

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Francis Kimani Githieya**

***THE FREEDOM OF THE SPIRIT:  
African Indigenous Churches in Kenya***  
Atlanta, Georgia, USA: Scholars Press, 1997.

Githieya's work is based on his doctoral research at Emory University, Atlanta, into the history and theology, particularly the ecclesiology, of two Kenyan independent churches, the African Orthodox Church (AOC) and the Agikuyu Spirit Church (Arathi). As the author admits in his preface, his intention is to rehabilitate these churches in the eyes of other scholars who have used expressions such as 'tribal' or 'nativistic' to describe them. He sets out to do this by presenting their own 'true self-understanding', and he concludes that they are 'new, African and Christian all at the same time'.

Initially the author examines the socio-historical background in which the two churches arose, describing the Agikuyu people, the initial establishment of Christian churches in central Kenya by western missions, and the policies of the colonising power. He argues that the teaching and practices of missions such as AIM and CMS undermined traditional values, while the acquisition of land by the missions and the colonial authorities, coupled with attempts to impose wage labour, disrupted social cohesion.

This provoked a growing Agikuyu reaction culminating in the 'Muthirigu Crisis' of 1929 over the issue of female circumcision, when large numbers of Agikuyu left the mission churches and in time formed their own. Among the new churches was the African Orthodox Church which now claims one and a half million members. Githieya discusses its origins, its splits, the process by which it became affiliated to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria, its proscription by the British authorities in the 1950s, and then its subsequent re-establishment and further splits.

By contrast the Agikuyu Spirit Church originated not in secession from a mission church but through the activities of prophetic figures who claimed to have received a divine calling, including Joseph Ng'ang'a and Musa Thuo. Ng'ang'a apparently experienced his call in a dream during an illness which followed a bout of drunkenness. He began preaching a millennial message whose thrust was the 'freeing of the Agikuyu from their colonial rulers'. He also denounced certain Agikuyu practices (sorcery, witchcraft, sacrifices to ancestors), and some western ones too (western medicine, ways of dressing, and foods). The authorities were alarmed at the millenarian tendencies of the Arathi and their rejection of medical services, and this led to arrests and confrontations, a growing Arathi militancy and the eventual proscription of the movement. However, the church continued, though much divided: between 1960 and 1970 fourteen different groups were registered by the Kenyan government.

In his discussion of the ecclesiologies of the two churches Githieya identifies the leading characteristics by which each understands itself, and thereby seeks to refute the view that they, and other African Independent Churches, are simply 'tribal'. He argues that they are to be seen as true churches, and compares them favourably with the 'mission' churches, praising especially their warmth, the level of indigenisation they have achieved, and their refusal to identify with the political or ecclesiastical status quo. In a comparison of the ecclesiologies of the two churches, he nevertheless recognises the presence of what he terms 'unresolved tensions in their theologies', a euphemism in fact for substantial weaknesses.

The Freedom of the Spirit undoubtedly contributes to our understanding of what are clearly two significant African Independent Churches, and gives insights into the African Independent Church movement in general. It is thoroughly documented with substantial footnotes and a reasonable bibliography. It is well laid out and on the whole lucidly written. The author is sympathetic to his subject, which is in some respects an advantage. Nevertheless he never clearly resolves the central issue of what constitutes a true church. He briefly reviews various

criteria which have been applied to identify one, and he argues that the two bodies under discussion understand themselves as true churches. In his words, to be the church is for them, 'first and foremost to experience God's liberating redemption in Christ'. In the context this seems to refer primarily to liberation from the domination of mission churches and their imposition of western customs and values. However, such an approach does not go far towards establishing the positive marks of a true church. From an evangelical perspective a central issue would have to be the nature of the message that is proclaimed, but here he is tantalisingly brief. Githieya makes some valid points. Missionaries have not always shown cultural sensitivity and have sometimes been too ready to denounce what they did not understand. Mission established churches are not the only possible form. But there is little that is new here, and there is sometimes a feeling that the author is fighting the old battles over again. The gospel challenges and condemns every fallen human culture at certain points. Maybe those who first brought the gospel did not always deal with cultural issues as sensitively as they might have done, but how do we respond to those issues now, in our own generation? What indeed does the Word of God say or imply about the practice of female circumcision? In revisiting the controversy, what should be said substantively about that and other 'cultural' issues? While sometimes perhaps regretting the cultural insensitivity of missionaries, we need to beware of the pitfall of absolutising or idealising cultural tradition too.

