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Book Review

No Shortcut to Success: A Manifesto for Modern Missions

By Matt Rhodes

Crossway, 2022

269 pages

US\$19.99, Paperback

Reviewed by Kenneth Nehrbass, Ph.D. He is the author of *Advanced Missiology*, *God's Image and Global Cultures*, and *Christianity and Animism in Melanesia*. He is the director of assessment at California Baptist University, where he is also an assistant professor in the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences.

The non-residential missionary (NRM) model that undergirds the Church Planting Movement (CPM) may be well-meaning, but it may not be as efficacious in facilitating the Great Commission as many would hope. And it may not even be biblical. Rhodes's *No Shortcut to Success* develops a systematic critique of the NRM model and argues instead for an approach that involves linguistically capable missionaries who accept long-term assignments, so they can adequately address the worldviews and obstacles they encounter in the field.

Rhodes does not refute the "CPM style methods" (67) out of a mean spirit, but rather because he fears that such rhetoric can cause false expectations, disillusionment, and burnout. Further, some claims in CPM seem to be naïvely propagated (if not deliberately misleading).

Missiologists may be skeptical of the numbers of conversions reported in "multiplication" literature but may not know how to respond to such impressive reports. Rhodes demonstrates several ways to challenge these

likely-inflated numbers. First, he argues that rapid growth is not the norm in the New Testament. If doubling the size of every church in 6 to 9 months was normal, the entire world would have been evangelized “within 8 to 12 years after Pentecost” (73). Second, he provides several published accounts of insiders who dispute the tales of mass conversions. Additionally, he carefully describes how selection bias can cause a surveyor to believe a movement is growing, even if it is, in fact, declining (64). Further, Rhodes explains that these impressive numbers are “audited” by outsiders who do not know the culture well enough to interpret the data. Besides, it would take nearly 20,000 census takers to gather credible information regarding 10 million converts (yet CPM literature relies on data collection techniques that are far less robust than this). Insightfully, Rhodes explains that even if the CPM numbers are accurate, the growth does not guarantee that those methods will work for us. Consider the mixed results of those who copied Rick Warren’s methods (66). Last, Rhodes asks, if missionaries have been working in these cultures for decades, how can it be argued that the growth is actually attributable to the non-residential missionary CPM methods, and not to those missionaries who have been laboring in those fields for decades?

Rhodes is particularly concerned that CPM-inspired models remove the role of teaching. Drawing from extensive examples in the New Testament, he shows that Jesus was a teacher. And he provides data to show that many national Christians want missionaries to continue in the role of teaching and training.

Rhodes’s critique of CPM literature also addresses the “man of peace” concept in CPM, as well as the orality movement, and “obedience-based discipleship.” Indeed, there is enough polemic in this book to strike a nerve with any missiologist.

It is not all critique. The “manifesto” (as the subtitle says) contains prescriptions. Chapters 4 through 7 argue that missionaries must engage in prolonged language learning that enables them to engage in bold, clear communication of the gospel. We must learn the culture well enough to earn a right to be heard. He almost apologizes for laying out a method that seems so obvious- and one that (as he shows) was known by missionaries of past centuries. But he also shows that in the CPM movement, language learning and clear, explicit teaching are de-emphasized. He lays out an argument, largely from the Book of Acts, that evangelism is not just sharing stories about Jesus; it is listening carefully to the cultural logic of the target audience, so widely held misconceptions can be addressed.

In chapter 8, Rhodes addresses missionary recruiting. He suggests that rather than trying to weed out those who may experience burnout

(213), mission organizations should focus on those who have the gift of learning other languages and cultures. Therefore, he believes that missionary recruitment campaigns should not market the notion that all Christians have an obligation to go into the missionary field.

In addition to the timeliness and importance of the arguments, the book is enjoyable to read because the writing style is clearer than most missiological works. But more than that, Rhodes provides an example of how missiologists can listen carefully to those with whom they disagree and then lay out careful arguments for their own position. He does not second-guess his interlocutors' positions. In fact, he assumes the best, regarding their sincerity and interest in fulfilling the Great Commission.

No Shortcut to Success should be read and discussed by leaders of mission organizations and should be used in courses on contemporary missionary methods.