

SUMMARY

This is the published dissertation of a Pentecostal theologian, who studies Christological approaches to evil within the Pentecostal Church in Ghana. The author is sympathetic to his tradition and shows how the church in Ghana can contribute to the welfare of the nation. European readers of his book will gain a deeper understanding of the thinking of the many Ghanaian Christians among us.

* * * *

This book is the product of sustained PhD research into the themes of Christological approaches to evil within the tradition of the Pentecostal Church in Ghana. Later, it focuses on what this study may contribute to the development of what is, at present, a nascent public theology. The author, Joseph Quayesi-Amakye, writes from within the Pentecostal tradition and his research reveals that he is both sympathetic to the tradition and a constructive critic of it.

The book is generally well written and is certainly readable. At points, I must confess, I found the transitions somewhat repetitive and strained, and in the process of editing I think this could certainly have been redacted; however, the consistency and clarity of thought is helpful and sustained my interest throughout.

As someone within the field of practical theology, Quayesi-Amakye has adopted an intentionally practical theological approach and this seems sound, although I found the hymnody and interviews that he used as his main sources somewhat limited. The thrust of the material at points seems to lean towards the anecdotal, and yet there are strong themes that present themselves and are vitally important to the global church. What is the meaning of suffering? What does suffering reveal of the nature of God? Who is the author of suffering? (See page 162, for example.) How are poverty and suffering interpreted in a world where both are manifest? Is there a way of engaging with the demonising of poverty and the sense that poverty can be unmerited or merited?

The ideas of universalising understandings of healing, health, identity and the nature of change, redemption and restoration are also significant and the author wrestles with that from within an African context.

It is in this area, contextualising, that some of the strengths of the work emerge. The focus on Ghana is significant – and the author does not claim to be speaking for the wider African community. The deep engagement with indigenous ideas, religion and practices of religion is interesting and insightful. It is also, as far as I am aware, quite unique in its attempt to explore the development of a Pentecostal theology of the soil alongside engaging with the contribution and otherness of indigenous Ghanaian religious culture to traditional, more European Christological perspectives.

I do not think that the public theology dynamic promised in the title fully emerges – as I read it, it seemed much more the embryonic stage of a Ghanaian

Pentecostal theological approach to the public. However, there are clear insights into the significant contribution the church can, should and must make to the future of a nation and the various spheres – business, politics, economics, education, media and the arts – that must be engaged with for the church to take its place as a Christ-centred participant in the world for the sake of the Kingdom.

A particularly welcome element of the book from my perspective is the insights it also offers for people within my setting (European non Pentecostal) in understanding some of the emphases that increasingly appear from African churches within a British context. The tendency towards expressions of faith that are related to healing, prospering, prophecy, leadership and culture are insightful and challenging – not least because (at least in the UK) these evangelical and Pentecostal churches are clearly making inroads into communities and lives that other evangelical churches are struggling to meet.

There are enormous questions that continue to linger after a first reading: is the leadership model sufficiently critiqued? To what extent can the leaders be seen as representative of the wider congregational understandings? Is the liturgical consideration offered deep enough to truly demonstrate a genuine Christological understanding? Is there sufficient evidence to support the claims made in the book?

Certainly I would argue that this book is a helpful contribution to those people seeking to understand the Pentecostal church at large alongside offering insights into its Ghanaian expression.

*Deirdre Brower Latz
Manchester*

Nationhood, Providence, and Witness. Israel in Protestant Theology and Social Theory

Carys Moseley

Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2013; 267 pp, £22;
ISBN 978-1-61097-942-9

SUMMARY

This book is a plea for a positive 'theology of nationhood'. The author argues that anti-Zionism is often due to a negative theology of nationhood, which is why a rethinking is necessary. Four major theologians, Reinhold Niebuhr, Rowan Williams, John Milbank and Karl Barth, are discussed very critically in relation to this subject.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieses Buch ist ein Plädoyer für eine positive „Theologie der Nation“. Die Autorin argumentiert, dass Antizionismus in vielen Fällen auf eine negative „Theologie der Nation“ zurückzuführen ist. Aus diesem Grund ist ein Umdenken erforderlich. Die vier bedeutende Theologen Reinhold Niebuhr, Rowan Williams, John Milbank und Karl Barth werden zu diesem Thema sehr kritisch befragt.

