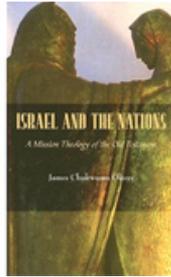


helps the reader to situate his/her particular context with that of the book. Moreover, the many case studies given also help the reader to reflect on what was just presented and make personal applications to life, again helping the reader connect with the text and understand it, as the book is quite voluminous (416 pages) and takes time to be read and assimilated.

Overall, *Encountering missionary life and work* is a unique and timely book in its category. It brings together the best missional thinking and fresh practical mission field applications for the life and work of the cross-cultural missionary. Tom Steffen and Lois McKinney Douglas provide what I think can be considered one of the best textbooks for contemporary missionary practice.

In my view, *Encountering missionary life and work* is for all mission students, professors of missions, and cross-cultural missionaries, but it can also be used by lay leaders and church administrators as it will help to orient them in the current cross-cultural ministry of the world Christian church. If people would come to understand the content of this textbook they would have a bridge between past and present, between their culture and foreign cultures that would facilitate the knowledge and application of the Scripture's *Missio Dei* into the life and work of God's church in mission to the unreached.

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Okoye, James Chukwuma. 2006. *Israel and the nations: A mission theology of the Old Testament*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis. 200 pages. Paperback. \$28.00.

Okoye writes from the Catholic tradition. In *Israel and the nations* he proposes a hermeneutic for studying mission in the Old Testament. In the foreword of the book, Carolyn Osiek very concisely summarizes the problem: “What is the role of the Old Testament in Christianity? Is it only to prove the superiority of the Christian revelation, or to justify political claims without regard to contemporary suffering?” (xi).

The author assumes that the readers come either with a mission background or a biblical background, but not both (xiv). He also claims that the integrity of the Old Testament as the Word of God is guaranteed in his book, preserving the organic links between the Testaments without reducing one or the other, although recognizing as authoritative bodies of texts not included in the Jewish canon. In addition, Okoye employs the Documentary Hypothesis and the sources that wrote the biblical text, as espoused by the historical-critical methodology.

The author believes that Israel was not missionary at the beginning but became so later on. For him the covenant between God

and Israel was particularistic. Only when Israel opened up her covenant to include the Gentiles did the nation become clearly missionary oriented. Only Israel was elected, and election stands in tension with mission.

Okoye insists that "such a focus is to be read not in isolation but in relation to internal transformations of the tradition that indicate that Israel's election had a missionary intention" (3). However, he is ready to accept Norman Gottwald's theory that Israel was formed in Canaan from oppressed peasants under the influence of the Moses group that came from Egypt, simply because under such a scenario "election would be intimately connected with mission." He concludes that in the Old Testament "the theme of mission shows itself to be the necessary accompaniment of that of election" (4).

Since "the Bible contains different models of mission operative in different faith communities at different times" (10), Okoye introduces his contribution to mission theology in the Old Testament under four faces of mission: the universality of salvation and righteousness before Yahweh, the "community-in-mission," the centripetal mission, and the centrifugal mission.

Okoye insists that today's reader of the biblical text must keep in mind the redactional process that did not alter the previous text but included several versions side by side, thus ending up with tensions between

universalism and particularism, which are opposites, in the same passage.

The author rejects the exclusive Christological reading of the Old Testament which "almost silences its independent voice," but similarly disagrees with those who see the Old Testament as self-contained Scripture. He recognizes that "divergent faith perspectives may thus be a factor in the divergence of interpretations" (16).

Okoye proposes Gen 1 as a blueprint for mission. Due to his assumption that the biblical text in Gen 1 is a result of redactional input, the author believes the Creation account is a theological reflection rather than a straightforward historical description. It is considered a myth that was already part of the ancient Near East environment which formed Israel as a nation. As a result, "there is no primordial principle of evil, for God looked on all God had made and found it very good (Gen 1:31). . . . Poetry will, however, retain the old motif of the 'cosmic battle.' . . . Creation out of nothing is not found in the Old Testament" (25-27). The author also notices the blessing of Gen 1 that precedes the blessing of Abraham in Gen 12. As "image," humans are to fill the earth, subdue and beautify it because God created the earth in a "frontier" state.

Genesis 1-11 explains why all the peoples of the earth need blessing, as a result of all the curses on the soil, on the serpent, on Cain, and on Canaan. Although the author recognizes

that the story could continue thus far only by God's grace and forbearance, he considers that Abraham became the embodiment of this grace.

