

Book Reviews

Jesus in Africa: The Christian gospel in African history and experience

Bediako K 2000

Oxford: Regnum. xiii +124 pages. ISBN 978-1-876345-34-7. No price quoted

The second focusses specifically on theology and culture. Here African theology is a derivative of African 'primal religion' where knowledge of God is not dependent on missionary intervention but is recognised as having its own distinctive integrity and which may have a pre-Christian and pluralistic origin. Bediako stresses that culture is not a deterrent to faith and may indeed provide a vehicle for its growth through communication/translation embedded in language. As the gospel is inculturated the Christian message is reconfigured in particular contexts.

The third section is devoted to the role of Africa in the development of the history of Christianity. This is not inconsiderable and resonates with other periods and contexts. It was holistic demonstrating the unity of nature and the world of spirits, the unity of the physical and the spiritual dimensions of life. A similar example is the development of Celtic Christianity in Scotland and Ireland was the result of the inculturation and transformation of Roman Christianity from the sixth century CE. Both contexts, deeply rooted in Christian history speak to the need for a holistic theological approach to human identity, ecological balance and justice reflecting the integrity of creation. In the present era, Christian history has found a new centre in the South – Africa, Asia and Latin America. This involves a qualitative and quantitative perspectival shift. This is the first of a proposed series of books which aim to introduce readers to the original writing of writers who have played a formative role in the development of African Theology as Theological Reflections from the South. As such these writings may not have been readily available, especially to lay persons or students who might want to access writings from their own continent or others who have heard of such movements as Liberation Theology, African Theology and Black Theology but have no easy means of access to foundational documents.

It is clear from page 1 that African theology is not a rarified form of theology but a way of doing theology which has deep historical roots and a global relevance as is evident on the chapter reproduced from Bediako's doctoral thesis, *Theology and Identity: The impact of culture upon Christian thought in the second century and modern Africa* (1992) where he engages the relationship between gospel and

culture in two very different periods. This collection is gathered into three sections of three sections each.

The first focusses on the African experience and reveals the authentic African origin and nature of the Christian faith. This involves consideration of the sensitive issue of ancestor veneration which, to a greater or lesser degree, is a constituent of all cultures. In Africa, Jesus of Nazareth is viewed as the Ancestor, as one who fulfils and goes beyond that role. He also fulfils the role of eternal Word, the one whose divinity was humanised in incarnation, crucifixion and communion, community being the key.

This volume may not provide comfortable reading for those of us reared in traditional western based theology. It challenges our many theological assumptions based as they are in Greek dualistic notions. It is a fitting reminder that the earliest form of Christianity was not based in Athens but in Jerusalem the centre of Palestinian Christianity. It is to be commended to a wide readership in the hope that it may inspire a deeper study of the African roots of theology and a lessening of the inferiority many Africans experience as the result of their negative perception of the African basis of their faith.

Reviewer: Prof GA Duncan Department of Church History/Polity, University of Pretoria

The new evangelisation: Faith, people, context and practice

Grogan P & Kim K (ed.) 2015

London: Bloomsbury. xii +296 pages. ISBN 978 0-5567-66737-4.

No price quoted.

The Roman Catholic Church has attained a fresh prominence in global Christianity since the election of Francis as pope and the publication of his apostolic exhortation *Evangelium Gaudium* in which evangelism is located in the pastoral ministry as well as the re-evangelisation of the lapsed and mission ad gentes. But Francis went beyond his predecessors in linking evangelisation not only to preaching and teaching; he extended it to include the challenge of globalisation as a threat to teaching concerning the kingdom of God.

However, not everything that is worthy of note and study is restricted to this most contemporary period. A recent conference of academics attempted to draw out the significance of this movement in continuance of the spirit of the Second Vatican Council The 'new evangelisation' is a movement that has gone largely unnoticed in

the non-Catholic world though its history has now matured over several decades and may even be traced back to the pontificate of Paul VI although it was pope John Paul II who first used the term in 1983.. It has no precise definition due to its implementation in a wide variety of local church contexts, ecclesial, cultural and geographical. This book attempts to determine the 'essential elements' of this timeless imperative taking account of the Lord's command to promote the gospel universally, that the promise of salvation is being fulfilled.

