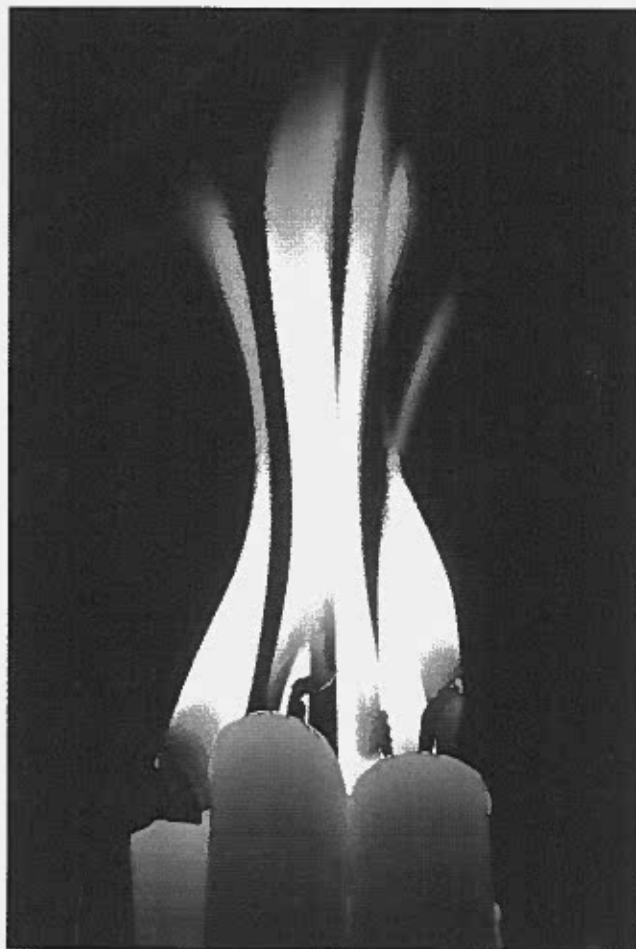




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Dibeela, Prince, Lenka-Bula, Puleng & Vellem, Vuyani (eds.) 2014. *Prophet from the South: Essays in honour of Allan Aubrey Boesak*. Stellenbosch: SUN Media. 281pp. ISBN 978-1-920689-24-7. Price: Not quoted.

Reviewer: Prof Christina Landman, Research Institute for Theology and Religion, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa.

Allan Boesak is an icon in theological and, to a lesser extent, political circles, both locally and internationally. This book, edited by a younger generation of liberation theologians, now called public theologians, is therefore timely and appropriate to his legacy. Boesak, moreover, will be seventy years old in a few months' time, having been born on 23 February 1945.

The book offers a delightful mixture of the undying insights of the liberation theologies of the 1980s and 1990s, and the new insights of public theologies. Every essay in the book has been chosen for its unique contribution; yet in the following I shall point out essays which I regard to be of special significance.

The first of four parts of the book deals – and appropriately so – with Boesak's theological roots. In this section, Dirkie Smith writes on Boesak's theological insight into power, presenting a study of relevance for today in which the liberation theology of Boesak's times informs the public theology of today in communities where power has taken on the same evil faces as before.

Part 2 contains "liberative liturgical conversations". The inclusion of this part comes as a surprise, since I have always experienced Boesak to be a liturgy on his own, and a very dramatic one if I may say so. However, I find the contributions in this section quite charming, with great impact. It contains a poem by the well-known Kenyan woman theologian, Njambura Njoroge, as well as an essay by Orfelio Ortega on the "Theology of the Absurd" which, in its definition of evil, reveals old wounds as well as new insights on the ongoing systemic abuse against the marginalised of humankind. She points out that the existence of evil – which causes loss and suffering – is absurd and meaningless, and has remained so, being with us in subdued but similar forms.