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**Stanley J. Grenz**

***THE MORAL QUEST:  
Foundations of Christian Ethics***  
Leicester, England: Apollos, 1997

In *The Moral Quest* Stanley Grenz 'attempts to lay a foundation for Christian ethical living'. He notes in his introduction that every person must face ethical challenges, and that this has always been the case. However, he argues that in the modern world (and he is thinking primarily of the West) living ethically has become harder, due partly to the possibilities offered by modern technological advance, and partly to the erosion of the earlier biblically based moral consensus brought about by the rise of pluralistic relativism. The Christian challenge is to live individually and corporately in a way that pleases God, which means being fully attuned to the present situation, analysing the issues that arise, and applying appropriate Christian principles to them.

The first two-thirds of the book set the stage for Grenz's own contribution to the subject. In a very good and promising opening chapter he discusses the ethical task and general ethical theory. His crucial conclusion here is that 'philosophical ethical systems leave us in an anthropocentric cul-de-sac, because they by necessity lack a transcendent point of reference' (p.235). He then examines five Greek approaches to ethics, which have shaped subsequent Christian thinking in the West. The following summary of the biblical material, 'Ethics in the Bible', is surprisingly brief in the context of the book as a whole, given the central importance of its theme for any consideration of a specifically Christian ethical 'quest'. He goes on to discuss Christian ethical approaches: three from the past (Augustine, Aquinas and Luther), and seven from the present, where in a breathless whistle-stop tour he briefly examines the ethical ideas of a whole host of people (Rauschenbusch, Barth, Gustafson, Nygren, Ramsey, Fletcher, Bonhoeffer, McClendon, Luther King, Gutiérrez, Ruether, Gilligan, Noddings, MacIntyre, Hauerwas, Henry and O'Donovan). The material in these two

chapters can be heavy going (though the sections on Luther and Carl Henry are a breath of fresh air!), and is not greatly exploited in the remaining third of the book where the author sets out his own contribution to the subject. There could, moreover, have been more substantial critiques of the thinkers he describes.

In the last three chapters he discusses the relationship between Christian ethical thinking and the universal human ethical quest; seeks to lay the theological foundations of a Christian ethic; and finally identifies 'comprehensive love' as its content. In an epilogue he points out that ethics is to be placed in the context of worship: we worship God with the whole of our lives. Along with chapter one, this section is the best part of the book. However, there are some reservations. Discussing what he calls the 'heteronomous' approach to establishing a biblical ethic - looking primarily to the Bible - he sets up what looks very much like a caricature of the position taken by many evangelicals and then proceeds to attack it. Some of the points he makes here are certainly valid: for example, the necessity of the work of the Spirit to produce a life that pleases God, and the uselessness of a merely external conformity to God's commands. However, it is highly questionable whether the writers he criticises actually hold the position he is attacking - some sort of sterile, Spirit-less, legalistic ethic which looks for a mere outward conformity to rules drawn from Scripture. Moreover, it is certainly not the case that an emphasis on the 'objective givenness of the Word' entails that sort of ethic. In stressing his point he appears at times to fall into the trap of false dichotomy; 'true obedience is not marked by outward compliance to a set of laws but by inward piety' (c.g., Mk 7:1-23). While genuine godliness must certainly come from within, obedience will, nevertheless, necessarily be marked by outward conformity; indeed, part of the Lord's criticism of the Pharisees in the passage Grenz cites here, was precisely their failure to conform in practice to the Law. In his discussion on love in the final chapter Grenz attaches too much weight to a lexical analysis of the different Greek words used for aspects of love - *storge*, *eros*, *philia*, *agape* - depending at times on definitions drawn from Kittel's 'Theological Dictionary of the New Testament'. To establish a New Testament concept of love he might have spent

more time exegeting and analysing the passages in which the vocabulary and concepts of love are embedded. Words have meaning in contexts. Indeed, generally he seems to be more at ease discussing ethics from a philosophical or theological perspective than analysing the biblical data.

