

## William Linscott reviews: *Challenging Western Christians and Their Neighbours*

William H. Linscott, in: *European Journal of Theology*, vol. 30, No 2, 2021, p.391-393 [[EJT2021.2.text.HR.pdf](#)], reviews: Steven Paas, *Challenging Western Christians and Their Neighbors. Be Participants in the Mission of Jesus, At Home and Abroad*, Eugene: Resource Publications (an Imprint of Wipf and Stock), 2020; 106 pp., £12.00, pb.; ISBN 978-1-725-27584-3

*Summary:* Steven Paas' short book aspires to help Western Christians gain a more robust biblical framework for the mission of the triune God, and to challenge his readers to engage in the internal obstacles that stand in the way of the Body of Christ fulfilling its vocation. *Challenging Western Christians and Their Neighbors* is a welcome resource for equipping the priesthood of believers.

*Résumé:* Ce petit livre de Steven Paas veut aider les chrétiens occidentaux à se doter d'un cadre biblique plus solide pour la mission que le Dieu trine leur a confiée. Il veut aussi les inciter à lutter contre les obstacles internes qui empêchent le Corps de Christ de répondre à sa vocation. *Challenging Western Christians and Their Neighbors* est un outil bienvenu, propre à équiper les croyants pour l'exercice de leur ministère.

*Zusammenfassung:* Das kurze und bündige Buch von Steven Paas beabsichtigt, Christen in der westlichen Welt einen solideren biblischen Hintergrund zur Mission des dreieinigen Gottes zu geben. Es will seine Leser herausfordern, sich mit den internen Hindernissen auseinanderzusetzen, die dem Leib Christi bei der Erfüllung seiner Berufung im Weg stehen. *Challenging Western Christians and Their Neighbors* [Eine Herausforderung für westliche Christen und ihre Nachbarn] stellt eine willkommene Quelle dar um die allgemeine Priesterschaft aller Gläubigen von Nutzen zu sein.

There has been no shortage of writings concerning the meaning of mission in the last few decades. However, a concise guide to a biblical perspective on mission that also speaks to the hearts of Western readers is greatly needed. It is this gap that Paas, in his slim book, *Challenging Western Christians and Their Neighbors: Be Participants in the Mission of Jesus, At Home and Abroad*, intends to fill. I have divided the ten chapters of Paas' book into three sections.

The first section (chapters 1-3) lays out the essence of a biblical understanding of mission. Chapter 1 serves as a cornerstone for the rest of the book as it defends understanding the mission of congregations in the sending nature of the triune God. The following chapter explores further the identity of Jesus as the

Sent One. The third chapter outlines the six aspects of mission given by the Lord Jesus to the universal Church: go, make disciples, teach, preach, be witnesses and baptise (28-35).

The second section (chapters 4-6) further elaborates on the cosmic and global goal of mission. In chapter 4, Paas defends a two-sided approach to the critical issue of 'points of contact or common ground between the religions and the Christian faith' (48). Such a perspective affirms 'the spots of light that God has left' in a particular culture but also asserts that those traces do not lead to salvation 'outside Christ' (51). In chapters 5 and 6, Paas challenges his Western readers, individually and corporately, like the apostles whom the Lord instructed to remain in Jerusalem, not to neglect their own context as they are sent to all the nations, including present-day Israel.

The third section (chapters 7-10) represents the heart of the challenge which Paas wishes to deliver, namely an exhortation to his Christian readers to address the roadblocks that potentially hold back the Body of Christ from participating in the mission of God. In chapter 7, aware of certain views on the sovereignty of God and the extent of the atonement that can serve to make Christians feel as if the missionary vocation of the church is unnecessary, Paas argues for a (un)limited atonement perspective: '[Jesus] came and died for everyone, but unfortunately not everyone has accepted Him' (71). Taking this route enables him to maintain a high view on the sovereignty of God while not lessening the urgency of sharing the gospel with unbelievers. Paas takes a more pastoral approach in the final three chapters. In chapters 8 and 9, he challenges his Christian audience, with conviction and firmness, to confront the personal and corporate roadblocks to participating in God's mission to the world. However, he does not argue for obedience performed out of self-reliant triumphalism. In the closing chapter, he encourages his Christians readers to participate in God's mission not out of their own fortitude 'but in the power of Jesus' (98).

While global in perspective (Paas interacts with voices from the USA to Nigeria) and willing to tackle head-on thorny issues (e.g., points of contact), the book's greatest strength is its capacity to be helpful to many likely different groups of readers in Western churches. As biblical illiteracy increases in the West, many new Christians will likely have less background knowledge of the Bible. Paas supplies such people with a thoroughly biblical framework for understanding the meaning of the mission of God that is free of technical jargon. For the understaffed and overstretched minister eager to teach a Sunday school course on mission, Paas' book is a strong candidate for the class' curriculum. It

would not be difficult to imagine other groups of people within the Body of Christ whom this book could aid.

*Challenging Western Christians and Their Neighbors. Be Participants in the Mission of Jesus, At Home and Abroad* represents, above all, a helpful contribution towards equipping Western Christians for mission in their own context. Readers are likely to walk away with a clear biblical framework for how to think about the mission of God, convicted of the areas where they have succumbed to evasive attitudes, and encouraged to follow the gracious and sovereign Lord into the world to tell especially their 'neighbours' of 'His wondrous grace and love' (100).

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