Part 3 reveals "echoes of Boesak's tradition in the diaspora" and indicates how far and wide Boesak's influence as theologian has reached. The essays indicate how Boesak has influenced theologies, education systems, liberation struggles and ways of thinking worldwide. Again, the essays are appropriate to the stature of a daring and productive man.

The final part of the book, of course, deals with "black public theology". Here the essay by Tinyiko Maluleke is of special relevance in its critique on the present South African government that, inter alia, "has dumped its apartheid era ally, the South African Council of Churches". With

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Boesak, Maluleke “laments the absence of faith and spirituality at the heart of South African politics”.

Apart from a few glaring editorial oversights, the book is beautifully published by SUN Media. It should be on the shelves of all universities, north and south, and become the property of all the hundreds – if not thousands – of students and colleagues of Boesak who have been influenced by his public courage and well-pronounced thought.

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De Bruijn, Jan 2014. *Abraham Kuyper: A Pictorial Biography*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 428pp. ISBN 978-0-8028-6966-1. Price: \$40.00.

Reviewer: Prof Christina Landman, Research Institute for Theology and Religion, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa.

I was introduced to the work of Abraham Kuyper when I was researching the influences on Dutch-Afrikaans women's piety and the reasons why this piety excluded them from public positions. During the early 1900s Kuyper was the main source on which Afrikaans men based their arguments against women obtaining the vote. Furthermore, it is widely recognised that Kuyper's theology and religio-political ideas were used to justify apartheid. Consequently, Kuyper's name evokes negative feelings with me and many others.

De Bruijn's "pictorial biography" of Kuyper does not render him blameless. On the contrary, it contextualises Kuyper within the impressiveness of his achievements without hiding that Kuyper "lacked insight into human nature", that he was "a torn and troubled person" and that he made serious political mistakes. Kuyper produced a large number of published works, co-founded a university, fought many battles and fathered a large family. Yet he failed at many of his political ideals, made many personal and political enemies ... and eventually could not cope with the consequences of his own behaviour and decision and suffered breakdowns.

The book consists of more than 400 pictures of Kuyper, his work and his world, from before he was born till after his death at the age of 83, having become the prime minister of the Netherlands at the age of 64. Many of these images have not been published before. Moreover, using commentary to pictures is an extremely effective way of communicating Kuyper's complicated and, at times, contradictory life. For this, his accessible style and sober analyses De Bruijn should be commended.

For me personally it is a pity that "the women's issue" – which was huge and important during Kuyper's time and in which he was strongly involved – has not really been documented in this book. However, there is an ironic reference to his eldest daughter, Henriëtte, who eventually became a

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public speaker in her own right with Kuyper even attending her lectures after initial resistance (p 258).

A few references are made to Kuyper's involvement in the theology and the wars in South Africa (pp 135-137, 260, 275). Because of Kuyper's huge influence on South African theology, the hard core Calvinists will find the book of special value. However, this is also a book for the broader public, not to support iconic interpretations of Kuyper but to appreciate and acknowledge a specific time in history of which we are all, in some way or the other, part.

The book is expensive but should find a home in all South African libraries.



Halbertal, Moshe. 2014. *Maimonides, life and thought*. Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press. 385pp. ISBN 978-06911-5851-8. Price: \$35.00

Reviewer: Prof Christina Landman, Research Institute for Theology and Religion, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa.

Maimonides, medieval Jewish philosopher of the twelve century, is not a well-known scholar in South Africa. That may be a reason for local scholars in religion to take note of the contents of this book.

The book is beautifully translated from the Hebrew by Joel Linsider, and stylishly published by Princeton University Press. It reads like a book. The translation no doubt contributes to the excellent reading experience provided by the contents. However, the fascinating way in which the life and thought of Maimonides is told, makes it a work not to be missed.

