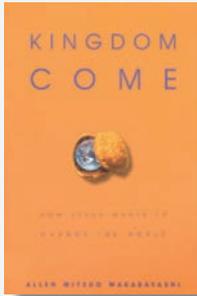


Book Notes

—Reviewed by Ralph D. Winter

Kingdom Come: How Jesus Wants to Change the World, by Allen Mitsuo Wakabayashi (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2003)



This book has one of the most spectacularly illuminating as well as concise definitions of what could be called

“Kingdom Mission.” Here’s a quote from page 82:

We’ve already discovered that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is about the presence and coming of the Kingdom of God. We’ve seen that the gospel is about God coming to us in Jesus Christ to establish his reign over all creation, every nook and cranny. Yet our traditional conceptions of the gospel are much more individualistic, focusing on individuals finding reconciliation with God through the death of Jesus rather than on God’s restoration of his entire creation. It’s more about people getting “saved” and less about bringing God’s will into every aspect of life and society. It’s more about helping people escape this earth to get to heaven rather than working to see more of heaven invade this earth. But the gospel is more than the good news that we can be saved; the good news of the kingdom is about creation being restored.

The author is an InterVarsity regional director, and is apparently a very well-educated person who has

thought a lot about this. The remarkable thing is that this is not one of the recent bandwagon books on the Kingdom of God and transformation that have been coming out all over the place, but is a 2003 book.

What Saint Paul Really Said, by N. T. Wright, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997)

Apparently N. T. Wright was thinking clearly quite a while ago. This book is not a recent book, being published in 1997, but it certainly has some very up to date statements, principally, for example, the statement on page 153 which talks about proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord. This clearly goes way beyond the ordinary pitch that young people are faced with, “accept Jesus Christ as your Savior and you’re on your way to heaven.” He says,

The Gospel is not, as I have stressed, a set of techniques for making people Christians. Nor is it a set of systematic theological reflections however important. The gospel is the announcement that Jesus is Lord—the Lord of the world, Lord of the cosmos, Lord of the earth, of the ozone layer, of whales and waterfalls, of trees and tortoises. As soon as we get this right we destroy at a stroke the disastrous dichotomy that has existed in people’s minds between “preaching the gospel” on the one hand and “social action” or “social justice” on the other. Preaching the gospel means announcing Jesus as Lord of the world; and, unless we are prepared to contradict ourselves with every breath we take, we cannot make that announcement without seeking to bring that lordship to bear over every aspect of the world.

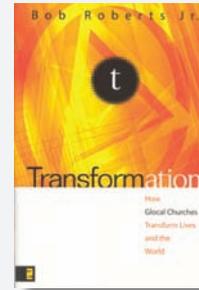
On page 154 he remarks that,

... it is much easier to turn Christianity into what the Enlightenment wanted it to be—a private system of piety which doesn’t impinge on the public world—if the kingship of Jesus is regarded as an unfortunate, and overly Jewish, way of thinking, which Paul and the rest of

the early church quickly and thankfully grew out of.

Today, of course, a whole lot of books are chiming in on the subject of the larger meaning of the Gospel, which is much larger than Evangelicals usually think.

Transformation, by Bob Roberts Jr, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006)



One contemporary pastor who, against some opposition, is against the simplistic gospel is Bob Roberts Jr, whose two books

I’ll mention here. The first book, *Transformation*, says on page 49,

When we understand that equipping people for Kingdom work is very different from merely making converts, we have the church in the right context. Converts may grow the church, but the caliber of disciples required to change the world and operate in the larger realm of the Kingdom is much, much different.

He goes on to say,

in the 21st century, missions translates to Kingdom. It’s everyone everywhere and every infrastructure, not just religious vocational workers, but everyone.

Now he actually stresses this to the point where he essentially says that instead of depending on missions, we can simply depend upon active laymen in the churches—which is somewhat the same as saying that if all the citizens of a city were willing to pitch in, in their spare time, we wouldn’t need any private enterprises in the city. The church needs mission structures just as cities need private enterprise. The church, in addition to the mission

perspective of its lay people, needs specialized missions structures through which both to preach the Gospel and to establish businesses.

On page 113, he says,

What is so sad is that some missionaries today are trying to be the business people and merchants that they are *not* in order that they can go places that the real business people in their churches *already are*.

Here, he's reflecting on the real distance between full-time religious workers who essentially only have a Bible in their hand and business people who have business skills, not only of technical knowledge but also of business management, and he's right. These two spheres are quite different and there's no use in one doing the other. However, the implication of the book is that we need more businesses not more missionaries, and that is a big mistake.

