Stephen B. Bevans and Cathy Ross (eds)

*Mission on the Road to Emmaus: Constants, Context and Prophetic Dialogue*


The editors, Cathy Ross and Steve Bevans, have published an ecumenical collection of highly readable missiological articles. The fifteen contributors have written their reflections within the framework of mission seen as prophetic dialogue. Bevans and Ross work in a Roman Catholic and Anglican context respectively, but *Mission on the Road to Emmaus* has a clear ecumenical profile. The book looks at mission in the contexts of Christology (Part 1), Ecclesiology (Part 2), Eschatology (Part 3), Soteriology (Part 4), Anthropology (Part 5) and Culture (Part 6). The basic narrative for this book – the biblical story of Jesus and his two followers on the road to Emmaus – is a model for missional thinking worked out by Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder in their book from 2004: *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*. This book has received world-wide recognition and was translated into several languages. It was followed up by the same authors in 2011 with *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today*.

The ‘mission as prophetic dialogue’ perspective is a refreshing framework for missiological thinking. It contains the constant tensions described through dichotomies such as humility and boldness, listening and articulation. The shaping idea or vision behind the book lies, as already mentioned, in the following narrative: On the road to Emmaus from Jerusalem, Jesus remained for a long time a silent listener to his friends’ frustrations and pains. In the same way the Christian Church and mission today must listen to the pain and sorrows of our contemporary world. But in the same way as, at one point on the road to Emmaus, Jesus changed his role from a listener to a teacher, so our missionary role also has to change from listening to bold teaching into the context of today’s world. In our pluralistic world the concept of prophetic dialogue can therefore be a fruitful help in missional reflections – and it can produce new insights in our understanding of mission and the church to day.

Our question from a more Evangelical point of view (which is the reviewers’ position) is, however, the following: Can a more classical approach to mission, namely mission as proclamation of the Gospel, be under-communicated in this prophetic dialogue perspective? We think, however, that this book balances the relationship between the dialogic and the prophetic (which also includes the proclamation of the Gospel) in a way that convinces us that the book’s main conceptual perspective is both important and fruitful for the Christian Church today. Especially Part 1 in the book – which contains articles on a christological and biblical basis that accentuate the balance between mission as
dialogue and prophetic proclamation – is very helpful for us as Evangelicals. We also appreciate the emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in this kind of missiological thinking. Jesus is also lifted up as a model for a prophetic mission today. And that might give us evangelicals a correction in relation to our fairly one-sided accentuation of Paul as the archetype for the Christian mission.

There are two chapters or themes in the book, namely migration and hospitality, which speak directly into our lives in our European context today. We are referring to Emma Wild-Wood’s chapter, ‘Mission, Ecclesiology and Migration’ and Cathy Ross’ contribution, ‘Hospitality: the Church as a Mother with an Open Hearth’. Emma Wild-Wood points out in her article that migration is not a new phenomenon, but has been a concern of the Christian movement from its very beginning. However, the waves of migration we see today raise important questions for social scientists as well as for missiologists. The migration churches in today’s world have created several interesting studies. The article points out that migration as a social reality affects our understanding of Missio Dei and our nature as human beings as well as the nature of the Christian Church. The article outlines a concept of mission focused on intercultural ecclesiology. The goal is to move from an acceptance of tolerance and differences in the church towards reciprocity – ‘to be together and one in Christ’. Until now most Christian churches have paid most attention to showing care and promoting justice for weak and vulnerable migrants. Migration has not been an integrated part of the ecclesiology in most churches.

Migrants are living out what this book is about: mission as prophetic dialogue. Dialogue means leaving your own comfort zone in order to get to know new cultures, languages and people. Moving into a new culture is an important part of dialogical mission. Multicultural churches have an ideal position from which to play a prophetic role in the country they are located in. They can serve as a role model by showing how to acculturate other cultures, how to live in reconciled plurality and how to express the universality of the Church. With references to the New Testament world, Wild-Wood states that alienation and homelessness were well-known phenomena then as they are today. But because the Christians’ citizenship is in heaven, we can live everywhere in the world; any country in this world can be our homeland. The experience of living as a foreigner can serve as a resource for creating a sound contemporary intercultural ecclesiology. To be a resident alien as a church includes a feeling of uneasiness and resistance to becoming too well adapted to the cultures in this world.

Cathy Ross reflects on hospitality and the Church. She describes the Church by means of the household metaphor, like a home. It is the place where mother/father God is ready to welcome us. The Church has to exemplify and