

Boekbesprekings / Book Reviews

and trust. All the quotations are accompanied by beautiful photographs which emphasize the impact of Bonhoeffer's words. The last pages contain a brief history of Bonhoeffer's life and provide a detailed list of sources of the referred texts.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A life in pictures is an English translation from the German edition *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Bilder eines Lebens*. It is edited by Renante Bethge and Christian Gremmels. They did an excellent job in portraying the life of a thinker, theologian, pastor and someone who stood for righteousness. They divided his life into several categories, beginning with his family background, his childhood and youth (1906-1923), his studies (1923-1927), his journey to Barcelona, Berlin and New York (1928-1932), the developments in his thinking from 1931 to 1932, his decision to resist Hitler (1933), his trip to London (1933-1934), his own seminary in Finkenwalde (1935-1937), his journey to America and the return to Germany (1938-1939), his active resistance (1942-1944), his imprisonment in Tegel (1943-1945) and finally covers his death in Flossenbürg (1945). The most amazing aspect about this book is the fact that it contains pictures of not only Bonhoeffer, but also of other prominent figures of his time. All the pictures portray a vivid image of the life of a man who died too soon. Every photograph is accompanied by a short paragraph giving details of the particular photo.



Matheson, P (ed) 2007 – *A people's history of Christianity, Vol 5. Reformation Christianity*

Publisher: Fortress. 306 Pages. Price: \$35.00

Reviewer: Dr Kobus Labuschagne (University of Pretoria)

The list of highly esteemed scholars who contributed to this book is impressive: Susan R Boettcher, David Cressy, Keith P Luria, Peter Marshall, Elsie McKee, Raymond A Mentzer, Karen E Spierling, James M Stayer, Margo Todd, Merry E Wiesner-Hanks, and then also Peter Matheson, the editor.

Writing a "people's history of Christianity", and choosing the period of the Reformation, as this book does, signify the intention to offer something decidedly different to what is usually read about the 16th century Church Reformation. This study's aim therefore was to "open up some new ground" (p 3) and to do research on the *effect* of the Reformation on the day-to-day lives of ordinary people. Although the history of doctrine and of theology will always be important, the focus now is on the challenges and successes, the frustrations and struggles of ordinary people – and on how they reacted to the Reformation. The interest is not in the great theologians of the time, or the princes, cardinals, popes and the individuals with power and authority. The vast majority of the population of which many were illiterate or semi-literate, forms the centre of interest. The objective is to see through the eyes of ordinary men, women and children. The anticlericalism of ordinary folk as a result of the injustices and exploitation in society of the time was linked to the Reformation (p 9). Some of the sermons and pamphlets concerned themselves with concrete socio-economic wrongs done to the poor population, and answers were needed from the Holy Scriptures, because the Bible was seen as the book containing God's will. In spite of being a religious transformation in essence, the Reformation somehow changed every dimension of life for everyone – people's hearts, minds, morality, everyday life, and society as a whole changed (p 12).

As far as highly debated issues, such as the contribution of pure political and socio-economical motives in the transformation are concerned, the editor gives a sober answer: "Ultimately, the answer given may be dependant not only on the evidence available but on the historian's understanding of what constitutes human nature and human society" (p 14, 15). In response to the views of cultural historians, pressing for political and socio-economic reasons, Matheson's wise words need to be remembered: "We have to guard against assuming that common folk were only interested in social outcomes and were not passionately engaged with faith in God and love of their neighbour" (p 15, 16). After all, many men and women risked their lives and possessions by standing firm in faith under all kinds of frightening and horrible threats against their faith, and some even lost their lives.

The book is divided into three parts, with each part containing several chapters. Part one is on the "Life of faith" in the towns, villages and rural areas. Part two, under the title, "From cradle to grave", explains the influence of religion in the lives of all people from birth and baptism to, in the end, leaving this world. Part three, with the heading, "Finding their voice", deals with the dreams of a just society, the emergence of lay theologies, the relationship of Christians with what was seen as the "outsiders" (Jews, Muslims, heretics and refugees), and the language of the common folk.

The book reveals in a wonderful way just how significant the Reformation really was in *involving the entire population*, including ordinary people, in religious life and church life, and in giving them respect, responsibility and position. Christian faith and morality were drawn into society as a whole. The poor were cared for and taught the Christian life. The Reformation emphasized the "priesthood of all believers" (p 38). A stable and Christian family life was deemed very important, and with this the father became the spiritual and moral leader of the family. Mothers taught their children the basic prayers and other basic elements of devotion. Men and women, together with their families, lived the Christian life and transmitted it into society as a whole. Mentzer said: "Constructive employment, stable marriages, and secure families were key elements in the maintenance of public order and social peace" (p 39). Ordinary lay people became respected elders and deacons in their congregations. The Genevan Psalter of 1562 was immensely popular. Psalm singing ultimately defined the Protestant identity (p 46).

It was of vital importance to the Reformation that prayers, hymns, Scripture readings, and the liturgy of the sacraments were not be in Latin, but, as all preaching, should have been in the language of the people. The Reformation's Church services in the *vernacular* were immensely popular even in rural areas (p 279). Matheson says:

Language is power. The nineteenth-century philosophers of language used to talk of language as an inexplicable miracle springing from the heart of a nation ... Yet within the body of the Christian church such "miracles" of linguistic energy and creativity have occurred again and again, not least in apostolic and patristic times. The Reformation undoubtedly saw another such outpouring. The lasting contribution of this period may well be the liberation of biblical language ... (p 283).

What the book clearly points out is that ordinary believers in their masses welcomed and embraced the innovations of the Reformation. The vast majority of the common folk passionately identified with the Reformed piety.

The book makes one realize that the Reformation's contributions to the Western world we know today, are vast and incalculable.

Together with many valuable pictures, the book is interesting, easy to read, and is recommended for theologians, students and *ordinary* Christians.