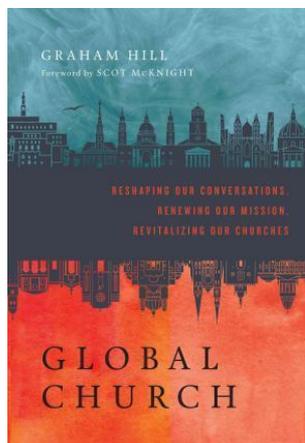


A Review of:

Graham Hill. *Global Church: Reshaping our Conversations, Renewing our Mission, Revitalizing our Churches* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015). Hardback.



It is widely documented how the church is declining in the Western world but flourishing in the Majority World. Yet for many pastors and theology students in the West, our diet of theological writing is predominately written by white, male religious professionals. What can we learn from Majority World and indigenous Christians, and where can we turn for a guide to their wisdom and insights?

Graham Hill offers a comprehensive overview in *Global Church* that promises to enrich Western perspectives on church and mission.

Launching from his framework for missional ecclesiology in his earlier book *Salt, Light and a City*, Part 1 contends that Western leaders will enhance their “saltiness” through more mutual global or ‘glocal’ conversations. In the context of church decline in the West, we can learn from other parts of the world where the church is flourishing and being renewed. Hill articulates this vision throughout the book, for example:

Those of us in the West need a new narrative. It’s time to abandon our flawed Eurocentric and Americentric worldviews. We need a new, global and missional narrative, and for that we must turn to the churches of the Majority World and indigenous cultures. They can help us explore what it means to be a global missional community. Many Christian communities in Majority World and indigenous contexts have been wrestling with these issues for generations. Marginalization and persecution and alienation have been their lot. Yet somehow, in spite of or because of that, they have flourished. ... grown exponentially. ... For far too long we’ve marginalized or ignored Majority World and indigenous voices. We must become a GlobalChurch. (Hill, p.16, 17)

Part 2 suggests the Western church will be able to shine its light and participate together in renewed global mission as we learn from indigenous and Majority world Christians about contextualization, liberation, hospitality, Spirit empowerment, creation care, ethics and neighbourhood transformation. Hill introduces the reader to very interesting thinkers, often writing from difficult contexts of poverty and persecution, and with challenging concrete calls to action. It is fascinating to read of the different issues prophetic Christians in others parts of the world emphasise. As just one example, Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orbaton argues ethics must engage the big five moral issues in Africa: the “lion” of governance, the “elephant” of creation

care, the “rhinoceros” of genetically modified foods, the “buffalo” of resource extraction and the “leopard” of domestic justice. Western Christians might both learn from such examples of local theology, and be inspired to do their own contextualization afresh.

Part 3 urges churches towards revitalization in order to function as a distinct “city on a hill”. Hill continues to suggest and illustrate with his literature overview, conversations and travel snippets how we can learn from Global church sisters and brothers. The topics he explores include indigenizing faith, devouring Scripture, renewing education, practising servanthship, recovering community, and developing spirituality and discipleship. A common theme is for local encultured theology, fostered in and for local communities, such as the “shade-tree theology” which Cameroon theologian JenaMarc Ela describes in *African Cry* as “far from the libraries and the offices, develops among brothers and sisters searching shoulder to shoulder with unlettered peasants for the sense of the word of God in situations in which this word touches them.” (Hill, p241) Theological education, moreover, that is traditional and residential-based is increasingly being questioned. Hill describes some constructive initiatives that are focused on training already recognised leaders, in financially accessible formats, in closer partnership with local churches, explicitly reshaped around missional curriculum, and in other ways that Western institutions can learn from Majority World educators.

The whole book is a summons, and a guide map, towards more interdependent, collaborative, postcolonial, holistic and humble alternate directions for our churches and mission. It freshly convinced me of the relative poverty of theological reflection if divorced from global conversation partners.

Global Church is a timely resource for students and teachers of World Christianity, missional church and contextualization. It is complemented by Hill’s blog and multimedia and other resources at the online Global Church Project: (<https://theglobalchurchproject.com>).

About the Reviewer

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