

Michael W. Goheen, *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011).

In *A Light to the Nations*, Michael Goheen, who is Geneva Professor of Worldview and Religious Studies at Trinity Western University, has provided us with a wonderful introduction to the biblical themes that support and guide the missional church. The book displays careful biblical and exegetical scholarship, interaction with a wide range of missiological and biblical sources, and attention to some of the key scholarly voices that examine the nature and mission of the church. A basic biblical theology of the missional church is presented, along with a missional reading and interpretation of Scripture, in a way that combines careful scholarship with an accessible, pastoral style.

Goheen's "primary concern... is to analyse the missional identity of the church by tracing its role in the biblical story" (p.ix). Instead of emphasising missiology at the expense of ecclesiology, as some in the missional church have a habit of doing, Goheen demonstrates biblically and theologically the important link between sound missional ecclesiology and the mission of God in the world and in human history. Our missional identity can never be fully appreciated without a substantial biblical ecclesiology that places mission at the centre of the church's essence, identity, and activities. Goheen shows how the church's self-understanding as a missional community has been obscured at particular times in its history, and how ecclesiological images shape the church and its understanding and pursuit of its mission. He also roots missional ecclesiology in the gospel, being careful to paint a biblical picture of the relationship between the gospel, missional ecclesiology, and the biblical story. Goheen's analysis of the mission of the church in the biblical narrative spans Israel's missional role and identity, the intertestamental period, Jesus' eschatological message of the kingdom and formation of a distinctive people, and ways in which the death and resurrection of Jesus define and shape the church's missional and ecclesial identity. From there he examines the missional identity of the church in the New Testament, and how the imagery of "the People of God," of the New Creation, of the Body of Christ, of the Temple of the Holy Spirit, and of "dispersion, exile, aliens, and strangers" might be conceived missionally. As he traces this biblical narrative he returns again and again to some central themes—the church participates in God's mission, the church understands its mission in the light of the biblical narrative, the church has a communal mission, and, while noting points of continuity and discontinuity, the church continues the mission of Israel, Jesus, and the early church as it faithfully follows the mission of God.

Goheen is both scholar and pastor. While concerned for the concrete application of a missional ecclesiology, he is committed to doing the necessary biblical and theological work first. Goheen laments that biblical scholars are sometimes "fearful of drawing out the relevance for today," while pastors "seek contemporary relevance and sometimes fail to respect the cultural distance between text and context" (p.201). In his treatment of the biblical themes and narratives undergirding the missional church, he has not only "attempted to remain faithful to the story the Bible is telling by remaining within the original historical and cultural context with its problems and questions" (p.201), but has also provided an excellent range of practical implications for local congregations in the final chapter. These implications span the church's worship, preaching, prayer, community, contrast, cultural engagement, vocation, leadership training, evangelism, social action, hospitality, global and local mission, nurture of children and families, small groups, and unity.

I have a few concerns about the work. My first concern is that Goheen has not engaged the voices, theologies, or missional lessons of the Majority World. The bibliography is almost exclusively Euro-American, and this would have been a richer book if Goheen had expanded it to include some of the key perspectives of missional ecclesialogists from Asia, Latin America, Africa, and other parts of the Majority World. Secondly, Goheen's critique of Christendom needs to be more nuanced. His examination of Christendom might have profited from consulting broader scholarship, and especially those authors that represent the complexity of the church's life, manifestations, and mission in Christendom. Reading Goheen one might be left with the impression that there was one uniform period in western history we might call "Christendom," but surely this isn't the case—it might be better to speak of "Christendoms." His analysis of the post-Enlightenment church is similarly problematic. Thirdly, while I enjoyed Goheen's chapter on New Testament images of the missional church, students and pastors cannot fully appreciate these images without supplementing this chapter with the work of Paul Minear and John Driver, and Goheen draws heavily upon these scholars. Fourthly, while the last chapter has an outstanding collection of practical consequences for the missional church, this list needs to be supplemented by the work of more radical missional practitioners if the pastor or student is to fully appreciate the profound, thoroughgoing work that is required to re-missionalise an established church—otherwise the reader might possibly come to the conviction that re-missionalisation of established churches, denominations, and other Christian organisations is a matter of merely tweaking what we are currently doing so that it is missional. If only that was the case! Goheen probably doesn't intend to send this message in his list of practical applications for local churches, but it does tend to come through. In order to fully appreciate the implications of missional ecclesiology for the nature, mission, structures, and leadership of the local church, I would suggest supplementing Goheen final chapter with the work of people like Michael Frost, Neil Cole, Reggie McNeal, and Alan Roxburgh, and, as I've already noted, with the writings of Majority World missional thinkers like Kwame Bediako, Leonardo Boff, Samuel Escobar, John Mbiti, Oliver Onwubiko, René Padilla, Peter Phan, Juan Luis Segundo, Jon Sobrino, Tite Tiénou, and Orlando Costas.

This is a very good introduction to the biblical foundations for the missional church. *A Light to the Nations* is on my list as essential reading for missional ecclesiology. I used to ask my students to lay foundations for a missional ecclesiology by reading David Bosch's *Transforming Mission* and Christopher Wright's *The Mission of God* and *The Mission of God's People*. I will now add to that list this new book by Goheen, which I think is an indispensable and timely addition to our understanding of a biblical, gospel-centred, missional ecclesiology.

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