Nevertheless, *The Moral Quest* is a comprehensive and very helpful exploration of its subject. Subheadings guide the reader through the argument and there are occasional anecdotes set apart from the main text to illuminate a point. It has an extensive bibliography and is thoroughly documented (but why do publishers relegate footnotes to the back of the book?). It is undoubtedly western in its orientation, which diminishes its usefulness in the African context, but it will nevertheless serve as a most useful introduction to its subject.

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**Hawthorne, Gerald F., Ralph P. Martin,  
and Daniel G. Reid, eds.**

***DICTIONARY OF PAUL AND HIS LETTERS***  
***A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship.***  
Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; Leicester:  
InterVarsity Press, 1993.

This book is the second in a three volume set of dictionaries on the New Testament published by InterVarsity Press. The first treated Jesus and the Gospels (1992), while the third covered the Later New Testament and Its Developments (1997). This volume on Paul and His Letters seeks to assist a broad audience: students hoping to gain an entree into various areas of Pauline scholarship, pastors looking for insights from the best of recent scholarship,

scholars seeking summaries of research and bibliographical assistance, and the educated lay person wanting a deeper understanding of Paul in his historical context. Such a broad target audience makes one sceptical about the possibilities of success. Yet this dictionary largely accomplishes its task.

By my count, this almost 1000 page dictionary contains 214 articles by 108 scholars treating a broad spectrum of issues related to Paul's letters, thought, and context. A sampling of the article titles portrays the breadth of the contents. In addition to articles on individual letters, the entries include: Chronology; Jesus and Paul; Social-Scientific Approaches to Paul; Abraham; Magic; Peace, Reconciliation; Preaching from Paul Today; Apostasy, Falling Away, Perseverance; Itineraries, Travel Plans, Journeys, Apostolic Parousia; and Elements/Elemental Spirits of the World. Concluding indices of references to Pauline letters by chapter and verse, subjects, and articles make information on almost any Pauline subject or passage easy to find, thereby enhancing the dictionary's usefulness.

Given its sheer size, a thorough analysis of the volume is not possible within the limits of this review. Instead what follows will attempt to assess the strengths and weakness, key features, and overall value of the dictionary.

First, although the six volume Anchor Bible Dictionary is now the standard critical Bible dictionary and an invaluable tool in numerous respects, I find its treatment of Pauline studies to be one of its weakest features. For example, articles on individual letters often devote far too much attention to the search for possible fragments of earlier letters now combined into the canonical letter. The Dictionary of Paul and His Letters (DPL), on the other hand, offers a far more affordable reference tool, with a thorough analysis of Pauline studies and related issues, from what I regard as a more balanced perspective. In addition, its articles contain abundant cross-references both within the text and at its end, plus helpful bibliographies. All of these features combine to make this volume not only easy to use, but helpful as well as a starting point for further study.

Secondly, I expect an article in a dictionary such as this to provide a reader with an accurate and even-handed introduction to its subject, including an overview of scholarly discussion on contested issues related to that subject and an astute analysis of that debate. Overall, DPL does well in this regard. For example, the articles by James Dunn on Romans, Paul Bowers on Paul's Mission, Frank Thielman on Law, and David Aune on Apocalypticism are all models of judicious scholarship expressed with clarity and conciseness.

Any work of this collaborative nature, however, will be somewhat uneven in this regard. Two examples of poorer quality articles illustrate this point.

