

Bean, Lydia. 2014. *The politics of evangelical identity: Local churches and partisan divides in the United States and Canada*. Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press. ISBN 978-0-691-16130-3. 316 pp. Price: £12.50.
Reviewer: Prof Christina Landman, Research Institute for Theology and Religion, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa.

The book presents the results of research done in two evangelical churches in the United States and two evangelical Canadian churches on their views of the relationship between the church as a leader in moral competency, and politics as the public policy-maker. The two churches in the United States are in Buffalo, New York, near the Canadian border. The two Canadian churches are in Hamilton, Ontario.

To investigate four churches out of thousands presents a small research population that cannot be generalised for these two countries. However, the findings of the author are worth taking note of, if only as pathfinders:

One. Since 2004, Evangelicals have diversified, and a moderate evangelical voice has been established that has been marginalised by the Christian Right. Their prime moral targets remain homosexuality, abortion, and atheism, but they have added poverty and environmental care as moral issues. The Christian Right is beginning to lose its hold on American evangelicalism.

Two. Since the 1960s, there has been a movement away from ethnoreligious congregations. Race seems to be no longer an issue amongst evangelicals. However, the evangelical culture wars on gays, abortionists, secularists and atheists continue.

Three. Religion in the United States – and less so in Canada – remains closely linked to politics, although religious pressure groups waging war on homosexuality, abortion and secularism/atheism do not see themselves as political activists. Crusades, especially those geared to protect children from hostile cultural influences, are mainly run by middle-class housewives, and where they have failed, private Christian schools were established. Religious practice is to be kept separate from party politics, but government is expected to impose Christian morality on the populace (p 148). For evangelicals, the link between evangelical morality and conservative politics is unbreakable. “In theory, working-class evangelicals are politically cross-pressured: torn between Democratic appeals to their economic self-interest and Republican appeals to their conservative morality” (p 169).

Four. Evangelical identity is rather pronounced – and remains thus – throughout the United States and Canada. The author recalls how she visited

a small Pentecostal church in Buffalo, New York, where she was asked whether she was saved, and whether she was studying this church as an insider or outsider. Growing up in a “vibrant, countercultural world of evangelical piety” (p xiv), she is sensitive towards the characteristics of evangelical identity: respect for authority, purity, and in-group loyalty – in contrast to the concerns of liberal political philosophy about “harm and fairness” (p 59). However, her “contribution is to de-exotify these traditional moral concerns, and to show how they become linked to conservative politics in local religious practice and social networks” (p 223).

Five. Evangelicals are economically conservative. This means that they distinguish between people in need, and people on welfare, passing a silent judgment on the latter and thus rejecting the premises of the welfare state to which both the United States and Canada belong. They choose for Christian individualism versus the state’s redistributive social policies. They also reject the Social Gospel and preserve grace for the “deserving poor”, which include the domestic poor, and who are to be distinguished from the “undeserving poor” – people who are too lazy to work and have too many children. However, the “Canadians generally support a greater role for government in addressing poverty than Americans do” (p 131).

Six. Is there an upcoming generation of young Evangelicals who will have different opinions from their parents on the above issues? The author finds that in both the American churches studied, “young adults actually fit surprisingly well into the culture war narrative of their parents” (p 187). Their morality excludes homosexuality, secularism/atheism and abortion, but includes a concern for the environment and for the “deserving poor”.

Seven. Evangelicals (as found in all four churches studied) are authority-minded (albeit not authoritarian), also in terms of parenting where a “loving” approach is followed that includes praise, encouragement, and physical affection towards children.

In her study of two American and two Canadian churches, the author finds that “moderate evangelical voices gained the visibility and institutional leverage to challenge the Christian Right. New leaders and advocacy groups have stepped forward to define poverty, creation care, and racial reconciliation as equally important moral issues” (p 225). While the author has done well in illustrating her point, the question is whether these findings are helpful to a South African readership.

