

Book Reviews

The distinctive identity of the church: A constructive study of the post-Christendom theologies of Lesslie Newbigin and John Howard Yoder

Nikolajsen JB 2015

Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick. x + 219 pages. ISBN 978-1-4982-0207-7. No price quoted

The identity of the church is a contested issue in the contemporary period when many people are deserting the institution in favour of more intimate, mystical experiences which enhance their sense of well-being, however temporary. The traditional church no longer holds its revered place in society or in local communities. Except for the places in it is called to 'hold the faith' as in contexts of persecution, the church has virtually become part of the furniture of a conservative society. To live in a post-Christendom era means that we live in an altered relationship with the state and with communities and individuals. These need redefinition and that is the main purpose of this book.

Historically the church has moved from a marginal position in society to a central place. It has returned, in a sense, to the pagan (read secular) society from which it emerged. While the institution decreases in relevance, personal religiosity increases exponentially. Post-Christendom society seems to imply a pluralistic multi-religious society. Nikolajsen seeks to analyse the writings of Lesslie Newbigin and John Howard Yoder as examples of different kinds of community.

Newbigin's work represents the missional church tradition derived from the ecumenical movement while Yoder represents the free church tradition based in the Anabaptist movement. These are not mutually exclusive and have a number of commonalities. Both view the church in a distinctive way which can provide a sound basis for a post-Christendom ecclesial identity.

The methodology adopted in this study lies in the field of systematic theology and aims to analyse distinctive themes which exemplify the two theologians' thinking on the identity of the church through a hermeneutical-analytic reading. These are interpreted through context, intertext, authenticity, consistency, coherence and pragmatism. All this is examined according to the author's synthetic-constructive method which allows for comparative readings.

Chapter one describes the basic structure of the research. Chapter two focusses on the distinctiveness of the church particularly in a post-Christendom society with reference to Newbigin's theology. Chapter four adopts the same approach to Yoder's

theology. The author attempts a constructive understanding of the role of the church in this time of ecclesiastical marginalisation, while chapter five summarises the results of the analyses. He points to Newbigin's early writings in which he develops a missional ecclesiology based on his critique of Christendom while his later writings reflect on the mission of the church in a Western post-Christendom society, at the heart of which stands the doctrine of election. For Yoder, the church is the mission. He defines various marks of the church seemingly unaware that John Calvin had implied, and John Knox had stated explicitly the role of discipline as a mark of the church in the sixteenth century. The other three are 'the moral nonconformity of Christians', the obligation to preach the gospel and suffering as an integral part of the life of the church. The author concludes that Newbigin's view of the church is that of a functional minority while Yoder argues for the distinctiveness of the church as a separate institution within the society in which it lives.

Several challenges for a post-Christendom church are suggested; the need to accept existence in a pluralistic society; social ethics; epistemology. What is required is a radically new constructive approach to theological discourse. This is the future of the church in pluralistic Western societies. What I found difficult to understand is the author's negative preoccupation with sectarianism. This is an interesting book well worth studying.

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

Transformative religious experience: A phenomenological understanding of experience significant relief as the result of their religious conversion

Iyadurai J 2015

Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick. xii + 265 pages. ISBN 978-1-62030-746-3. No price quoted

Simply put, this book is about conversion despite its elaborate title Transformative religious experience. It aims to understand the dynamic which enables the Holy Spirit to radically alter lives despite formidable obstacles before and after the experience which in almost all of the cases examined here are sudden immediate affairs. Conversion is a very risky business in India which is the context of the study. The narratives included here offer some insight into this remarkable process through psychological analysis leading to the discovery that the encounter between the divine and the human involves a cognitive restructuring where a new set of beliefs, values and practices re-

places previously held faith or no faith practices. This is a transdisciplinary research model which draws on psychology, sociology, anthropology and theology to produce a phenomenological aspects of conversionperspective in which integrates religious practices with psychosocial factors to give a central place to religious experience. Throughout, the argument is substantiated with case studies.

