

H. Balz, *Der Anfang des Glaubens. Theologie der Mission und der jungen Kirchen*, Neuedition: Erlanger Verlag für Mission und Ökumene 2010, 465 p., ISBN 978-3-87214-620-5, price € 34.00.

In the foreword of this book Heinrich Balz puts the question whether it is possible to speak of a 'Theology of Mission'. The book itself may be regarded as his answer to this question. It is Balz' spiritual legacy after a long career as a teacher of New Testament, a researcher of African Religion in Cameroon, 13 years as a professor of Religious Science, Missiology and Ecumenism in Berlin, and five years as a teacher of Systematic Theology in Tanzania, and also in Congo.

The book consists of four sections. Balz speaks respectively about Young Churches: the New Situation (1); Church, Mission and Faith (2); Communication: Moment of Missionary Activity (3); Hermeneutics and Persistence of Faith (4). Each part is concluded with a chapter entitled 'Biblical verification', in which Balz relates the material treated to a particular book or specific passages from the New Testament.

In Part One Balz begins by explaining the new situation: the shift of the centre of gravity of the Christian faith from the North to the South. This implies that Western churches have to face the reality of living together with churches within other cultures.

In the following chapters Balz deals with the question of how far Asian theologians and African theologians respectively have developed their own theology of mission, and in this way contribute to missionary thinking, independent from Western missionary thinking. In this regard Balz examines the development of Christianity in China, Korea and India, and reviews the theological thinking of theologians like K. Koyama, M.M. Thomas, S. Samartha and V. Ramachandra, (to mention only some of the most important names), and their discussion of Christianity as a minority within a wealth of religions, and from this viewpoint, considers their particular contribution to the theology of mission.

In the next chapter The author gives a survey of the new theology of mission in Africa, analysing the writings of B. Idowu, T. Okure, K.A. Dickson, J.N.K. Mugambi, Kā Mana, J.M. Ela. This chapter deals with questions like gospel and culture, and the theology of liberation, and finally considers questions about the translatability of Christian faith as treated by L. Sanneh and K. Bediako.

This section is concluded by a surprising chapter on the 'New Testament as book of the young churches', concentrating mainly on the gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. Balz mentions this in the framework of what he calls 'Biblical verification'. He proposes, that whereas in the past, from Gustav Warneck to David Bosch, the theology of mission started with a presentation of Biblical foundations, the theology of mission, in view of the present state of Christianity, should *verify* the situation with what is written in the New Testament. In the New Testament we read texts of the young churches at the beginning of the church history. Only what is compatible with and what is not denied by the Scriptures may be correct. The Scriptures should not have the first word but the last word (p. 100). The Scriptures of Luke: the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, are fruits of the missionary enterprise, and thus of what Luke as a member of the young Syrian Christianity thought as theologically relevant. The gentiles who became Christians were subject to change, but at the same time, in turn changed Christianity, through the enculturation of the faith that they accepted and

shared with the Jewish Christians (p. 102). In relation to this it has to be observed that the poor who represented one of the main themes in the gospel of Luke, are not mentioned in the book of Acts, in which the relationship between Christian, Jews and gentiles forms the main theme. Luke therefore witnesses, 'perhaps unconsciously' (p. 116), a theology of enculturation in Act 17.

Through this the answer gives rise to questioning the beginning: the theology of mission is possible only if it takes into account this new reality of the churches in the non-Western world, and their developing theology of mission.

The second part of the book, on 'Church, Mission and Faith', analyses the place of 'Mission' in the 20th century Systematic Theology, more specifically in German-speaking theology. Balz shows how in the course of the 20th century the theological discussion was centred on terms like Eschatology, History of Salvation and *Missio Dei*. He carefully examines the discussions held by theologians including Walter Freytag, Peter Beyerhaus, Wolfgang Pannenberg, Ernst Käsemann and Jürgen Moltmann. All these reflections see mission as something 'from above', says Balz. He himself prefers another approach: from below, so to speak, from the experience of the birth of new churches. Here we observe that that in these churches something has been rediscovered which was central in the Reformation: faith.