Firstly, a majority of South African churches are poor themselves. And yet, they establish themselves as religious assets in needy communities to enhance the living conditions of both believers and unbelievers. The author’s findings on the churches’ reaction to the deserving and undeserving poor, however, are important for self-reflection and knowing how the issue of poverty is not being addressed in church.

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Secondly, the racial divide in South African churches is still very strong. Although the author mentions “ethnoreligious” church/communities, she does not use race as a category for interpretation, probably because it was not needed in her study. For South Africans this will always be important.

Thirdly, South Africa with its more than ten thousand churches displays an enormous diversity of beliefs. The question can even be asked if “evangelical” is a useful term for investigation when the African Independent Churches, for example, are studied.

However, the findings of the author as summarised above do not do the rich contents of this book justice. And although her study only has a few points of contact with South African realities, this book needs to be read by local academics as an example of thorough research into the influence of dogma and beliefs on the private thinking and public doing of believers.

The book is highly recommended for libraries and scholars working in the field of church and politics.

Gitari, David. 2014. *Troubled but not destroyed: The autobiography of Archbishop David Gitari*. McLean, VA: Isaac Publishing. ISBN 978-0-9916145-4-7. 346 pp. No price quoted.

Reviewer: Dr Julius Gathogo, Kenyatta University, Mombasa, Kenya and Research Fellow in the Research Institute for Theology and Religion, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa.

In this autobiographical book, David Gitari (1937–2013) portrays his church ministry as a life characterised by troubles, challenges, triumphs and prospects. It also depicts his country Kenya, where he served as the Anglican Archbishop (1997–2002) and as an Anglican bishop of Kirinyaga Diocese, as a land of opportunities. The underlying message is that, great prospects still lie ahead, despite the troubles. In particular, one of his challenging moments is the era of President Daniel Arap Moi (1978–2002). During the 1980s, church and state relations deteriorated as political dissent was suppressed, to which the church protested strongly. Critics of the government went underground, some were jailed for politically instigated charges; others went into exile (refer to Koigi wa Wamwere and Chelagat Mutai, among others); still others disappeared mysteriously without a trace. For his quest for a multi-party political system during the single-party dictatorship, he became a targeted cleric. His prophetic ministry with stinging sermons resulted in state functionaries giving him the label “one serving foreign masters” rather than Kenya. This trouble reached its zenith at about midnight of 21 and 22 April 1989, when political thugs were sent to kill him in his Philadelphia home, thereby prompting him to scream for help. Nevertheless, he got ready support

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from his friendly neighbours who thwarted the assassination bid (p 240). He says, “the thugs were carrying powerful torches, started by going around the house and breaking windows and the glass on the doors ... the thugs had first cut the telephone lines ... mobile phones were at that time unheard of in our part of the world ... from the top of the roof I raised distress calls and about fifty neighbours responded and came with all kinds of weapons” (pp 246 and 247). Soon after (April 25, 1989), President Moi appointed a special commission to investigate the Bishop’s attackers. Unfortunately, Gitari died a troubled man as no report was released by September 2013 when he breathed his last. As family and friends commemorated the first anniversary since his death (October 2014), Hon. Paul Muite led the crowd in calling for President Uhuru Kenyatta’s government to release the commission’s findings, thereby confirming that Gitari’s troubles remain even in death.

In this book, Gitari recalls his exposition of Daniel 6 (p 215) at St. Peter’s Church, Nyeri, on Sunday, 21 June 1987. According to him, the tradition was that in June every year, a civic service was held at St. Peter’s Church, Nyeri [County], and all Nyeri Members of Parliament and Councillors are invited to attend (p 214). He goes on to say, “the Provincial Commissioner and [the] District Commissioner [were] also invited to attend the service. The then Bishop of Mt. Kenya Central diocese, the Rt. Revd John Mahia-ini, invited me to be the guest preacher on that day ... The Provincial Commissioner, John Etemesi, was unable to attend the [church] service, but the District Commissioner, a Mr Mukhalule, was present. Also present was Isaiah Mathenge, the area MP, and the Nyeri KANU [ruling and only registered political party] sub-branch chairman, the Nyeri mayor Mr Nderi and nearly all the councillors.”