Chapter one examines the experience of visions that leads to conversion with substantiation from oral evidence. The role of dreams is the subject of chapter two. These precipitated life changing effects. Chapter three explains incidents where people became aware of God communicating with them as the result of scripture reflection on the Bible or preaching. The response comes from within. Stories of converts who have struggled towards conversion are presented in chapter four as the result of miracles where they have tested the authenticity of the religious option before accepting it. Chapter five focusses on conversion experiences associated with prayer. This is followed by a chapter on mild experiences including an awareness of sin, personalising the message of the gospel and feeling the experience of God. The mystical turning point of conversion, the divine-human encounter, is analysed in chapter seven. It is the changeover of faith. The features of this experience are revelatory, conversational, noetic, transient, passive and intimate. Chapter eight highlights of conversion and its transforming events are spiritual, psychological, behavioural, physical social and economic. Conversion for many is not a peaceful or pleasant experience for those who experience conversion and its consequent hostilities and persecution from among family and friends. The Step model of transformative religious experience is delineated in chapter 10. This is a flexible model that can accommodate the complex aspects of conversion which is both a process and an event. The aim of the book is to introduce readers to conversion in the Indian context through the voices of those involved where the divine-human encounter has led to an intimate personal relationship with Jesus. Often this has involved a costly personal sacrifice of friends and even family.

Despite the potential for negative fallout post conversion, no evidence is made available of struggle during the actual process of conversion although the step model has two stages – disenchantment and crunch which are critical. From the evidence presented from examples of those who have had negative or struggle experiences directly related post the conversion experience we can only conclude that the process itself was problem free. This leaves on with the feeling of inauthenticity despite the largely oral evidence provided. Nonetheless, it might help some in the midst of the process to gain insight into what is happening to them. Unfortunately, the sceptical may reach other conclusions. But read for yourselves in spite of my reservations,

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

Creation care in Christian mission

Kaoma KJ (ed.) 2015

Oxford: Regnum. xvi + 320 pages. ISBN 978-1-908355-94-2. No price quoted

It is fortunate that this issue was tackled during the 2010 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh because it is one of the most vital and pressing matters in life today, let alone mission. We have been aware of living in the midst of a crisis of epic proportions for over fifty years and for the most part are oblivious to its effects, immediate, short term and long term. This topic is the pressure cooker which is about to blow its lid off and the fallout and its effects, using an African metaphor, will be the proverbial pawpaw hitting the fan. It is difficult to conceptualise how impending chaos can be avoided but there are many attempts at mitigation evident globally on the part of Christian bodies where politics has failed to provide a coherent solution, even since the 1980s when ecological issues (the integrity of creation) were linked to justice and peace.

A significant novel feature of the ecological crisis is the holistic approach which no longer views humanity apart from the environment; they are interdependent. This provides a broader front on which to confront the economic and political forces which appear to be hell-bent on Destruction of all, particularly since this is God's world and we are fortunate in having been created to participate in God's mission in it. This is an ecumenical concern with all major traditions participating singly or in company with others.

Very appropriately, the volume begins with a contribution from that doyen of southern African missiology, Inus Daniel on earthkeeping ministry in Zimbabwe linked to ecumenism and interfaith perspectives. Cederholm's chapter on focusses on eco-spiritual transformation while Santos et al offer an insight into how communities care for their environs. A Norwegian perspective is Våaje's contribution to this section.

Section two opens with Dana Robert analysing historical perspectives on Earth care (note the upper case denoting the holistic approach of human, animal and environmental integration). This is followed by Hart's paper on the contribution of the Roman Catholic Church with its sacramental aspect which is later echoed by Metropolitan Coorilos. This theme is pursued from an evangelical perspective by Bookless, despite their being a divided evangelical witness on this subject. Then Yong offers a Pentecostal perspective with its emphasis on the role of the spirit in environmental care. Faramelli challenges against an oversimplified approach to the topic. Grenfell-Lee concludes the section with an exposition on 'empathy' which is a necessary factor in care for the Earth.

In section three Wright offers a critique of what he describes as a defective theology of creation which evades the biblical witness to creation care. Then Moore suggests a multi-faceted approach with a challenge to be daring in living with the paradox in doing mission in Earth care. Pui-lan advocates a 'winning hearts and minds campaign (WHAM) to raise consciousness from the experience of indigenous peoples globally, while Petersen proposes that science and ecological mission are interdependent. Mvula employs the *imago Dei* concept to argue for poor peoples' responsibility to care for the Earth. Carriker develops a biblical theology of care based on the salvation narrative and W'Ehusha uses 2Kings17:24-29 to work out a concept of 'priestly mediation through educating people.

