

BOOK REVIEWS

Diane B. Stinton

*Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary
African Christology*

Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004, 303 pp, US\$25

Stinton's book represents a major contribution to the study of current African Christologies. Stinton is professor of theology at Daystar University, Nairobi, and her book is the result of her doctoral work at the University of Edinburgh. The research behind the book is outstanding. Stinton combines a thorough understanding of published studies of African Christology over the past half-century with current ethnographic research in Kenya, Uganda, and Ghana. To this she has added a set of in-depth interviews with leading African Christological theologians (Bujo, Ela, Mugambi, Nasimiyu, Oduyoye, and Pobee). Though the ethnographic research is limited to three English-speaking countries in East and West Africa, the inclusion of findings from focus groups and participant observation ensure that this is not simply a survey of what the professional theologians are saying; rather it is thorough study of what Africans of many social and educational contexts are thinking and saying about Jesus. The interview excerpts she has chosen to include are colorful and brilliantly illustrate her generalizations. She deeply appreciates the importance of theologizing in the vernacular, and she brings an often overlooked awareness of women's perspectives of Jesus.

Stinton begins her presentation with a historical survey of the development of Christologies in Africa. She then examines the sources of African Christology, which she identifies as the Bible and other Christian tradition, African culture, and African religions and culture. The heart of the book is her analysis of four over-arching images of how Jesus is understood by African Christians: as Life-giver (including Healer), Mediator (including Ancestor), Loved one (including Family member and

Friend), and Leader (including King or Chief). Her understanding and explanation of how Africans understand Jesus is clear and comprehensive, though occasionally her categorizations appear forced. Though she is primarily descriptive of how African Christians understand the person of Jesus Christ in their lives, she also provides a measure of evaluation, her primary criteria being whether or not Jesus is “significant to life in Africa today” (222).

Stinton’s evaluation might have been stronger had she taken more into consideration the degree to which the most widely held images of Jesus correspond to Biblical images of Jesus, though she does emphasize the importance of Scripture controlling Christological images. Her own sympathies are clearly with a Christology of social engagement, and she emphasizes relevance and innovation as primary values in theological thinking. Besides providing an excellent study of the state of Christological thinking in Africa today, the book is valuable as a source for potential case studies in contextual theology. In places the book still reads like a doctoral dissertation (with appropriate “dissertation-ese”), but this does not detract from its readability, partially because of the excellent chapter and section summaries. This book is highly recommended for anyone who wishes to become acquainted with the state of Christology in Africa, for theological libraries throughout Africa, as a textbook for graduate level courses on Christology in the African context, and as a primary resource for anyone teaching Christology in Africa.

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Damtew Teferra and Philip G. Altbach, editors
***African Higher Education: An International
Reference Handbook***

Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2003. 723 pp.
hb, f78

This impressive work of reference is a fruit of the African Higher Education Project at the Centre for International Higher Education, Boston College, USA. Both editors, Damtew Teferra and Philip G. Altbach, work as co-directors there. The other contributors, 76 in number, are researchers and administrators of higher education, coming from Africa and the West, mainly US.

In a few years time we have seen a number of studies addressing various aspects of higher education in Africa. One example is Ajayi, Goma and Johnson's *The African Experience with Higher Education* (Accra 1996), which outlines important aspects of higher education in Africa from historical perspective. Another example is the Association of African Universities' *Guide to Higher Education in African* (New York 2002), which surveys university systems and individual state universities, country by country. The present volume is an important addition to these two. Its general part (chs. 1-13, pp. 3-148: "Themes") has a wider and deeper approach to the current challenges of higher education in Africa than does Ajayi et al, and its more special part (chs. 14-65, pp. 151-648": "Countries") offers other kinds of analyses than that provided by the Association of African Universities (2002)

It is for obvious reasons hardly possible to give a fair presentation of the wealth of knowledge found in this volume. Its first part includes separate chapters on topics like the development of higher education in Africa, university governance and university-state, financing and economics of higher education in Africa, private higher education in Africa, foreign aid financing of higher education in Africa, massification and future trends in African higher education, women in universities,

tertiary distance education, the language predicament in African universities, student activism in African higher education, scientific communication and research in African universities, and African higher education in relation to the world. The second part then goes through all 52 countries, discussing historical patterns (a little) and contemporary challenges (much more). The volume concludes with two indices (themes/countries and institutions) and two bibliographies. The two latter are organized according to nation and region; one lists 914 articles and books on higher education in African, the other lists another 301 [sic] doctoral dissertations on the same topic.

This volume will for many year to come be an indispensable source and discussion partner for anyone engaged in research on higher education in Africa. But also the general practitioner will find a lot of useful information here – and that include those of us who are responsible for the running of theological institutions of various kinds. The most important thing is of course the documentation of the simple fact that there is no such thing as an “African” way of solving the problems of higher education! The challenges of Namibia and Nigeria are not the same, and neither are those of Madagascar and Mali. The historical backgrounds, the challenges, and the experiences all differ and so indeed do the solutions.