RÉSUMÉ

Ce livre est un plaidoyer pour une théologie positive de l'appartenance nationale. L'auteur tente de montrer que l'anti-sionisme est souvent la conséquence d'une théologie négative de l'appartenance nationale. Elle y voit là une raison de la nécessité de repenser la chose. Elle considère les positions sur cette question de quatre théologiens influents, Reinhold Niebuhr, Rowan Williams, John Milbank et Karl Barth.

* * * *

Dr Carys Moseley, researcher at Edinburgh University, is the author of *Nationhood, providence and witness*, which can be seen as an urgent and sophisticated plea for a theology of nationhood. The book explores three interrelated themes. First, that anti-nationalism and anti-Zionism are often two sides of the same coin, and involve taking leave of a serious, providential reading of the Bible as well as a willingness to understand history in broadly providential terms. Second, that such an approach also tends to involve a reluctance to recognise subordinated Gentile nations, especially those that have lost independence. Third, how 'social theory' has handled the same issues. Moseley discusses four major theologians: Reinhold Niebuhr, Rowan Williams, John Milbank and Karl Barth.

Moseley has a polemic, critical approach which results in a reactionary and sometimes chaotic argument. She is very critical of the – in her words – apophatic approach of Rowan Williams, but she suffers from the same symptoms. Her line of thinking is negative, most of the book is spent on what is wrong in the approaches of the theologians under discussion, and the many other theologians she refers to, but there are hardly any constructive suggestions for a theology of nationhood. In this sense the book is not very helpful if you need an overview of theologies of nationhood or a decent exegetical or systematic-theological exposition. For example, Moseley opens the Introduction with the bold statement 'Nationhood and nations lie at the very heart of the biblical meta-narrative that forms the framework for Christian theology, with the one nation of Israel represented as chosen by God to further his purpose of redemption for the whole world' but she does not take any time to back this statement up. The book merely provides a very critical perspective on four theologians of the twentieth and twenty-first century and their reception. Moseley is most affirmative of Karl Barth's approach and she finishes the book by showing how Barth's approach illuminates approaches discussed in the book.

The main focus of the book is a Christian theology

of nationhood, and it focuses on the State of Israel as the theological mirror for selected theologians and socialists. So *Nationhood, Providence and Witness* does not offer an overview of Zionist or anti-Zionist argument either. At the heart of 'the issue of nation-state and stateless nation' Moseley uses Wales as a case study.

Although after reading this book you will feel the necessity to formulate a theology of nationhood, this heavily documented study also raises a lot of questions about Christology, eschatology, biblical theology and the theological task. For example, is it the task of Christian theology to develop a 'politics of recognition' or a 'theology of nationhood' in such a way that we can declare the state of Israel or the stateless nation Wales legal or illegal? Although Moseley mentions that she is speaking from a 'free church' tradition and perspective, her argument sounds indeed 'Protestant' (as the subtitle mentions) or, as the free church theologian John Howard Yoder would call it, 'Constantinian'. 'To understand history in broadly providential terms' leaves little space for criticising the course of history, which is often forced in a certain direction by the powerful and the violent.

A second example of the kind of questions raised: the already-mentioned quote 'Nationhood and nations lie at the very heart of the biblical meta-narrative that forms the framework for Christian theology' is highly questionable from a viewpoint of biblical studies. Moseley's references to Acts 17 (recapitulating Genesis 10) or Acts 2 ('We can see this clearly in the outpouring of the Spirit on Jewish and gentile members of the nations in Acts 2') are not helping either.

Should you read this book? On the one hand *Nationhood, Providence, and Witness* is a highly scholarly book in which – in an antithetic way – a theology of nationhood is unfolded. If you like to immerse yourself in a richness of bold, provocative theology, you may like this book. On the other hand, the book suffers from a lack of clear argument and has a tendency to be chaotic because of the immense volume of literature to which Moseley refers and reacts. She dismisses many scholars and publications in a few sentences and this polemic style can be tiring, also because it often does not contribute to the main argument (if there is any). Although the last chapter is called Conclusion, it lacks a summarising overview of the argument and a proposal for a theology of nationhood. If you are looking for a low level introduction to the subject, look elsewhere.

Daniël Drost
Amsterdam