The most recent impetus to the 'new evangelisation' came from Benedict XVI as a result of the mounting awareness that Catholics were abandoning their traditional faith and a consequent desire to re-evangelise the West as their fundamental mission with the family at the centre as the 'model place' for passing on the faith. Integral to this process of evangelisation is a serious commitment to life and working towards justice. The design of this book is built around four questions concerning the project of new evangelisation.

The first section is concerned with continuity or discontinuity with Vatican II in view of different approaches advocated by various Vatican documents. Religious pluralism in Europe, for example, seems to suggest that a contextual approach is required. Part two is devoted to a discussion of the implications of the new evangelisation for the Church and its mission. The integral relationship between evangelisation and ecumenism is highlighted in the sense that disunity is a denial of theology. A critique of the Eurocentric nature of Roman Catholicism is mooted despite its Vatican II affirmation of its intention to be a global community. The third section looks at two case studies related to Africa and other faiths. Africa needs to be a focus in an attempt to supersede the negatives effects of colonisation which failed to inculturate the gospel. With regard to world faiths, a question is raised concerning the appropriateness and validity of evangelisation and the central role of the laity. The final part of the book describes various British examples of the new evangelisation in practice relative to pastoral principles and interreligious dialogue in the context of the proclamation of the gospel.

These conference proceedings bring us up to date with recent developments in the Roman Catholic Church regarding the new evangelisation. It is not only inward looking but also demonstrates a compassion for the world and its inhabitants at large. Despite its commitment to economic justice issues, it makes contribution to the debate regarding its own contribution to economic injustice regarding its own wealth and its allocation. But in this regard it is perhaps no better or worse than other churches as far as matching its words with its actions.

*Reviewer: Prof GA Duncan Department of Church History/Polity,
University of Pretoria.*

A missiology of the road; Early perspectives in David Bosch's theology of mission and evangelism

Livingston JK 2014

Cambridge: James Clarke & Co. xvi + 402 pages. ISBN 978-0-227-17459-3. No price quoted.

On first sight this book offers a reinterpretation of David Bosch's magnificent contribution to the theology of mission in the twentieth century. It offers a lively introduction to the person and work of Bosch setting him firmly within his Afrikaner context and gives an interesting outline of his theology of mission with perhaps a disproportionate amount of space to the topic of evangelism. He outlines challenges to Bosch's missiology but misses out his attention to the role of women and the already pressing situation of the rise of Pentecostalism. Perhaps this betrays his own preferences. Ten chapters are divided into sections on Bosch in context, his theology of mission and evangelism, and critical dimensions for a missionary church. These are well summarised but offer no significantly new interpretation among the many works devoted to Bosch's theology of mission.

There is little evidence that a revision of this doctoral thesis has been carried out before publication. It is repetitive in places where it need not be and is overheavy with footnotes. In many places it could have been summarised to make it more accessible especially to lay readers.

I find several things mystifying about this book. The title is problematic. He refers to Bosch's theology of mission and evangelism; yet, Bosch drew no sharp distinction; see the title of his magnum opus *Transforming mission: Paradigm shifts in theology of mission* (1991). Here Livingston seems to be imposing his own agenda on to Bosch. Then the title refers to early perspectives which I also find strange since he includes all Bosch's writings up to the submission of this doctoral thesis, just prior to Bosch's death. For some reason he takes *Witness to the world* (1979) as a normative text when it simply reflects a stage in the development of Bosch's thinking. One wonders where the later perspectives begin unless the author cannot accommodate Bosch's postmodernistic thinking in *Transforming mission* (1991) and *Believing in the future: Toward a missiology of western culture* (1995) published posthumously. Surely he was not beyond integrating insights from these two works to offer a more comprehensive consideration of Bosch's theology, especially since the twentieth anniversary edition of *Transforming mission* was published in 2011 more than twenty years after this thesis was submitted? In this sense it is very disappointing.

*Reviewer: Prof GA Duncan Department of Church History/Polity,
University of Pretoria*

Sent out: African missionary work in the West

Kwiyani HC 2014

xii + 244 pages. ISBN 978-1-62698-101-0. No price quoted.