Nevertheless, two things should especially be notices. First, the volume has a generally positive approach to private institutions of higher education. In addition to a separate chapter in the first part addressing this topic (ch. 5, pp. 53-60), many of the country entries (chs. 14-65, pp. 151-648) do the same. It is here repeatedly said that the private institutions offer valuable additions on study programs of state institutions, and that due to their relatively small size they may be able to attract new ideas and create new programs more rapidly than the state colossuses are able. Still, some of their problems are also highlighted. For example, the “for-profit-institutions” may be forces to accept students with low qualifications whereas the “not-for-profit-institutions”, which are often affiliated to some religious body, may tend to value the religious affiliation of the employees higher than their professional competence. However, as theological institutions generally are of the “not-for-profit” type, the description of the private institutions as having few full-time academic staff is hardly

appropriate for them to rely on poorly paid part-time staff coming in from state universities.

Secondly, and more directly related to the problems facing theological institutions of higher education, the volume shows no interest in the difference of approach to theological and religious studies generally evident between Anglophone Africa and francophone Africa. Some of the AJET readership will be familiar with the problem in terms of the different possibilities of securing state accreditation instead in such respective regions. In the present volume the problem surfaces frequently; however, without being directly addressed. A comparison of the chapters on Kenya and Madagascar may illustrate this. The Kenya chapter (pp.359-371) lists by name all thirteen private universities, including state accredited ones. The Madagascar chapter (pp.403-413) simply says that there are some religious seminaries for the training of clergy without including these seminaries in the general discussion. The different approaches to theological and religious studies in these two chapters reflect a much deeper problem than a difference of authors. Rather, it reflects a general marginalization of theological and religious studies in the academia of francophone Africa. This is a problem that ought to be explicitly addressed.

In conclusion, it must be said that this volume is an extremely important contribution to the understanding of higher education in Africa. The price will obviously prevent many potential readers from obtaining a copy. Nevertheless, it deserves to be familiar with the leadership circles of theological education in Africa. What is more, its challenges deserve to be met with more research on the role of theological and religious studies within society and academia in Africa. In spite of the impressive number of 301 doctoral dissertations on questions related to higher education in Africa, there should be room for a few more relating to theological and religious studies programs on the continent especially in light of the importance of religion in African society.

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Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder
***Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission
for Today***

Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004. 488 pp. with index. US\$30

Bevans and Schroeder are to be congratulated for developing a text that takes its place beside David Bosch's *Transforming Mission* as one of the most important of contemporary missiology texts. Sweeping in scope, irenic in tone, it covers the breadth of mission history and theology in readable fashion. The foundation the authors lay to build their theology of mission – that of prophetic dialogue – is astonishing in its depth and clarity.

Bevans and Schroeder build their theological case by examining six theological constants, “doctrinal themes to which the church must be faithful at every boundary crossing and in every context” (p.2). These themes are Christology, ecclesiology, eschatology, salvation, anthropology and culture. To make their case, they trace these six constants through the history of the church using a typology of three streams of theological development set out by Justo Gonzalez in *Christian Thought Revisited*. The streams of missional theology they use to follow through the history of the church are 1) conservatives, called Type A and characterized by the word “Law”; 2) liberals, called Type B and characterized by the word “Truth”; and 3) radicals/liberationists, called Type C and characterized by the word “History.” As a foundation for their mission theology, the six “constants” are traced through the lens of typologies throughout six historical periods of the church. This analysis sets the stage for the discussion in the final section, in which they analyze each stream in contemporary mission theology and propose a synthetic model of prophetic dialogue built largely on Gonzalez’ second and third theological streams.

Several elements of this work are outstanding. First is the depth of the presentation of Roman Catholic, Orthodox, conciliar and evangelical

Protestant perspectives – a feature unique to this text. Bevan and Schroeder make entire realms of theology accessible to the reader in lucid and interesting prose. Second, while they note that the breadth of their discussion prohibits anything but caricatures of each stream, I felt that in many ways they captured all three streams in admirable fashion. Persons representing each stream will find elements that they will quibble over, but by-and-large most would agree that Bevans and Schroeder have fairly presented the perspectives. Third is the irenic tone of the book. While the authors are clear from the outset which stream they favor (Stream C), they are careful to frame what they consider the strengths of each stream in their discussion without building straw figures in the process. While I found the stream I represent (Stream A) comprised of several historical figures and perspectives that I found strange, the broad brushstrokes still painted a reasonably accurate picture. Third, and finally, they purposefully work hard to incorporate insights and discussion from the elements of the church that are frequently overlooked, including not just African, Asian, and Latin American perspectives, but also perspectives from the early church that were ultimately judged to be heretical (e.g. Nestorians). This is perhaps one of the most important contributions of the for readers in Africa.

One question that must be asked of the text is a distinctly post-modern one. Do we really learn more about 20 centuries of mission theology or more about the 20th century spin that Bevans and Schroeder (and Gonzalez) put on it through the paradigm they use? For example, do we really see a stream of radical/liberation theology from Antioch through Irenaeus to the present day? Or are the authors just re-reading theology in a way that makes sense to contemporary ideologies?

All in all, however, Bevans and Schroeder are to be congratulated for developing a text that will almost certainly take its place beside David Bosch's *Transforming Mission* as one of the most significant texts on contemporary missiology. This book deserves a place on every theological library shelf, and use as a textbook for schools that offer courses in mission theology.