

contribution this book makes. So often we see imbalance to one side or the other. This book will not accept an "either/or" answer but holds consistently and tenaciously to the "both/and" solution.

The book is remarkably unified and cohesive for a ten-contributor volume. The dual questions answered by each author create a sense of continuity; chapter length is uniform. For these reasons I give the editors high marks.

Most intriguing to me were the African chapters by Tokunboh Adeyemo and Edward John Osei-Bonsu. Adeyemo's explanation of the way Africans perceive God and Osei-Bonsu's distinction between traditional and indigenous religions were particularly insightful. I also found Grace Y. May's explanation of why it is hard for the Chinese to grasp God's grace very helpful. People attempting to communicate the gospel to these cultures will find them must reading.

One is led to ask at the end of each chapter, What does this all mean for practical communication, ministry, and mission to these people? While some hints are given, and Chuang (chap. 9) does speak in conclusion of missiological questions, by and large this issue is not discussed in a systematic way. While comprehensive answers may not be possible, suggestions by the authors would have been welcome. I wish the Spencers had added this issue as the subject of a third question to the original two questions that gave shape to the book.

Classes in non-Western theology and contextualization would find this book helpful. Even classes in theology of mission would find its insights valuable. As a missiologist, however, I see a particular use for this work. I am going to give a copy to the theology department of my seminary. Many books written from a mission or global perspective deal either superficially with theology or zero in on specific issues of theology that culture makes prominent. This book, on the other hand, deals thoughtfully and cross-culturally with one of the most basic issues of theology—What is God like?

It is high time Western theology considers such questions in a global context. In today's world, speaking about God only in the context of the Western theological tradition is inadequate and unfair. I see this book, edited by a theologian and a NT scholar, as a hand across the gulf to begin or nurture the cross-disciplinary dialogue which desperately needs to take place if the Western church wants to truly be part of a world Christianity.

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Thangaraj, M. Thomas. *The Common Task: A Theology of Christian Mission*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999. 167 pp. Paperback, \$22.00.

Thangaraj is a fourth-generation Christian from India. He is currently the D.W. and Ruth Brooks Associate Professor of World Christianity at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, in Atlanta, Georgia. He is the author of two other books relating to Indian Christianity in an interfaith context, *The Crucified Guru: An Experiment in Cross-Cultural Christology* and *Relating to People of Other Religions*.

In the 1960s Marshall McLuhan introduced us to the "Global Village." At the advent of the twenty-first century we have moved to the period of

“Globalization.” This has occasioned new social realities that have serious implications for the practice of Christian mission. One of these is the largest mass migration, perhaps in human history, transforming distant people from the pages of *National Geographic* to next-door neighbors.

The death of political colonialism has deprived Christian mission of its clout as partner of that form of power. New Christian missionaries depend upon more internal forms of superior faith. The rise of urban secularism, permeating almost all cultures, raises new questions that make the old answers unacceptable and demand new answers. It is these new realities that Thangaraj addresses directly and indirectly.

In a time when our attention is being drawn to the 10/40 Window and the secular populations of Europe and America, Thangaraj offers a fresh approach. In the setting of a globally widening circle of discussion and a crisis of confidence, Thangaraj asks, “What common ground do we have?” He then dismisses the easier and shallower answers that would make “pre-Christians” or “hidden Christians” (cf. Karl Rahner) of our Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, and secular neighbors. His answer is simple: our common humanity.

He would enlist people of differing religious or nonreligious orientations in a discussion of *missio humanitatis*. “What I have shown through these affirmations is simply this: While there is, in fact, a multiplicity of understandings of the human, we can recognize the interconnectedness of these differing views at the level of self-consciousness, historicity and ecological interdependence. Such a recognition makes it possible to engage in a conversation toward developing a common understanding of *missio humanitatis* . . . to engage in a conversation on the mission of humanity” (45).