The first chapter of the book gives background to Maimonides' life. It is neither hagiographical nor does it detract from the life of a great scholar who nevertheless suffered from depression, a tendency to overwork, and had to carry – like any other human being – the concerns of his financial situation. The context in which Maimonides worked comes to life and space is given to aspects in which Maimonides surpassed his times, but also those in which he would have failed in public eye of today. One example of “modern failure” would have been his harsh way of treating women, confirming that a woman who does not do her chores well should be whipped. The name of his own wife – who gave birth to his son Abraham when a proud Maimonides was 48 years old – remains unknown.

The second part of the book analyses the earlier works of Maimonides with special emphasis on his *Commentary on the Mishnah*. The major part of the book is dedicated to Maimonides' main work, the *Mishne Torah*, which took him 10 years to complete while he was living in Egypt. Maimonides' main claim to fame was his engagement with the “*halakhah* (Jewish law,

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broadly construed) which he sought to change, in a fundamental way, from a fragmented and complex system to one that was transparent and unambiguous" (p 1). Apart from the book being well-written and well-researched, the book also delightfully brings to light that Maimonides was struggling with the very same issues that (Jewish and Christian) theologians who are engaged in the reception of holy texts by the broader faith community, are trying to address. They are the struggles against anthropomorphism, the natural and causal aspects of divine revelation, and what should be placed in or outside tradition.

A worthwhile book to read and to own.

Neels Jackson 2014. *Op soek na Jesus: 'n Verslaggewer se verrassende perspektief op die lewe van Jesus*. Vereeniging: Christelike Uitgewersmaatskappy. 232pp. ISBN 978-1-4316-0791-4. Prys: R140.00.

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

Hierdie is 'n bekoorlike boek. Neels Jackson was *Beeld* se Kerksake-verslaggewer vir baie jare, 23 jaar en ses maande om presies te wees. En duidelik het hy baie geluister na kerke en teoloë, voordat hy geskryf het.

Die boek is 'n interessante saamkom van wêreld. In Jerusalem van 2000 jaar gelede, is daar 'n koerantkantoor. Nou dit kan mos eintlik nie. Daardie tyd was daar nie koerante nie, en mense kon nie lees nie. Lees was soos 'n ambag, net 'n klein groepie opgeleides kon dit doen. En daar was ook nie telefone en fakse nie. Jackson se koerantkantoor in Jerusalem is 'n bietjie 1980s. Geen eposse of selfone. Maar wel saktie en telephone en fakse.

Dis die wêreld wat Jackson ken, en hy plaas sy storie daar. Dit gaan oor 'n verslaggewer, Johannes, wat storie navolg wat uiteindelik vir 'n rukkie nuuswaardig word. Dis die storie van Jesus van Nasaret. Johannes volg Jesus se politieke storie soos die Romeine hom sien. Hy volg Jesus se godsdienstige storie soos die Joodse godsdiensteleiers hom ervaar. Hy volg Jesus se storie soos dit uit die monde van mense kom wat deur Jesus genees, gevoed en versorg is.

Hy is regtig vol nuwe idees, dié Jesus. Duidelik het Jackson dié idees gekry by moderne teoloë se navorsing oor die historiese Jesus en dit in Jesus se mond gesit. Niks daarmee verkeerd binne die konteks wat Jackson vir sy verhaal skep nie. Dit maak juis 'n boeiende boek om te lees en die vars nagevorsde Jesus pluk mense aan die neus en hou hulle wakker.

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Die boek lees nie van die begin af lekker nie. Dis of Jackson styf en onseker is aan die begin, of te hard probeer. En 'n mens moet eers aan die nuuskantoor en verslaggewing in Bybelse tye gewoond raak – as daar maar sulke publikasies oor Jesus was. Maar uiteindelik word dit 'n boek wat jy in jou handsak saam met jou dra en orals lees waar jy 'n tydjie kry – sonder dat jy die draad van die storie verloor, want dié ken jy mos uit die Bybel uit.

