocentric view of establishing churches, which has been the experience of missions in the 20th century. This similarity of the life and mission of the early church to the present, among the poor and marginalised, is the key to rediscovering the role of laymen, women, children, and elderly people, all involved in the process of missionary enterprise.

Tracing the growth of the church, with events of the past until the present, the author now concludes that the vibrancy of Christian faith, in the poorer societies, and in the so-called Third World, is noteworthy, when we think of missions and their work.<sup>4</sup>

Considering globalisation, under the title, "A Brave New World", the writer describes the process of globalisation, and how it affected people's lives so much that Desecrates' famous saying, "I think, therefore I am" can be safely changed to "I buy, therefore I am". He warns, however, of the danger of superimposing the ideas of globalisation onto our missions and their ideologies, but acknowledges it as a tool for the spread of the gospel.<sup>5</sup> One must be careful in assessing man's life. A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 13:15).

Contextualisation is a way the text of the Bible is understood, within a given context of culture and history. While this is so, one must be careful not to make idols of our language and culture. Reacting to the wide sweep of globalisation, contextualisation can be taken to the extreme of isolation. In the same token, one cannot ignore the benefits of exposure of local cultures to a wider audience. There is a learning process going on from one culture to another, and across all cultures. Here is the tension. The missionary has to be sensitive that he could be a carrier of globalisation tools in one hand, and,

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

therefore, should give adequate hearing to the local culture and language that he is based in as a witness of the gospel. Yet, one should not forget the dimensions of the gospel, that it is universal and its application calls forth universal response.

In chapters five and six, Escobar focuses on the content and the means of the gospel. In postmodern societies, such as what we are ushered into now, Christ is still the point of attraction. The mission involves obedience to the great commission to reach the unreached people, who are found within the vicinity of our own societies. What the Apostle had in mind, when he quoted these words, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (1 Cor 15:32), seems to apply to our generation as well. People in the world are searching for answers. Can we reconstruct a safer, humane world, not with Marxist ideology, but with the message of Jesus Christ? There is new openness in today's societies, which reflects the hunger and thirst of mankind for the truth of God. What should not be forgotten in our missionary ventures, however, are the keys of prayer, and a fresh view of humanity, with Christ's compassion. The message is about Christ Himself. The model of missionaries is Christ Himself. His incarnation and His depiction of the Suffering Servant of God are the guidelines for us to follow.

In another chapter, the author highlights the importance of knowing the Holy Spirit, as the participant in the work of missions. Without Him, no mission can thrive, no missionary can be successful. To emphasise this point, Escobar points to the introduction of the Holy Spirit by the Lord Jesus Himself in John's gospel. The Holy Spirit is the fulfilment of God's promise; He was the energiser in the ministry of Jesus, and God uses people who are filled with the Spirit. In fact, the book of Acts can be read as an extension of Jesus' teaching about the Holy Spirit, found in John's gospel. The missions now have to look ahead, with the sensitivity to the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit in all our ventures.

Another most important element in successful missions, is how much we give importance to God's word. Wherever we find churches thriving in the world,

it is because they have discovered the truth of God in the Bible, in a fresh, living way. Instead of depending on the Western interpretation of the Bible, and its diversified theologies, Christians in the Third World have found the scriptures as the true embodiment of God's truth, and that Christ is the centre and end of scriptures.

### **CONCLUSION**

In closing, the author appeals to a new way of looking at the world, taking his cue from Paul's missionary experience, as outlined in 2 Corinthians.<sup>6</sup> The outcome will be new partnerships in missions, and the global church at odds with the world's values, but confidently moving in the direction of God, proclaiming Christ. The last chapter provides information on current publications in mission theology, and a few reference books.

This book enables readers to see the global church, with its inherent task of missions in our generation.

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.