In his exposition on Daniel 6, he noted that it pleased King Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. He then explained that Daniel had such exceptional qualities that the king planned to appoint him over the whole kingdom (Daniel 6:1–3). He then explained that Daniel’s jealous colleagues had schemed to remove him before he could catch the king’s eye. He then compared the Kenya of 1976, when a group of politicians attempted to stop the then Vice-President Daniel arap Moi from succeeding the late President Mzee Jomo Kenyatta (father of current president), who was too advanced in age. In case of his eventual death, they argued, Moi was constitutionally mandated to take over the government in acting capacity for 90 days, after which fresh elections could be held. The proponents of the so-called “change-the-constitutional move”, such as Kihika Kimani, Paul Ngei, Jackson Angaine, James Gichuru and Njoroge Mungai, among others, feared that if Daniel Moi were to act as president for three months, he would disorganise his political opponents and destroy them altogether. Gitari in his sermon appears to have drawn a clear parallel between the biblical Daniel and Daniel

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Moi, the president of Kenya. Unfortunately, such comparisons, especially where the president was mentioned, were seen as seditious and disrespectful to the head of state and the ruling party, KANU. Ordinarily, Gitari would have expected all listeners to appreciate the sharp comparison.

After the Nyeri sermon, the district commissioner, Mr Mukhalule, told him that this was the best sermon he had ever heard. But on the following day, on the one o'clock Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) news, he was greatly surprised to hear the same district commissioner (DC), Mukhalule, disassociate himself from the sermon, which, he said, was bordering on sedition. From there, he was attacked publicly by government functionaries such as the national chairman of the ruling party, David Okiki Amayo, assistant minister in the office of the president, and Ngumbu Njururi, among others. The ruling party also published a reply to his sermon, in the *Daily Nation* newspaper, on Saturday June 27, 1987, accusing Gitari of "seeking to create chaos, confusion and incite *wananchi* [citizens] against their popularly elected leaders" (p 220). In his press release, the national chairman of the then ruling party noted that he was unable by any stretch of the imagination to understand the comparison of King Darius, "a pagan King who ruled over a conquered kingdom and worshipped idols, with the leadership in this country" (p 221). Moreover, the ruling party's newspaper, the *Kenya Times*, wrote an editorial which was published on Monday, June 29 1987, entitled CPK [referring to the Church Province of Kenya, the Anglican, as it was then called] SHOULD DISOWN DR GITARI'S ANTICS" (p 222). He was accused of misinterpreting parts of the Old Testament in a vain effort aimed at justifying his own radical disposition.

Another troubling moment in Gitari's prophetic ministry was when the method of voting by queuing and its resultant abuse was introduced in the politics of Kenya in 1986. Gitari kept up the struggle until 1991, when a multi-party political system was introduced. Certainly, his troubled ministry received a boost when political ex-detainees joined his crusades for a democratic society without fear of reprisals. Other church leaders also protested against injustices in the country. They included Anglican Bishop Alexander Muge, who was killed in a mysterious road accident, and the Rev. Dr. Timothy Njoya, who was once clobbered nearly to death by security agents for leading political demonstrations.

