

Snow, Donald B. *English Teaching as Christian Mission: An Applied Theology*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001, 190 pp. \$16.99 (US), \$26.79 (Can.) ISBN 0-8361-9158-7

Teri McCarthy
International Institute for Christian Studies
Overland Park, Kansas

The English language has become the *lingua franca* of the 21st century. Today, more people study English than any other foreign language in the world. As a result of the global demand for English, Christians have seen teaching English as a way to spread the Gospel. Don Snow's book, *English Teaching as a Christian Mission: An Applied Theology*, is written for Christians who presently are, or who desire to become, teachers of English as a foreign language for the purpose of evangelism.

At no other time in Christian history has a language been so intricately connected to the Great Commission. In fact, TESOL, the professional organization of teachers of English, reports that their largest caucus group is the Christian Educators of TESOL (CETESOL). More Christians teach English as a foreign language than any other special-interest group. It is this group that will find Snow's book most helpful.

Snow has not only observed the global impact of the English language and Christian ESL/EFL teachers over the past twenty years, he has been an integral part of the movement. His book, *More than a Native Speaker* (TESOL: 1996), has won critical acclaim in both the secular and the Christian worlds. *English Teaching as Christian Mission* analyzes the role not only of the English language, but of Christian English teachers (CETs as Snow calls them) in the modern-day missions movement.

Snow begins the book by examining teaching English as a second/foreign language (TESL/TEFL) as a Christian vocation. He explains the difficulty that CETs have in integrating their call to evangelize with their need to teach. Snow refers to TESL/TEFL as a "Christian service" (p. 19). He then discusses in chapter two the specific roles in missions that CETs can and do play worldwide: that of reconciler between God and man, nation and nation, Western church and non-Western church.

In chapter three, Snow encourages CETs to be humble and respectful learners of the customs and languages of their host culture. He

clearly illustrates that what one does outside the classroom is as important as what takes place inside the classroom, as far as Christian witness is concerned. He strongly promotes cultural sensitivity to the host nation.

In chapters four through seven, Snow breaks down the specific ways that TESL/TEFL can be an effective tool for evangelism and insightfully points out ways in which it can actually harm the Christian witness. He explores in turn English teaching as witness, as ministry, as Christian service and as peacemaking. In these four chapters, Snow's years of overseas teaching provide an invaluable milieu for his honest and unique observations and conclusions.

In the final chapter, "English Teachers as Bridges Between Churches," Snow gives practical, step-by-step advice concerning how CETs can help expand a vision for the world for their home churches. They can also help the host-nation church have a voice outside its own borders. Snow challenges CETs to see that one significant service they can provide to the Body of Christ is to be a link of communication and understanding between these two groups. By making the connection between them, they can then find ways of helping one another and of seeing God working around the world.

English Teaching as Christian Mission should be required reading for Christian university students pursuing a degree or certificate in TESL/TEFL. Snow has done a good job of presenting both the strengths and the weakness of this peculiar approach to evangelism. He grapples with the difficulties of the "dual role" (p. 70) dilemma of the CET: "Am I a missionary or am I a teacher?", and he honestly admits, "These are not easy questions and I have no easy answers" (p. 71).

However, there is an aspect of this dilemma that, unfortunately, Snow does not explore. Why should there be a dichotomy between the missionary role and the teaching role? Why should teaching English as a second or foreign language *not* be considered as the individual's calling, and soul-winning a natural by-product of one's teaching and love for students? Snow has explained the problem, and described this dichotomy, but not explored adequately the biblical option that teaching *is* a calling and that ESL/EFL can be a sacred subject when surrendered to the Lordship of Christ. When the CET is faithfully and effectively teaching, she is *ministering* and successfully fulfilling her calling.

Another weakness of Snow's book is the absence of any mention of the role of prayer. One vital and significant activity that CETs around

the world can participate in is personal prayer for their students, their colleagues and their host nation. For some students in closed nations, the CET may be the only person on earth to intercede on their behalf. Prayer is one of the most important aspects of seeing English teaching as Christian mission.

Finally, one of the most compelling aspects of Snow's book is the idea of "Liberation Through Phonetics" (taken from a 1996 article by Henry Bergen). The learning of the English language can empower students. It can enable them to earn good salaries—a tool against poverty. It can open doors for educational opportunities abroad allowing them to become physicians, scientists, lawyers and business people—a tool to improve the health of a nation, its economy and even its government. It allows CETs to see that TESL/TEFL can be a ministry to the poor. This is one of the strongest cases in the book for an applied theology. The book is a must-read for any ESL/EFL Christian professional who sees their discipline as connected with the task of reaching the world for Jesus Christ.