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Book Review

New Funding Models in Global Mission: Learning from the Majority World

By Tim Welch

William Carey Publishing, 2023

134 pages

US\$10.99

Reviewed by John Cheong, associate professor of world religions and intercultural studies at Grand Canyon University. He has written many articles in the areas of world religions, contextual theology, world Christianity, globalization, diaspora missiology, and urban missions, and co-edited or published six books, including *Christian Mission and Economic Systems* (William Carey, 2015).

According to the book *Missions and Money: Global Realities and* According to Tim Welch, if the Great Commission is Christ's clarion call for all Christians to heed, knowing *how* to send followers to obey Jesus' command is highly significant (1). One of those ways in which the Church needs to send well is in the way it funds and sends mission workers to do God's work. In his book, *New Funding Models in Global Mission*, Welch examines how the global church does this. The foundational rationale of the book is to address the underlying weakness and obstacle in the funding of missionaries in the Majority World - in particular its reliance on a Western and individualistic way of fund-raising that involves soliciting people and churches for mission that is objectionable and countercultural (2).

To address this, Welch writes about the diverse ways in which funding can be done aside from the dominant model. His book has three objectives: to encourage reflective leadership by offering different perspectives on the subject, to stimulate global leadership towards an openness to a change in

funding methods and practice, and to offer prophetic leadership by critiquing the problems of the dominant model (2-3).

The book is divided into eleven chapters. Chapters 1-5 discuss the rationale of the book – a review of mission funding thought and practice, and the pro and cons of the dominant model which he terms “Missionary Funding 1.0” (i.e., where the missionary solicits financial support from churches that are then funneled to a mission agency that later disburses the funds to the missionary on the field, minus some percentage going toward the agency’s administrative costs). Chapters 6-11 (and the appendix) examine the alternative funding models (termed “Mission Funding 2.0”) and their benefits. This section also discusses the biblical support for such funding models, and the new economic standing and ability of the Majority World to give to mission. Lastly, it answers leaders’ fears about such funding methods. Chapter 11 summarizes the entire book and the key global models of funding.

For Welch, the dominant model does possess certain strengths. For example, missionaries that go about soliciting funds from individuals and churches tend to cultivate stronger one-on-one familiarity and trust, as well as prayer support for their ministry (3). However, even when the practice is followed to the letter, problems still exist. Among them: 1) the sending of money from an external source to missionaries overseas leaves a paper trail in restricted nations that signals an ominous “foreign influence;” 2) the time it takes to visit many churches and raise support takes too long (some can last five years or more), which can discourage missionaries and delay their time to serve; and, 3) the local church plays a tangential, not primary role in much of the missionary’s life overseas while the relationship of the mission agency to the missionary becomes more important (14-16).

If this model were to be deployed overseas to raise support, another set of dynamics would create further issues for the Majority World: It could limit the circle of potential supporters to those who have sufficient disposable income, and there may be a generational hesitancy and cultural resistance to the idea of “begging” for monthly financial support. Welch notes that in Majority World settings, individuals who ask for funds for themselves are often considered self-serving and shameful (16, 27).

The book brims with excellent ideas and offers over twenty examples from Africa, a reflection of Welch’s long experience as a missionary who served for thirty-one years there. Some of his insights worth emulating are: “seeking support from the mission” (i.e., where the president or director seeks financial support for the missionary (38-39)), the “twelve church model” (i.e., a multi-church consortium that rotates to support a specific

month of funding (39-41)), and my favorite, *buhfai tham* (“a handful of rice,” where women set aside a handful of rice at each meal, bring it to church where it is then sold for proceeds that go to the mission (45)). Other more common and increasingly popular methods deployed in the Majority World are tentmaking, business as mission, partnerships, and crowdfunding. Less-considered but important funding streams are “living off the fruit of ministry” (i.e., ministries established that later provide financial support for the missionary such as tithes from churches planted, profits from publishing houses, or radio/media ministries that were started). The pros and cons of some Mission Funding 2.0 models are also discussed.

