

[MJTM 14 (2012–2013)]

BOOK REVIEW

Robert L. Plummer and John Mark Terry, eds. *Paul's Missionary Methods: In His Time and Ours*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012. 253 pp. Pbk. ISBN: 9780830857074.

Methodology in the work of mission is a popular topic; everyone wants a method that will work. Missional practitioners of all stripes love to discuss and test methodologies in hopes that something will prove useful in their often difficult work of propagating the gospel in various cultural contexts. Contemporary methodologies abound and provide contextualized practices for the work of mission, and most of them claim to be based on established biblical models. This is obviously of great importance to Christian practitioners of mission as there is a clear pull toward biblical concepts and practices that offer canonical support for their various enterprises.

In the pursuit of biblical models for mission and evangelism, the apostle Paul looms especially large as a subject for study. This reality is reinforced in the book *Paul's Missionary Methods: In His Time and Ours*. In this volume Robert Plummer and John Mark Terry have brought together a group of biblical scholars, missiologists, and ministry practitioners to engage in a study of Paul the missionary with a view to providing fresh insight into what can be learned from Paul for the practice of mission today. The impetus for the book is the work of noted Anglican missionary and missiologist Roland Allen, whose work, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's and Ours*, was first published in 1912, but did not draw a large amount of attention at the time. However, as the twentieth century wore on, Allen's interaction with Paul's methodology began to capture the interest of missional practitioners and as a result has become quite influential in the study of mission and methodology of mission.

Terry and Plummer's efforts mark the centennial anniversary of Allen's book and provide an introduction to Allen's work for a whole new audience. In *Paul's Missionary Methods*, the various contributors interact with both the biblical text and the work of Allen in order to elucidate Paul's approach to and philosophy of mission in today's world.

The book is divided into two sections. The first focuses on the biblical text with an emphasis on "Paul in the New Testament," while the second section is dedicated to reflection upon "Paul's influence on missions." The result is a concise but helpful overview of Paul's theology of mission coupled with reflection on the potential implications that Paul's missionary methods could have for the practice of mission in various contexts today. This approach makes the overall work readable and accessible to students and scholars of Paul and/or mission.

Throughout the book the chapters are compact and deal with a large swath of material in a brief but encompassing way. Chapter 1 offers an analysis of Paul's historical/sociological context and provides insight into how the gospel could spread so rapidly in the ancient world. It also points out that Paul was not just fortunate to find himself in the right place at the right time; he understood his context and engaged it effectively. Chapter 2 presents an overview of Paul the missionary; his call, motivation, and travels. It pieces together a biographical and auto-biographical profile of Paul and his theological impetus for world mission. In the third chapter, Robert Plummer offers an effective reflection on 1 Cor 15:1–8 and its presentation of Paul's theology of the gospel. But this chapter also demonstrates how a book like this one, which focuses on the theology of one part of the Bible (the Pauline corpus), can lead to truncated presentations of theological issues that in fact transcend particular parts of the Christian Scripture. In this case, while Plummer's definition of the gospel according to Paul may be reasonable, it demonstrates that Paul's gospel focuses on different ideas than does the gospel of Jesus as found in the four canonical Gospels. Paul's version of the gospel may in fact enhance Jesus' vision, but it also neglects an emphasis on ideas such as the kingdom as something that is happening "now" and this world as a place to

be embraced. Ultimately, one is left to reflect on how other parts of the canon must be brought into interaction with Paul if a fully orbed missiology is to be developed.

The rest of the first section reminds us of Paul's commitment to the church and to working with local congregations and other people in doing mission, and also the role that suffering played in shaping Paul as an effective missionary/theologian. Chapter 7 is of special note as Craig Keener deals with the topic of "Paul and Spiritual Warfare." Keener's chapter is highly balanced but takes seriously the idea that there are powers and authorities in the world that manifest themselves in ways that transcend explainable human structures, although Keener notes that Paul most often sees Satan as working through "human passions and systems" (p. 116). Keener makes the important point that in Paul's theology of spiritual power, the most strategic means that God has given to the church to reverse the power of evil is the gospel and its proclamation. Mission is the ultimate answer to evil and the powers that perpetuate it in this world. Keener's chapter is a highly provocative—though not exhaustive—exploration of spiritual powers. He expertly navigates the foundational issues of this topic with a sober but open-minded approach.