This is a valuable contribution to developing awareness among Christian communities who may not have been conscientised regarding Earthcare. It is informative and challenging as well as drawing on relevant global resources. It is to be commended for its clarity of thought and expression despite being multi-authored.

Reviewer: Prof GA Duncan, Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria, PRETORIA 0002, SA

The reshaping of mission in Latin America

Alvarez M (ed.) 2015

Oxford: Regnum. xii + 316 pages. ISBN 978-1-908355-90-4. No price quoted

The question that dominates this book is the place of mission in Latin America. That might be taken for granted but appearance are deceptive in this case. For centuries the Latin American nations were the subject of Roman Catholic missions; until in 1987 Luis Bush declared that Latin America was rather than being a mission, it was then a 'mission force'. The mission was followed by an intense period of church planting which led to further missionary endeavour by both traditions, although the missionary outreach of Evangelicals and Pentecostals, which included social action, goes back to the opening up of Panama in 1916. This book serves to engage a process of mutual edification of the differing traditions in Latin America, particularly in trying to understand the discrepancy between numerical growth and human transformation. Hence, it is a narrative of mission from the margins to the margins. Of note, is the significant revival among Mayan peoples which have extended to the Inca and Aztec populations. This has led to a call for Protestant mission to be practised holistically within a context of hope for a better future. The approach adopted here is multi-cultural, including African and Asian voices and those of women children and youth.

As a mission field, Latin America was open game (almost literally) for the Roman Catholic colonisers and their religious counterparts for the next four centuries, with their traditional approach of establishing an institutional visible Roman Catholic church presence, although a translation of the Bible from the sixteenth century was to become a key instrument of evangelisation. This was as true of the revival sparked by Pietism with its emphasis on a personal experience of faith in practice in contradistinction to formal affirmation of creeds. Individual conversion was essential. Yet even they were incapable of resolving the issues of poverty and injustice, although they were possessed of great endurance and loyalty in the context of a hostile environment. Also in contradistinction to the Roman Catholics, they operated with a weak ecclesiology and an extremely fundamentalist theology which inevitable led to sectarianism. This necessitates a strong focus on leadership development.

George asserts that such traditional stereotypes can be challenged by developing a holistic perspective through the erection of building blocks including liberation, dialogue, integral/holistic mission and ecclesiogenesis. And he adds a further component – compassion (with passion). Inculturation and interculturality in the Latin American context are characterised by contextuality, plurality and ecumenicity in the promotion of a society characterised by solidarity, interdependence and communion – in sum, authentic partnership. However, in all this recognition of the role of the Holy Spirit can operate as an ecumenical corrective and also a source of renewal.

The ecumenical configuration is complicated by the presence of significantly large bodies of Catholics, Evangelicals and Pentecostals, leading to confusion regarding the meaning of 'Ecumenism in the Spirit', leading voices in the search for identity and mission, how the process of mission and unity evolved and diverse forms of Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism. It seems that common ground is found in the unity of the Trinity. And into this complex mix comes the prosperity gospel which dominates much American inspired contemporary religion. The overarching motifs of the *Missio Dei* and *koinonia* are crucial elements in the search for identity and partnership along with mission and unity as gifts of the Spirit.

This book is extremely informative and engaging particularly for those with little knowledge of the Latin American context. Yet, this is a necessary addition to our understanding if we are to gain an integrated overview of global mission.

Reviewer: Prof GA Duncan, Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria, PRETORIA 0002, SA

Seeing new facets of the diamond: Christianity as a universal faith

Bediako GM, 2014

Oxford: regnum. xv + 378 pages 978-1-908355-59-1. No price quoted

This book constitutes a wonderful tribute to the late African theologian, Kwame Bediako, edited by his wife and several friends. It is also a tribute to the commitment he devoted to the development of African theology and theological education, perhaps most evident in the establishment of the world famous Akrofi-Christaller Centre in Ghana, the first postgraduate centre of its kind in Africa.

Walls reminds us that the study of religion in Africa is not new since it has been provided in African tertiary education since 1947 and included the biblical subjects and African Traditional Religion (ATR). As the subject developed within the academy it became clear that many of the ideas, beliefs, institutions, assumptions and practices of primal religion are common in America, South East Asia, China, and the Pacific. Its religious systems are not uniquely African but are to a large degree universal, meaning that African religious and cultural insights may have a relevance far wider than the African continent. Fotland points out that this is available through the designation of 'primal religions' which are historically prior to historical religions and contain the basic elements of religion in the relationship between peoples and the transcendent world. Bediako himself had already claimed that Europe shares with Africa a pre-Christian primal religious heritage.