On page 114 he makes the statement that, "I believe that God is in the process of raising up a completely new breed of Kingdom Pilgrim that looks different from what we've known in the past." In this statement he is absolutely right, unless, as I fear, he is implying that this new kind of Kingdom Pilgrim will outmode the professional in missions. He's thinking, of course, as a local pastor and he sees mission potential in every single family in his church. That's great, and to maximize that potential is precisely the work of a pastor who has a mission heart. On the other hand, this important discovery ignores the fact that you still need people out there who have been there for years and who know the language.

On page 117 he says,

I'm grateful for what William Carey did in 1792 by being the first "modern" missionary. But we took

the Great Commission and turned it into a vocation instead of marching orders for the entire church.

In transforming the Great Commission into "marching orders for the entire church" he is unwittingly ignoring those members of the entire church who may become, and need to become, professional in mission activity.

On page 163, he states,

If our primary motivation of humanitarian aid is only to "convert" them and not to practice Christ's love in



feeding the thousands and healing the sick (even knowing, as Jesus himself did, that some would not follow), then that negatively influences what we proclaim. What then is the motivation of our evangelism? What does that say about our sincere love of others? I serve not as a "bait" but because it is the nature of Christ in me. Who would help a hurting person on the side of the road and then demand, "Accept Jesus because I helped you." Absurd! The kingdom is not just about proclamation to the nations; it's about inauguration. It's about healing; it's about helping—digging wells, feeding the hungry, building shelters, teaching farming, opening up small microbusinesses; all of these and a thousand other things are ways we emphasize God's love for the nations. We communicate that we're here for the long haul and we care. That's how we earn credibility.

Here Bob Roberts states very clearly his concept of transformation and this is an excellent statement. However, the things he talks about—digging wells, giving shelter and so forth—are all relatively small projects which in fact a series of short-term lay people visiting overseas might very well be able to accomplish. What's missing here, and this does not minimize the value of what he's saying, is the fact that there are much larger problems to be dealt with than what these suggest, and what even a big local congregation can tackle by itself.

Glocalization, by Bob Roberts Jr, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007)



In this more recent book by Bob Roberts with a rather bizarre title, he goes even further in an artificial polarization

between *missions* and *Kingdom Pilgrims*, to use his phrase. He says, on page 33,

church leaders like to think people today are excited about missions—they're not. It's about glocalization—that's where the fires are burning.

He goes on to say on the next page, William Carey, for example, engaged society on many different levels, far beyond missions.

Oops, is he employing here a narrow definition of *missions*? Also,

we have to move from the one shot evangelism perspective that says, "Boom—here's the four spiritual laws. If you don't accept them, it's over. I've done my duty," to a radically different faith response where one is unabashedly pro-

claiming the gospel, *and* serving, *and* loving.

A technicality: in this last sentence he could better have said “a Gospel of the Kingdom which includes *serv*ing and *lov*ing.”

Apparently he feels that it is legitimate—I don’t think so—to equate missions with a rather narrow type of evangelism and in that case it might very well be that people really aren’t interested in missions. If he is talking about mission agencies and professionals who have learned the language and know what they are doing after a number of years of learning and slowly gaining the confidence of the people, then he is really off track. He hopefully states, on the same page,

It is easier than ever nowadays to practice kingdom work because the kingdom itself is a viral organic response, it is societal as opposed to religious, skeletal and institutional.

He adds,

The understanding of the Kingdom is evolving right now.

It’s fine to say that, but that doesn’t mean that he is describing something different necessarily than the wide spectrum of many different missions of the past, especially in the 19th century.

On pages 35–36, he has some interesting comments; he talks about the fact that

In order for the Great Commission to be carried out, it would take the whole church. People want more than just Sunday. These authors have hit a nerve among people who want to do more than just go to church.

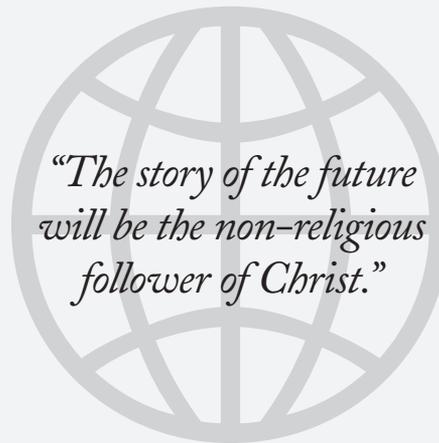
He then mentions Bill and Melinda Gates, Bono, and people like that. He says,

This isn’t just a religious thing that is happening, but what is tragic is that it should be. People from outside of the church are now leading and challenging the church to get with it.

On page 36, he says,

The west has been the preacher and the missionary, however, I believe that is shifting. The story of the future will be the non-religious follower of Christ.

Now it may well be that the majority of active people in the world, yearning for a mission for themselves in one way



or another, will in fact be lay people. Actually, I think that is already true. But that doesn’t mean that we can phase out all professionals, all specialized entities, like the Wycliffe translators and the publishers of Bibles and even the people who run seminaries and pastoral programs around the world. Those things are just as necessary as ever.