In his rural home district, Kirinyaga, Gitari's clashes with Hon James Njiru, the ruling party KANU hawk, are also analysed. He says, "the member of parliament for Ndia, James Njiru, had styled himself as the most important person in the district" (p 243). He goes on to say that Njiru had endeared himself so much to both President Jomo Kenyatta and his successor, Daniel arap Moi, that he was feared by even the most senior of civil servants from Kirinyaga. And despite being less educated, he was appointed the Minister of National Guidance and Political Affairs, thereby becoming the first minister

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from the then Kirinyaga district, now county. According to Gitari, Njiru used to carry out a reign of terror by ordering assistant chiefs to expel from polling stations, during elections, voters who were known to favour other candidates. Kirinyaga County, then a district of central Kenya, held “their positions at his pleasure as he claimed to be very close to the president” (p 243). He says, “when KANU youth wingers attempted to grab microphones from me as I was preaching at St. Thomas’ Cathedral, Kerugoya, in April 1989, I posed the question as to whether this was what was meant by “National Guidance and Political Affairs” (p 243). Gitari also narrates how political supremacy battles almost cost Hon Nahashon Njuno his life in the early 1970s, when Hon Njiru found him having drinks with friends at Kutus Town and shot at him with a pistol. The bullet narrowly missed him as all scampered for safety. Gitari wonders why no action was taken in respect of Hon Njiru. Other issues that Gitari addressed with a lot of “trouble” include: land grabbing, corruption, gender disparities, ecclesiastical leadership conflicts, Bishop Peter Mwang’ombe’s forced retirement, issues of polygamy and single motherhood, and attacks by Muslim youths.

Interestingly, his childhood was characterised by a lot of troubles. He says that when he first went to school in 1943, he was told that he was too small. He was made to join Standard A in 1944, proceeded to Standard B in 1945 and then qualified to join Standard One in 1946. Hence three years were wasted! Nevertheless, his troubles did not destroy his resolve to succeed. Again, when he was forced to play football at Kangaru High School, while a student, he scored a goal only to be told that he was offside. He says, “I never tried to play football since that day” (p 15).

An interesting area that is conspicuously missing in the book is Gitari’s relationship with his successor bishop (Daniel Munene Ngoru) of Kirinyaga diocese. Was there any bad blood between the two church leaders? Did he regret passing the baton to Daniel Munene Ngoru as the second bishop of the Diocese of Kirinyaga? His relationship with his successor archbishop of the Anglican Church of Kenya, Benjamin Nzimbi, is equally not discussed exhaustively. What went wrong? Did he feel abandoned by the Church he so faithfully served after retirement? Why does he appear to eulogise the retired president Mwai Kibaki (2002-2012) as a good economist, yet the 2007/2008 political clashes happened during Kibaki’s watch? Isn’t good economics accompanied by sustainable politics? Nonetheless, the book is boldly written to show that the author’s troubles have not been in vain. The book was launched by his three sons (Sammy, Jonathan and John) on October 16, 2014, a year after he passed on. As one reads the book, one realises that his troubles are Kenya’s troubles or/and challenges that ought to be addressed forthwith.

His book is a necessary textbook for all students of political science, theology, history, anthropology, sociology and all Africanist scholars.

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Reading the book, it becomes clear that neo-colonialism is as bad as colonialism or even worse.

Leiter B. 2014. *Why tolerate religion?* Princeton: Princeton University Press. xxxviii + 185 pages. ISBN 978-0-691-16354-3. Price: \$12.50.

Reviewer: Prof Graham Duncan, Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa.

Recently, a case erupted in the European Court of Human Rights as the result of British Airways forbidding a member of cabin staff to wear a Christian cross. The case raised in stark perspective the issues of religious toleration and, consequently, the moral foundations of religious liberty. In this book, the author reworks basic moral issues both from a Kantian/deontological and utilitarian perspective.

The introductory chapter raises the matter of religious difference and leads into the question of integrity. The following chapter offers a commonly accepted definition of toleration as 'putting up with' something or someone. In practice, the principle of tolerance is at least indifferent or offensive and serves as a strong marker of "différence" which is not helpful in contemporary society. But arguments are made in favour of moral and epistemic forms of tolerance as a right in the sense of the contribution it makes to knowledge. There are limits to tolerance with regard to acts of conscience, as when the exercise of liberty is threatened. It is one thing to believe others are wrong. It is another to act against them on that basis, for instance the condemnation of and death of heretics.

