
Book Reviews

Jen Gobby, *More Powerful Together: Conversations with Climate Activists and Indigenous Land Defenders*, Fernwood, Winnipeg, MB, 2020. 250 pp. \$26.00. ISBN: 9781773632513.

The week before the Global Climate Strike in September 2019, a group of several hundred youth gathered on the steps of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and staged a “die-in.” I listened from the sidelines as the young organizers spoke passionately and strongly about their grief, fear, and anger over facing a world changing rapidly from climate change. They invited the adults standing to the side to participate with them as they symbolically lay down on the steps and “died.” As rain fell from the sky, we lay down on the ground, but one young Indigenous activist stayed standing, fist in the air. The young activist called out, “I’m standing here because I’m not dying. I refuse to die. My ancestors fought so hard for me to be here. Indigenous people are never going to die. We’re going to stay here and fight for our lands, no matter what it takes.” For seven minutes, representing seven generations into the future, we lay in silence, contemplating those words, lamenting the hurting planet and the uncertain futures these young people face. When the seven minutes were over, we rose up, singing hopeful songs.

The youth die-in was a profound and powerful instance of people from many generations coming together to insist on change. It was an important reminder for me that in the fight against climate change, it isn’t simply the earth and its plants and creatures that we advocate for but also the lives and livelihoods of people all over the world, especially those on the margins. With these thoughts in mind, I joined the climate strike the next week, which drew over ten thousand people in Winnipeg and millions around the world.

Jen Gobby’s book *More Powerful Together* opens with a vivid description of her experience at the Global Climate Strike in Montreal. She describes her excitement, the optimism of the crowd, and the lingering feelings of hope after the event. She then describes finding out that Indigenous activists had experienced racism and violence from non-Indigenous people attending the protest. Gobby recounts being surprised but reflects that perhaps she shouldn’t have been. The climate strike in Montreal ended up being a microcosm of the wider world. Racism, colonialism, and other forms of domination are playing themselves out in social movement spaces as they are in many other parts of life, rendering the work ineffective at best and incredibly damaging at worst. The antidote, Gobby writes, is to work toward creating a “movement of movements” in which diver-

sity and collaboration have the power to create “decarbonized *and* decolonized . . . systems” in Canada (6).

To construct her argument, Gobby interviews activists and Indigenous land defenders. She also provides a thorough review of the scholarly literature on climate change, inequality, social movements, and social change. Gobby presents a strong overview of the climate and inequality crises in Canada and the social movements that have surfaced to address them. The people she interviews identify settler colonialism, capitalism, and worldviews that justify domination, as the root causes of these crises. These root causes “have bred systemic disconnection from land and from each other, cutting us off from the knowledge and relations we need to get ourselves out of this mess” (54).

After envisioning alternatives to those systems of destruction, and taking stock of what is working and what isn’t working in environmental movements today, Gobby discusses how to overcome the various barriers that are hindering movement efficacy and transformation. The most significant barriers are the relational tensions within and between movements, which lead to siloing and fragmentation. She writes, “damaged relationships hinder our ability to think across difference and forge powerful alliances strong enough to radically transform our world from one of destruction of people and planet to one of healing, justice and mutual flourishing” (179). The solution, she posits, is that “strong, just relations are the means and ends of building a better, climate safe world” (6). Gobby concludes that it is through working better together and through building relationships based on “justice, equality and reciprocity” with each other and with the land that we will gain a truly transformative ability to create such changes (214).

More Powerful Together is a timely and important book for anyone looking to learn about how change can happen. This book was an important reminder to me, as someone who works in environmental education and conservation, to consider how forms of domination may be present within the work I am doing. Gobby, and many of the people she interviews, state that it is not enough to address only ecological crises; we must also learn to see that social crises are deeply interrelated with ecological crises. Gobby argues that both ecological and social crises “are symptoms of a deeper pattern of dysfunctional relationship based on domination” (10).

As the climate movement has become more mainstream, many Christians have become interested in the environment and involved in creation care efforts. Yet, in my experience, it is rare to hear about creation care efforts that also seek to address the damages done by colonial and capitalist systems. Many in the church, myself included, benefit from these systems in the form of wealth, access to land, and/or positions of privilege. That makes it difficult to confront the ways that colonialism, racism, and other forms of oppression are present within our churches.

