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## Book Review: A Testimony to All Peoples: Kingdom Movements Around the World Edited by Dave Coles and Stan Parks

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## Book Review

### *A Testimony to All Peoples: Kingdom Movement Around the World*

Dave Coles and Stan Parks, Ed.  
345pp.

Reviewed by Gene Wilson, former church planter, now global catalyst with *ReachGlobal* and co-author with Craig Ott of *Global Church Planting—Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplication*, Baker Academic 2011.

Jesus promised in Matthew 24:14 that "This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed in the whole world as a testimony to all *ethnē* (people groups), and then the end will come." The 24:14 vision is to see the gospel shared with every people group on earth in our generation. Editors Dave Coles and Stan Parks also lead the 24:14 Coalition. They have assembled an anthology of Church Planting Movement (CPM) articles and case studies to inform, inspire, and call the church to action.

The premise of this book is God is doing something unique in our day through kingdom movements with disciple making and church multiplication in their DNA. The editors have helped our understanding of CPMs through this compendium of articles and case studies by 37 authors from 10 different countries. Many of the authors are non-Western leaders of CPMs. The articles, most originally published in *Mission Frontiers*, are grouped in two parts: The first part centers on Jesus' Promise in Matt. 24:14 and describes how CPMs are accelerating the day of Christ's return. The second

part reports how churches, agencies and individuals are responding to that appeal and describes how others can join in the 24:14 effort. The first part explores the nature of CPMs, including the dynamics, mind shifts, and commitments required for them to happen. Then case studies highlight some of the more notable movements in places as diverse as India, Haiti, and the Middle East. First-hand accounts are told by those directly involved in the movement or closely connected to it. Some movements have grown so quickly in size they appear exceptional and unattainable in other contexts. Others are presented in earlier stages of development when the growth can be tracked more readily. Indeed, the stories come from a broad array of contexts, including a few Western ones. Steve Addison, author of *Movements that Change the World* (IVP 2011), contributes a helpful historical perspective (Ch. 23) entitled “The Story of Movements and the Spread of the Gospel.”

J. Snodgrass takes us back even further by quoting passages in the *Book of Acts* that document the powerful advance of the first gospel movement that traveled north and west from Jerusalem to Rome. He defines a biblical movement as “A dynamic advance of the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit through multiple localities or peoples. This includes large in-gatherings of new believers, vibrant transforming faith, and multiplication of both disciples, churches and leaders.”

Snodgrass and Stan Parks (Ch. 6) include qualitative dimensions of movements such as disciples growing in maturity, showing great faith, loving their neighbors and blessing those who persecute them. This takes us beyond the more familiar definition which stresses speed and scope: “a rapid multiplication of indigenous churches planting churches that sweeps through a people group or population segment” (Garrison 2004:21). The emphasis on rapid, explosive multiplication as a normative pattern is not found in Scripture. While desirable, they are not Biblical mandates or part of Jesus’ Promise. Fortunately, most of the authors describe living out kingdom values along with numeric growth. The balance between transformation (the gospel working in depth) and multiplication (the gospel expanding in breadth) is indeed a positive development in CPM literature.

The second part of the book serves as a call to action. It presents several perspectives on how individuals, churches, and agencies can get involved in a CPM. Change is difficult. Leading an organization toward a CPM vision, strategy, and process can be costly. In Ch. 36, Charles D. Davis outlines five lessons the American Church is learning from CPMs. Each of these lessons calls churches to a shift in focus: (1) from come and see to go and tell evangelism, (2) from individual to group conversions, (3) from church growth to generations of reproducing churches, (4) from training that is highly specialized to training that is simple and reproducible, (5) from teaching for knowledge to obedience-based discipling.

Several examples present the challenges of moving from addition to multiplication. Aila Tasse, who leads a CPM network in East Africa, narrates his painful transition from merely adding churches to multiplying them through disciple-making movements (DMM). He was leading an agency that had about 48 missionaries, half of them bi-vocational, when he started making the shift in 2005. Thirteen missionaries, including two key leaders, left to join a denomination that offered better salaries and positions. For three years they spun their wheels. Aila was discouraged. But they stayed the course and eventually built a coalition of kingdom minded DMM practitioners. Now the leaders see themselves as catalysts rather than owners. From 2010 to 2019, their agency extended their reach to eleven countries and have seen 9,000 new churches planted.

This book is not technical or polemic. Indeed, this treasure trove of articles will be enjoyed by anyone who rejoices in the global spread of the gospel. Both students of global mission and practitioners will appreciate the realism of its narratives, the diversity of its voices, and the internal coherence of its movement perspective. The appendices contain helpful definitions and clarifications. In his article Steve Smith communicates a sense of urgency and a “whatever it takes” commitment. Davis describes five lessons the American Church is learning from CPMs. This book is a must-read for anyone who has a CPM vision in the American post-Christian context.

I expect that skeptics who read it will have some of their questions answered but not all. For example: Is the definition of a

church adequate? We are told (Ch. 10) that it must be biblical and reproducible and follow the pattern of Acts 2:42-47. However, a definition with baseline essentials would have been helpful. Can a church be considered planted without a group of spiritual leaders who meet the New Testament qualifications (Acts 6, Titus 1, and 1 Tim. 3)? The Scriptures are presented in several articles as a sufficient guard against heresy while the Epistles indicate that elders apt to teach and to correct are needed. The authors do not attempt to answer all our questions. Rather, they point to some amazing results and give glory to God.

Reading candid testimonials from all over the world gave me great joy. The FAQ section in the appendix was helpful in dispelling some myths and presenting a broader tent than I expected. I appreciated the recognition that many specialized ministries can contribute to movements and that not all workers are called to catalyze CPMs or embrace a CPM approach. Many in the early stages will resonate with Lee Wood's appeal (p. 137) to take care of the depth of their ministry so that God will take care of its breadth. In a nutshell, the book was informative, inspiring and challenging. If there is another edition, it would be helpful to include the names of the authors of each article in the Table of Contents and provide an index at the end.