

Book Reviews

A learning missional church: Reflections from young missiologists

Fagerli B, Jørgesen K, Olsen R, Haug KS, Tveitred K (ed.) 2012.

Oxford: Regnum vi +218 pages. ISBN 9781 908355 01 0. No price quoted.

The distinctive feature of this volume is that it is written by young and emerging missiologists – the next generation – which means that it could indicate potential new developments to look out for in coming years. Another distinctive to note is that none of the authors come from the traditional American and European centres of missiological thinking although there is a predominance of writers from Scandinavia. Further, their contributions come from the contextual situations in which they exercise their missional ministries; hence this is a volume of practical missiology. It espouses a truly contextual approach to mission which combines an understanding of the gospel and its implications for the life and mission of the church. Here contextualisation is defined as ‘the primary learning experience of the church’ (p.4) and a key factor in contemporary missiology (p.7). This was itself an initiative from the theologians of the south. The emphasis on the church being ‘missional’ (a hotly contested term in some circles, does not obscure the fact that it refers to a dynamic church in motion.

The book is composed of four sections based on the themes investigated: Missional church, Encounter between religions, Migrant perspectives and Missional challenges. In the first section Kristensen begins by alerting us to the danger of parochializing mission leading to a reduction in the concern for global outreach. Dysjeland discusses the role of theological education based on a Brazilian model. Amalraj offers a perspective from the global south focussing on the decline of denominational approaches in favour of an ecumenical approach in India. Ge then provides an historical overview of a leading Chinese theologian, Tsu Chen Chao, who advanced the cause of the indigenous church in face of a stressful political situation.

In section two, Sødal discusses the mutual learning that can be achieved between Islam and Christianity in the way they perceive and exercise ‘obedience’, while Folkestad engages with the development of ethical guidelines for missional activity. Section three on migration contains two papers by Adele Ngomedje and Lemma Desta which underline the thoroughly contextual nature of mission from the beginning of the church until the present as hospitality, vulnerability and love. The final section engages with current and future challenges. Breen evaluates the chal-

lence of contextual bible study within a community from South African and Norwegian perspectives, while Olika considers the charismatic activities of the evangelical church tradition in Ethiopia.

All in all, this book makes an important contribution to the practice of the missionary church globally in learning made. It is an encouragement to those who would attempt novel methodologies but have so far lacked the courage to attempt or implement their ideas. It is to be commended for its innovative approaches and forward looking practice.

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Ministry across cultures: Sharing the Christian faith in Asia.

Beattie WR (ed.) 2016.

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This book is a timely addition to works on Christianity and culture as the Christian faith has had to adapt itself to a global postmodern cultural milieu where the imposition of Christianity as a culturally neutral norm is no longer possible or desirable. This is attested to by the increasing incidence of studies sponsored by a conservative evangelical or even fundamentalist approaches to mission which acknowledge that there has never been a time when culture free religious faith existed. It also constitutes an admission that discipling and culture impact one another to the benefit of all concerned.

Although this is a multi-authored edited work drawing on insights from a wide geographical area, each chapter has an innovative structure which includes book ideas for more in-depth reading, further reading sections, suggested readings and questions for reflection indicating that this is not a completed debate.

The examples discussed here testify to the principle that with regard to contextualisation, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to contextualisation cultures vary as do interpretations of the gospel. This is exemplified in Taylor's maxims: '1) God is involved in every culture; 2) there is no "culture-less" church; and that 3) no culture remains "static"' (p.11) and van Rheeën's influences on culture '(1) God is the creator and sustainer of culture; (2) Christ is the transformer of culture; (3) and human beings are God's designated rulers over culture and innovators within culture' for all are 'in and of culture' (p. 14). However, it is a rather outdated reading of scripture not to give the entire created order a cooperative role in creation. Yet, it is clear that both an in-depth reading of culture and scripture is vital in order

that participants engage in reflecting on issues that are of relevance to the lives of indigenous peoples as well as the temptation to slip into accommodation or syncretism. Recent decades have also witnessed the greater meeting of cultures with their resultant impact on one another and the gospel. Kim uses the analogy of the growth of a seed and its different growth patterns. In southern Africa, for instance, tall slender bulb plants like tulips and daffodils have a rather stunted growth due to differences in climate in their natural habitat and their adopted habitat. Regarding habitats, he suggests an interesting focus on the home (oikos) as the place of ultimate hospitality as does Szto in his chapter. Harley emphasises that contextualisation is a process which is initiated by God often in the context of covenant which they understand within their own context.

Because it focusses on contextualisation, this volume is eminently practical in its orientation and therefore, probably more attractive to practitioners than a purely abstract discussion although it remains a source of theological insight. This book makes a valuable contribution to the debate on contextualisation without compromising either the gospel or the cultures it engages with leading to the conclusion that Christianity performs an integral and integrating function in society.

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