

Tormod Engelsviken, Ernst Harbakk, Rolv Olsen & Thor Strandenaes (eds.), *Mission to the World; Communicating the Gospel in the 21st Century. Essays in Honour of Knud Jørgensen* (Oxford: Regnum Books & Egede International, 2008)

We wish to give the benefit of the doubt to the subject, but ultimately the assumptions are not empirically accessible. The author can make brilliant logical arguments, based on a subjective line from the sacred texts. As such, theology (to the outsider) is a give and take between the rational (-logy) and the ultimately unknowable (theo-).

Christianity is suffused with these paradoxes:

- Is the church an entity of the community or of the leadership? Catholics and Lutherans for instance will answer this question in differing degrees on this scale, but this tension exists in both churches.
- In spreading the gospel, how do we meld the gospel with indigenous beliefs to honor our targets without compromising the religion itself? This tension goes on today in Indigenous American communities, and Jørgensen dealt with it in Ethiopian and Chinese communities.
- In our personal faith, when we accept our vocation and participate in mission, how do we know we are serving God and not our own sense of self-importance?

Knud Jørgensen has dealt with these tensions or paradoxes throughout his life's work. He was born in Denmark in 1942 and followed a career of study and missionary work that included education, radio, Africa, Asia, and greater Europe. In honor of his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday, and to reflect on his life's work, Regnum commissioned a "festschrift:" *Mission to the World: Communicating the Gospel in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (2007).

An exploration of the tension inherent in these three paradoxes forms the basis of this festschrift. The section on mission explores several aspects of this. Aano discusses the emergence of the global South as the new direction for the church – but not one that necessarily will yield to European dominance in leadership (92-102). Ho-Fai (85-91) discusses the challenges of cultural work to meet the people of China in evangelism. Lutheran scholars try to use Chinese history to be relevant to potential Chinese Christians in Hong Kong. At the same time, Buddhists are using traditional evangelical tools to reach modern Chinese. The tension here is a postmodern one where the interplay between history and modernity is complex enough that the best strategy for growth is not clear.

Kraft addresses the tension between multiple religions as a collection of forms expressed within a given culture and faith. Kraft defines faith as a "commitment to someone or something, supported by a set of deep worldview-level assumptions." (182) The tension discussed by Kraft is one between social structure (religion) and personal devotion. The first can be a vehicle for the second, but can just as easily obfuscate or become its own goal. Holter (205-214) looks at the Bible's adoption and use in Africa, wondering rhetorically who

Tormod Engelsen, Ernst Harbakk, Rolv Olsen & Thor Strandenes  
(eds.), *Mission to the World; Communicating the Gospel in the 21st  
Century. Essays in Honour of Knud Jørgensen* (Oxford: Regnum  
Books & Egede International, 2008)

actually 'owns' the book. He notes that the first extreme was Europeans' use of the book as justification for the colonisation and exploitation of Africa. The other extreme is represented by the translation of the bible into three hundred languages, including which vernacular polytheistic gods should represent Yahweh, and adopted by people for whom the events in the stories happened literally in their back yard.

Eskilt's (382-390) research investigated the concept of "calling" to their mission among boomer and Xer Norwegians. She found that indeed the different generations did understand their calling somewhat differently. The older respondents saw their calling in much more clearly delineated and objective terms than the younger respondents, who were more likely to use subjective and blurry language. The boomer generation had a much stronger institutional connection than the X generation. Mortensen (405-418) closes the book by reflecting upon the tension of teaching missiology academically within a non-religious university. In the contemporary secular university world this necessarily marginalizes missiology. She recognizes the contemporary conflict between university neutrality and religious-based studies, or even a postmodern recognition that objectivity might not even be possible. She concludes that this sometimes awkward context for missiology in the university allows for an understanding of the cultural discourse that missionary work itself must address. After all, missionary work necessarily entails addressing non-Lutheran cultural and religious contexts.

This festschrift is a complicated work, with perhaps many applications. It is very large, with around thirty contributors and stretching over four hundred pages. At the same time, most of the essays are short and very digestible, so its breadth means that there will be works that appeal to many readers. While the theological topics are certainly (and appropriately!) Lutheran, this Catholic reader found them relatable, as many similar issues are happening with the Roman church as well.

N.B. Special thanks to Joe Domko of St. John's Episcopal Church of Boulder, Colorado for his theological assistance.

## **Share this:**

- [Share](#)