

Book Reviews

The Unquestionable Right to be Free: Black Theology from South Africa, Itumeling J. Mosala, and Buti Tihagale, eds, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1986, pp. xviii, 206.

Ten years on from the publication of the first black theology book by Black African theologians in South Africa (which was banned by the government), comes this collection of historical and theological essays, which reflect on developments over the last decade. But more than this, each contributor offers direction to the process of writing a theology relevant to the South Africa struggle. There is the awareness that black theology must interact with, not only history and the liberation struggle, but also with African traditional religions, the African Independent churches, the Black Consciousness movement, Marxism, feminism, and, not least of all, the Bible. Various contributors interact with each of these factors.

The first essay in the book, by Lebamang Sebidi, looks at the four main phases of the black struggle, from two conflicting perspectives of analysis – racial ideology, and the class analyst's position. In many ways, this was the most stimulating essay in the book. He shows that there is no “ideological difference” between the older ANC strategists and the white regime, against which they persistently fought. Recognition must now be given to the fact that the black people in South Africa suffer a double bondage – racial oppression and economic exploitation. “Racial capitalism is the name of the game”, and black theologians must assist in the writing (and righting!) of a strategy for action which fits.

Many readers, I suspect, will be interested in how these theologians respond to the violent response, which has taken root, in the struggle for liberation. After noting the “hard sayings” of Jesus about loving our enemies, Buti Tihagale, who specifically addresses this issue, observes that the story of Jesus is a story of socio-religious, and political, subversion. So, without condoning violence, Tihagale parallels the “intensive assault on the apartheid institution”, with “the tradition of subversion, modelled on the person of Christ”, as a necessary part of establishing justice and peace.

How can this book assist the theological process in Melanesia? The Black South African church, like the Melanesian church, is confronted with the need to show the relevance of the gospel for people handicapped in their thinking by imported theologies and ideologies. And, like South Africa, the recent history of the Pacific region also calls the church to stand against “racial capitalism”, even if it is not the same “African” monster. This book, then, is recommended for its showing the affinity we have with our African brothers and sisters, in addressing the problems of our broken world, with the radicalism, and the love, of Jesus.

*Mark Brimblecombe
Christian Leaders' Training College.*

Can Spirituality Be Taught?, Jill Robson and David Lonsdale, eds, [Place of publication unknown]: Way Publications, 1989.

If spiritual growth truly means learning to live increasingly in response to the Spirit of God, this is a form of life, which, at least potentially, affects every dimension of personal and communal living.

The papers of this collection were written by members of a working party on the teaching of spirituality. The editors describe the contributors as “weighted in the Anglican and Roman Catholic direction”, but hope that the variety of views expressed, even within that circumscribed range, will facilitate dialogue and discussion. They claim that spirituality is, by its nature, “context-laden”, and the papers, both descriptive and analytical, reflect the personal experience of their writers.

The papers acknowledge a debt to set forms from the past, yet seek refreshment from the spontaneity of direct, everyday experience. So, when reflecting on his own experience of being spiritually “formed”, James Woodward first acknowledges the value of regular communion, and daily prayers, as “bringing-together” times, and then goes on to say: “I have a feeling that authentic spirituality happens unexpectedly, indirectly, in a non-authoritarian, “set” way: for example, listening to a piece of music, a Sunday afternoon walk, etc.” In itself, such a statement is one-sided, but it does remind us that our spirituality is, at once, unique to ourselves, yet in touch with what is common to all, unfettered, yet