Ek sit nou die dag vinnig 'n koppie tee te drink in 'n teetuin terwyl ek verder in die boek lees. 'n Jong Afrikaanse seun doen die bedienwerk en sien die titel van die boek: “Op soek na Jesus”. “Heng, tannie, wat lees jy?” vra hy. “Is dit 'n boek oor die Meksikaanse grenspatrollie?” Suid-Amerikaanse mense doop mos graag hulle kinders Jesus. Die seun se eerste reaksie was toe hy “Jesus” lees, is dat dit 'n Suid-Amerikaner is – en nie Jesus van Nasaret nie. En daarom is boeke soos hierdie van Jackson belangrik, om die gedagtenis van Jesus lewens te hou in 'n nuwe konteks. 'n Mens sou daarom hoop dat hy ook 'n boek oor Jesus sou skryf vanuit die mond en deur die oë van 'n jongmens van die tyd.

Die boek is nie vir 'n akademiese gehoor bedoel nie, maar sal akademië ook bekoor.



Koester, Nancy 2014. *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A spiritual life*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. ISBN 978-0-8028-3304-4. 382 pages. Price: \$24.00; £16.99.

Reviewer: Dr Dion Forster, Systematic Theology and Ethics (Public Theology), University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch, South Africa.

A friend recently remarked that a good biography “gives a face to history”. This is true of Nancy Koester’s biography, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A spiritual life*. It is a superbly researched and well-written account of the life of one of America’s great historical figures.

Koester’s biography of Harriet Beecher Stowe offers a thoughtful and honest reflection on the triumphs and struggles of a woman who engaged society in a rare and powerful way through her writing and Christian witness – contributing in great measure to the ending of slavery in America in the late 1800’s. Stowe’s antislavery novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) was only second to the Bible in sales in the 19th century. With such literary success and social prominence it is clear to see how “with her pen Stowe shaped public opinion” (p. xi). That her work was such a success is remarkable in itself, since 19th century America was still deeply patriarchal. Women were not allowed to contribute to public discourse. They could not yet vote and had very few legal rights. They were barred from entering professions and were not allowed to preach (see chapters 2 and 9 for particularly insightful

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reflections on the constraints and challenges of being an outspoken woman in her time).

As Koester suggests, it may have been because her voice was so different in its time that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* captured the hearts and imaginations of the American North and even the South, where the book was banned (pp 31-133). Stowe, having experienced what it was like to live in society without agency, casts the disempowered slaves in the leading roles of her work. This was so different from other similar works of the time that it activated the moral imagination of her readers awakening "sympathy and feeling for the African race" (p 129). The result of her gift with words and images, and the unique perspective she offered on the suffering of fellow human beings, lead to legions of her readers changing their views on slavery and converting "to Christ and to anti-slavery at the same time" (p 128).

What makes Koester's account of Stowe's life and work so powerful is that she places remarkable, even mythical, events like these within the broader context of the social, political, cultural and religious landscape of 19th century America. Koester delineates her study by focusing on the central importance of Stowe's faith convictions as the source of both her strength and her struggle. She writes, that this biography "tells the story of the life of Harriet Beecher Stowe as a Christian author who drew inspiration from her faith" (p vii). In order to undertake this task Koester draws on Stowe's own prolific writing, which includes books, magazine articles, devotional works, poetry and children's stories. In addition to this she carefully constructs the contextual backdrop to her personal and social life through other important documents and accounts of Stowe's life. Koester is a historian of Christianity par excellence, which means that she presents a textured and vibrant theological explication of the faith-based motives and consequences at play in Stowe's work and life.

Since this is primarily a spiritual or theological history it does not touch on every aspect of Stowe's life. Rather it focuses on those elements that help the reader to understand Stowe's complex and developing spirituality and theology throughout her life. Of particular interest is the struggle that she had with her father's brand of "New England Calvinism" (p xi). Chapters 11 and 12 offer the reader a rare and valuable insight into Stowe's theological struggle and engagement with the dominant theological influences of her past and the unquestioned Calvinism that was so strongly propagated in the United States at that time.

