

Book Review

History of the World Christian Movement, Volume 1: Earliest Christianity to 1453, Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 10545, USA, 2001, Paperback, Pp xiv + 517

“Orbis Books”, known for supporting emergent theologies and publishing thoughts of contemporary theologians, comes out now and then with books of a different nature. “History of the World Christian movement” is one such book concentrating on the background history of different Christian traditions of the world. Generally speaking, the shortcoming of any book on the history of the church institutions is that it will focus mainly on the faith of the author or of the institutions that publishes the book. Contrary to this the publisher has worked hard to eliest the collaborat so many scholars, institutions, historians, resources, coming from all corners of the six continents and thereby bring out a comprehensive background history of the Christian churches in this whole world (*page viii-x*). It is also an interesting feature for a research student since the authors in their acknowledgement give the list of all those contributors involved in the formation of this book with the addresses of institutions, universities, and societies that the contributors are associated with (*pages viii-ix*).

It is also very interesting to note that the authors of the book, Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, give a wide spectrum of the setting of the Christian churches around the globe without having biased ideas on any particular Church movement. The very title, “History of Christian Movement” testifies to us that the authors have broad out look on the world Christianity, which actually sprang on the day of the Pentecost in Jerusalem after the ascension of Jesus. The first volume of the book narrates the ups and downs of different Christian churches till 1453 CE, the year the Ottoman dynasty sealed the fate of the Christian churches in Minor Asia minor and Western Asia once and far all.

The book, like a novel, develops the account of the growth of the Christian churches in the world starting with its hero, Jesus, and his mission, from Galilee (*page 1*). Subsequently, the authors transfer their attention to the movement of Jesus. Thereafter the authors explain the influence of the movement of Jesus on the cultures in the Mediterranean and Mesopotamian areas (*pages 47-98*). The climax, according to the authors is the Church movement surging into the western cultures (*pages 155-256*). The anticlimax is the emergence of Islamic movement in the 7th century in and around Western Asia (*pages 257-288*). There after the authors concentrate for 100 pages mainly on the Christianity of the medieval Europe (*pages 323-439*).

The description in the last two pages of the first volume (*pages 503-504*), concerning the attack of the Ottoman Turks against Constantinople, its fall, the conversion of the great Hagia Sophia in Constantinople into a mosque, almost all the groups of Byzantine Churches, i.e., Serbia, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Greece except Russia in Eastern Europe embracing Islam and the complete wiping out of the Christian movement from the Western Asia and Asia Minor, gives a feeling of the final scene normally provided by the Shakespearean tragedies.

In However, the number of the maps (eight) and the illustrations (twenty two) that the authors give for such a great scope of historical material is very scanty (*Pages 504-506*). While the Christians in the west coast of India (Malabar region) consider themselves as "Thomas Christians" and these traditions having their firm roots from the liturgies of Syria (Edessa), the authors' reluctance to place the origin of Christianity prior to sixteenth century (*page 307*), in spite of the authors discussion on the coming of Thomas to India in the 9th chapter (*pages 93-95*), leads to doubting their faith in the non-written traditions which are very basic for the world Christian movement. The authors are very particular in giving a concise and overall history of the Christian movement from Asia to America covering 1453 years, which in turn checked them not to overstep on specific themes, like the crusades, spiritual and intellectual renewal, and the cultural revolution of Islam in the terrain of Christendom.

All the same, one is able to understand the mind of the authors in exposing the real faces of the Christian churches all over the world till the time the western European churches began their search for a new world. A person who is interested in knowing the background history of different Christian churches and their growth should never miss such book.

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CHRISTIANITY: Essence, History and Future. Hans Kung. New York: Continuum, October 1996, Pp xxvi + 936 + 2 (summary diagrams). \$29.95.

Among the different volumes of theological works of Hans Kung, the genius theologian of this century, this work is outstanding for its clarity and simplicity.

The author is very clear about the basic Christian message. The unshakable faith in the person and cause of Jesus Christ is focused by him as the essence of Christianity. Jesus made the cause of God of Israel his own and envisioned Kingdom as the will of God with a view to human salvation. Jesus is an invitation, call and challenge to individuals and society for a new way of life. Personal discipleship of trusting oneself in Jesus and guiding one's life by it is the only way of being Christian. The ideals of the Sermon on the mount, for example, renounce your right in favour of others, renounce your power at person, the living and normative embodiment of his cause. The book examines the historical paths of the faith in Jesus and points out critically its deviations and reorientations. The author himself compares the historical course with the different curves in the journey of the river. The radical message of the gospel and its challenge to the churches are brought out in the form of six paradigmatic constellations of historical insights of Christian faith and their futuristic orientations. The Jewish Apocalyptic paradigm of the early Christianity explains the free profound and creative features of Christian faith: the

empowerment of Christian communities by Baptism and Eucharist; the life in freedom, equality and sharing; and the hope in the immanent coming of the Lord.

