

book reviews

Great Commission Companies: The Emerging Role of Business in Mission

Steve Rundle and Tom Steffen

Downers Grove, Illinois
InterVarsity Press, 2003

Rundle and Steffen provide an important study that opens up exciting possibilities for entrepreneurial Christian business people who want to be involved in mission beyond making donations. This does not require that individuals exchange a career in business for one as a full-time professional church worker (e.g., a missionary) supported by the donations of the rest of us in the church. Instead, the model of mission work that the authors have researched and now urge us to consider is the "Great Commission Company (GCC)."

A central thesis of the authors is that globalization is part of God's plan to spread the Gospel to the whole world. Many governments that are hostile to Christianity and would not allow missionaries in the country nevertheless are very receptive to foreign investment. Therefore, Christian business professionals have opportunities to become directly involved in mission to populations of the world who have been the last exposed to the Gospel by founding, managing, or otherwise supporting GCCs.

The name "Great Commission Company" is an obvious reference to Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus' directive to "make disciples of all nations ... teaching them everything that I have commanded." Although not explicit in the name, Jesus' Great Commandment (Matthew 22:36-40) that His followers should "love God with all their heart, soul and mind, and their neighbors as themselves" is also integral to the GCC model. This was understood throughout the history of the church until early in the 20th century when liberals began to emphasize social justice rather than making disciples, and evangelicals did the opposite. By the end of the century it had become obvious that both extremes were flawed, and more holistic approaches to missions began to emerge (pp. 34-35).

One manifestation of a more holistic approach is the GCC. A GCC is a company that is very intentional about bringing the Good News to the least developed and the least evangelized

parts of the world. Although a GCC can take on a wide variety of forms, the authors identify several common characteristics that surfaced in their five-year study of these enterprises: A GCC is socially responsible, is an authentic business that creates wealth, is managed by professionals committed to serving Christ in the market place, deals ethically with all its stakeholders, and promotes the growth and multiplication of local churches (pp. 41-42). The profits are often used to support other local mission and ministry programs.

In addition to the access that GCCs afford to the least-evangelized peoples of the world, the authors believe there are other advantages to this model that make it more effective than traditional mission efforts. These advantages include lowering the cultural barriers that often exist between foreigners and those with whom they are trying to connect and the opportunity that Christian managers have to model ethical business practices that are very often not the norm of the society.

Although this book is directed toward Christian business people, the mission of the church would be well served if its leaders were to consider the GCC model as they engage in the process of adopting and refining strategies to more effectively touch the lives of people throughout the world with the transforming message of salvation through Jesus Christ.

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Bethlehem Besieged

Mitri Raheb

Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2004

Though its setting is an impoverished land under cruel domination and occupation, *Bethlehem Besieged* is a testimony to the ironic hope that flows from the Gospel.

Mitri Raheb is an unlikely prophet. He is tall and slender, a bespectacled pastor and a lifelong citizen of Jesus' birthplace. He earned his theological doctorate from Marburg University in Germany, is fluent in four languages, and is intensely dedicated to proclaiming the Gospel within the context of the on-going struggle between Jews and Palestinians. Moreover, Mitri Raheb is absolutely strategic in wringing hope from despair.

In this, his second book (*I Am a Palestinian Christian* was published in 1995), Raheb reflects on the siege of the "Little Town of Bethlehem" in the occupied territories of the State of Israel in April of 2002. Israeli troops stormed the vulnerable city, killing innocent civilians and inflicting senseless damage on its buildings, including the campus of the historic "Christmas Church" of which Raheb is the pastor. Raheb uses stories to take the reader beyond the news headlines into the hearts of fellow Christians who, by virtue of their Palestinian Arab identity, are literal targets for the cruelty of an oppressive government. As he describes holding his young daughter Tala tightly in his arms in her darkened bedroom while an American-built F-16 strafed his neighborhood in October of 2000, political arguments seem irrelevant. Raheb's poignant narrative brings the conflict between Jew and Palestinian into the heart of the reader.

