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## Book Review: Choosing a Future for U.S. Missions by McKaughan, O'Brien, & O'Brien

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*Choosing A Future for U.S. Missions*

Reviewed by Tom A. Steffen

What is the effective role of U.S. missions in the 21st century? While most church and mission agency leaders recognize that some change is greatly needed, many still seek a solid solution for the future. *Choosing A Future for U.S. Missions* (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1998) offers "promising new possibilities" through creative dialogue between the involved parties (church, seminary, agency, foundation).

Authors, Paul McKaughan, executive director of the Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies, Dellanna O'Brain, executive director of the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Fellowship, and William O'Brian, director of the global Center, Beeson Divinity School, lament the level of spirituality evident in today's U.S. churches, and the lack of passion for missions. In that it is the churches (many of whom are forgetful, fragmented, and faithless) that produce and sustain the missionary movement, the future for missions does not bode well. But the authors also see a triad of hope: renewal through numerous prayer movements, racial reconciliation, and collaborative relationships.

Structurally, the authors divide the book into four parts: (1) "The Context" (global, churchly, and mission realities), (2) "Probing U.S. Mission Realities: What We Heard," (3) "How Shall They Be Sent?," and (4) "Getting Inside the Future." A brief bibliography and six appendixes follow.

After an initial consultation in Birmingham, the authors conducted focus groups in nine U.S. cities across the country. "Our purpose was to listen to persons directly involved in churches, agencies, seminaries and foundations who could pro-

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vide candid views on a range of issues affecting the U.S. missions community" (pp. 20-21). A wrap-up consultation reconvened in Birmingham to assess the findings. The following synthesis (Part Two) highlights the priority issues:

1. The local church is retaking the initiative for missions.
2. The church in other parts of the world is more dynamic than the troubled churches in the West.
3. A passion for missions is on the wane.
4. Functional issues have replaced geographical concerns.
5. The younger generation is not committed to long-term or career mission.
6. There's a lot of anger under the surface as the churches find it difficult to keep up.
7. Short-termers drive the (often short-term) vision.
8. We must recover a place for the church, including the poor.
9. The current outlook is business as usual.
10. Without renewal the system is not sustainable (pp. 55-56).

In Part Three, "How Shall They Be Sent?," the authors attempt to address the ten issues noted above. They call for holistic mission education that makes mission more than a peripheral issue, communicates to today's audience (multimedia teaching and application tools), challenges pastors to think globally, and critiques the influence of the American culture on the church. More specifically, they call for (1) a "big picture" presentation of mission from Genesis to Revelation, for all age groups, delivered in appropriate learning styles, 2) a churchwide awareness strategy that identifies one-time, short-term and long-term ministry opportunities, and (3) exposure to mission research and consultants, publications and distribution, and training (e.g., the Perspectives course). Say the authors, "In an ideal scenario, missions education becomes synonymous with Christian education. The church embraces its role in bringing all the nations to the worship of God by creating an environment out of which people minister, go, send, welcome those from other cultures, and mobilize for further involvement" (p. 65). Churches must move beyond programs and projects; mission must become the central driving force. For this to become possible, a new view of the future is necessary. Part Four, "Getting Inside the Future," addresses this concern.

John Anderson of NASA developed a model for seeing and

thinking about the future that has moved the space program ahead significantly. The authors cite Anderson's model as a means to help all the involved parties to envision the United States' future role in missions. The Horizon Mission Methodology moves beyond extrapolating from present knowledge to discern the future. Rather than looking metaphorically at a light shined on a dark wall and extrapolate back to the present, Anderson sees the future represented in the black that surrounds the beam illuminating the wall.

The five-step process model helps illuminate that darkness. The steps include: (1) leap outside the flashlight beam; (2) construct a new frame of reference; (3) think within a new frame of reference; (4) identify higher-order approaches and high-leverage capabilities; and (5) return to present frame of reference. (Appendix B provides a detailed application of the model, "The African Miracle: Emergence of a Global Power.") The author's conclude: "No one can predict or forecast the future . . . But we can engage in visioning . . . By postulating a strategically relevant and plausible future, we can engage human intuition in ways that have not been available" (p. 81). By "we" they mean, crossing the last frontier in the missions effort, collaboration between the church, seminary, agency, and foundation.

This book raises serious questions that beg immediate answers. Churches must ask, Is mission central to our very existence? Agencies must ask, What new role should we play in relation to the churches? Those sent out must ask, Will short-term efforts (that often lack language and culture acquisition) be sufficient to create on-going movements for Christ? Seminaries must ask, Does mission or maintenance drive our curricula? Foundations must ask, How can we help increase giving in the local churches? While beyond the scope of this book, we all should ask, How does the national church view all this? How the involved parties answer these questions will have tremendous impact on the extent of missions flowing from the U.S. in the next century.

Who should read this book? I would say this is a must-read book for all those concerned about *panta ta ethne* from the U.S. perspective. And then it's time to act, as the authors suggest, collaboratively (that includes the megachurch players) so that mission receives its rightful due theologically, missiologically, economically, and geographically (locally [the world has come to our doorstep] and globally [the remaining unreached people

groups]). Only then will it be business as unusual.

Reviewer

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