Chapter 8 begins the second section of the book, which turns to Paul's influence on the methodology of mission. To begin, veteran missiologist David Hesselgrave interacts closely with Roland Allen in an attempt not only to offer a critique of Allen's conclusions but also to "modernize" them. His chapter is a good example of theological reflection on ministry practice since it combines biblical and historical concepts in order to provide applicable ideas for today's practitioners. This leads nicely into Michael Pocock's chapter that asks the question, "Is Paul's methodology normative for today?" In his analysis of this question, Pocock stresses both Paul's and Roland Allen's emphasis on the Holy Spirit as the guide for doing mission. Both Paul and Allen clearly see the role of the Spirit as the key to any missionary strategy. Perhaps, as Pocock implies, it is this reliance on the power and leading of the Spirit that resulted in neither Paul nor Allen developing an easily definable strategy that they stuck

to in every circumstance. They were both missionaries who believed that the Spirit would lead them uniquely in each context. The final four chapters offer reflection on highly practical issues for the work of mission, including two chapters that look at Paul and various aspects of his core work as a church planter, particularly as they relate to developing indigenous churches and movements. This is followed by chapters that reflect on the issue of contextualization and leadership development. A postscript, which offers a brief review of Allen's contributions to the thinking about and work of mission, closes the book.

This book is one that could serve effectively as a textbook for a class on Pauline mission or a general course on missionary strategies because it covers a number of key areas and offers a fair and thorough cataloguing of Paul's thought when it comes to his missionary enterprise. It also offers some fine insight into the missionary Paul. This in itself could provide an interesting contour in a class on Paul and/or mission.

While *Paul's Missionary Methods* commends itself as an accessible volume on Paul and mission, however, it must be noted that it is largely an academic book that may not have practical value for those outside of the academic conversation about mission. This is not a criticism per se, but an honest reflection on the nature of the book and its intended audience. Also, in some places the book comes across as a cautious effort that does not seek to venture outside of traditional evangelical constructs of concepts such as contextualization and the meaning of the gospel. In this vein, there is a systematization to the book that makes it feel a bit wooden in places. There are lots of lists that can make the writing feel a bit prescriptive (i.e., Paul did this, and Paul did that, thus this is how mission should proceed). Ultimately the findings of the book must be brought into conversation with the whole of Scripture, just as Paul's contribution to the canon must also be drawn into the larger perspective (Old Testament, Gospels, General Epistles, Apocalypse) in order for a proper missiology to emerge. I suspect that the editors, and also various contributors, would agree; however, it is worth stating because of the priority that Paul is often given in

mission studies.

Perhaps most interesting to note at the end of the day is what Michael Pocock points out at the beginning of his chapter, that neither Paul nor Roland Allen seemed to advocate for what we might call a “strategy” today. He concludes that whenever we discern a pattern to Paul’s ministry we can also easily find examples where he diverges from that plan. Pocock notes the work of Charles Bennett, who concluded that Paul “made hay while the sun shines.” This is perhaps the most poignant idea that is offered since it captures the reality of the practice of mission: no matter how much we want a strategy that is biblically rooted, a systematized approach is elusive. Leaders like Roland Allen and the Apostle Paul may have had broad trajectories that guided them but in the end flexibility and discerning the Spirit’s leading are what make for effective mission.

None of this means that a book like *Paul's Missionary Methods* is not a useful contribution to missional theology. The overall content of the book has great value for helping us understand Paul as a missionary thinker and practitioner. However, mission is as unique and diffuse as the contexts that missional practitioners are called into; thus, a book on Paul’s missionary methods can certainly provide an important perspective on the challenge of developing strategies for mission in the contemporary context, but it can never provide an ultimate strategy for the work of doing mission.

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