It is now apparent that Godself was revealed to Africans prior to their exposure to Jesus Christ. This has challenged those who believe that no good can emerge from Africa. Tshela urges African thought leaders to soberly present appropriate evidence and interpretation which cannot be justifiably ignored'. Bediako himself made fresh and original contributions, to risk dislodgement from benefactors who have prescribed the perimeters of acceptable African thought, and speak primarily within the terms of reference prescribed by one's indigenous philosophy and worldview, even as these frankly engage Jesus Christ.

In terms of theological education Balcomb asserts that Africa needs to get in step with Christianity as an African religion at an epistemological level. A clear and distinctive shift needs to be made toward a philosophy grounded in African wisdom for 'forced confrontations as between the traditional African religio-cultural heritage and contemporary Christianity and/or Islam are untenable' (Tshela 2014:63). Curriculum development has to deal with the hegemony and normativity of Western birthed theology despite our reiterations that all theology is contextual. Even in the West and north, western theology has lost its edge. With regard to the impact of globalisation, Gillian Bediako (2014:362), reflecting Kwame Bediako's thinking, comments:

this is not translating into an acceptance of Western value-setting for the Christian religion in the rest of the world. . . . not only is the western theological academy unable to commend the Christian faith to its own Western context, but it also has increasing difficulty in understanding the world Christianity beyond the West.

This appears as a global crisis of confidence in the normativity of western Christianity.

Now is the time for a deeper penetration of Africa into Africa if the Africanisation/transformation process is to be marked by authenticity and integrity. Guiding principles in such a paradigm change are suggested by Carpenter: the reintegration of theological disciplines, reconstructing of systematic theology, re-grounding theological discourse, re-engaging other ideologies and traditions and renewing the theological mind. To these might be added recognising 'primal spirituality' as a universal spirituality, and the prioritising of eco-justice. After forty years experience in the Ghanaian Akrofi-Christaller Centre for postgraduate studies, Bediako (2014:363) proposes the need for a novel integrated intellectual framework with a communally based epistemology and ontology which is premised on an understanding that Christianity is a 'non-Western religion'. She cautions, however, that this can only be achieved where 'the Christian faith lives as a vital presence, informing human experience - individually and collectively - and so is capable of shaping all of life'. She has an extremely positive yet, realistic view of the present and future 'that the vocation of Christian institutions in Africa, Asia and Latin America could now include the rescue of the Christian academy!' (Bediako 2014:362-363). Then we might be surprised by joy as we re-encounter the awe and wonder and love of creation which can give us hope for the future.

This is an excellent volume and well worth deep study.

Reviewer: Prof GA Duncan, Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria, PRETORIA 0002, SA.

Blessed and called to be a blessing: Muslim-Christian couples sharing a life together

Richmond H 2015

Oxford Regnum. xvi + 168 pages. ISBN 978- 908355-89-8. No price quoted

This valuable book on the sensitive topic of mixed marriages within a particular context is the result of practice-based or action research. While this might be an obstacle to a faithful marriage, it also provides opportunities for mutual understanding of differing faith perspectives. In the case of Christianity and Islam, this is an urgent need which reaches up to the level of international politics. It is

based in two case studies carried out in Indonesia and Australia by someone who is well acquainted with both contexts. The subject has become more topical as a result of the increased mobility of peoples and the resultant exposure to other peoples and cultures. The focus is on Christian mission and Muslim da'wah relating to the Other in our midst and the prospect of compatibility. This is a practical theological narrative study which brings theology and religious traditions into an engagement on issues which are of mutual concern. Here a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' operates to illuminate issues from multiple perspectives on experiences. In such cases the ethical values of anonymity and confidentiality are vital.

The author chose a 'Missiological Inquiry Approach' based on Thomas Groome's (1980) 'Shared Praxis Approach' as set out in his *Christian Religious Education*. Groome delineated a five movement process of praxis (theory interacting with practice and vice versa). In this context it involved partners sharing stories of faith degrees of interaction between two religious faith groups.