This book is an enjoyable and informative read which reveals the joy (mostly) and despairs of an African missionary working in the USA. It exposes readers to current thinking and practice in missiological thinking and can be a useful resource for those working with and in immigrant diaspora. Communities. This is an area in which there is a great need for intercultural understanding and this book is a serious attempt to provide it. It is written out of diligent study and experience within the church and it reflects the rapidly changing face of church and mission today. We are clearly living in a new era of mission and this is vastly different from the colonial form of mission we all recognise. This is often characterised by the term 'reverse mission' but that is a misnomer but it is a necessary attitude towards mission taking account of the decline of Christianity in the West. To remain a global faith Christianity needs to humble itself in the name of the redevelopment of Christianity worldwide. However, this takes place within a very culturally diverse Christian faith where diaspora Christians often exist quite apart from the Christian communities in which they live, partly because of the community they find there. A significant difference is that many diaspora Christians do not migrate primarily to propagate their faith – yet they bring their faith expression with them and it is not easily welcomed or integrated in traditional western Christian forms, eg. of worship. This postcolonial form of Christianity is therefore unique.

Following an introduction, chapter one focusses on the role of Africa in the development of a theology of migration whose diasporic proponents are predominantly conservative and charismatic reflecting the global trend towards Pentecostalism. This development is a helpful corrective to the manner in which church history has been taught traditionally, to reflect the early great theologians as products of Europe rather than Africa, and that everything good and worthy has its origin in Europe and North America. A theology of migration is grounded not only in world history but in biblical history too. The second chapter relates Africa's place in mission history and particularly the role of African agency. Three tracks have emerged – nineteenth century missions, late nineteenth and twentieth century African Initiated churches and late twentieth and twenty first century Pentecostalism. These are 'blessed reflexes'.

Chapter three takes account of the contributions of various scholars who have followed the development of the African diaspora over the past forty years, early voices who foresaw the development of African missionaries, developments in Europe and developments in America. Chapter four examines the African immigrant community in the west while chapter five looks at mission and African migration.

The sixth chapter goes beyond the ‘blessed reflex’ and introduces the mission components of dialogue and hospitality. The final chapter consists of reflections, particularly on the subject of power, race and the mission Dei.

On p9 it is stated that a conference like Edinburgh 1910 if held today would attract more Africans Asians and Latin Americans. This is a surprising error in a book published in 2014 (cf. the composition of Edinburgh 2010).

The practice of African mission to the west is fraught with misunderstanding and prejudice. It also confronts western Christian with their lack of understanding the need for mission in their context based on an inherent sense of superiority and self-sufficiency. This book is a valuable corrective to the idea that Christianity is a western faith and that its mission is to the ignorant, poor and needy elsewhere. It deals with theological, practical and pastoral matters directly related to diaspora Christianity on the twenty first century and is a forerunner in the field.

*Reviewer: Prof GA Duncan Department of Church History/Polity,
University of Pretoria*

Roots & Fruits: Retrieving Scotland’s missionary story

Ross KR (ed.) 2014

Oxford: Regnum. x + 173 pages. ISBN 978-1-908355-29-4. No price quoted.

Yet, another book emerges from the preparations for the World Missionary Conference, 2010, this time lauding the mission history of the nation that hosted both the 1910 and 2010 conferences. In fact, the issue regarding the venue is an apologetic theme in the papers presented here by Ross and Breitenbach.

The book contains eight papers beginning with a brief, brilliant yet comprehensive overview of Scottish mission history written by Andrew Walls which clearly demonstrates that Scotland’s contribution to nineteenth and twentieth century mission is well out of proportion to its size and resources. This paper occupies almost a quarter of the book. Nonetheless other contributions also make significant contributions although two have been in print before, including the conclusion. Breitenbach demonstrates the force of Scottish missions within Scotland through the impact of missionaries in the field and their ability to communicate in an appealing manner to a Scottish audience in which education played a significant role, as well as class inclusion (eg. the working class was not excluded – ie. David Livingston), gender and voluntarism, all added to the blend of secularism and religion in Scotland. Dowsett’s paper reflects on the contribution of the evangelicals in Scotland mostly beyond the direct influence of the churches. Her discus-

sion of the Bible Training Institute (now the International Christian College) shows that great things were achieved by its products throughout the missionary world. The college has mutated and adapted as circumstance have changes and still plays a valuable role in the Scottish missionary scene. John McCracken's paper on Andrew Ross is an excellent example of a missionary and scholar enflamed with a passion for justice. Ross was the stuff of which historically renowned missionaries are made. History will likely judge him to be the equivalent at least of John Philip. Stephen Smyth's chapter breathes fresh air into the Church of Scotland's domination in missionary activity, though actually the national church lagged far behind the United Free Church and the United Presbyterian Church. His paper demonstrates the enormous amount of common ground which exists between the ecclesiastical traditions which are still, and will probably continue to be separated by memory and history. Chris Wigglesworth, another outstanding example of a mission practitioner reflects in internationalisation in mission perspective on the areas of poverty, environmental threat and religious conflict where international agencies can work together towards the vision of life in all its fullness.

