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Review

Urga, Abeneazer, Edward L. Smither & Linder P. Saunders (eds). *Reading Hebrews Missiologically: The Missionary Motive, Message, and Methods of Hebrews*. William Carey Publishing, Pasadena, 2023. ISBN: 9780878084556, 213 pp.

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Reading Hebrews Missiologically: The Missionary Motive, Message, and Methods of Hebrews is a giant stride forward in scholarship on the book of Hebrews. As the editors rightly posit in the preface, most scholars limit their discussion of Hebrews to its being a message directed solely at strengthening believers to remain in the faith amid life's challenges. While the contributors did not deny this, they argue further that the book is ultimately missiologically inclined. It fits perfectly into the *missio Dei* purpose of the Bible's metanarrative.

The volume's first part focuses on the the missionary motive of Hebrews. Here Matthew A. Bennet, Linda Saunders, Allen Yeh, and Michael P. Naylor describe Hebrews as a theological exposé about God's supreme sacrifice and the work of Jesus' atonement in the metanarrative of *missio Dei*. The description of Christ as the exact replica of God and as the lineage of Abraham qualified him to uniquely fulfil God's perfect mission. In part two, Edward L. Smither, Jessica A. Udall, and Irwyn Ince discuss the missionary message of Hebrews, putting Christ at its centre. Believers are to hold fast to their faith and to live as pilgrims in a storm-tossed transitory world as they fulfil their missional purpose, "expectantly waiting to receive the full and glorious inheritance that is theirs in Jesus Christ".

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In the volume's third section, Abeneazer G. Urga, Sigurd Grindheim, Jessica N. Janvier, and Sarah Lunsford consider the missionary methods of Hebrews. They agree that proclamation is a central communication dynamic in Hebrews. The importance of contextualisation is also obvious. The contributors also identify Hebrews' framework for both converting the unsaved and establishing believers in authentic Christlikeness. In the volume's final part, Robert L. Gallagher uses three hermeneutical lenses—interpreting the metanarrative, understanding Hebrews, and exploring mission—to assess the contributions within the volume. He acknowledges the hermeneutical fidelity and diversity of contributions.

In all, *Reading Hebrews Missiologically* addresses a critical issue: the book of Hebrews, like all other biblical books, is integral to the *missio Dei* purpose of the Bible, and should be read with that in mind. The volume's emphases on the supremacy of Christ and on the exclusive nature of the Christian faith in a multi-religious context are foremost missiological motifs. Its Christological contribution to missiology, especially in part one, is profound as it emphasises that God as the initiator of the salvific program establishes Christian missions in *missio Dei*. Furthermore, the volume also demonstrates that proclamation is critical in missions, noting that Hebrews has a clear theology of missions that prioritises proclamation among other activities. Sequel to vocalising the gospel, it also identifies the need for the hearers to exercise their faith. These are critical in missiology and in agreement with Romans 10:17. The book's identification of Hebrews' framework demonstrate its harmony with the two key parts of the Great Commission mandate, namely: baptising and teaching to obey everything Jesus has commanded.

A careful reading of *Reading Hebrews Missiologically* shows an emphasis on contextualisation, a core motif in missiology. The contributors link the missiological motif of Hebrews with some contextual issues that serve as reminders for stakeholders of missions. These include Janvier's reference to narrative style of proclamation, Smither's focus on *philoxenia*, Grindheim's "missiology of weakness," and Yeh's focus on mission to the margin. The missional community has a time-bound purpose to proclaim the exclusive faith everywhere people are, offering hope now while looking forward to an eschatological hope that will be fully realised later. However, Grindheim's reference to 'power' needs a balance with Paul's idea that gospel is 'power of

God' in Romans 1:16 and 1 Corinthians 1:18, 24. Truly, the effective witness of the church is through the principle of incarnation, but Grindheim's use of power focuses more on the Western wealth against the poverty in the mission field. The use of 'power,' especially with the section titled 'Mission and Power', makes some Christians from the Majority World think of the gospel or Pentecostal power to confront diabolical power in their contexts.

Lunsford's tactical balance between reproducibility and maturity is commendable, especially in light of the current discourse on the church planting movement, especially through disciple making movement. Lunsford shows that Hebrews demonstrates the need and strategies for reproducible discipleship. Hebrews does not encourage a rush for quantity and multiplication at the expense of quality because infants cannot be placed in the role of elders. Further, the book shows that missions is both centripetal and centrifugal and that the missional community must seek to go after the people, whether they are close by or far away, to the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20.

An obvious lacuna relates to an assumption about the definition for missions. As Gallagher rightly notes in his concluding assessment, each contributor could have briefly presented the understanding of Christian missions with which they were working. Better still, the volume could have included an introductory chapter that offered a clear definition of missions to which each contributor could have connected their discussion. Such introduction may have also catered for other terminologies, like church growth movement, diaspora missions, church planting movement, and disciple-making movement, which are implicitly referred to by the contributors.

Hermeneutically, Gallagher assessment, including his three lenses view, is commendable. However, if the volume had used a conventional outline of contents of the book of Hebrews, it would have impacted its contribution more. Such would have dealt with almost every section of the book. As it is, the contributors seems to have selected their themes randomly with no stated rationale. Further, though the contributors are from different backgrounds and experience, including Asia, North Africa, East Africa, and part of Europe a voice from West Africa would have added a flavour, considering the

contributions of Christians from that region to the development of global Christianity.

With an overall goal of drawing out the missiological motif of the book of Hebrews, this volume is suitable for theological educators, missionaries, and mission administrators, among other members of the missional community. Its key value is in the contributors' engagement of the message of the book of Hebrews with the practical realities of missions. They demonstrate how the book of Hebrews is useful in guiding the missional community to partner with the Triune God in *missio Dei*.