As a theologian Koester is also uniquely capable of helping the reader to understand the intricacies and even challenges of the theological imagery and undertones that shape Stowe's life's work (and particularly *Uncle Tom's Cabin*). Koester avoids hagiography by showing the reader aspects of Stowe's own cultural and historical fixedness, for example the critiques by William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass. Both of these critics had

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concerns about how Stowe's portrayal of forgiving and longsuffering (Christ-like, p 324) slaves might condemn blacks to subservience and passivity in the face of injustice.

I found this volume fascinating and informative. It gave me insights into the life, work and faith of Harriet Beecher Stowe that I have not gained from other biographies. In addition it offers invaluable insights into the social, cultural and religious context of America in the mid to late 1800's. It is exceptionally well researched and masterfully written. I am of the opinion that this work will be of great value to both popular audiences, as well as academic researchers. I highly recommend it to anyone who is interested in understanding this important historical figure, the role of faith in the anti-slavery movement in America, as well as the intricacies of engaging such powerful and complex social and political issues as a woman in an age where women's voices were not often heard in the public sphere.



Vale, P., Hamilton, L. & Prinsloo, EH. 2014. *Intellectual traditions in South Africa: Ideas, individuals and institutions*. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu Natal Press. ISBN: 9781869142582. Price: R375-00. (www.kalahari.com).

Reviewer: Dr Wessel Bentley, Research Institute for theology and Religion, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa.

Intellectual traditions in South Africa is a timely publication on the process of intellectual change taking place in the South African context. In the introduction to this book, Peter Vale is correct in asserting that 1994 did not only herald in the change of a political system in South Africa, but set in motion a range of transitions that required inevitable conversations that needed to be had in redefining our understanding of critical public spaces. It would be a mistake to overlook the tremendous impact Apartheid had on our understanding of what it means to be human, to be citizens, or even to be religious in a country characterised by the intentional segregation of entire peoples. Perhaps this is the point: that during Apartheid there was not only a separation of people, but also a fencing off of ideas, understanding and discussion. This publication asks a critical question: "What is taking place now that the separation-walls, dividing people on so many different fronts, have been destroyed (institutionally, in any case)?" How do we address each other and where is our self-understanding heading?

The thirteen chapters in this book seek to answer these questions, outlined in three broad themes. The first section focuses on inherited ideas and the transition of institutions from the old South Africa to the new. Structural transformation is a challenge by itself; social transformation

requires not only frameworks which facilitate practical change, but also the change of public perception, understanding of identity and processing a hurtful past while moving into uncharted waters. Friedman, Nash, Duvenhage and Allsobrook discuss issues relating to liberalism, Marxism, Afrikaner intellectual history and South African positivism. What is quite clear from their assessments is that for the time being, South Africans live in a space of dual identity. The old self, whether it is economic, political or cultural, is engrained like a thorn, deep in one's foot; hard to remove while constantly reminding you of its presence whenever you step a bit off-centre. The new self, on the other hand, is excitable and dynamic, but cannot quite yet run as free as it would like to – the pierced flesh needs time, care and attention to be healed.

The second section teases out the theme: *Resistance to domination, African and Asian alternatives*. Suttner, Ndletyana, More, Dhupelia-Mesthrie and Moffett describe the successes and failures of transition models in the South African context. Some questions asked are: Is African Nationalism helpful? What is the place of the Black Consciousness Movement and similarly, Feminism, in the new South Africa? Can any new contribution now be made by liberation movements that once had a tremendous role to play in the downfall of a segregation-based system? The insights in these chapters are both challenging and hopeful as the authors take us to the coal-face of social identity formation.

