

Book Review: *Majority World Perspectives on Christian Mission*, edited by Nico A. Botha and Eugene Baron

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Botha, Nico A., and Eugene Baron, eds. 2020. *Majority World Perspectives on Christian Mission*. George, South Africa: KREATIV SA. 241pp. ISBN 978-1-928478-84-3. R300.

Nico Adam Botha is a professor of missions at the University of South Africa, and Eugene Baron is a senior lecturer in missiology at the University of the Free State. The book is a compendium of extracts from the Majority Christian Leaders Conversation with a “rich diversity of perspectives on mission.” The material has 241 pages and contains 13 articles by different authors (except for Hwa Yung who has two articles). It is edited by Nico A. Botha and Eugene Baron. The book opens up areas necessitating shifts as dictated by current global issues, and it calls for attention on shifts that have occurred from original patterns due to given factors.

The conversation began in 2016 with eleven mission practitioners from the Majority South (Africa, Asia, and Latin America). Although not to be understood as anti-western, it is a “decisive response from those Christian

Leaders in the Majority World.” It aims at achieving a “new avenue for meaning and interpretation” (vii). Its intent is to decolonize mission and to present it as genitive to God; repudiating wrong notions that are likely to emerge about the Global South; presenting mission from the perspective of the Reign of God (vii); to recognize that mission is the essential task of the church; and to become aware of geographical shifting in that, “the center of gravity” is no longer in the North but has shifted to the Global South or Majority World (viii).

Peter Tarantal examines Global South leaders in the African perspective. First, he notes remarkable growth of the Christian populace after which he highlights the need for a fresh look at how theology, mission, and leadership are done (1). Tarantal observes that African leaders stand in between two tensional characteristics in that, while some of the leaders portray favorable characteristics, others represent the direct opposite. Tarantal is hopeful that African leaders can overcome recent failures and take the lead in global matters by being people of integrity and ability, and by being people who mean well for their fellow citizens through mentoring and discipleship.

Nico Botha notices another shift in two major areas: first, the meaning of mission migrating from an ecclesiastical center to a theological center (21). Second, church and mission are no longer viewed as the same in objective but separately, as evidenced by the existence of various and multiple mission agencies. Botha believes that the New Testament has a missionary character, history, and theology to influence the world (18); hence by nature, the church is sent to engage in mission and her mission should encompass love and justice. Moreover, all church members should be involved because relationship and unity are key factors.

Moses Parmar identifies and examines factors challenging the spread of Hinduism and Buddhism (35–37), even though it was believed that both

Christianity and Islam would have been wiped out by 2030 (35). Parmar sees a possibility for Hindus and Buddhists to be penetrated with the gospel when freedom for decision is granted to them, and when the gospel is demonstrated by targeting the needy, accompanied by mobilizing support and prayer.

Patrick Fung proposes a shift from the tradition of merely passing the mission baton from the Western World to the Majority World Church to partnership sharing, where all participate in fellowship and mission, and (in the words of Samuel Escobar) “neither imperialism nor provincialism has a place” (45). The author recommends a method modeled after the Trinitarian unity thus giving us “the esteemed privilege of being junior partners with the Holy Spirit” (46). Fung notes the need for the Global South Church to develop the capacity to increase itself by itself.

MLH and GF (names not disclosed for security purposes) target the Middle East and North Africa where the Muslim population is dominant and where Islam is determined to bring all people to submission/subjection with her position of wealth (58–60). Even though several Islamic militant and jihadist groups are great threats to Christianity, especially in missions, the author sees possibilities in connection with dialogue in MENA (72). Similarly, Ben Abraham reflects on the challenges Christianity faces from Islam and the role Christianity should play in evangelizing Muslims in the Middle East. He notes the reality and prospects of Asian Muslims turning to Christ as never before (229–241) and displacing the tension between the two religions through efforts of gifted missionaries. The authors anticipate a generation of efficient missionaries who have the persecuted at heart. Furthermore, Christians becoming objects of Muslim hostility is a recurring development. Indeed, dialogue as suggested by MLH and GF, in an age of increasing social and political divides, can be a workable and efficient mode

for stability in relational and coexistent stances. It works proficiently in settling disputes as well. On the other hand, there can be drawbacks when those concerned lack the ability to converse without avoiding a dispute.