After the introductory chapter, Richmond examines what is involved in a discussion of marriage and inter-marriage in Islam and Christianity. Chapters two and three deal with intermarriage in Indonesia and Australia respectively. Chapters five to nine discuss the critical findings of the study through interviews conducted highlighting those findings which are relevant to missiology.

A significant finding is that having a theology of being called provides a sound basis for married life. Commitment is fundamental for co-existence and development in a relationship of marriage as loving friendship and spiritual companionship. Shared devotions are important which might mean agreement on meditation and silent prayer where shared values contribute to a sense of togetherness and spiritual partnership. Heightened religiosity has the potential for good and bad in the relationship, raising the question regarding the extent to which God's purposes are fulfilled in such relationships where no one community has a monopoly of God. Two motifs emerge from the study; that of respectful witness and joint witness.

Richmond draws a five point missiological approach in addition to the two theological approaches – coercional, invitational, connectional, affirmational and actional. Ultimately, the majority of the couples involved in the study found their vocation and affirmed a deepened and abiding faith in God's activity and power to draw people together.

This book has much to offer the whole arena of relations between people of different faiths, beyond the marriage relationship and deserves to be read, reflected on and acted upon.

Reviewer: Prof GA Duncan, Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria, PRETORIA 0002, SA.

Forgiveness and Reintegration: How the transformation process of forgiveness impacts child soldier reintegration

Goins S 2015

Oxford: Regnum. xx +281 pages. ISBN 978-908355-92-8. No price quoted

This book is the result of courageous research in a complex problem area which appears to defy resolution – child soldiering. Here the victims become perpetrators and the perpetrators become victims. It is certainly a situation where all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). But how do we achieve restoration and transformation. Is it possible and even desirable? This is the subject of this research which was carried out following Sierra Leone's ten year civil war and ended in 2002. It focusses on forgiveness and reintegration from the perspectives of theology, psychology, philosophy and anthropology. It is transdisciplinary in its attempt to make sense of the past, present and future through the eyes of those most intimately involved and affected – children. The outcome is the possibility of overcoming a horrendous past through the transformative process of forgiveness. The necessity of dialogue between the disciplines is vital and normative as the research struggles towards the vision of reconciliation built on a firm foundation of dealing with the past through reconstruction of truth in the achievement of restorative justice as an achievable aim. Any forgiveness attained must be of the costly kind; nothing less will suffice. The ultimate aim is reconciliation which brings us closer to both God and one another as well as peace of mind within ourselves following what has been described as 'soul murder' (p.2).

The book begins with an understanding of forgiveness and proceeds to an examination of child soldiering and its implications. Chapters follow on forgiveness language in the available literature; the civil war in Sierra Leone; disarmament demobilisation and reintegration, hearing forgiveness; seeing forgiveness; conditions favouring forgiveness; benefits of forgiveness. Then the author concludes the work and explains her research methodology. This final chapter may have come sooner to give the work greater coherence. Several appendices are included.

Sin is a state of alienation which can arise *inter alia* in our case study from rape, amputation or murder. A vital component of future life for those who survive is hope. This may imply some form of restoration to a former state of wellbeing, but it may also mean a pressing on to an uncertain future with no possibility of a return to past conditions. It involves a reconstruction which may involve body, mind and spirit – a re-embodiment (rehabilitation: re-inhabiting the body holistically) – although that may be impossible for those who have lost limbs, for example. Forgiveness is integral to this holistic process. However, we should not underestimate the

resilience of children which can more easily be nurtured than in adults. But the process is not universal; it occurs in a definite time and place so local factors must be considered.

As a result of the study, forgiveness emerges as a unilateral or bilateral process that is realised beyond words in action and is related to cultural context. It involves questions regarding the ability to forgive and be forgiven as well as redemption. Bilateral forgiveness offers greater possibilities of reintegration whereas withholding forgiveness was an obstacle to comprehensive reintegration. This applies equally to groups in addition to individuals which is often the case in child soldiering. In cases where a belief in ancestors is encountered, secondary forgiveness may play an important role. What is important, and this may involve the belief in ancestors is that reintegration depends on a balance of social relationships in the community, and is necessary for a recovery of social values.

This book cannot fail to make an emotional impact on a reader, despite it being about academic and social research. Its findings can be applied to a variety of situations that confront us in the contemporary world.

Reviewer: Prof GA Duncan, Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria, PRETORIA 0002, SA