

Book title: *The Mission of God*
Book author: Christopher J.H. Wright
Review title: Holistic reach
Reviewer: Jim Reapsome
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"Whole Christian mission is built on the whole Christian Bible," says Christopher J. H. Wright in *The Mission of God* (IVP Academic). For Wright, the call to reach the nations does not begin and end with the Great Commission of Matthew 28. This perspective, advanced relentlessly in this substantial, thoroughly documented work of scholarship, provides a healthy antidote to the recent propensity of some churches and mission agencies to focus solely on the unreached. It certainly could calm the mad rush to multiply short-term mission experiences.

Wright, director of international ministries for Langham Partnership International (known in the United States as John Stott Ministries), sees no dichotomy between what have been known as "missions" and "social work." His exhaustive Old Testament exegesis suggests that there's hardly anything that does not fall under the rubric of God's mission, including ecology and aids.

God "pins a mission statement" to every sign in the Bible, Wright says. While Wright, a mission educator, focuses mainly on the Old Testament, he never slights the centrality of Christ. All mission, Wright says, flows from the Cross.

This will be good news to churches and agencies that spread their missionary work across a wide spectrum of ministries. But those who see their primary mission as evangelism and church planting will not welcome it. In fact, Wright appears to slight church planting as a goal of God's mission. The book's extensive index, for example, lists far more references to "creation" than to "church."

Wright never disparages evangelism—in fact, he exalts it as an absolute necessity—but his advocacy for engaging social, economic, and political issues will arouse controversy. It's worth asking: Just because something should be the concern of the church and all Christians, should it be thrust under the rubric of mission? Wright's huge, all-embracing umbrella of God's mission could renew fears that evangelism and church planting will be lost. If he seems to indicate that everything is mission, the risk is that nothing is mission in the end.

Unfortunately, Wright sets up straw men occasionally in an attempt to prod the church to be more holistic. Is it fair, for example, to blame the debacles in Northern Ireland, Rwanda, and Nagaland on sub-biblical mission work?

Wright also tends to overlook significant ministries that echo his own recommendations. Since he places ecological ministries under God's mission, why not cite at least a few of the many ministries instituted by missionaries that plant trees, improve farming, and provide water?

Wright calls his understanding of the *missio Dei* a "very healthy corrective to the egocentric obsession of much Western culture—including, sadly, even Western Christian culture," saying a holistic approach is "disturbingly subversive." In this book, church and mission leaders will find a wealth of fresh scholarship exalting God's initiative—and, indeed, more than a bit of subversion.

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