

BOOK REVIEWS

Steven A. Hardy

***Excellence in Theological Education:
Effective Training for Church Leaders***

Edenvale RSA: SIM, 2007

[order from: SIM, P O Box 4163, 1610 Edenvale, South
Africa; US\$10 per copy plus shipping]

In his preface Steve Hardy explains that his purpose in writing this book is “to help theological school leadership, especially within the non-Western world, to affirm the excellence of their training institutions, and where excellence may be lacking, to discover ideas that will strengthen the quality of what they have.”

The author is well-qualified to write on theological education in the non-Western world. He has three decades of experience as a theological educator in Ethiopia, Mozambique, South Africa and Brazil. In addition he has visited over a hundred theological training institutions throughout the non-Western world while serving as a consultant with Overseas Council International (OCI). Presently he is the international advisor for theological education for the mission SIM, and senior consultant for the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE). He writes, therefore, out of a wealth of personal experience both as a teacher and as a trainer of teachers.

I found the book to be very insightful and thought provoking. Hardy does an excellent job of addressing many of the key issues that theological schools face. He devotes one chapter each to a wide range of topics, including: leadership, strategic planning, administration, curriculum, teachers, facilities, libraries, fund raising, extended training, evaluation and renewal. The book particularly accents the strategic role that theological schools can play in equipping present and future leaders for work within the Kingdom of God. Hardy writes, “If we perceive leadership as primarily a

functional role into which most of our graduates will someday step, our training efforts should focus on providing practical skill, tools and resources to help the person lead well.”

I appreciate how the author stresses character development as one of main tasks of theological education. Hardy expresses it this way: “The primary task of theological education is to shape the lives of those who are followers of Jesus so that they can be used by God as leaders and influencers for the good of His Kingdom. Character matters, which is why leaders of leadership training programs primarily ‘teach’ by who they are.”

I also appreciate Hardy’s encouragement for individual schools to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their programmes in light of their mission statements. By doing this they will be able to “clarify the task of strategic planning” and “give impetus to making the right kinds of changes happen.”

My favourite chapter is entitled “Excellence in Teachers.” Hardy writes, “We need those who know their subject matter well and who model what they know.” He goes on to say, “We aren’t helped by having people on staff with advanced degrees and lots of knowledge if what they know can’t be communicated coherently at the level of the students.” He emphasizes that teachers need to keep on learning how to do a better job of teaching. “An adequate teaching faculty is composed of those who constantly learn new things by listening and observing, with an internal commitment to keep on growing and to do things even better.” “The best teachers,” he says, “are those who keep on learning.”

Another contribution of Hardy’s book is his challenge to theological schools to offer continuing education for their graduates. He writes, “We can offer our graduates seminars and workshops on topics that will sharpen their ministry skills. We can strengthen their relations with other graduates as they are all invited back to campus at least one a year for celebrations of special events, such as graduation or a week of spiritual emphasis.” A good example of this is the Alumni Continuing Education Programme at Moffat Bible College in Kijabe, Kenya. For the past several years, Moffat has

offered annual one week refresher courses for its graduates during times when the college students are on break and the college facilities (e.g. dormitories, library, classrooms, and dining hall) are not being used.

The author challenges those involved in Christian higher education to strive for excellence in our theological colleges, graduate schools, and seminaries. Hardy emphasizes that theological institutions at every level need to have mission statements and curricula that are rooted in reality and are contextually appropriate. One of the major themes running throughout the book is "Excellence in education starts with real people who are being equipped for real ministries."

Each chapter ends with a list of thought-provoking discussion questions, and a "Suggestions for Further Reading" section. There Hardy provides a bibliography of resources and other reading materials that are related to the content of the chapter. I especially liked the illustrations and anecdotes that Hardy includes throughout the book. They help to illuminate his points and make the reading of the book very enjoyable. In fact, my only criticism of this book is that I wish the author had included even more illustrations from real life situations.

Although the book is written primarily with administrators in mind, I believe it would be a very beneficial exercise for faculty members and administrators alike to read the book and meet together periodically as a group to discuss the questions at the end of each of the twelve chapters. The questions will stimulate much good discussion and help put the educational principles into practice that Hardy is so helpfully advocating.

