Kingdom Without Borders: The Untold Story of Global Christianity

By Miriam Adeney
Reviewed by Darren Cronshaw

A big challenge for the church, especially in the Western world, is responding positively to cultural diversity and being prepared to learn from what God is doing in other cultures. In a postcolonial world, and with the shift of balance of Christianity moved from the West to the global South, this is a timely learning opportunity for Western Christians. People and churches can have a vision for global mission, and be committed to giving and going, but it is only one way until we are committed to listening and learning from the stories of Global Christianity. This is why I was drawn to and enjoyed reading Kingdom Without Borders.

Miriam Adeney is an anthropologist and missiologist who teaches as Associate Professor of World Christian Studies at Seattle Pacific University. Her passion for global Christianity, community development, diaspora missiology, and multicultural ministry breathes through the pages of this book as she gives an overview of the living faith and witness of Christians from around the world.

There are exciting things God is doing and vibrant expressions of ministry across the globe. Kingdom without Borders introduces readers to stories of joy and struggle in China and Latin America, the Islamic and Buddhist worlds, and revitalized churches in Africa and the disillusioned younger generations of Iran. It intersperses these regional explorations with themed chapters examining the places of media and disaster response, creativity and suffering, and the Word and Spirit in mission.

My favorite parts of the book were the celebration of heroes of the faith: legendary missionaries, indigenous leaders, contemporary scholars, and everyday witnesses witnessing courageously in difficult circumstances. We meet heroes such as Simon Zhao and John Sung in China, Justin Olor in Africa, Bahram Deqani-Tafti murdered in Iran, and the exemplary missionary example of Sadhu Sundar Singh, Ath Fernando and Ann and Adoniram Judson. The story that most inspired me, however, was of Chantal, a Tutsi survivor who gave false testimony against a Hutu neighbor, but five years later recanted her false testimony. He forgave her and offered to be like a father (pp. 235-237). Such reconciliation in a context of injustice greater than we could often imagine in the West was the most powerful testimony to God's grace and transformative influence.

Some Western missionaries are celebrated, but the book predominately tells and celebrates the stories of missionaries working indigenously within their non-Western cultures, or ministering cross-culturally in other contexts. This is a help to move us on from seeing mission as 'from the West to the rest', to mission being from every culture to all the world. Philip Jenkins informs us that by 2050, only 25% of Christians will be non-Hispanic Whites, and so it is appropriate for more of our inspiration and guidance about how to do mission come from the non-Western world.

Adeney also teaches readers to read the Bible with intercultural eyes and see glimpses of truth we would not see from within our own cultural readings. She tells stories of radical mission and of history being written and rewritten. The book explores global trends including Pentecostalism and Liberation Theology, Creation care and food security, art, story-telling, and mysticism. It gives honest insight into the struggle of persecution and martyrdom (more Christians have been killed in the twentieth century than ever before).

The distrust and sometimes kidnapping of missionaries in some contexts is described, but Adeney balances her concern for toleration of Christians with a concern for sensitivity to other faiths. She points out the lack of wisdom in preaching confrontationally, evangelizing children without respect for their families, making disrespectful comments about other religions, and breaching the law to gain access to a country. The world in many places is hostile to Christianity, but this does not call for a necessarily aggressive or combative stance.

Adeney’s Kingdom Without Borders is an excellent primer for students of mission and those preparing for short-term mission, or for anyone open to the insights and inspiration of what God is doing in Global Christianity.

This review was originally published in Australian Journal of Mission Studies, Vol. 8, No. 1 (June 2014).