First, Ralph Martin's article on "Center of Paul's Theology" should serve as an important article in a dictionary such as this, since this subject has been a focal point of controversy in the study of Paul's theology. Martin, however, offers an inadequate introduction to the subject, followed by an argument for his own thesis that "reconciliation" constitutes the organising centre of Paul's thought. Such a presentation does readers of DPL a great disservice. Likewise, Knox Chamblin's contribution on "Psychology" (dealing with anthropology) largely treats Paul in modern psychological terms. In doing so, he fails to even mention the recent work of scholars such as Jerome Neyrey and Bruce Malina, who have attempted to interpret Paul as a first-century hellenized Jew using tools of sociology and cultural anthropology. Although this work is still in its early stages and therefore stands open to correction, it carries important implications for Chamblin's topic. The articles by Martin and Chamblin stand out, however, precisely because they are exceptions to the overall high quality of the remaining articles.

Third, the publication of E. P. Sanders' seminal volume on Paul and Palestinian Judaism in 1977 changed the course of Pauline studies almost overnight. Sanders questioned standard paradigms for understanding Paul and the Law, and therefore, for a host of related issues (covenant, Israel, etc.) vital for interpreting Paul's theology. It is not an overstatement to say that Pauline scholars (including evangelicals) can largely be categorised according to



their positions on issues defined by Sanders and the debates his work initiated. Within DPL, for example, one could contrast the interpretation of Mosaic Law in the article by James Dunn mentioned above with the treatment of "Works of the Law" by Thomas Schreiner. The editors are to be commended for allowing disagreements among contributors in this post-Sanders era to stand, since such differences accurately reflect the state of Pauline studies at this time. Some evangelicals may be uncomfortable with such disagreement. Yet, the adjective "evangelical" encompasses a wide perspective of viewpoints within a orthodox confessional framework. The reality is that many issues in Pauline studies remain matters of intense debate even among scholars with a high view of Scripture.

In summary, the Dictionary of Paul and His Letters presents the best of evangelical Pauline scholarship collected into one volume. I find no other comparable reference tool. In addition, its content bears witness to the growing maturity of evangelical biblical scholarship. Surely this volume belongs on library shelves throughout the African continent. Both lecturers and students stand to benefit immensely from its use.

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**Ralph P. Martin & Peter Daniels, eds.**

***DICTIONARY OF THE LATER  
NEW TESTAMENT AND ITS DEVELOPMENTS***

Leicester, England and Downers Grove, Illinois, USA:  
Inter-Varsity Press, 1997

The *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments* is the third in a relatively new series of substantial reference works on the New Testament published by Inter-Varsity Press, coming after the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* and the *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*. It covers those areas of the New Testament not dealt with by the earlier works - the Acts of the Apostles, general epistles, Hebrews and Revelation. Unlike the other dictionaries in the series it goes beyond the New Testament itself and deals with developments in the post-apostolic period of early Christian history up to approximately 150 AD. It is a very weighty work: including indexes it contains 1289 pages plus 30 pages of preparatory material, and there are over 230 articles contributed by more than 100 writers. There are helpful Scripture and Subject indexes as well as an Articles index. Each article is followed by a bibliography, some of them very full indeed. The flyleaf lists plaudits from a number of respected New Testament scholars.

It would not be practical to review in detail a book of this length, but a number of general observations may be made. First, the book undoubtedly contains a vast quantity of material and will be a reference work of enormous value to the students and academics for whom it seems to be primarily intended; its accessibility to the preachers, ministers, [and] Christian lay people for whom it was also written is perhaps a little more questionable. There are full discussions of major theological issues, including early church heresies, and a very helpful, concise introduction to New Testament theology. There are thorough introductions to each of the New Testament books covered by the dictionary, and a number of articles cover questions of historical background including, for

example, those on Antioch, Alexandria, the emperor cult and even church architecture. Several others deal with the Jewish background to the literature under discussion. It is pleasing to see an article on 'Early Non-Pauline Mission', as well as one on prayer and another entitled 'Preaching from Acts, Hebrews, General Epistles and Revelation', which contains the not-to-be-missed comment, 'Preachers who bore themselves will almost certainly bore their hearers!' Several articles deal with hermeneutical issues.

