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BOOK REVIEWS


In his new book Professor Verstraelen speaks of Christianity with many centres. In so doing he illustrates one of the specific questions, which a World religion (one that has transcended its traditional ethnic, cultural and linguistic context and has become a global religious movement) poses to Religious Studies.

Take the study of Islam for example. The attempts by Orientalists to identify the Arabic roots of that World religion have to be supplemented by specific studies of Islam in Africa or Europe, if we want to achieve a relevant understanding of what Islam is today. The same holds true for Christianity, though the geographical terms of reference differ. At the University of Zimbabwe, therefore, Christianity and Islam in Africa is taught parallel to courses on Christianity and Islamic History and Thought in their respective historical contexts.

In the study of Christianity in Zimbabwe we are accustomed to a distinction between Mission and Independent Christianity. Mission Christianity is seen to maintain its links to and, perhaps, dependency on its Northern centre. Independent forms of Christianity on the other hand are said to be authentic African attempts to appropriate and articulate the Christian understanding of Life in its fullness.

Like any distinction this, too, can be disputed. If I understand Professor Verstraelen correctly, his plea for a Christianity with many centres contains a more relevant alternative. In institutional terms centres such as the Vatican in Rome, the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva or the US Centre for World Mission in Passadena are in the North. At the level of spirituality and theological reflection, however, the initiative has been taken over by the Church — i.e. both Mission and Independent Christianity — in the South, where new central themes and new institutional centres evolve.

Professor Verstraelen's particular scholarly contribution in his new book is his energetic attempt to identify and formulate these new central themes in global Christianity. He speaks of the concern for human and societal transformation in Latin America and the search for relevant spirituality in a multi-religious Asian context. He sees that African Christians contribute to the World Church their profound awareness of the Wholeness of Life. So far Professor Verstraelen concurs with a consensus in contemporary studies in Third World Christianity. His most original contribution is his analysis of the distinct environmental theology from within the Church in Oceania. I miss, though, references to John Garrett's substantial three-volume *Church History of Oceania.*
But this study does not limit itself to the level of descriptive analysis. Professor Verstraelen's main concern is to facilitate what he calls 'Global Intercommunion through Intercontinental Communication'.

*Christianity in a New Key — or in New Keys?* — raises many intriguing questions. One is where the new and more aggressive North American missions, which Paul Gifford studied some years ago, fit into this vision of a global Christianity with many centres. Another is more profound and has to do with hermeneutics. How are these new centres to be identified?

The classical issue of the relation of 'a portion of a text' to 'the text as a whole' returns in any attempt to define what are characteristic features of Christianity — or Islam for that matter — within as well as outside their traditional centres. Handling this issue Professor Verstraelen moves in the direction of defining main themes or core-motifs in different contexts, which can enrich each other in an exchange across continental and contextual boundaries. This is a loaded proposition and the purpose of the author had been better served if he had devoted greater attention to this issue of hermeneutics. Instead he moves fast on to resources and techniques for the kind of intercontinental communication which he pleads for.

The matter of interpretation is not just an internal academic issue. It has profound pedagogical implications. When we know what are representative theological concerns in different religious and social environments — and how to get access to them! — it is easier to convey these concerns in another context. Professor Verstraelen shares, of course, this pedagogical concern, as the book is presented as a handbook for 'anyone interested in the significance of Christianity in our world today and tomorrow'. Hopefully the reader will not go astray in the rich collection of loaded quotes and theological variations.

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CARL F. HALLENCREUTZ


This book comprises a collection of papers presented at a workshop on 'Prospects of the Mining Sector in SADCC' held in Lusaka, Zambia, in 1991. It provides a detailed and analytical assessment of the past and present importance of the mining sector in the region and highlights the factors that have negatively affected its performance.

The book proposes that, in the light of the recent demise of apartheid and the birth of the new democratic South Africa, Southern African countries should devise appropriate strategies to make the region's mining
sector more productive and efficient. Among these are the integration of the region's mining economies and the adoption of a common policy on the production and marketing of minerals. The book also recommends that efforts should be made to promote economic diversification in the region in order to lessen Southern Africa's unhealthy dependence on mineral exports, which are an exhaustible resource whose terms of trade are constantly declining.

Measures should also be taken to increase the region's capacity to process minerals into 'intermediate and finished products' and to establish regional producer organisations whose main role would be to 'maintain terms of trade and to husband resources by limiting supply'. Collective efforts to ensure the future prosperity of the mining sector should, however, guard against the danger of the giant economy of South Africa dominating the rest of the countries in the region.

The book should be of great interest to policy makers in Southern Africa since it highlights both the historical and present characteristics of the mining sector in the region, analyses the problems confronting it and the impediments which have prevented it from realising its full potential and makes recommendations about possible future paths of development. It is evident that, with the changed socio-political and economic climate in Southern Africa, following the democratisation of South Africa, the role and focus of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), now the Southern African Development Community (SADC), needs extensive review in order to make it more relevant to the needs of the region.