In an age notorious for social balkanization or fragmentation, this offers a unique base for discussing the human purpose or mission and what it means to be responsible members of this purpose or mission. But the admitted weakness of the concept is that it is almost totally academic. It presupposes the goodwill and responsible self among neo-Nazis, the Taliban, and the U.S. Congress.

Thangaraj leans on the concepts of solidarity and mutuality to call for an uprising against the demonic in sociopolitical realities. At the close of the second chapter Thangaraj states, “*The mission of humanity is an act of taking responsibility in a mode of solidarity, shot through with a spirit of mutuality*” (58, italics original). This, he notes, is only the beginning, the setting for a new mission activity. “Though the kind of *missio humanitatis* that I have outlined may assist us in engaging in conversation with a wide variety of people, it does not satisfy fully the demands of a Christian theology of mission. It offers only a setting in which we may bring into view our specifically Christian theological orientation” (61). From this setting Thangaraj moves on to explore the mission of God, the mission of Christ, and finally the mission of the church under the rubrics of cruciform responsibility, liberative solidarity, and eschatological mutuality.

Of interest is the author’s concept of God’s responsibility being *with* the other rather than *for* the other. This is God’s “liberative solidarity” with all of his people, an incarnational perspective (John 1:14) in which we are invited to participate (Matt 25:35, 36). This leads Thangaraj to an appreciative discussion of

God's "preferential option for the poor," as an act of compassionate solidarity. The eschatological mutuality "invites us to join the groaning of the whole creation toward the day of freedom and liberation" (75).

Chapter 4, "Issues in Mission," attempts to take the reader beyond mission as evangelism and mission as conversion to mission as transformation, particularly social transformation, and mission as dialogue or discussion. Evangelical readers will be suspicious of this, but the author appears to be working toward a slower, deeper process that ultimately incorporates evangelism and conversion without the negative, colonial, and oppressive features that are an obvious affront to Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists. This affront was recently demonstrated by Hindu outrage toward an evangelical Thirty-Day Prayer Calendar for the conversion of Hindus.

Chapter 5 takes a brief look at eight models of mission as kerygmatic presence, martyrdom, political expansion, monastic service, conversion of the heathen, mission societies, education, and joint action for justice and peace. The final model of joint action clearly leads into Thangaraj's own model of dialogue based on a *missio humanitatis*.

Chapter 6 will be a disappointment to conservative readers. Particularly disappointing to this reviewer was Thangaraj's insistence that the central motif for the history of Israel was freedom from bondage. This waters down their place in God's mission. By focusing instead on the movement from Egypt to Canaan, their inheritance of the Promised Land, and the mission of Israel as a geographically-centered people who could serve as a living advertisement of God's mission (*missio Dei*), Thangaraj would have strengthened his book. The biblical focus, this reviewer holds, is on *freedom for* rather than simply nondirective freedom. The second part of chapter 6 looks briefly and ineffectively at "difficult texts," particularly John 14:6 and Acts 4:12. The final chapter explores motivating factors for mission and ends with excellent practical suggestions for motivating and mobilizing local congregations for mission.

Thangaraj writes from a moderately liberal theological perspective that will bother more conservative readers, but it is helpful in that it speaks of mission from a non-Western, Indian context, in which the author is accustomed to living and operating next door to non-Christians, interacting with Hindus, Muslims, and secularists. It is a helpful book that will broaden the perspective and raise the consciousness of seminary and college students as well as mission executives and concerned laypeople.

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BRUCE CAMPBELL MOYER

Vance, Laura Lee. *Seventh-day Adventism in Crisis: Gender and Sectarian Change in an Emerging Religion*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999. x + 259 pages. \$18.95.

A revised (but not updated) edition of the author's 1994 Ph.D. dissertation at Simon Fraser University, this is the first book by Laura Vance, assistant professor of sociology at Georgia Southwestern State University. It offers a balanced treatment of Seventh-day Adventist origins, beliefs, organization, gender issues, and current "crises" within the church. It should be read in tandem with other