Gobby's book makes it clear that we cannot afford to continue to relate to each other and the earth in the ways we have been relating. She also makes it clear that everyone has a role to play. Anabaptists have a long history of resisting state-sanctioned violence and status quo relations. Might it be possible to step into those roots again and work toward a decarbonized and decolonized church and world? *More Powerful Together* offers us practical ways of moving in that direction.

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Bryan Stone, *Evangelism after Pluralism: The Ethics of Christian Witness*, Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academic, 2018. 151 + vii pp. \$22.00 (paper). ISBN: 080109979X.

Evangelism makes me uncomfortable. Even when I was a teenager doing summer mission trips in Africa as part of a team intent on winning Uganda for Jesus, the prospect of going up to a stranger and telling them to accept my religion gave me a queasy feeling. I later learned that Uganda is a majority-Christian nation and the strangers who accepted my tracts and listened to my stammering pleas were probably just being polite. This did not make me any more comfortable with evangelism.

And yet, the stories of the apostles in the New Testament show a community eager to spread the good news of Jesus Christ, and I can see why. This good news is transformative and renewing, capable of bringing hope into a despairing world. To evangelize is to show someone that they are more deeply loved than they realize, that there is a community where they can be fully themselves, and that the systems that dehumanize them will not have the last word.

Is it possible to recover this kind of evangelism—an exuberant sharing of “a reason for the hope that is in you”—from beneath the imperialism and self-righteousness with which evangelism has (quite fairly) become associated?

Bryan Stone's *Evangelism after Pluralism* aims to help readers navigate the complicated waters surrounding evangelism. The book is a follow-up to Stone's *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2007), but it can be fruitfully read and appreciated without any familiarity with Stone's earlier work. Though the book is subtitled “The Ethics of Christian Witness,” Stone's central aim is not to discern whether evangelism is ethical or not but to show how closely connected Christian ethics and Christian witness are. Indeed, Stone even claims that “ethics is evangelism” (9).

As Stone defines it, “Evangelism is the noncompetitive practice of bearing faithful and embodied witness in a particular context rather than an attempt

to produce converts by first safeguarding the credibility or helpfulness of the good news” (13). All too often, the framework through which people approach evangelism is through a competition in a battleground of worldviews. If one wins a convert, one has enlisted them from “the other side” to “our side.” At worst, this framework reinforces an “us versus them” mindset and treats members of other religious and nonreligious groups as a threat. But even at its best, this competitive framework promotes questionable sales tactics and flattening the gospel into a commodity.

Stone’s discussion of the “winning converts” framework helped me understand some of my own discomfort with evangelism. If a person’s religious convictions are part of their core identity, inviting them to change their convictions—no matter how compassionately—is telling them that there is something wrong with who they are, that they need to change fundamentally. If a person’s religious commitments aren’t part of their identity, inviting them to change their commitments is basically asking them to adopt a new “brand” (93), a set of cultural markers without any inner transformation. Evangelism, then, either involves an implicit condemnation of a person created in God’s image or a superficial facsimile of the gospel. Proselytizing is either too judgmental to be good news or too hollow to be news at all.

Stone argues that these two pitfalls are two sides of the same coin. The more colonialist, sanctimonious attitude toward non-Christians and the more privatized, domesticated version of Christianity are both consequences of Christians allying their cause to what Stone calls “empire.” In a fascinating chapter, Stone describes how evangelism can easily become a way of “playing chaplain to the empire” (27) as Christians become preoccupied with Christianizing their societies and neglect the work of proclaiming the radical message of the kingdom of God. This discussion will no doubt be of interest to chaplains, pastors, and missionaries working within Anabaptist traditions.

Cornel West writes, “Justice is what love looks like in public.” Stone’s book suggests that evangelism is what worship looks like in public. Not coincidentally, evangelism also looks a lot like work for justice. Stone makes the familiar but still important case that Christian witness is political, offering an alternative to the stories empires tell to justify their own power.

In contrast to the “winning converts” framework, Stone proposes a different model for Christian witness, centered on giving faithful witness to beauty. Rather than seeking results by selling or defending a worldview, evangelists should seek to testify to the beauty of God’s work in Christ carried on by the Holy Spirit. Just as an impressionist painter tries to express the beauty of a night sky as they see it, so witnesses try through words and actions to express the beauty that has captivated their imagination. Evangelism is not so much a duty to be carried out but rather an abundant gift to be shared freely. “A faith born out of a response to beauty,” Stone writes, “inclines organically, naturally, and per-

haps even necessarily toward sharing” (120). If contemporary Christians want to discover the same missionary fervor as the biblical apostles, we should not grit our teeth and push through our discomfort but should rather re-awaken our imaginations to the divine beauty we can’t possess but can only revel in. Not only is the culture pluralistic, but Christian witness is pluriform—evangelism is not about securing uniformity of opinion but freeing different witnesses to show others the facets of divine grace that uniquely inspire each of them.