Clearly there is much in the Scottish missionary enterprise to celebrate but, as it stands the book signifies an adherence to a hagiographical mode of mission reporting despite Dowsett's caution that 'there is no room for triumphalism' (p.83). However, reflecting on the title, one thing comes to mind that jars with me. In seeking contributions for this volume, the editor seems to be unaware that fruit can be sour as well as sweet. Sweetness is abundantly present here but why suppress the sour fruit? Where is the sad tale of the virtual demise of global mission in the Church of Scotland in the twenty first century and its implications for 'partnership in mission'? Where also is the other account of the preparations for Edinburgh 2010 that indicates that paternalistic attitudes towards mission have not advanced much since 1910. In sum, this interesting book lacks balance.

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To the nations of the earth: A missional spirituality

Fensham C 2013

Toronto: Clements Publishing Group. viii +173 pages. ISBN 978-1-926798-09-7. No price quoted.

Missional spirituality is one of the most exciting and dynamic trends to emerge in the study of missiology recently. Its relationship to matters ecological make it more topical and less individualistic in a world facing environmental catastrophe. Never

was the time more opportune for human beings to work out their identity along with our relationship with God and our destiny in such a situation. Therefore, the subject is the formation of the pilgrim people of God with God and creation. This formation has a number of dimensions and these are the subject of this book. Spirituality is about worship in its widest sense and worship is about doxology – giving God the glory. Formation is about establishing a nurturing discipline in all people and their life's direction and end which is the kingdom of God. Following David Bosch's definition it as a Spirituality of the road (1979) in which God is the caller and we the respondents. In this process we gave freedom to choose and to act humbly and responsibly in the face of the great challenge we have been presented with. This process had five dimensions and to each a chapter is devoted.

The Call is the subject of chapter one and is encapsulated in vocation a call to It is linked to formation through the journey we are called to embark upon with a clear direction and destiny before us as leaders with a particular challenge to self-renunciation and orientation towards the needs of others-in-community. This is not only a process which gives meaning to life; it also involves experience and affectivity. This call, in good Presbyterian fashion, has to be the result of discernment and affirmation by the community to be valid, since the call is to community. But it is also not a straightforward process for most. Biblical and historic witness testify to the reticence and even resistance which often accompany the call and thereby validate it. The call is not always to a separate existence but for most is a call, following Bonhoeffer, to be worked out in the communities where we normally live and work.

Listening is the second dimension. This is the most difficult for we live in an extremely noisy society and in WH Auden's words – 'we are very deaf'.

Formation is a process and we are therefore in movement. In Christianity, all of formation has involved a journey of one kind or another. We are Christians in transit. Here, I like Paul Tillich's concept of the 'courage to be' in the face of the anxiety produced in stressful situations such a leaving home either physically or metaphorically. Still following Tillich, this is a process of self-renunciation as we move out of ourselves towards others. Self-examination becomes an integral part of the process and Fensham repeatedly states, I believe correctly that, 'When the facts demand death, God insists on life for God's creatures'.

Sacrament concerns obedience: 'Do this ...'. In my tradition as in others it is preceded by self-examination. To this imperative we remain faithful. It is a sacrament of integration – with oneself, with God, with fellow believers and with the wider community and is characterised in all these ways be hospitality.

Send. Being sent is a necessary part of the process of calling. Its focus is love defined by Tillich as 'the drive towards the unity of the separated'. And following

Richard Rohr's thinking, local Christian communities exist to discern the call and send the candidates on their way, supported as they embark on their journey.

This is a lovely book to read. It is stimulating and full of fresh thinking and it entirely appropriate for the mission of the church in the twenty-first century.

*Reviewer: Prof GA Duncan Department of Church History/Polity,
University of Pretoria*