In conclusion, I highly recommend this book especially to administrators and faculty members of theological institutions in the non-Western world. Reading and discussing the book will have a lasting impact.

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Laurenti Magesa

***Anatomy of Inculturation: Transforming
the Church in Africa***

Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 2004

ISBN 9966-21-939-0 (Nairobi) edition. 312 pages, US\$10,
[also Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004. \$28]

Laurenti Magesa is a Roman Catholic parish priest in Tanzania, already well known as author of *African Religion: the Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (1997). The present volume, written primarily from a Catholic perspective, is a lengthy treatment of inculturation, which he defines as the 'the process whereby the faith already embodied in one culture encounters another culture' (5). It is, he says, a 'primarily instinctive and popular' process, but 'can also be promoted and enhanced by institutional study and direction.' It involves risk, and vital aspects of the message may be lost, but it is nevertheless vital to effective communication.

The book is divided into three sections. In the first Magesa looks at the way in which a sample of people in churches in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda understand and respond to the notion of inculturation. A chapter is devoted to each country, but these chapters are not entirely parallel in either structure or content. The research was carried out through assistants and drew mainly from Catholics, although in the chapter on Kenya members of an African Initiated Church were also consulted. Magesa identifies popular understandings of inculturation with some reference to the possibly divergent attitudes of different groups—in Uganda interviews were mainly with women; plus he notes areas where people felt that inculturation was needed. At the end of the section he draws no overall conclusions from this research.

In the second part of his book Magesa considers the process of inculturation in the Bible and the early course of Christian history. The critical issue in any such discussion is the way in which the author defines the relationship between gospel and culture. Magesa argues that as Christian faith and church encounter new cultures they transform them but are also transformed in the process, and subsequent discussion illuminates his understanding of the way in which that takes place. He finds it exemplified initially in the Old Testament, where Israel 'intuitively incorporated' elements of the religion of their neighbours into their worship of Yahweh. His discussion suggests a somewhat humanistic evolutionary approach to Old Testament revelation: thus, monotheism is 'a culmination of historical process ... the end result of a long development of cultural-religious contact between Israel and its environs in terms of Israel's adoption and rejection of some "foreign" notions of God' (90). In the same way there are grounds for seeing the 'current process of cultural-historical re-evaluation in Africa as the interpretation of and faithful response to God's continuing self-revelation in the African historical experience' (93). As this quotation suggests, Magesa has a high view of culture, which comes particularly into focus in chapter 9, 'The Church in Mission'. Here he claims that 'both the African identity and the gospel identity possess within them an irreducible divine character because both enjoy divine origin ... both are divine in terms of their positive inner values' (142). Magesa thereby rejects the notion that culture is essentially human and therefore contingent. He refers to 'the Word in the gospel' and 'the Word in a culture': 'the revelation of God in the Christian scriptures meets the God who is already present in the values of a culture.' There may be some subtle qualification of this stance when he refers to '*positive* [my emphasis] African traditional religious particularities and identities', which would seem to imply that there are also negative ones, thus raising the issue of the criteria by which they might be distinguished, and perhaps allowing a determinative role for the gospel. However, for Magesa the gospel may also have less than positive elements, since he speaks of '*mutual* [my emphasis] correction and adjustment' between gospel and culture, and equates the Bible and ATR as both 'more or less imperfect expressions of the unfathomable mystery of God' (147). It is therefore no surprise that he speaks positively of syncretism (154), in the case, for example, of a "'staunch Catholic"' who along with family and friends, and 'in the context

of their Christian faith' (90), offered a sacrifice to appease a deceased wife who was troubling his dreams.

In the final section Mageša considers areas within current Catholic Church life where inculturation needs to take place, and makes his own proposals to that end. Much space is given to questions of liturgy and ritual, along with some consideration of experimentation going on in Catholic churches, and reflection on pastoral issues including that of maintaining unity in the context of diversity.

Given its approach to Scripture and culture, *Anatomy of Inculturation* will offer little to evangelicals looking at similar issues, apart from an awareness of some current Catholic thinking. Even in that respect the general approach is not strikingly different from that of others—if perhaps developed somewhat more fully. The principal original element would be the research into attitudes towards inculturation in some East African countries.

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Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology

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