Chapter two looks at religion and asks how it is constituted in a community. If, for instance, politics is separated from religion, it is problematic. The question which arises, then, is what are its distinctive qualities that indicate that it should be tolerated? If it is constituted by beliefs and rites, this can imply a difference between the sacred and profane, which is incomprehensible for many in the world today and raises the question of the essence of ultimate reality – the transcendent. This brings us to existential consolation arising out of the distinctive features of religious beliefs.

Chapter three asks the question: "Why tolerate religion?" What are its distinctive characteristics? Here, matters of conscience enter the discussion and raise questions relating to the risk of doing harm at various levels of intensity. The matter is further complicated historically when we look at totalitarian regimes, for instance apartheid, which evoked simultaneously religious support and opposition. It also raises the degree of sincerity of belief. The author concludes that there is no reason for religion to be protected, though there are some who would argue that society needs to be

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protected from religion, especially from its fanatical and fundamentalist expressions.

The discussion proceeds to respect, which is the focus of chapter four, as the foundation of intolerance is disrespect. This raises questions of loyalty, responsibility and devotion and who benefits from respect and how? This leads into the final chapter and a discussion of the law of religion in a tolerant society. The argument is that the state ought to protect liberty of conscience under the rule of principled toleration, but there is no equally principled argument that singles out religious conscience as an object of particular moral or legal diligence. Religious conscience may seek exemption from compliance with legal provisions, but how are these differentiated from the “secular” claim of conscience? This smacks of unequal treatment, so why not extend the claims of conscience to all in a context where universal exemptions already exist?

Written from a particular Western perspective, this book raises many issues which are, to a degree, incomprehensible in an African society and proceeds from such assumptions. The question: “Why religious tolerance?” might be answered as follows: “Why not?” It is an integral part of all cultures as a source of belief/non-belief, value systems and tolerance versus non acceptance. It grounds our humanity and identity. Why do we tolerate other “institutions” – education, law, social systems, and health services? It is difficult to pin down as it is variously viewed as harmless, pernicious, hypocritical and lacking integrity. All of these views and attitudes are evidenced throughout the 20th century and into the 21st, despite attempts to marginalise and abolish them. This book makes a limited contribution to the debate in Africa. In sum, I would argue that we cannot eliminate the ground of being or our human response to it. The question that remains is: Can we abolish hope, love, *shalom*, and a yearning for justice?

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McNeil, GR., Roberson, HB., Dixie, QH. & McGruder, K. 2014. *Witness: Two hundred years of African faith and practice at the Abyssinian Baptist Church of Harlem, New York*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company. ISBN 978-0-8028-6341-6. Price: \$45.00; £29.99.

Reviewer: Prof Mokhele Madise, Department of Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa.

This book was written as a reflection on the history of African Americans in their struggle for religious independence, especially as Christians. It begins with a chapter taken from the Scripture, entitled “Upon This Rock”. Historically, the name “Abyssinia” originated in Africa and was originally

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the name of present-day Ethiopia. The name Abyssinia was adopted simply because it was used inter-changeably to mean African or black people. Adopting this name is not clearly explained on the basis of the beginning of the church other than the meaning itself. The major issue that prompted the founding of the Abyssinian Church was slavery and slave ownership, which led to questioning the understanding of being a Christian. Simultaneously, this was putting the unity of the church at a crossroads as a result of an anticipated split from the mother church, namely the Baptist Church.

Like many other denominations around the world, the history of the Baptist Church in New York is characterised by turbulent experiences. New York or the United States of America in those days was still discriminating against black people, while at the same time keeping mainly black or African Americans as slaves. White people were not willing to enter into debates about slave ownership in the Baptist Church and this kept alive the question of Christian morality over owning slaves. It was not surprising that, in many instances, churches tended to become institutions of conflict, particularly between blacks and whites. The conflict in institutions such as the church also had dire consequences, as it became apparent that the Baptist Church in New York could no longer stop the looming split. This split meant that the question of Christian brotherhood and sisterhood was very pertinent in its own nature. The outcome of the split was also quite obvious as black or African Americans could not share in the same communion with their white counterparts as slaves and slave masters. The result of this was an independent church.

