

Book Reviews

Renewing Christian Theology: Systematics for a global Christianity

Yong A & Anderson JA 2014

*Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press. xxiv + 453 pages. ISBN 978-1-60258-761-8.
No price quoted.*

My first impression of this book was not good. Despite the attractive cover, I was not convinced that we need another version of systematic theology especially in the form of a textbook. Then, a confession; I am aligned neither to the charismatic nor the pentecostal movement – I am content to be an orthodox catholic reforming Christian. However, as soon as I began reading, I was gripped by the potency of the argument of a twenty-first century global theology grounded in a postmodern, postcolonial and post-denominational context.

First, it states explicitly that from its foundation Christianity is a missionary faith – it is a living, active and developing entity. To survive and grow, especially during the vagaries of the early centuries under persecution, and, worse still, under co-option by and collaboration with the state is nothing less than miraculous. Part of its durability has been its transportability in time, space and essence through inculturation (a word nowhere found in the index!). It has survived the tragedy of the slave trade which was one significant means of extending the faith to the USA. I take issue with the assumption that Pentecostalism was birthed in the Azusa Street revival when there is growing evidence that it was predated by numerous expressions in Asia. Not everything has to begin, develop and end in the US of A. Global pentecostalism has many springs.

Yong adopts a novel approach to his work. Accepting the enduring validity of the Apostles', Nicene-Constantinopolitan and Chalcedonian creeds, he bases his work on the World Assemblies of God Fellowship's (WAGF) Statement of Faith (SF) as the result of its size and international influence and its ecclesiological self-understanding. The ethos of this work is grounded in a relational encounter with the living Christ. It blends orthodoxy with orthopraxy and produces an innovative orthopathy. The author himself explains it: 'a pneumatological and eschatological theology is not only a theology of hope but also a theology of the heart. The heart, in the biblical traditions, signifies the whole human person ...'

Yong reconceptualises his theology by placing the last things first along with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit before proceeding to more abstract theological topics.

He justifies this approach: 'that we pay attention not just to abstractly stated ideas but to desires shaped over time (narratives), feelings (affections), and practices (missional engagement) (:19). Yet it is 'robustly' Trinitarian, the author having taken careful account of the approaches of historical systematic theologies. The chapters are arranged to align with the WAGF SF, beginning primarily with human life and experience. Interpretative glosses supported by distinctive art work are provided by Jonathan Anderson who adds substantially to the attractiveness of the book. However, full page plates with the glosses on the opposite page would have further enhanced the book.

Each chapter begins with a brief narrative reflection on a biblical character and how that person interacted with God's salvation history, and concludes with a list of discussion questions and a brief reading list. A comprehensive bibliography is appended. Due to reasons of space the focus is on the New Testament which is rather limiting. Renewalist readers are free to generalise methodologically for their own traditions. The author regularly refers to the postliberal context, but for myself I find the approach rather liberating as he gives fresh perspectives on hardy topics such as the authority of Scripture. While it does not suit my own theology, nonetheless this book provides an innovative, challenging and stimulating approach to theological reflection and worthy of our serious consideration. It also provides what we have been looking for as Pentecostalism develops. In the author's own words:

Renewalists are fairly new arrivals on the scene of theological academia and thus have barely begun reflecting on matters related to theological method. In practice, they often do not think about doing theology but about living into and out of the scriptural narrative in general and the apostolic message in particular (p.342).

This is a major step forward with a book that is strongly supported by a massive bibliography and the inclusion of the main creeds and statements of faith referred to.

Reviewer: Prof GA Duncan, Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria, PRETORIA, 0002. (:15)

Millennials and Mission: A Generation Faces a Global Challenge

Raymo J & J. 2014

Pasadena, California: William Carey Library. xv+136 pages. ISBN: 978-0-878085-36-1. Price US\$14.99

The global missions enterprise, to the extent that it involves the members of each generation passing responsibility for an “unfinished task” to those who follow them, is inherently intergenerational in nature. Jim and Judy Raymo are seasoned mission leaders who possess a keen awareness of this reality. Over a period of more than four decades, these authors have served as missionaries, missionary educators, church leaders, and USA Directors for WEC International. This accumulated experience, which spans more than a generation, has outfitted the Raymos with a unique perspective on the intergenerational nature of the global missions enterprise.

The authors introduce the Millennial Generation (by their definition, those born 1982-2002) as the emerging adult generation that is now charged with carrying forward the baton of global missions. Many years of interacting with young people across Europe, Australia, Canada, and the USA have motivated the Raymos to strive “to understand and respond intelligently” to the generational distinctives they have encountered in relating to the members of this generation (1). In this book, they paint a picture of the Millennials as a unique generation with tremendous potential to impact the world. At the same time, the authors raise a question that has significant bearing on the future of global missions (1): “How will this generation of Christians respond to both dangers that seem pervasive and the global biblical mandate to go to all nations with the teachings and life of Jesus?”

In exploring the makeup of the Millennial generation, the Raymos draw extensively upon sociological sources, data from surveys and interviews, and their own personal experiences in working with young adults. This material is supplemented frequently by paragraph-length written comments from mission-minded Millennials. The authors’ careful scholarship, thoughtful reflections upon their rich practical experience, and intentionality in including Millennial voices all enhance the quality of their presentation.

Most of the chapters in this book are devoted to exploring key issues that come to bear on this generation’s potential as cross-cultural contributors. Chapter Two provides a compelling start to this investigation. This chapter introduces the Millennials as a generation characterized by both passion and inexperience; they believe they can change the world, but are somewhat unsure of how to proceed. This chapter also describes the challenges presented by the fact that many Millennials

have been “indulged” and have emerged into adulthood more slowly than previous generations. In this chapter, the Raymos also explore how this generation’s familiarity with multiculturalism has the potential to be an asset to its members in cross-cultural settings.

Several other chapters offer noteworthy contributions. Chapter four provides an insightful survey of the sort of training and preparation Millennials need in order to be well equipped for cross-cultural service. In Chapter Five, “Is Fear a Factor?”, the authors make a compelling case that the greatest fears hindering Millennials from global service may actually be those that their parents and church leaders hold toward the riskiness of today’s world. Chapter Six, “What Ministries Interest Millennials?”, provides a succinct summary of this generation’s heart for justice. Chapter seven explores the sort of organizational conditions that resonate well with Millennials’ values and that will be important for mission organizations to take seriously if they are going to develop effective, sustainable working relationships with the members of this generation.

Authors dedicated to examining the characteristics of specific generational cohorts are sometimes prone to paint with unduly broad brush strokes, thereby rendering an overly simplistic image of the generation under examination. In addition, some authors tend to describe generational cohorts predominantly in terms of either their strengths or weaknesses. The Raymos largely succeed at avoiding these pitfalls. The picture they present of the Millennial Generation effectively captures the complexity and diversity inherent in the composition of this cohort. They also are to be commended for providing a balanced assessment of the Millennial Generation’s strengths and weaknesses.

The authors of *Millennials and Mission* envision this as a useful resource “for those considering a ministry career as well as for those attempting to motivate others to join the adventure” (xiv). Seeking to address both of these audiences effectively within the same book is not an easy task. However, the Raymos do offer something of value to both of these intended audiences. Perhaps even more significant is the potential that this book might hold as a means of stimulating meaningful dialogue between these audiences.

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