alternative actions, spiritualities, and networks we may reconstruct the human condition with an earthly utopia. Thus “another world is possible.”

The paradigm of prophetic dialogue allows us to leave aside the often-used typology of salvation (and mission) as either exclusivist, or inclusivist, or pluralist. The first two categories are embedded in a self-centered Christianity, while the third is often translated as “everything has its own value” thus closing our eyes to injustice and to evil. A better discussion begins with God’s universal salvation and revelation and its particular spiritual and social mediations, then embraces dialogue among religions, inculturation, and reconciliation in the midst of unbearable pain and violence (pp. 378–394).

I also mention two inadequate metaphorical assumptions: doctrine as constant and context as changing. Significant variations exist within the three models of mission (linked with Trinity, the kingdom, and Christology) and also within the three types of theology (law, truth, history) examined by Bevans and Schroeder. In terms of context, globalization “from above” is different from alternative networks and spiritualities thriving at the margins of the great and powerful.

What is written, including interactions among theologians, does not have to finish with concepts. Rather the last word may be the language of the heart, a heart amazed at the life-giving Spirit. Let us once again give thanks to the universal presence of Christ, that leads communities of faith engaged in healthy dialogue without barriers.

“The Variables and Constants of Christian Mission”:
A REVIEW FROM AFRICA

By LAURENT RAMAMBASON

Constants in Context represents an important tool for both mission students and practitioners. The fruit of wide-ranging accumulated research by Stephen B. Bevans and Roger Schroeder from Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, a major site for the study Christian missions and cultures, this work enlarges and deepens the field of mission studies. Their location has helped these experienced mission scholars assemble insights for missionary practice drawn from the latest understandings of the theology of mission. The book is also written with remarkable clarity, especially given its scope. Bevans and Schroeder cover a stunning amount of data on the theology and history of Christian missions, and do so comprehensively but without losing sight of their overall organization. Its presentation is particularly enhanced by ten maps and twelve very helpful “Historical-Theological Theme Summary Tables.” Moreover, the book’s analysis of the
Bible and Christian history can inspire present missionary practice. In particular, the authors have identified “Seven Stages of Mission” within the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles, and their treatment of each of the six epochs of the history of the church concludes with “Implications for the Theology of Mission Today.” As a consequence, present-day mission activists can learn lessons from the positive and negative sides of the history of Christian mission.

Constants in Context naturally compares with David Bosch’s Transforming Mission. Both aim at what Bevans and Schroeder call a “more reflective and intelligent participation in the purposes of God” (p. 1). The main difference, in my opinion, lies in the attitudes taken toward mission’s inevitable contradictions and tensions, found both in theory and practice. Bosch, in the words of William Burrows, was able “to entertain cognitive dissonance that defied his synthetic temperament’s desire to overcome it.” In contrast, Constants in Context reads like a finished magnum opus in which differences, though recognized, are addressed directly and integrated into an historical viewpoint and a theological perspective. Thus, though the text reads in a straight-forward and clear manner, this can be deceptive. This is problem-solving and exploratory research in complex theological and historical deep water where inexperienced researchers could easily drown. That being said, this book represents a treasure trove of valuable mission information and insights.

Three features offer particular benefits to students of mission studies. First, there is the clear framework in which their reflections are offered, a framework constituted by two sources. The first source for the framework is the three-fold classification of theological perspectives, drawing on typologies given by Dorothee Sölle and Justo González: orthodox/conservative, liberal, and radical/liberation theologies; or, in González’s terms, A (from Tertullian and focused on law), B (from Origen and focused on truth), and C (from Irenaeus, focused on history). The second source for their framework is the grid of six constants, defined as “six doctrinal themes to which the church must be faithful at every boundary crossing and in every context” (p. 2): Jesus, sacraments, eschatology, salvation, anthropology, and culture.

A second great benefit of this work is its clear thesis. Bevans and Schroeder argue that the best model for mission in the current era is mission as prophetic dialogue. Their model combines the strengths of the three competing models of mission: mission as “participation in the mission of the triune God,” as “liberating service of the reign of God,” and as “proclamation of Jesus Christ as Universal Savior.”

A third very attractive feature of this work is that the authors are transparent about themselves and their assumptions. They admit, “We are both white, male, Catholic, ordained, fifty-ish, native-born citizens of the United States, both