Gideon Para-Mallam proposes a shift in which spiritual evangelism, social involvement, and activism of the church are all harnessed to transform the national society (88–113). He proposes discipleship and partnership in this task as a sure way for Christians to build their communities. Hwa Yung, in a similar article, approaches nation-building with an evangelical agenda especially in emergent nations (175–192). This is in the sense of “its givenness, especially in the modern world today” (176). Both Para-Mallam and Yung see possibilities for Christians partaking in nation-building through evangelism chiefly in the Global South and other emergent nations, with the objective of transformation through participation of believers. Mallam, for instance, expects the church to go beyond seeking conversion especially in the midst of global challenges (89). Yung also purposes a “multi-level Christian approach on the subject in which Christians at different levels of society can participate” (176).

Rupen Das observes a shift in humanitarianism in the Majority World Church from its original, spiritual, and missional objective, claiming that it “has reached unprecedented levels since World War II” (120). He questions its genuineness, whether it is part of God’s mission, and whether it can be prioritized in Christian mission and integrated with gospel proclamation (123). He suggests that the church can be a very convenient medium for humanitarian agencies when she collaborates with those in need at a local level (130). It is worthwhile to observe that in a world where violence, crises, and natural disasters are not only a fact of life, but are on the increase, succor of this nature is a welcome development. Conversely, its helpfulness is hindered when the objective is manipulated so that others

enrich themselves, leaving the affected in their deprived conditions.

Hwa Yung observes a shift in Christianity from “white-man’s religion” to the explosion of the church globally (139), arguing that the nineteenth and twentieth century marked the great missionary advance of the gospel. Consequently, the center of gravity of the church is moving into the Majority World as modernity/secularism has moved into America (140). The author is concerned about churches in the Global South still depending on the West for theology and financial support, and he highlights the dangers of stagnation.

Eugene Baron raises questions for post-apartheid South African missiologists in the context of the fourth industrial revolution (4IR) in which he observes another shift in the praxis cycle and/or method mission agencies adopt as a mode of operation, especially in colonized South Africa. The problem he observes is one of identity and roles, especially in a post-apartheid context like South Africa (158–164). Using the original intent or objective of the 4IR, Baron considers the current social imagination and the projected spiritual spheres (156).

Ruiz on his part observes a danger where “the church is being pressed by the ambitions of worldly success” (196), warning against a system where growth is determined through numerical count, materialism, monthly turnovers, and salary sizes, to name a few. Ruiz focuses on the Great Commission to emphasize the making of disciples. He recommends the involvement of the whole church in transforming traditional patterns of Christianity and commitment to obedience. The author has done well to raise the consciousness of the church to a neglected but effective area in ensuring church growth.

Krishnasamy Rajendran examines the history of the church and its missional movements and activities during the 1800s and 1900s to the latter part of the twentieth century with a focus on the Protestant mission

era in which Western missionary movements focused on the two-thirds World with the gospel (213). Consequently, the Global South has witnessed an increase in Christians to even many more than there are in the West. On this basis, Rajendran proposes the need for the Global South to re-evangelize the West (220). The article realistically presents a clear need for a shift to the West and North with the gospel where modernism and other influences prevail.

In my opinion, the book draws attention to shifts that are necessary for missionary endeavors in enhancing the spread of the church as well as sustaining its growth. I find the book refreshing; and its rich perspectives are widely enriching, especially in understanding church life and the practice of mission. This material is highly recommendable to all who intend to have a global idea of what Christianity is and does.

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