As for the 'Biblical Verification' Balz offers a broad survey of the exegesis of the term faith that Paul used in his theological reflection on the mission to the Gentiles: 'now that faith has come' (Gal. 3:23-25). This passage speaks of the twofold discovery: the end of Law for the Jews, and the end of submission to the divine forces for the Gentiles. From this passage the basic insights of the mission may be developed. This is also the title of the book: 'Anfang des Glaubens', which may be translated as: The Coming of Faith. This expression refers to the coming of Christ in different forms: through incarnation, through the Pentecost event, through the preaching of the gospel and through the acceptance of faith by the faithful. Balz argues that in mission theology these different moments are subject to analysis. They include the transmission of the gospel by human, thus fallible missionaries, and the assimilation or acceptance by the younger churches into their own culture, followed by enculturation as a continuous process of translation which may only be done by people who belong to that particular culture (p. 255). From the theological viewpoint these human activities may be seen as the work of divine will and election.

It is from this position, that Balz gives an overview of two basic concepts in Western missiological thinking of the 20th century: Communication (Part III) and Hermeneutics (Part IV).

As a starting point for his thinking about communication Balz takes the communication theory of Eugene Nida, who had picked up the topic from Hendrik Kraemer. It deals with philosophical and anthropological aspects of what may be meant by 'the communication of the Christian faith'. In relation to this Balz positions himself in a balanced way within the reflections on several questions that for several decades have been debated with bitterness and sometimes with hostility within the world wide Protestant ecumenical circles: mission, poverty, and development; questions relating to enculturation and communication of the gospel; the gospel in relation to adherents to other religions and the meaning of conversion; the discussion (mostly within Catholic theology) about church planting as the goal of the Christian mission.

This section of the book is concluded by a 'Biblical verification' consisting of an extensive chapter about the 'Bible as a book of the mission'. Here Balz gives interesting insights: Mat. 28 is not the starting point of Christian mission, but merely written in a time when mission was already practiced in the church. It should not be used against any emphasis on Mat. 25, where Jesus identifies himself with the poor. Planned missionary activity started in Samaria and not immediately after the Pentecost event in Jerusalem. Close reading of Mat 15:21-28, about the Canaanite woman's faith shows that Jesus is close to people who hesitate to give up their own tribal religion.

In the final section, entitled 'Hermeneutics and Remaining Faithful' (*Hermeneutik und Bestehen des Glaubens*) Balz reconsiders the basic questions formulated by F.D.E. Schleiermacher, W. Dilthey and Paul Ricoeur, and discusses the positions of some German missionary thinkers: H. Frick, H.-W. Gensichen and the development of the thinking of particularly of Balz's own teacher Th. Sundermeyer.

The 'Biblical verification' of this part is based upon the gospel of John, which, according to the author, reflects the life of a church community living as a minority and is a theological elaboration of a community in crisis. John is speaking about the coming of faith, but more so about remaining faithful as Balz explains with John 20:30, and this in a situation where one may speak of the failing of communication, which brings the community into defence against Gnosis and other forms of religion.

This book is characterized by Balz's intention to always take a well balanced position and by the intention to be complete. The positions of the different theologians are truthfully rendered, often in detail, which tends to make the book sometimes hard to read.

The attractiveness of Balz's writing is that he combines deep and sharp theological thinking, and a broad and many-sided theological and philosophical knowledge, always taking into consideration his own experiences as a researcher and teacher in Africa. In relation to this he makes an observation that may disappoint Western theologians: that the revival movements within the African churches do not so much focus on Africanizing these churches but on making them more Christian. This kind of observation makes reading the book a great pleasure. It is a pity that the author did not include a broader analysis of the growing Pentecostal movement in all parts of the world, a subject on which he has published elsewhere, and also that he consciously has left aside a deeper discussion on the dialogue between Christians and adherents of other religions.

Reading this book I realized that in most of the theological faculties in the West missiology has been replaced by the study of inter-religious dialogue on the list of theological disciplines. Missiology as presented in this book is exactly the field in theology that integrates disciplines like philosophy, anthropology, church history, Biblical sciences and systematic theology. It is to be hoped that inter-religious dialogue will develop into a discipline where also these different disciplines are integrated. If not, the replacement will turn out to be an impoverishment of the study of theology. — GERARD VAN 'T SPIJKER, Utrecht, The Netherlands.