The shift to Ecumenical Hellenistic Paradigm points out the new alternative ways of life such as monasticism, retreat from this world. A renewed ethics of Christians which is different from the passivity, larcenies and cynicism; a renewed spirituality of unity among churches and a renewed spirit of Christian humanity that is to be in peace with world religions and to be in a collaboration of all the people of good will are highlighted as special features.

The third Roman Catholic paradigm of middle ages is, of course, a deviation from the simple and practical discipleship of Christ, in spite of its institutional power in establishing continuity in the Christian society. Pope-Emperor, Canon Law and scholasticism were the powerful forces that replaced gospel and its values. In this situation, the author portrays Francis Assisi as a man who gives a reorientation to the faith of the gospel. In the theological level, the author speaks of the shift in the thinking of Thomas Aquinas, a shift towards empirical, rational and scientific research.

The Protestant Evangelical paradigm is a return to the gospel on its broader sense. God is understood as a God for us; faith is seen as a total surrender to the whole person of God and the church is seen as the community of equal and the sacraments are seen as signs of trusting faith in the gracious God. It is interesting to note the growth of Anglican Churches as the combination of the above two models.

The fifth one is the paradigm of modernity orientated in reason and progress. It is interested in the human nature which is common to all. Self – determination of an individual person is the basis for human existence. Human right to life, freedom and property are portrayed as primary concerns of human life. Social and political emancipation of citizens against the religious dependence are the goals of this thinking pattern and secularization becomes the norm of life. Theology has to go against the present currents of the day. Religious experience becomes the starting point of theology and the consciousness of our redemption through

Christ is considered as the peak religious experience. The author points out the historical and critical method of Friedrich Schleiermacher as a model in the theological thinking of this epoch.

The ecumenical paradigm of post modernity is envisioned as the paradigm of Christian faith in the twentieth century. The crisis of modernity is well explained by the author. The understanding of reason, progress and nationality undergoes a tremendous change in the post modern are. The new awareness of ecological crisis, rights of women, distributive justice and the religious power of the subaltern people have called for a basic consensus in the value pattern of life. In this situation, the author wants to give a new orientation for Christian faith. The orthodox, catholic and evangelical vision of Christian faith has to discover the global ethics of human convictions through shared values in the pluralistic society.

This book gives a basic understanding of Christianity to every reader. The historical preciseness and critical vision of the author makes the book an encyclopedia of theology. The Questions are not only thought provoking, they provide a method to interpret the historical events of the day. The faith conviction of the author is tremendous. The author leads not only the churches, but the whole world of religions to a future based on global convictions. This book is highly recommended as a text book for the students of theology. The author wishes to write another volume in expressing his convictions in a concrete way. While appreciating the masterpiece of theology for its holistic and critical approach, we recommend everyone to cherish its richness and make it one in the personal library.

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Common Objects of Love: Moral Reflection and the Shaping of Community. Oliver O'Donovan. Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002. pp. viii + 72, \$ 15.00.

This book contains three lectures delivered at Calvin College and Seminary in 2001 (after the events of September 11, 2001) in honour of Dr. Henry J. Stob d. 1996 (The 2001 stob lectures).

Starting from the Aristotelian distinction between theoretical reason and practical reason (Plato propounded a threefold division of reason – logic, ethics and physics) O'Donovan teaches how to think from truths of Christian faith to conclusions in Christian action. There are issues that do not directly affect the students of moral reflection and we cannot undo the decisions already taken in the past. St. Augustine's proposition that we know only as we love summarizes his stand. The first lecture affirms that the goods we love are goods common to all, and we love them properly as our own goods only as we understand that they are everybody else'. St. Augustine defines people as "a gathered multitude of rational beings united by agreeing to share the things they love" (a multitude united in association by a common sense of right and a community of interest – Cicero). One can see the three titles of the lectures – Objects of Love, Agreement to share and A Multitude of Rational Beings United – enshrined in this definition. Loving knowledge of the world is the ground on which we deliberate and as individuals and as communities.

The second lecture states that community is built upon the common objects of love and the essence of community is "communication", the exercise of sharing things or transmitting them among people. While in the narration of history and in varied forms of art the transcendental representations lead to common understanding of significance, the competition and plurality cannot achieve that representation. In neoplatonic terms redemption is seen as universal world – community without barriers. The author remarks that the example of the Good Samaritan is uncommon. Kingdom of Heaven is a real community subject only to God and gathered around Jesus Christ, very God and very man, stripping away all barriers.

The church cannot dispense with all representations neither can it encourage an unlimited representational chaos. Publicity is the dominant feature of the modern society; it embraces news, advertising and entertainment. The political theology afraid of the excess of authority

opts for liberal minimalism. What should be noted is that the authoritarian regimes and political ideology as oppressive are results not of excessive authority but of perversion of authority. In conclusion the author envisions a visible sign of the Kingdom of God in the community that is alert, patient and worshipping.

As the author himself states, "the journey of thought that is undertaken in these lectures does not circle comfortably around its subject like a pleasant afternoon stroll, but sets out for a far country" (1). The two world religions that proclaimed the universal reign of God on earth have leaped across the borders of political organization and radicalized their universalizing tendencies. This explains the traumatic events of September 11, 2001.

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