On page 38 he admits that the cause of missions should be understood in ways different than his own usage because he says that

sadly what we have done to missions is to make it only the gospel of proclamation regarding accepting Jesus as Savior.

Well, that is the way he is using the word. The fact is that “missions” never meant only that and it doesn’t need to mean that now. There is no sense in getting rid of the word.

Although the book we’re talking about is no longer the one titled “transformation,” on page 47 there is an excellent definition of transformation. He says,

Until our faith engages the whole of society, we will not see transformation. Until our understanding of the kingdom of God moves beyond the gospel of individual conversion, we will keep it all inside churches. Until our vision is expanded beyond what makes me feel good and successful to what brings the most glory to God, we’ll just be piddling around playing church and being religious, all the while missing what God has called us to do.

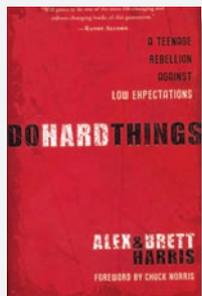
Now, this is a statement we can agree with unreservedly except that from his point of view, this type of activity, apparently, is not something a mission agency could perform, but requires merely lay people from his church and other churches to go out on short trips to hammer away at these problems. This perspective is clarified on page 85,

So as a pastor, my job is not just to fund missionaries, pray for them, and take an occasional trip. As a pastor, my call is to get the people sitting in our pews to use their vocations in a natural way to connect locally and internationally. That’s my call.

On page 87 he spells out more clearly and specifically what he has in mind, and shows a great deal of wisdom. He is talking about alternative approaches to a poor village situation. One approach would build houses with volunteer labor and give people some money for food. The other would establish a factory or office of some sort and lend money on a five-year lease and so forth. This is absolutely brilliant—obviously people don’t just need handouts. They need a means of earning money with which they can buy the food they need. But the prob-

lem is that his own congregation is very unlikely to contain members who have both the business sense and the time in after hours or vacations to go across the world someplace and deal with different language and cultural situations and really get a viable business started. So in a sense, he can see the solution, but without the tools in his hands, he cannot provide it. This is where “business as mission” comes into the picture. Business is an absolutely essential strategy, but it needs to accompany and not replace standard missions. In any case, it is something that is certainly relevant and is often talked about in our days in wonderful ways.

Do Hard Things, by Alex and Brett Harris, (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2008)



What a fascinating book! It is written by two teenagers, for teenagers. I have already seen how teenagers will get hold of it and stay up late at night trying to finish it. This book stresses, as its subtitle indicates, that teenagers in our society have been exposed to nothing but “low expectations” and they have responded with low response. This is something that the book excitingly and forcefully portrays. One of the limitations, of course, that results from that exclusion of teenagers from the workaday world (by all kinds of laws and impediments, school systems among others) is the fact that they only know how to work with other teenagers. They are locked out of the adult world.

The irony is that this book would not have been written had these two particular teenagers not been invited

to go to Alabama to be in charge of a political campaign to elect a supreme court justice for the state of Alabama. In that rare experience they found out what they were able to do even as teenagers, and they went home and wrote this book. But the book confines itself to what *teenagers working with teenagers* can do. That’s not their fault, it’s the fault of society. The book itself is a tremendous challenge and is a remarkably important book to get into the hands of every teenager



who is a follower of Christ. Note that this book bears out much of what is said under the section in this issue called *Reflections*.

His Kingdom Come, by Jim Stier et al, Eds. (Seattle: YWAM Publishers, 2008)



This is a tremendously important book. It has thirty chapters written by top YWAM leaders, published by YWAM Publishers for a major conference in the east. It is brim-full of personal testimonies of people who have worked for YWAM for years, stressing evangelism of a rather narrow sort. One author refers

to it as “evacuation evangelism.” But now, the entire 48-year history of YWAM, as one chapter by Dr. Debra Buenting indicates, is facing a significant change. The entire ship is beginning to turn.

Apparently, a lot of the top leaders have realized that the word *salvation* means a lot more than we thought it should mean, and that the *Gospel of the Kingdom* is a better and more Biblical phrase for what God is really after. One reason for the book and for further conferences about the book is that YWAM leaders are going to try to convince the rest of their 16,000 full-time people that all of them need to get a better grasp of what they’re doing in this sense. I am very excited about this book. It is important evidence of a major organization turning very gradually and definitely into a nation-building kingdom type of mission, in addition, of course to the ongoing stress on personal conversion.

As with some other books, this one may not include active plans for tackling major world problems, but of course, micro good deeds are also essential for the credibility of the Gospel. But what evangelicals in general lack, and not just YWAM people, is a clear grasp of what they could do to deal with the major evils of this earth which violate the purposes of our prayer, “Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth.” **UJM**