The epilogue, titled “The Meaninglessness of Apologetics,” is the least persuasive section of the book. It’s unclear whether Stone is arguing that Christians should abandon apologetics as a pursuit or—as he argues with evangelism—pursue it in a different mode from what we usually imagine. Lacking a sustained engagement with how apologists understand their task, this epilogue feels more dismissive than the chapters that precede it.

Evangelism after Pluralism is an accessible, well-written treatment of an uncomfortable topic from a theological perspective. Though Stone is ordained in the Church of the Nazarene, his emphasis on nonviolence, embodied community, and dialogue resonates with Anabaptist commitments. I hope this book brings us closer to the day when people will associate evangelism not with competition but with a shared appreciation for the beauty of divine grace.

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John G. Flett and David W. Congdon, eds., *Converting Witness: The Future of Christian Mission in the New Millennium*, Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, Lanham, MD, 2019. 240 pages. \$110.00. ISBN: 978-1-9787-0840-2.

Converting Witness is a festschrift edited by two of Darrell L. Guder’s former PhD students at Princeton Theological Seminary. John Flett and David Congdon honor Guder’s influential role in the development of missional theology and missional hermeneutics, giving voice to an international array of scholars who appreciate Guder’s work as a catalyst for new insights in their diverse fields. The work is soundly these authors’, not a summary of Guder’s thought with a few reflections. Beyond the introductory first chapter, the chapters are not a close reading of Guder’s published works; rather, authors in their own scholarly perspectives expound on themes that Guder engaged. The authors share Guder’s commitment to scholarship for the Christian church, enabling scholars and practitioners to find something of relevance in this academic volume, even if only a single chapter.

Flett and Congdon open with a robust yet concise summary of Guder’s life and work. With careful footnoting, they trace the influences, primary themes,

and trajectory of Guder's theology. A reader not already familiar with Guder can become acquainted with the person behind the work and grasp the scope of his scholarship.

Eberhard Busch is one of three Swiss or German authors in the volume, appropriately so because Guder holds Swiss citizenship, spent his early career in Germany, and is an avid English translator of German theology. Busch, Karl Barth's former assistant, expounds upon Barth's gathering, upbuilding, and sending functions of the church. Busch insists on the missional task of every member of the Christian church. Christine Lienemann-Perrin, of Basel, explores the etymology and history of the term "Christendom," surveying its different uses by Christians in Europe, North America, and the Global South. Believing the concept stifling for missiological discourse, she calls for a global movement to transcend the binary split between Christendom and post-Christendom, "to avoid altogether that term [Christendom] at least for a while and replace it by describing the intended phenomena as precisely as possible" (73). Henning Wrogemann of Germany assesses current trends in the globalization of mission, observing an increase in mission efforts worldwide, diversification, and surprising directions in missiological movement. He proposes an adaptable theology of mission that is both doxological—with dimensions of "prophetic criticism, power, communal-physical experience, and [invoking] the name of Jesus Christ"—and *oikumenical*, "with aspects of solidarity, plurality, cooperation, and ecology" (206).

From a distinctively Roman Catholic perspective, Stephen Bevans explores the missional mark of catholicity as one of four Nicene marks of the church. Though he relies heavily on Vatican II, Protestants will also find much relevant material in his chapter.

From Fuller Theological Seminary (Pasadena, CA), Richard Mouw recommends conceptualizing the church as an organism rather than an institution, as distinguished by Abraham Kuyper. Interestingly, Mouw offers the only direct and sustained critique of Guder in the entire volume, judging Guder's emphasis on the parish context as "unnecessarily restrictive" (143). Also from Fuller, Wilbert Shenk emphasizes Guder's call for the church to experience ongoing renewal through "life-changing encounter with the Word" and "deep conversion to God's mission as the foundation on which new structures and practices can be developed" (217). Drawing on Ezekiel's prophetic vision of dry bones, Shenk points out that renewal begins on the margins of the church and results in mission.