He is blunt both in his telling of the story and in his reflections on the current conditions in Bethlehem and the Occupied Territories. His most openly political chapter, "Building Walls or Planting Olive Trees?" is incisive in its indictments. "The current crisis in Israel/Palestine arises from a leadership lacking vision," he says. He is critical of both Ariel Sharon with his vision of Palestinian apartheid and the PLO for its inability to free themselves from a "liberation organization" into a more constructive "creative state."

But ultimately, *Bethlehem Besieged* becomes a case study in Christian hope. As he rests in bed after thirteen hours of Israeli firepower devastating Bethlehem, Pastor Raheb reflects on Jesus' words from Matthew 10: "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." His fear dissipates: "I stopped worrying about what had been destroyed and started to think of ways to rebuild ... I felt as if I had been given a new dream in the midst of a nightmare ..." (p. 13).

Over the years since that first siege of Bethlehem, Mitri Raheb's "new dream" gave birth to Dar Al Kalima Lutheran School, the International Center of Bethlehem, a Health and Wellness Center, and "Bright Stars," an arts program for Palestinian children that seeks to replace their nightmares with visions of beauty and peace as they use their God-given talents.

It is hard for these two reviewers to be completely objective regarding this fine book. Pastor

Raheb is a dear friend, and our congregation, Our Father in Centennial, Colorado, raised \$60,000 for a classroom at Dar Al Kalima. "Christian hope holds firm that it's never too late for faith in action and for acts of compassion," Mitri reminds us toward the close of his book (p. 156).

Bethlehem Besieged is an engaging chronicle of the power of Christian hope in action. It is never too late.

Donald and Margaret Hinchey

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The New Global Mission: the Gospel from everywhere to everyone

Samuel Escobar

Downers Grove Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003

Samuel Escobar's book is a valuable perspective on God's mission of bringing the Gospel to the world. The author states: "In this book I shall explore how the church propagates the Christian faith. The heart of 'mission' is the drive to share the good news with all, to cross every border with the gospel," and "This book is intended to be a missiological reflection. I define *missiology* as an interdisciplinary approach to understanding missionary action" (p. 21). He more than succeeds in accomplishing these two stated goals. The ten chapters include the titles, *Brave New World Order (globalization and contextualization)*, *Post-Christian and Postmodern*, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Mission*, and *Text and Context—the Word through New Eyes (Bible and culture)*.

Escobar is eminently qualified to write on the topic of mission theory. Currently professor of missiology at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, he served in the International Congress on World Evangelization held in 1974 in Lausanne, Switzerland, is president of United Bible Societies, and is past president of International Fellowship of Evangelical Students.

As a native of Peru, he embodies one of the characteristics of the world mission movement. Today, more Christians live in Africa, Asia,

and Latin America than in Europe and North America, and the number of missionaries from these regions is growing. Non-Western cultures continue to be more receptive to the Gospel in contrast to those in the West, and the relocation of Christian migrants and refugees provides increased opportunities for their witness. Some of the book's strengths are: It is an example of a non-Westerner writing for both Western and non-Western audiences; the broad global, historical, and scriptural approach Escobar provides; and the way he integrates samples of other mission writings.

The author creates awareness of the certainty of God's mission when he writes, "... we lose perspective and a sense of direction when we forget the divine dimension of mission. A sound grasp of the history of missions helps us to avoid becoming idealistic or paralyzed by cynicism." He quotes K. Latourette, "No fact of history is more amazing than the spread of the influence of Jesus."

By making numerous Scripture references (a one-page Scripture index is included; there is no general index) and comparing the church described in Acts and the church today, Escobar challenges readers to examine their own beliefs. He cautions all Christians against substituting man's plans for God's when he says, "If Christian mission is first and foremost God's mission, Christians must always conduct mission in an attitude of humility and dependence upon God." He calls all believers to consider their vital part in God's mission when he writes, "... the church exists for mission and ... a church that is only inward looking is not truly the church," and "Global partnerships of churches will be indispensable for mission in the twenty-first century." An appendix "For Further Study" describes additional book resources to help further inform and challenge the reader.

The New Global Mission is highly recommended for laypersons, all church workers and church leaders, mission personnel, and theology or mission book collections.

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