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Book Review

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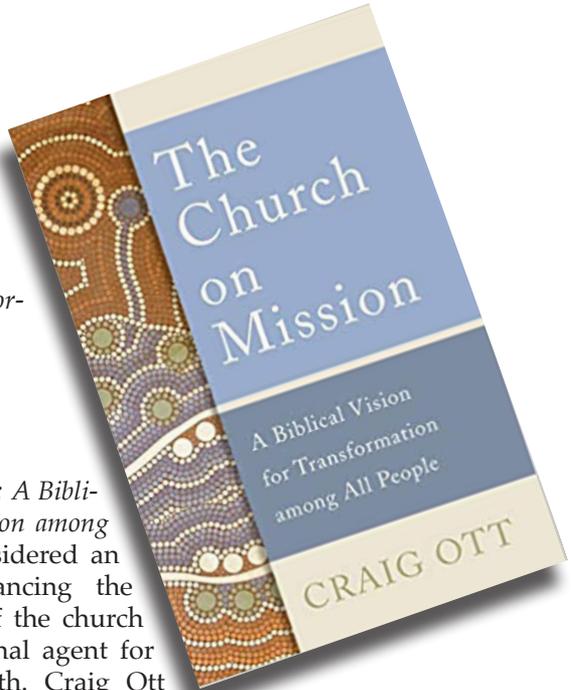
The Church on Mission: A Biblical Vision for Transformation among All People.

Grand Rapids, MI:
BakerAcademic.

138 pp. US \$13.99.

The Church on Mission: A Biblical Vision for Transformation among All People might be considered an abbreviated work advancing the view that the mission of the church is to be a transformational agent for God's Kingdom on earth. Craig Ott makes a compelling case for the role and impact of the church in mission. He is of the view that the church must first understand its mission, its purpose, and then set about carrying out that mission.

Ott lays out his arguments quite succinctly but unequivocally. He first argues for the church in every generation to clarify its understanding of its mission, then provides the reader with an understanding of mission as the goal of the church in the world. Ott espouses the thinking that the church in the world is the link between the now and not yet. The church is to carry out the teaching, preaching, healing, and the good news of the gospel in preparation for the second coming of Christ, which will usher in the ending of the "not yet" and the actualization of the kingdom of God.



The reader is not left to figure out or deduce the author's intent. Ott is quite explicit in his position. For example, in his opening statements, he contends that each generation has to reaffirm its understanding of what is meant by the mission of the church. Further, he identifies the meaning of church as a representation of worship to God.

The author addresses the possible criticism that his view of missional transformation is too church-centered. His response is three-fold. First, that the church is, in fact, the lone agency on the earth to fulfill God's mission. He cites Leslie Newbigin as stating that the root of the history of the Bible is God calling a people to serve him and represent his light to the nations of the world. He states, "God's purposes in history are intimately linked to a people; in our day that is the church" (20).

Second, Jesus' focus was the church. One of his promises was to build the church so that his name could be lifted up in all the earth. Ott's third point is that the church is called to be transformational and to multiply around the globe. To this end, he sees eschatological significance. He recognizes that in light of the fact that Christ redeemed the church and adds to it those who should be saved, the church can be viewed as the first fruits of the new creation, when Jesus makes all things new because the believers would have become "new-creation people." Thus, God's church is a spiritual kingdom; not a national one.

The church indeed is not the kingdom of God; the concept of the kingdom of God is much bigger and includes heavenly realities, whereas the church, though a part of the kingdom, is an earthly reality that will experience the final transformation when Jesus comes. First Peter 2:9 portrays the church as a priesthood, a nation, a generation, never a kingdom. In verse five, the apostle mentions that the believers are *living stones*, to be used in building a spiritual house. The kingdom language therefore is not a fitting characterization in my view, even as a metaphor, for the church of God.

In continuing with the missional and transformational nature of the church, the author laments the neglect that has characterized the behavior of the church as it relates to theology that is rooted in Scripture. He cites a number of reasons for this including the avoidance of dealing with hard issues that usually create discomfort; the tendency to make Scripture a relative and/or experiential philosophy rather than conforming the life to the dictates of Scripture. Some believers have very little interest in doctrinal issues that have created divisions among Christians. This has resulted in a diminished regard for formal theological study, which Ott sees as necessary in order to have sound theological positions. He argues that the church must have the ability to deeply study the Scriptures. To lose sight of this need or to disregard its import is to compromise the

biblical foundations that must be the church's anchors—something that will imperil the church.

Ott is correct in his understanding of the issues that plague today's church. It is true to say that the message of the church is compromised by a relaxed attitude towards the foundational beliefs found in Scripture. This means that the ability to be transformational as well as missional is significantly lessened. For Ott, the transformational church sees the Word of God as fundamental to bringing glory to God's name. They cherish it, love and mediate upon it, and live by it (41).

The author uses poignant metaphors of salt and light to emphasize that the transformational church does not operate in private, that it infuses itself in the wider world. I think that the author makes correct use of the metaphors to illustrate the impact that the church is expected to have in the world. Another example is the Genesis mandate to be fruitful and multiply. Ott sees this Old Testament instruction as a theme that carries all the way into the New Testament because even there, God is working towards the multiplication of his church. A fruitful church is a multiplying church with one goal, to bring glory to God.

Throughout the book Ott remains true to his goal of demonstrating that the mission of the church is to be transformational in the world and to glorify God. In his last two chapters, he argues for unity in the church that must be achieved because people in the world are confused when segregation and other social ills are exhibited in the church. He posits that a transformational church must see this facet as essential to church growth and being Jesus' witnesses. Further, in order to multiply in a way that represents heaven, selfless efforts must be made to embrace others who do not look like us and to work through the discomforts and challenges of diversity. It is necessary, he contends, for kingdom building.

The author does accomplish his goal of providing a clear vision and understanding of the mission of the church. His arguments are well thought out, compelling, and rooted in Scripture, albeit not always deeply theological as he promised. Nonetheless, there is an abundance of scriptural evidence to support his perspective on mission, transformation, and the role of the church in kingdom building. Ott is unequivocal in demonstrating that the church is indeed meant to be a missional and transformational agency in the world, for the glory of God.