A split in the church is an old phenomenon which can be traced back to the early church, especially in Egypt, with the Mennonites breaking away from Catholicism. This phenomenon demonstrates some stark similarities with the experience of the founding of the African Independent Churches (AICs) on the African continent. The African Americans also were committed to their faith, much the same way as the AICs, but found themselves unable to share the same Christian values as the slave masters and owners. Keeping the faith was the major thing which, for the Abyssinians, was a catalyst between themselves and Christianity. This phenomenon is not just religious as it is also social, economic as well as political. It is not surprising that Africans in both the African and American contexts involved people of African descent who experienced slavery, colonisation and oppression – all of these major reasons for the formation of the independent churches.

The founding of the Abyssinian Church was not simply an expression of self-emancipation by the African Americans, as they were not only religiously committed but found themselves involved in economic, political and social engagements of the United States of America in a broader context and that of New York, in particular Harlem. The two hundred years of the

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Abyssinian Church, from the 20th century, marks a milestone of the existence of a church formed amidst hardships and through perseverance.

This book simply reflects the history of African Americans' desire for self-determination on many terrains, for instance religion and politics, social interaction, which includes sport, music, leadership, and so forth. It is a book which one cannot ignore but must read to understand the global experiences of the African. I came to understand why people sometimes go against the direction the wind is blowing. It clearly makes one aware of the diversity and challenges that people need to embrace and not simply dismiss. It is possible to recommend it as a prescribed book in respect of comparative global historical phenomena. It is an interesting book to read, especially if one is interested to know and understand the history of African Americans in general, as well as in terms of their Christianity.

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Neumann, Erich. 2014. *The origins and history of consciousness*. Foreword by CG. Jung. Translated by RFC. Hull. Princeton: Princeton University Press. ISBN 978-0-691-16359-8. Price: \$16.95.

Reviewer: Prof Cornel du Toit, Research Institute for Theology and Religion, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa.

This book is a reprint of the 1954 edition and forms part of the Princeton Bollingen Series.

The work of Jung and Neumann comes into focus again, with the latest developments in cognitive and neuroscience and new models probing the nature of consciousness. Neumann's work has been seen as a significant contribution to Jungian thought.

Neumann proposes three mythological stages in the evolution of consciousness. The stages are described by the myths that characterise them. They are the creation myth symbolised by the Uroboros, the hero myth and the transformation myth, which is identified by the Egyptian god Osiris. The Uroboros is seen as a representation of the pre-ego "dawn state", depicting the undifferentiated infancy experience of both mankind and the individual child.

Neumann proposes that human consciousness develops out of unconsciousness through a series of stages, a process represented by the ego's emergence from the "uroboros" (p 5-38), a primordial condition of self-contained unconsciousness symbolised by the circle of a snake devouring its own tail. As the ego consciousness differentiates itself from uroboric unconsciousness, it begins to experience this primordial unconsciousness both as the life-giving origin of its existence and as a threat to its newly won autonomy.

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This ambivalent experience is often given shape in the form of the Great Mother (p 39ff, 299), who bestows all life and also holds life and death, existence and non-existence, in her all-powerful hands. For true autonomy to occur, the domination of the Great Mother must be shaken off by individual ego consciousness. This process occurs in two subsequent stages: first, the separation of the worldly parents, in which the opposites of masculinity and femininity emerge from the matrix of uroboric unity, and second the hero myth, in which the ego aligns itself with the principle of heroic masculinity in order to free itself from the dominance of the matriarchy.

The archetypal mother is similar to what Jung called "the collective unconscious". It is uncertain what its exact nature is. Neumann thinks that archetypes are passed from one generation to another, but evolution does not work that way.