Second, there could at times be a greater attempt to synthesise the material presented in order to make the work more user-friendly. Invariably, articles begin with an introduction but very many have no conclusion. In some cases a conclusion may be inappropriate, but sometimes it would be helpful to have a final summing up of the author's major conclusions, especially where the issues raised by an article are contentious. Occasionally, there seems to be a duplication of material. It is not clear why there should be an article entitled 'Theology of the Cross' and another rather longer one on the 'Death of Christ', which covers similar ground. Similarly one might have thought that 'Liturgical Elements' could have been included in 'Worship and Liturgy'. And at times the dictionary format seems to impose a degree of repetition which has the reader hopping here and there through the book. So, there is a general article on 'Christology' as well as separate treatments of 'Christ', 'Logos', 'Christology', 'Lord' and 'Son of God'. Similarly there is an article on the book of Revelation and additional articles on 'Bowls', 'Scrolls and Seals', and 'Trumpets', as well as one entitled 'Beasts, Dragon, Sea Conflict'. The last named is indeed very interesting, although the author fails to define the meaning of Satan's expulsion from heaven by Michael.

Third, while according to the flyleaf the contributors are evangelical, some of the positions espoused may surprise those accustomed to a more traditional understanding of that term. Thus the article on 2 Peter by Richard Bauckham affirms the epistle's pseudepigraphical nature, and that on pseudepigraphy itself, written by J.D.G. Dunn, argues for the existence of 'canonical pseudepigraphy: a practice of 'continuing and developing a literary tradition, begun by an authoritative figure in the past, after his

death'. In a further article, 'Pauline Legacy and School', Dunn maintains Pauline authorship of Colossians but accepts the scholarly consensus that Ephesians was written by 'a disciple of Paul to preserve the heritage of Paul in a form that was of general rather than specific use'. In discussing the Pastoral epistles, far from accepting Pauline authorship, Dunn suggests that 'the Pauline legacy is beginning to be decisively eroded'. However, Michaels maintains the Petrine authorship of I Peter, and Webb that Jude, probably the brother of Christ, wrote the epistle attributed to him. The idea that some New Testament writings may have been pseudepigraphical has traditionally been rejected among evangelicals on the very reasonable grounds that it would raise serious doubts about the truthfulness of the Scriptures. For the present reviewer it is still difficult to reconcile the notion of pseudepigraphy with a high view of the Scriptures' truthfulness.

Fourth, the book responds to certain modern questions. Thus, not just one but two long articles on the gender issue, 'Woman and Man' and 'Women in the Early Church', indicate one of the editors' preoccupations. Both of them take what is, for a reference work of this nature, a surprisingly tendentious approach to the issues under discussion, which diminishes their value as balanced appraisals of a contentious area. If two articles on the subject were really necessary, the editors might at least have invited authors of differing persuasions on the issue to submit them. Typical of the tenor of the articles is the following question begging statement made in 'Woman and Man': 'The step from Jesus' practices to first-century epistles containing household codes was a large one, but it was a cultural accommodation that most early Christians apparently felt necessary in order to survive in a hostile environment.'

Fifth, the extension of the book's coverage beyond the canon of the New Testament does raise disturbing questions. The editors point out that 'Christian thinking did not cease with the last New Testament book, and it developed in those writings usually called the apostolic fathers'. This would of course be true right up to the twentieth century: Christian thinking has not ceased yet. However, the decision to continue beyond the canonical writings and to do so

on the basis stated, does in fact tend to blur the distinction between the canonical and the non-canonical writings (especially in view of the approach taken to the issue of pseudepigrapha), notwithstanding the rather weak disclaimer: 'the term, *Developments*, is not intended to blur the line of demarcation the church has accepted (since Athanasius) between canonical and non-canonical'. Thus in some discussions references to canonical and to non-canonical writings are mixed together, as if they were all of equal status.

This is certainly a very valuable and useful resource. It will no doubt be an essential work of reference, useful both for what it has to say about the later New Testament writings and beyond, and for what it reveals of contemporary scholarly preoccupations. However, it should be used with some caution.

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