For a short book, there are many praiseworthy aspects. It is groundbreaking by its provision of fresh ideas and visions for fund-raising. It is accessible to all readers from lay to academic levels. Lastly, it is immensely practical and full of concrete funding-raising examples which encourage rapid adoption and execution. Everyone from mission executives, missionaries, mission pastors, and church leaders who are involved in the sending, financing, or raising of money for mission must read this book and seriously consider these options now.

However, mixed among its many gems are some overgeneralizations on funding models, unspoken problems in other models, troubling readings of some biblical texts, and shortcomings in the editing.

Concerning funding models, Welch seems to address examples from missionaries in agencies that encourage or teach them to verbally or openly articulate the need or amount to give. However, missionaries from various well-established agencies (such as OMF) are taught to never ask for nor mention money unless they are first asked by the church of the need. Elsewhere, in some church denominations, believers who have been confirmed in their call or service to missions need not ask for funds – the money is provided to them as part of their response if they have faithfully committed to serving.

There are also missed opportunities to discuss problems specific to some models. For example, situations can arise if a president or director who is corrupt or nepotistic seeks support for foreign missionaries (such as the infamous example of K. P. Yohannan who raised money for workers in Gospel for Asia) but actually embezzles the money for himself or his family. How accountability comes into such cases begs further discussion. Another model or path to fundraising, transferring money by doing banking via mobile phones, suffers from the dangers of hacking and phishing scams but they are not mentioned!

Concerning the reading of Scripture, the book sometimes has

questionable exegesis of certain texts. For example, Welch states that “African presence in the New Testament does not address the financial aspect of mission.” However, Acts 2 implies that all the foreigners, including those from Egypt and Libya, stayed in Jerusalem in order to have fellowship. As they stayed, they gave resources for the mission of the church (Acts 2:45-47). Later, in Acts 13:1-3, an African (Simon the Niger) in the Antiochian church *sent* Barnabas and Saul out for mission. Such examples are important because they remind and inspire many of us and the Majority World that even from the birth of the church, God has used many peoples to send others on mission.

It should be noted that Welch offers good possibilities and insights to understand specific theological words that connect to funding in mission (e.g. his exposition and chart (68-69) on the meaning of the word “send” in Paul’s letters is noteworthy); but the exegetical and biblical data that he relies on to make his case deserve stronger evidentiary support other than references to study bibles by Alfred Kuen, John MacArthur, etc. as key sources (60-62). More disturbing is the editing of the book – most of the appendix section (101-108) is a verbatim repeat of chapter 9 (77-86), with near similar titles as well. One wonders why the author felt a need to duplicate whole paragraphs or pages instead of providing short summaries.

Despite such shortcomings, I heartily recommend the book for bringing to light the many funding practices that have been commonly practiced in the Majority World but are hardly known in the West. This book will serve the global church in its mission funding practices for many decades to come. For this, Welch deserves our gratitude. From personal experience, I would add another funding model that was not mentioned in the book.

In Matthew 10:9-11, Jesus instructs his disciples to “not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you ... no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff [for] whatever town or village you enter, search there for some worthy person and stay at their house until you leave” (NIV). This model may seem highly impractical (who can plan their missions budget in such ways?) and improbable today (who will give in such a manner?); but in reality, this model is alive and well in the Middle East, parts of Central Asia, and in rural Southeast and South Asia. In such places, visitors who come upon a village are still received and hosted by people as a cultural practice. Through such hospitality, visitors are welcomed to stay and possibly even work and find means of support. More startlingly, a powerful corollary also exists in today’s modern and urbanized world: I know of a Filipino missionary who was granted hospitality, housing, and money to stay in a Muslim city center and used this to missionize among

Muslims. He found this hospitality and the outworking of this model when he applied to study at a major university. In fact, he was granted a full scholarship with housing and a student visa for five years!

In conclusion, the book is a watershed publication that helps us to discover new ways of raising funds for mission. Even as the funding and sending of missionaries in the West for mission declines, the rise of the Majority World and its methods of supporting missions is a salient, salutary, and strong reminder that we have much to learn from how God works among other believers to send and support missionaries in such creative ways. By this, the Global Church teaches us much if we open our eyes to see and our hands to grasp and practice these things wisely.