One can surmise that human consciousness developed over many years. How this happened and whether the development of the unconscious took place in tandem with that of consciousness is unclear. What Neumann takes for granted, is that the unconscious developed and existed first and that consciousness gradually emerged from the unconscious. He has no physical evidence for this. Anatomically this also does not fit what we know of the brain. The various organs in the brain all contribute in varying degrees to both the phenomenon of consciousness and the unconscious.

What consciousness really is and when it is constituted in such a way that we can speak of a "fully" human consciousness is difficult to determine. The research done on chimps and the bonobos sharpened this dilemma. There are various degrees of consciousness and many factors such as language, culture, memory, belief systems, et cetera, must be brought into the equation.

What is significant, however, is the fact that similar symbols seem to play a role in the myths, cults and religions of all the great classical civilisations. "The self-representation of the dawn of human history can be seen from its symbolic description in ritual and myth" (p 6). The way in which Neumann refers to these as if they mean the same in different cultures, epochs and contexts, must be regarded with suspicion. This brings the issue of mythological analysis to the fore, especially the question about the certainty with which certain stories and symbols can be linked to specific psychological factors. With these uncertainties in mind, one cannot imagine anyone proposing conjectures with dogmatic certainty. Unfortunately, this is what Neumann does. (See the work of Hillman, James (1978). *The myth of analysis: Three essays in archetypal psychology*. New York: Harper & Row).

The notion that consciousness is male and the unconscious female is similar to the notion of the ancient Greeks that rationality is male and emotion female and can be rejected as utter nonsense (see pp 42, 121, 125).

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In brief, Neumann's book was not well received by the scientific community because of its lack of knowledge of evolution, biology, genetics, Darwinism, anthropology and archaeology. Although it is a creative proposal, it should not be seen as a scientific basis for an understanding of human consciousness.

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Gouws, Tom. 2014. *Die evangeli van die volkome bevryding van vroue*. Pretoria: Foundation Publications. 220 pp. ISBN 978-0-620-49657-5. Prys Nie bekend.

Resensent: Prof Christina Landman, Navorsingsinstituut vir Teologie en Religie, Universiteit van Suid-Afrika, Pretoria, Suid-Afrika.

Hierdie is 'n ambivalente boek. Eerstens probeer die skrywer uit die Bybel bewys dat vroue eerstehandse burgers is ten spyte van die feit dat die kulture waarin die Bybelse boeke ontstaan het, vroue diep onderdruk het. Die metodes wat die skrywer gebruik, is egter fundamentalisties, dit is, hy gebruik juis die metodes wat fundamentaliste gewoonlik gebruik om vroue hulle plek te leer.

'n Mens sou, byvoorbeeld, besonder bekoor kon word deur die skrywer se interpretasie van Johannes 8:3-11 waar die Fariseërs die vrou wat owerspel gepleeg het, na Jesus toe bring (sjoem, wat het van die man geword met wie sy dit gedoen het?). Die skrywer sien diep simboliek in die manier waarop Jesus in die grond skryf wanneer die Fariseërs met hom praat om sy lae dunk van hulle te wys. Wanneer hy egter met die vrou praat, staan hy elke keer op. So gee Jesus erkenning aan haar menswaardigheid. Dit is 'n preekbare en verkondigbare interpretasie. Partykeer egter maak die skrywer sy eie saak belangrik deur te ver te gaan, soos om Maria Magdalena wat na Jesus in sy graf kom soek, te skryf: "En hier, in die primordiale tuin, soek die korporatiewe Eva vir Jesus wat vir haar oortreding gesterf het" (p 77).

Die "stem" en status wat die skrywer aan stemlose en naamlose en statuslose vroue in die Bybel gee, is inderdaad merkwaardig. Hy gebruik egter twee maniere om dit te doen, wat erg problematies is.