Section three turns to *Religious dogma and emancipatory potential*. South Africans are predominantly religious and therefore any talk of transition will need to be reflected on by the religious traditions that exist in this context. Four religious traditions were chosen to contribute to this section: Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism and Islam. Needless to say, Egan, Jagarnath, Gross and Haron present compelling arguments for the role of religion in South Africa's unfolding history. Perhaps readers may ask whether it would have benefited the publication to include contributions by some of the AIC-traditions. I certainly would have found it valuable as all of the faith traditions represented here are historically from outside the African and, more specifically, the Southern African context. In my opinion, AIC's and African religious philosophies have significant contributions to make.

The editors and contributors need to be commended for this well-edited publication. Its format is easily accessible and the quality of print, layout and design afford the reader a pleasurable and engaging reading experience.

Overall, this publication is a very good conversation-starter and will not disappoint in raising issues which are sometimes hidden under the mat of bureaucracy, the duvet of cultural identity or the shadow of seeming religious obscurity.

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Vale P., Hamilton, L. & Prinsloo, EH. (ed.) 2014. *Intellectual traditions in South Africa: Ideas, individuals and institutions*. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press. xii+364 pages. ISBN 978-1-86914-254-2. Price: R375-00.

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

In his introduction to this book, Peter Vale cautions readers not to expect too much from this study since it simply inaugurates a discussion which he hopes will gather momentum as the discussion proceeds. This is a work of the expression of diverse ideas. That this is a historical work cannot be contested because each of the thirteen intellectual traditions introduced has its roots firmly in past centuries and each has deep political, social and historical origins. Their origins lie beyond South but were rapidly inculturated and so the link with their languages of transmission. By definition, interdisciplinarity is a feature of this study which consists largely of papers from social scientists and lawyers, many of whom work in interdisciplinary contexts all of which contribute to a multi-faceted nation.

The first part of the book considers the role of significant ideas in the development of South Africa – liberalism, Marxism and the Afrikaner tradition. Positivism is also included as a pervasive formative influence. None of these influences can claim innocence in a positive sense. For example liberalism is displayed as having at least two faces concurrently – as a means of domination and as a source of freedom. Marxism is presented locally as one approach and means of solving the “Native question”.

The second part is devoted to alternative paths of resistance to domination with the introduction of African and Asian options. But the situation was more complex because, as Suttner points out in his chapter on nationalisms, there were a number of contending nationalisms, and within this category we must note that state nationalism has supplanted popular nationalism. And here again, we note that nationalism was a Pan African phenomenon which was inaugurated in the United Kingdom! In its South African expression its roots go back to the earliest stage of Christianity in the Eastern Cape. Necessarily, this proceeds to a discussion of Black Consciousness (BC) and thankfully the work of Chabani Manganyi is mentioned as a valuable contribution. Then again, logically, the discussion moves on to the role of Black Theology, the religious outcome of BC and by this time it becomes crystal clear that this work dispels the myth that South Africa’s intellectual history is the battleground of Afrikaner and African nationalism alone and that religion plays a significant role throughout South Africa’s history. The inclusion of chapters on Judaism, Hinduism and Islam makes a vital point

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that the religious territory is not inhabited by Christianity alone. It is not only to be politically correct but because it is an integral part of South Africa's intellectual development that a chapter on feminism is included; for women have made significant contributions to the debate concerning feminist perspectives in South African politics despite what is described as a betrayal of trust which is not only referring to male trust.

Part three focuses on religion and emancipation and here church and state form a symbiotic relationship.

With regard to the development of intellectual ideas, Lawrence Hamilton summarises the situation well – “a miscegenation of ideas”. This is truly a book about the history of ideas. This requires an encyclopaedic knowledge of the writers, contexts and their meanings and intentions and a clear motivation to go beyond the “facts” of these social, political, cultural, religious and economic contexts. This book makes an innovative but laudable beginning to this vast and complex project which must maintain its interdisciplinary perspective. It is a book to be recommended to students who in particular wish to come to a deep understanding of the underpinnings of South African society as well as all who have a concern for understanding our past as a prelude to future understandings.