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Book Review

Missions and Money: Global Realities and Challenges

Edited by Jonathan J. Bonk, Michel G. Distefano, J. Nelson Jennings,
Jinbong Kim, and Jae Hoon Lee

William Carey Publishing, 2022

292 pages

US\$19.99

Reviewed by Gregory C. Cochran. Gregory is the author of *Christians in the Crosshairs: Persecution in the Bible and Around the World Today* and serves as Director of Applied Theology at California Baptist University.

According to the book *Missions and Money: Global Realities and Challenges*, more money is stolen by fraud and embezzlement in Christian churches each year than is given to world missions (p. 46). That startling fact highlights just one of the many challenges plaguing money and missions. The Apostle Paul famously taught his young disciple Timothy that “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Tim 6:10, ESV).

Surely, some of the evils Paul had in mind would be familiar to missionaries today who have seen both mission agencies and fellow workers fall to one temptation or another regarding the love of money—temptations including greed, coveting, embezzling, stealing, and defrauding. At the other end of the money problem, agencies and missionaries have also suffered from an aversion toward embracing money and thus find themselves sorely lacking funds. Both of these — having money and lacking it —prove to be hazardous to the ongoing work of missions.

To address the money problem, a group of editors compiled conference messages on the topic of missions and money to provide missionaries and mission agencies a path forward with integrity, viability, and accountability. The compilation takes the title, *Missions and Money: Global Realities and Challenges*. This book extends an ongoing series established by William Carey Publishing on behalf of the Korean Global Mission Leaders Forum (KGMLF). Other titles in the series focus on accountability, family, megachurches, disrupted people, and mental health. *Missions and Money* represents the content from the 2021 Leaders Forum.

Contributors to the volume include both credentialed academics and practicing missionaries—producing an overall tone of what might be called applied theology, with aspects of biblical and systematic theology applied to concrete missional contexts such as church planting in Cambodia or the use of public funds by the Onnuri Church in Seoul. The structure of the book affirms this applied theology framework, as the work begins with three Bible studies from Old Testament scholar and missiologist Chris Wright.

Wright's first study extracts lessons from the life of David found in 1 Chronicles 29 under the heading, "The Integrity of Our Funding in the Eyes of God." Clearly, the essence of the message is distilled in the practice (and privilege) of God's people giving to fund mission work. Wright's study answers the question, how might missionaries and those supporting them do so with integrity?

Wright follows that chapter with another study from 2 Corinthians 8. In this second study, attention is given to accountability. Wright demonstrates how believers are stewards of resources from God and must remain completely transparent in how those resources are deployed. Finally, in the third study, Wright pleads for the viability of ministries under the sovereignty of God. Working from Ecclesiastes 11, he features such concepts as "Godly opportunism" and "enjoying life responsibly." The three Bible studies form the foundation of the overall work, highlighting the primary theme of the forum. In fact, the Bible studies are followed by eight case studies, each featuring a response to the facts as presented. Case studies concentrate on the following subjects:

- Investments in mission by faith-based organizations to the All-Africa Conference of Churches (AACC).
- Fundraising practices of the Mizoram Presbyterian Church in a geographically isolated region of India.
- Christian finance in global perspective—including the startling claim mentioned earlier that more money is stolen from Christian churches (through fraud and embezzlement) each year than is

given to global missions (p. 46).

- Faith financing (or faith mission) as exemplified by Jesus Abbey, a kind of laboratory Christian community in Taebaek City (South Korea).
- Assessment of the financial practices of the Global Mission Society, the primary mission agency of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Korea.
- Consideration of missions and education, under the general framework of educational institutions in Ghana, yet with an eye toward more general application.
- Registration of real estate properties in Postwar Japan, with a particular focus on establishing a seminary (Tokyo Christian Theological Seminary).
- Development of the genealogy of the Nevius Method for fundraising and self-support in Korea.

As noted, each of these case studies is followed by a response from a practitioner familiar with the case. This concept of opening dialogue for feedback and critical reflection is a healthy illustration of the editors' goals of integrity, accountability, and viability.

The case studies are followed by a section containing 14 workshops. As with the case studies, so, too, the workshops each give space for a response. In truth, the workshop section feels very much the same as the case study section. Topics are similar: Short-term mission opportunities in Athens, Greece; mission training and the Antioch Church Mission Fund; and the role of patron as father (*Gap*) in church planting efforts in Cambodia. Perhaps the actual forum distinguished the workshops and case studies in a manner that is not as clearly visible in print.

Following the case studies, testimonies are given by four missionaries. Hak Hyun Cho offers a testimony of fundraising and support for church planting. Sokreaksa Himm details the horrific evil perpetrated against him and his family by the Khmer Rouge, with a powerful (and unsettling) personal journey toward forgiveness in Christ. The third testimony by Paul Ogbadu returns to the theme of money and support for mission work. Finally, Hakkyoon Shin retells his testimony, detailing how God supplied resources for him and his wife while planting Smyrna church in South Korea.

The final section of the book offers two conclusions. The first conclusion, written by Timothy Kiho Park, offers a summary of the numerous topics covered throughout the book (or forum). The second conclusion, supplied by Jonathan J. Bonk, summarizes more generally the

main point of the forum.

Money and Missions is like a magnificent house with copious windows, allowing outsiders to peek in—each pane offering a glimpse of a new hallway, room, or accent piece, each glimpse affirming the magnificence of the abode. As a house is familiar—even if very different from the one that is called “home”—so this work on money and missions is quite familiar, yet it is starkly different from what western Christians might associate with the comfort of home. The book should stimulate critical reflections from mission agency leaders anywhere in the world. Likewise, pastors—and especially mission pastors—would benefit greatly from exploring it. Students of missions and those researching in the field would benefit, too, from both the data available and the specific case studies.

Perhaps in future editions, the publishers will consider further editing to distinguish between the forum and the printed publication. At times, the book feels a bit like it exists for those “in the house,” meaning those who attended the forum. Churches and ministries are mentioned with the expectation that the reader knows where the churches are located. Many readers will not be as familiar with these ministries as those who participated in the forum.

While the book clearly grounds its conclusions in Scripture—thus putting the Bible studies up front, it doesn’t always demonstrate how the particular case studies relate back to the Bible studies. The Bible studies themselves appear to be messages written prior to the forum and later adapted to the forum’s themes, as opposed to being the very wellsprings of thought from which the forum’s themes derived.

Finally, for all its diversity, the book ironically lacks a bit of diversity in terms of perspectives on missions and money. The book is heavily focused on the church-giving model with only passing references to other models such as the Business as Mission model. Granted, this was written specifically for the Korean mission leaders forum. However, putting the material into written form suggests that a broader audience might benefit from reading it. To facilitate that benefit, the editors could add voices from economists, as well as present models featuring microgrants and community development approaches to mission labors.

Overall, the book offers unique perspectives on a universal problem for Christians around the world: money for accomplishing the mission of God. *Money and Missions* is a useful resource for anyone hoping to establish funding in a way that upholds integrity, accountability, and viability.