

Editorial Introduction

David Emmanuel Singh

Dr David Emmanuel Singh is Research Tutor at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, Oxford

The idea that theory and practice are in some sort of permanent clash or in separate spheres needs reexamination. The problem of divergence between Christian theologies and practices represents one aspect of this. Theologians and Practitioner function as the prime spokespersons of these spheres within Christianity. The evidence of conflict or divergence between the spokespersons (and the spheres) potentially discredits Christian holism; it undermines the centrality of knowledge and love in Christian faith. Christian life is not just about doing, it is about *right knowing* and *right doing* and - neither is possible without a continuous pursuit of truth in context. Overemphasis on knowledge may contribute to the decline in the active engagement of the community of faith in society. However, if it does happen, it does not owe necessarily to the focus on knowledge (formal theological education), but rather, to the lack of adequate emphasis on engagement with the 'ordinary' social life. On the other hand, practice with out thoughtful and socially engaged theology need not be Christian and will lack the necessary depth and 'holiness'.

The example from the Baptist seminary's missional vision shows that theological education indeed can seriously engage with the practice of Mission. Practitioners need to pause and notice that theologians are not oblivious of the need for a 'praxis-based' theological education and vice versa. The 'praxis-based' theological education need not necessarily take place in formal institutions; it can happen with and among the 'ordinary' people and be led by the 'ordinary' people as the examples of the Peruvian Zuratas demonstrates. In fact, disengaged theological formation and the consequent mission 'outreaches' can gravely undermine and, in some cases, destroy both the good and the bad in local cultures. The Peruvian Zuratas can be a model for the inculturation of Christianity in local cultures. Some may view it as syncretistic but it is also affirming of the universality of God and his grace. Its potential for the acknowledgement and affirmation of human creativity and divine grace is infinite.

Seeing inculturation as re-orientation of the local cultures towards the Christ is indeed a giant step for theologians and especially for the practitioners of Mission. Living God wants to engage and therefore, for theology to be living, it needs to take Pentecostal and Charismatic theology of the Holy Spirit seriously; the Spirit of God is the Supreme Person and as such, he is capable of challenging traditional notions about God and his world which arise out of different contexts. This Spirit transcends all human cultures and institutions; his knowledge, the awareness of his presence and work is attested to by the Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions of Christianity. This needs to be increasingly incorporated into mission practices where love for God is translated into actual involvement in the life of the poor and the marginalized. The Kibock Sinang and Minjung Theology from Korea are two examples of the post-war contextual theologies. However, both are in need of embracing the dynamic characteristics of the Holy Spirit in order to maintain their relevance in society.

Critical thinking has atomized the Bible and one of the concerns practitioners have is to do with this fragmentation of the scriptures that for centuries believers have seen as the reliable source of the will of God. This problem is compounded by what some might perceive as the 'political' use of the Bible in the different 'contextual' and 'liberation' theologies. Rather than discrediting the Bible, these uses of the Bible demonstrate the power of the Holy Spirit who moves people not only to think but to act on behalf of the poor, the weak and the marginalized. As the Bible is central to the worshipping communities of Christians, its 'recovery' in applying it as a resource for pastoral practice too is to be encouraged. Lesslie Newbigin, a great missiological thinker combined theological thinking with passion for practical missions. He shows through his ministry that these need not be distinct. The challenge for Christians (both practitioner and theologians) is to study theologians-practitioners like him to rethink new ways of being a living church.