Three Western Theological Seminary (Holland, MI) faculty are featured. George Hunsberger offers a theological reflection on church planting—affirming its importance, clarifying its nature and *telos*, and exploring its biblical foundations. He recommends "a church spawning imagination, recognizing our midwife relationship to what the Spirit is birthing" (161). This and Benjamin

Connor's feature on missional Christian practices are likely the most relevant chapters for ministry practitioners. Regarding Christian practices as inherently missional, Connor translates two of Guder's core concepts—incarnational witness and communal formation for walking worthily—into a practical theology of Christian practices within congregations. New Testament scholar James Brownson briefly examines two challenges emerging for missional hermeneutics since its development in the 1990s: the universality/particularity tension and missional hermeneutics as primarily an academic movement of rational discourse.

Four authors address intercultural and interreligious engagement. Congdon overlays Rudolf Bultmann's program of demythologization with the framework of intercultural hermeneutics at the intersection of the biblical text's ancient culture and that of contemporary readers. He examines Bultmann's categories of preunderstanding and self-understanding, concluding that an intercultural hermeneutic simultaneously translates the proclaimed message from one historical context to another and eschatologically "transpropriates the kerygma to ever new contexts" (114). Peruvian scholar Samuel Escobar points out that Latin American Evangelical missiology has understood the church as missional from the beginning. He highlights the complicated and problematic missiological relationship between European and American Christians and the peoples of Latin America, and recommends a new approach of Integral Mission that incorporates evangelization. Seong Sik Heo interrogates Lesslie Newbigin's reluctance to engage in interreligious dialogue. From his perspective in Korea, he reviews Newbigin's writings on religious pluralism, considers Newbigin's cultural context, and proposes steps toward engaging in interreligious dialogues in Asia as "a way of Christian pilgrimage" (179). Deanna Womack—in conversation with Guder, Newbigin, and John Mackay—explores from the American Protestant context how a commitment to mission might be reconciled with the Christian "calling to live as loving neighbors alongside people of many faiths" (184). She calls for the conversion of American mission so that Christians do not privatize their faith, reduce it to a simple truth for converting souls, or clothe it in the garb of white supremacy.

Coincidentally, *Converting Witness* was published the year Princeton Theological Seminary temporarily closed Stuart Hall for renovations—the 1876 Venetian Gothic academic building where Guder taught as Professor of Missional and Ecumenical Theology from 2002 to 2015.¹ As Guder enlarged students' imaginations for the apostolic, missional vocation of the church, it was as if

1 "Princeton Historic District," nomination form, National Register of Historic Places, United States Department of the Interior National Park Service, May 15, 1975, <https://npgallery.nps.gov/GetAsset/8ef7085f-a375-4f72-827c-2acc409f972f>, accessed January 6, 2020, 5.

the conversation occurred within a stone monument to the very Christendom Guder critiqued.

In 2019, scaffolding was erected around Stuart Hall. Guder uses the metaphor of scaffolding to describe theology and ministry's need to become "missional." "We would not need that scaffolding if our theological work were shaped by the *missio Dei*," Guder writes, "truly focused upon the formation and equipping of the church for its apostolate."² The term "missional" has become wildly popular among Western Protestants, yet some scholars now call it into question. The same day Guder was formally presented with this festschrift, scholars at a Gospel and Our Culture Network Forum on Missional Hermeneutics debated—with Guder in the room—dropping the term altogether.³ Some wondered, Is the term so tied to vestiges of colonialism that it can only issue a partial diagnosis of the church's underlying problems?⁴ Is it so offensive and misunderstood that different scaffolding should be erected?

Though the title might suggest that *Converting Witness* would interrogate the current and ongoing function of missional scaffolding in the new millennium, it hardly does so. With a few fleeting exceptions, most authors build upon Guder's accomplished critical work—and indeed, he has done much—and proceed with the already-defined missional task without deeply interrogating it. A tribute worthy of Guder might better critique these theoretical starting points, as Guder himself demonstrated in his own scholarship.

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2 Darrell L. Guder, *Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2015), 168.

3 The festschrift presentation occurred on November 24, 2019, during Princeton Theological Seminary's reception at the American Academy of Religion and Society of Biblical Literature annual meeting in San Diego, California.

4 Drew Hart, respondent, "James Cone, Blackness, and Missional Hermeneutics," Gospel and Our Culture Network Forum on Missional Hermeneutics, American Academy of Religion annual meeting, San Diego, CA, November 24, 2019.