The book should also be of value to the students of Southern Africa's political economy, not only because it contains a wealth of detail on the nature, volume and character of mining sectors in each of the Southern African countries, but also because it provides a very useful comparative dimension in which developments in each country are seen within the broader regional and global context over time.

What academic researchers will find somewhat disappointing, however, is the total absence of footnotes throughout the book. Researchers who wish to consult the original sources of the statistics, quotations and other pertinent information used in the book thus have no guidance as to where the material came from. They essentially have to take the authors' statements on trust.

Also disconcerting is the failure by the editor to update those sections of the book which had, by 1995, become outdated. One example of this will suffice. On page 4, it is claimed that the only remnant of apartheid's Constellation of States (CONSAS) scheme is the South African Development Bank (SADB), which 'now funds projects in South Africa's Bantustans'! There are also occasions when the present tense is used to refer to
apartheid South Africa's destabilisation of neighbouring countries even though, by 1995, apartheid was no more. These problems arise, of course, out of the fact that the papers incorporated in the book were written several years before 1995.

These minor errors notwithstanding, The Mining Sector is a significant and welcome contribution to Southern African economic discourse and a useful addition to the growing scholarship on the political economy of the region in general and the history of the mining sector in particular.

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A. S. MLAMBO


The author must be congratulated for tackling a task that badly needed attention. The book deals with traditional healing as it relates to children and childhood in Zimbabwe. We knew very little about the role of children in the practice of traditional medicine in Zimbabwe. The first chapter examines the process of acquiring traditional medical knowledge. Like many of us, Professor Reynolds is impressed with the amount of technical and other kinds of knowledge that traditional healers have. On the possession of technical knowledge, she observed that many traditional healers know an impressive amount about flora and fauna. They have a wide range of information and show fine discrimination in their observation and classification of leaves, stems, roots, fruits, flowers and bark. They are able to distinguish plants on the basis of taste, touch, smell and their appearance across the seasons.

The author sought to discover from whom, at what age, with what leeway for innovation, and in accord with what checks and balances traditional healers learn the use of plants, symbolic systems, and social and psychological analysis. The findings are interesting. The author has shown that much of this knowledge is not acquired in adulthood; some children are provided the opportunity and encouragement to acquire specialised skills and information to do with healing.

There are many traditional healers who claim that much of their knowledge is revealed to them in dreams. Chapter 2 traces Zezuru healers' dreams as part of the repertoire available to them for the constitution of self and for the direction of others. In addition she sees the use of dreams as part of their strategy for coping with contingencies of their upbringing. Dreams are also viewed as a part of the description of self and help to make connections between personal problems and the burden of an epoch between the present and the past.
Traditional healers in general played a part during and after Zimbabwe's War of Liberation between 1970 and 1980. Chapter 8 gives an account of the part traditional healers played; it also deals especially with children's suffering and the part they played in the fight for freedom. Many children suffered a great deal during the war; they displayed their distress after the war. The author shows that there was 'more' madness after the war than before. On the part of older people this madness was also due, at least in part, to the fact that many spirits of people who had not been given correct ritual burials or whose deaths resulted from acts of wrongdoing remained unsettled. Traditional healers responded to their need largely by mediating between the spirits and the community. On returning from the war, many men and women, who had fought on either side visited healers to be cleansed. Traditional healers provided opportunities through ritual for reconciliation and the soothing of individual trauma.

Chapter 4 largely deals with the problem of evil with particular reference to the exposure of children to evil. The author also discusses innocence and identity. On the problem of evil the author comes to the conclusion that children learn from adults. She writes:

Bear in mind that while I sat and talked with n'anga or watched them divine, treat patients, collect and prepare medicines, discuss cases, and conduct rituals, children were almost always there—watching, listening, and sometimes participating. Children are aware of their elders' ideas of the canker of evil and they collect their own stock of lore about evil.

The last chapter examines in more detail the learning process in the field of traditional medicine. It compliments the previous chapters. The chapter shows that in many cases children are selected for medical training early in their lives; they serve their apprenticeships by acting as acolytes. The chapter shows how they eventually become healers.

Professor Reynolds did her fieldwork in three areas of Mashonaland in Zimbabwe. She obviously got to know well the people she worked with and was able to analyse their actions in depth. I am impressed by her sympathy towards and deep understanding of the men, women and children who are the subject of this book. In my view her greatest contribution has been the study of the process of acquiring traditional medical knowledge.

The role of dreams in traditional medical practice did not, in my view, receive adequate attention. There are some traditional healers who deny that they were taught to identify certain plants; they claim that this technical knowledge was revealed to them in dreams. In other words in his or her dream the person is shown the place in the bush where the medicine is to be found. The next morning he or she goes there to find the herb. I have accompanied to the woods a number of people who had dreamt about a cure for a certain ailment. In all the cases in which I have taken part, the herbs discovered in this way have turned out to be useful.
Professor Reynolds did not, in my view, test this hypothesis adequately. She had the opportunity to examine this aspect.

The book, however, remains an important text for those involved in the study of African society. The author has tried, I think successfully, to present her material in a language that ordinary men and women, who have no knowledge of psychology or social anthropology, can understand.

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