Een. Die skrywer sien alles wat in die Bybel beskryf word, as die volvoering van 'n "skeppingsdoel". Hierdie ordeningsteologie is lankal as gevaelik bewys, en kan net so omgedraai word om vir vroue 'n skeppingsdoel te gee onderaan die skeppingsranglys. Meneer die skrywer, vermy asseblief daardie word "skeppingsdoel", want jy weet nie wat die bagasie is waarmee jy dit gebruik nie.

Twee. Die skrywer gebruik 'n allegoriiese metode (wat van die Alexandryse Skool van die derde eeu nC stam) om die "dieperliggende betekenis" van al die gebeure in die Bybel aan die lig te bring. Alles rondom

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vroue in die Bybel is simbolies, en elke vrou in die Bybel is ‘n “prototype”. Vroue in die Bybel het waarde omdat hulle tipologiese waarde het, volgens die skrywer. Hierdie metode is ‘n skrikwakkende manier om te Bybel te lees, want jy kan jou interpretasies enige kant toe vat, na God se kant, of die “satan” s’n, soos die skrywer dan wel ook doen. Boonop is dit my ervaring dat dit juis die menslikheid van vroue in die Bybel is waarmee vroue vandag identifiseer. Vroue (lees: mense) identifiseer nie met simbole en tipes nie, maar met vroue in die Bybel wat, soos hulle, verliese gely het, kinders verloor het, kinders gehad het wat hulle harte gebreek het, mans gehad het wat hulle geminag het, en magteloos gevoel het voor onmenlike kulturele gebruike.

Die tweede ambivalensie in die boek is dat die skrywer dieselfde Bybel waaruit hy die bevryding vir vroue betoog, gebruik om te “bewys” dat die gebruik van die Pil onbybels en satanies is, en die onderdanigheid van die vrou aan haar man in die gesin ‘n lieflike Bybelse gebruik is wat ons vandag moet voortsit (alhoewel vroue, aldus die skrywer, nie in die werksplek onderdanig hoef te wees nie. Dit laat ‘n mens vra: Verstaan die skrywer waaroer dit in die “volkome bevryding van vroue” gaan? Verstaan hy die konsepte van “gelykheid” en “selfbeskikking oor jou eie liggaam”? Miskien laat die skrywer die vroue in die Bybel praat, maar hy hou die stemme van vroue-teoloë redelik stil. Die enkele vroue-teoloë wat hy aanhaal, soos Mary Daly, Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza en Rosemary Ruether, se werke kom uit die 1960s, 1970s en hoogstens die 1980s. Jammer dat onlangse werke en plaaslike vroue-teoloë nie gelees word nie. Afrika se vroue-teoloë het geen stem in hierdie boek nie alhoewel hulle al baie oor vroue in die Bybel nagevors en geskryf het.

Ek het al baie proefskrifte nagesien wat, soos hier, probeer aantoon dat geslagsrolle wat vroue inperk, romanties is, en dat daar bevryding in onderdrukking is. Daardie proefskrifte het nie geslaag nie. En ongelukkig slaag hierdie boek ook nie. Ten spyte van die hoë waardering vir ‘n man wat probeer om mites oor vroue se minderwaardigheid af te breek, kan ons dit nie so doen nie soos hy dit probeer doen met oordrewe apologie en outydse allegorie nie.

Ek verstaan ook nie mooi die voet op die buiteblad nie. In die Bybel is “voet” dikwels ‘n eufemisme vir “penis”. Hierdie is duidelik ‘n vrou se voet. Wat sou die diepere betekenis daarvan wees?

Die boek dra nie by tot die wetenskap van Bybelinterpretasie nie, en as ‘n populêre boek kan dit mense dalk mislei, juis omdat die boodskap daarin so ambivalent is – en die bevryding vir vroue wat aangekondig word, juis nie volkome is nie.

Die boek is egter goed geskryf, en miskien sit dit ‘n paar mense tog aan die dink. Dan is dit ‘n goeie geskenk vir ‘n vriendin. Of selfs vir ‘n vriend.