

Review of Sills, M. David. *Reaching and Teaching*. Chicago, Ill.: Moody, 2010.

In *Reaching and Teaching* (Moody, 2010), M. David Sills evaluates the practices and philosophies of ministry that drive much of contemporary, evangelical missions. Biblically speaking, he aims to consider what it means to be faithful to the Great Commission. In the process, Sills casts a vision to mission-minded Christians by articulating what missionaries are called to do, how it is to be accomplished, and tendencies that trap missiological thinking.

The reader should take away a number of key points. First, many missiologies are plagued by false dichotomies. For example, missionaries that emphasize methodology, speed, and pragmatism are prone to neglect the theological training and critical thinking necessary for sustained growth (23-25, 29). The salvation of the individual can be pitted against the formation of a healthy community. Sills especially highlights an unfortunate distinction made by many, namely, between quantity and quality. Whatever does not multiply churches most rapidly is seen by some people as a hindrance, even if it is theological education (30-31). This pattern suggests a second key idea: missionaries should concern themselves with both sowing and reaping, reaching and teaching (105-127). Therefore, Sills argues that we cannot let helpful but arbitrary classifications, like “reached” and “unreached”, distract missionaries from other tasks besides evangelism. If one only has a “search” mentality, any labor not directed at the least reached of unreached peoples in the world is deemed to have secondary importance. However, he gives two valuable retorts. First, missionaries must look for receptivity, which is a fruit of the Spirit’s work; thus says McGavran, “No person is equally ready all time to follow the way” (115). Second, given that theological training is necessary for maturity and leadership development, “the best way to make an unreached people group is to abandon one that is reached” (127).

A third key point then involves the question of when a missionary's work is done. Sills rightly urges missionaries to reflect upon their final goals and exit strategy (See Ch. 2). His comparison of churches and church planters with children and their parents is fitting. A rapid multiplication strategy that prioritizes speed, leaving and getting converts to make "decisions" leads a high "birth rate" but also fragile, perhaps heretical churches. Foresight and vision must guide methodology. He concludes, "Don't stop teaching until you have taught teachers; don't stop training until you have trained trainers" (46).

Therefore, fourth point must be made explicit so that one can consider its implications. The goal of missions is the glory of God (36). Any other good ambition is subordinate to this, whether it is obedience, church planting, evangelism, social justice, or theological education. However, when this principle is left assumed, a mere means of glorifying God becomes supreme, replacing this final end. As a result, missions becomes fragmented and imbalanced.

Fifth, greater attention must be given to recruiting and training missionaries. Given the truth of the saying, "Your ecclesiology will drive your missiology" (34), we see the danger of using "the lowest common denominator of ministry skills and preparation" (37) as a criterion for sending missionaries. Consequently, there needs to be greater investment in long term ministry, not simply "short-term gains" (148), all too often epitomized by short-term mission trips and 1-2 year personnel.

Sixth, we must know what it is missionaries are to teach and do. Fundamental is a "biblically responsible hermeneutical process" (53). A key aim is reproducing leaders who have the character, theological competency, and vision to take over the ongoing work of ministry. If ministry is done according to one's preference or using a "pre-packaged approach" (56, 58), the mind can default to manipulation, the heart is not sensitive, and obedience quickly becomes

illusory. Therefore, Sills correctly reemphasizes that the Great Commission does not command mere obedience, but rather obedience to *all* Jesus has commanded, including 1 Tim 2:2, which requires we train people capable to training others in what we have been taught (19-27, 77). An obvious corollary then must not be forgotten, namely that the all we do strives at training nationals. They are the ones most naturally equipped to reach their own culture

Seventh, “if one does not contextualize, he is doing just that—changing the gospel. He becomes a modern-day Judaizer. He is in effect telling his hearers that they must become like him to be saved” (198). Faithful contextualization requires “a theologically trained missionary” (212) to catalyze the process. Since our methods typically carries a number of hidden assumptions and values, we must be mindful to use the Bible not only for our message, but also a method, lest ignorance or tradition lead to either syncretism or sectarianism.

Eight and finally, Sills makes the point that missionaries must have a long-term perspective. We have implied this when speaking of the need for missionaries to train those who will replace them in local leadership. Although advocates of church-planting movement (CPM) approaches claim they wish to minimize local dependence on foreign missionaries, (141-143) in fact, the opposite may be true. If leaders are not trained who can take over the essential, ongoing training of the church, the church will struggle to break free of the missionary; even if this happens for a time, the unhealthy and probably death of weak churches will requires future generations of missionaries to return to the newly *unreached* peoples. Therefore, by withholding theological education, missionaries may in fact perpetuate *theological* imperialism, keeping them from joining the international “hermeneutical community” (27). Long-term vision enable Sills to tells many missionaries, “Slow down” (143). In so doing, missionaries could also feel less like failures (146), helping perhaps to maintain higher retention rates among missionaries.

*Reaching and Teaching* is both a timely and holistic corrective to recent missiological thinking. Not only does he advocate higher priority be given to theological education, he also helps the reader see the unfortunate consequences of lacking such training. For instance, Sills exposes how short-term approaches rest on unbiblical, false dichotomies. In addition, theologically uncritical strategies forsake long-term growth and defaults to personal preferences and instant, visible results. In short, Sills effectively demonstrates that missionaries often suffer from reductionism, inappropriately emphasizing one biblical mandate over others. This stems from assuming what it means for God to get glory; that is, if missions exists for God's glory, what else, besides evangelism, glorifies God and thus is a component of missional thinking?

Sills' treatment of other views is fair, appealing to Scripture rather than caricature. He does however show the assumptions that drive prominent but deficient views as well as their natural conclusions. This is an essential approach to evaluating the theological basis for any given missiology. His example then helps the reader to observe that "biblical" practices derive from biblical thinking, not merely (superficially) biblical results. In the end, Sills highlights the practical importance of one's philosophy of missions and ministry. Too much is left unspoken, such as the definition of a missionary, his or her long term goals, and the ways that one is to prioritize the various needs found in world.

In conclusion, Sills' work contributes to the ongoing conversation how to balance quantity and quality. In short, he argues that they cannot be separated; any approach that deemphasizes the establishment of long-term, quality DNA will ultimately undermine seemingly high numbers of conversions and church plants. Given the diversity of mission fields, the limited resources at hand, and the complexity of the task, missionaries must train up a world full of Christian leaders who can think theological and contextually. This will be slow going indeed.