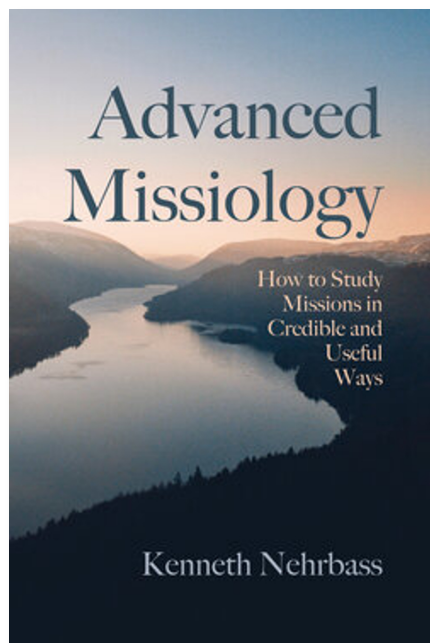


REVIEW: *Advanced Missiology: How to Study Missions in Credible and Useful Ways* by Kenneth Nehrbass

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**REVIEWED BY
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Nehrbass, Kenneth. *Advanced Missiology: How to Study Missions in Credible and Useful Ways*
Eugene: Cascade. 2021. 338 pp,
ISBN: 978-1-7252-7222-4. \$39.00 paperback.



This comprehensive volume by Kenneth Nehrbass (with contributions by Julie Martinez, Rebeca de la Torre Burnett, and Leanne Dzubinski) on the contemporary situation of missiology divides into two sections. Part I uses the metaphor of missiology as a series of tributaries (theoretical disciplines) that form a river, which connects theory into the practice by converging at the common goal of making disciples of Jesus in cross-cultural settings. For instance, the river has tributaries such as theology, history, anthropology, intercultural studies, community development, and education. Part II maintains the river metaphor and deals with the distributaries of missiology such as defining cross-cultural discipleship, seminal theories and models of cross-cultural discipleship, and the future of missiology.

The book states its purpose up front: “to help you [the reader] integrate academic fields in order to increase your understanding of how Christianity spreads across cultures” (1). As a scholar practitioner, Nehrbass’ ten years with his family completing a translation of the New Testament in the language of Southwest Tanna in Vanuatu with Wycliffe Bible Translators surely shapes his passion for the nations to know Christ as Savior. Nehrbass is a clear and concise writer offering fresh perspectives on what are the prime movers, shakers, models, and issues that have globally shaped our evangelical northern-American missiological understanding of cross-cultural discipleship together with how to apply educational and community development strategies that make an

impact for Christ and his kingdom. He wants the reader to know how Christianity spreads across cultures by appropriate biblical and cultural exegesis with the “conviction that a paramount goal of any academic study is to make disciples across cultures” (1).

“What we have found lacking,” claims the author, “is a book that shows how missiologists have actually generated academically credible theories that are useful for those missionary-practitioners who are making disciples across cultures” (2). Hence, the volume challenges many sacred views of yesteryear concerning the Great Commission. Missiology is not a static three-legged stool composed of theology, social sciences, and history but better viewed as the metaphor of a dynamic river; and needs a new definition since there is a discontinuity between theory and practice. Missiology is the “the utilization of multiple academic disciplines to develop strategies for making disciples across cultures” (chap 1, 14).

We all know the David J. Bosch, Wilbert R. Shenk, Charles E. Van Engen, and Johannes Verkuyl argument of the mission tapestry that runs through the entire Bible. Not completely so, argues the author, as he offers an alternate missiological theology approach (chap 2). Biographical mission history likewise comes under the microscope as a missiological historiography unfolds that uses six theses of analysis to examine mission history and the shifts in the roles of global mission (chap 3). Nehrbass critiques anthropologists of mission as to how they use their studies to advance the gospel in chapter 4. The next chapter (5) examines the usefulness of intercultural studies for making disciples across cultures. Chapter 6 aims at aiding readers to apply community development strategies that work in social transformation and the role that churches play as globalization influences in societies, nations, and cultures. And yet another tributary to the river is the contribution of formal and non-formal education to missionary strategy (chapter 7).

At the beginning of part II, having defined cross-cultural discipleship as “any activity that helps people across cultures to bring these spheres of their lives under the Lordship of Christ” (chapter 8, 202), Nehrbass reviews models and theories of tested field missiology (chapter 9) before he dips a large bucket in the river and distributes a broad splash of missional activities that contribute to God’s mission (chapter 10). The last chapter ventures into the future with a panoramic sunrise over the river that propels the reader towards global trends of mission to keep the discipline relevant. By provoking and prodding at the question of how missiology is to advance through the twenty-first century, Nehrbass helpfully explains the tail life and expiration date of missiological ideas. For instance, the table of missiological ideas that have staying

power is a striking reflection (295), even though it is missing the contribution of renown Catholic missiologists that have influenced evangelical thinking such as Stephen B. Bevans, Angelyn Dries, Anthony Gittens, Madge Karecki, Louis J. Luzbetak, Mary Motte, Francis Anekwe Oborji, James Chukwuma Okoye, Robert J. Schreiter, and Roger P. Schroeder. Nehrbass contends that missiology must be more interdisciplinary if it is to address the increasing intricacies of our century's missional contexts.

In addition, I would claim that missiology must also be more ecumenical and non-Western to address these twenty-first century complexities. The book understandably focuses on northern-American evangelicalism with respect to influencers and publications, and even then the volume nearly reaches the 400-page mark. Therefore, my last few thoughts are not so much criticisms but possibilities of awareness towards the unravelling history of our new millennium. First a reminder that the Holy Spirit (the Lord of the church on earth) empowers the currents that move the tributaries and distributaries towards the river of missiology, as well as the river itself. Missiology is the work of the Spirit of Jesus and the direction and volume of flow of God's mission are with the Lord's authority alone. And in that manner, the Spirit is emboldening more streams of women (e.g., the book's contributors) and majority-world scholars to flow with interdisciplinary input into the mainstream. Furthermore, there is an increase in acceptance and volume of inter-Christian dialogue with Catholics and Orthodox practitioner-scholars who will only enhance our understanding of missiology as our streams merge together. Also, how can we neglect in our missional river the ever-increasing stream of the majority-world Pentecostal movement if only by sheer volume alone (10,000 Pentecostals in 1910 moving to 270 million today).

Nehrbass and contributors deserve sincere congratulations on a project that stirs the missiological waters causing eddies, whirlpools, and rip tides all orchestrated to dislodge the flotsam and jetsam of missiological theories and models found wanting that hinder the flow of the Spirit in the mission of God to cross-culturally fulfill the Great Commission in our contemporary world.

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