Commenting on the reflexive and passive meanings of Abraham as the blessing for the nations, as a paradigm, and a source or agent of blessing, the author suggests that the universalistic editorial input changed the text, and that "earliest Israel did not yet understand the blessing of Abraham in a missionary and universalistic sense" (48).

Okoye discovers that God never intended that Israel become an ethnic entity, separated from the Gentiles, but a spiritual one based on faith. He concludes that "the embers of mission would not glow in Israel until Israel rediscovered the primacy of righteousness of God, who freely calls all humanity to Godself" (54).

The second face of mission, the "community-in-mission," assumes that all laws are considered part of the covenant between God and Israel or at least embedded within its context. Israel has to become a sacral worshipping covenant community, a model of a just society in the Promised Land. It is not only separation from other nations but aggregation to Yahweh. As a "kingdom of priests" Israel is a community-in-mission serving others "by bringing them closer to God" and serving God by "mediating God's revelation and decrees to the community" (62). The implication is that the goal of election is mission, not salvation.

The main duty of a priest, the doxology, becomes missiological.

However, election proves to be no guarantee against divine retribution. When Israel manifested injustice and unrighteousness, and forgot its community-in-mission role, leading nonbelievers to disrespect God, it became God's enemy.

For Okoye, the book of Jonah is a fictional prophetic tale with a theological intent. Universalism and particularism stand in conflict and tension. The Ninevites believe in Yahweh the same way Abraham believed God and thus were considered righteous before God and their city was spared. God's love and salvation is not exclusively confined to Israel, and "mission is about God's free gift of deliverance or salvation for all peoples" (87). The nations live by God's mercy, the same as Israel does, because God's unmerited grace is universal.

The author believes that from the time of the exile God changed the strategy in his relationship with people. Personal responsibility replaces corporate retribution, while divine surgery to replace peoples' hearts precedes true repentance. Because there is no mentioning of the repossession of the land (Jer 31:31-34), all nations may discover themselves in the promise. The focus is solely on God's character. Mission becomes all God's work, in which God's people simply share.

The third face of mission, centripetal, is seen in the Psalms which indicate that true worship

leads to true society. God's kingdom is encompassing all nations, with Israel being the medium of Yahweh's praise by the nations. Only Yahweh protects, saves, and deserves to be worshipped. "God's glory can be fully realized only when the families of nations share fully together in the worship of Yahweh and in life with Yahweh" (108).

Isaiah 2:2-5 is the classical text for centripetal mission in the Old Testament. It is "the earliest expression of a belief in the eschatological glorification of Mount Zion," although Okoye believes it belongs to the (post-)exilic period (110). Mount Zion becomes the center of attraction, with a moral and spiritual focus rather than geographical. The nations come to the mountain by themselves, attracted by the Torah revealed there. This Torah offers peace and fulfillment, and responds to the deepest human need.

The last face of mission, centrifugal, is found in Isa 56:1-8, the earliest mention of Gentiles religiously converting to Yahweh, based on an inclusive covenant. As a result, Egypt, Israel, and Assyria stand as blessings for the rest of the nations. Israel reaches its goal only when the blessing to bless is shared. This remnant of nations is defined not in national or ethnic terms but in confessional language.

The centrifugal aspect of mission is also seen by Okoye in Isa 66:19, in the sending of Jonah, and in the activity of the Jewish Diaspora in Egypt. However, the

author considers that the nations will not come to or become Israel; acknowledging the power of Yahweh is not the same as joining Israel in the worship of Yahweh.

Okoye disagrees with authors who consider that Israel was never in exile to bring redemption to the world. "Transformed Zion is not for the 'Servants of Yahweh' alone. Yahweh has other servants also, whom Yahweh has taken from the nations (Isa 56:6; 66:19) and who equally inherit 'my holy mountain'" (149).

Finally, Okoye proposes that we read mission in the Old Testament from a diversity of angles and allow for at least the four faces of mission. Although the author works with historical-critical presuppositions, *Israel and the nations* represents an attempt to read the Old Testament from an ecumenical and post-modern perspective. This makes integration of the four themes difficult, each floating on its own. However, the book provides interesting insights and angles, and makes for an attractive read. I recommend the book for seminary students who have previously studied mission theology in the Old Testament, and for professors of mission who could include it in their course outlines.

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