

Faiths and Faithfulness: Pluralism, Dialogue and Mission in the Work of Kenneth Cragg and Lesslie Newbigin. Nicholas J. Wood. Paternoster Theological Monographs. Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 2009. ISBN: 978-1-84227-371-5. 219 pages. £24.99.

With the growing pluralism of our global world there can be little doubt that the relationship between the Christian faith and other world religions must be a top priority for our theological agenda. Nicholas J. Wood tackles this subject by mining the resources of two great missionary bishops of the 20th century, Kenneth Cragg and Lesslie Newbigin. Wood is a Baptist minister and Fellow in Religion and Culture, and Director of the Oxford Centre for Christianity and Culture at Regent's Park College, University of Oxford, England.

The book is divided into four parts. Part one sets the background for his analyses of Cragg and Newbigin with a brief survey of the history of a Christian approach to other religions. The first chapter sketches the scene in the late 19th and early 20th century when the fulfilment position was in ascendancy with a focus on its most eloquent exponent John Nicol Farquhar. The second chapter explores the ongoing discussion of Christian mission and world religions after the First World War, when Hendrik Kraemer was the towering figure. I was pleased to read that Wood would not follow the general trend to dismiss Kraemer's position in terms of a narrow exclusivism. Rather, he writes, "Kraemer's position is actually much more subtle and complex than is sometimes allowed . . ." (p. 9). A nuanced interpretation of Kraemer follows but I still wonder whether Wood has captured the genius of his position. The next two chapters describe the growth of religious pluralism paying special attention to the position of John Hick in the first chapter, and later developments including Karl Rahner in the following chapter. These chapters highlight a shift in the discussion of world religions from missionary circles to secular academic institutions. They further raise urgent questions about how a Christian might affirm their faith in a pluralistic world while recognising the truth in other religions. Wood is concerned to address the latter question by returning to mission as a proper entry into the subject.

This introductory section sets up the heart of the book where Wood elaborates the positions of Cragg and Newbigin. He believes a central problem in understanding world religions from a Christian position is the relationship between continuity and discontinuity. He believes Cragg continues the Farquhar tradition and Newbigin the Kraemer tradition, while both offer refinements of these positions. In part 2 Wood analyses Cragg's position in two chapters and in part 3 Newbigin's also in two

chapters. Wood is at his best in these two sections especially as he digs deeply into Cragg's writing with evident affection for Cragg and sympathy for his position.

In part 4 Wood offers his conclusions first by elaborating a Christology and then by opening up the biblical notion of fulfilment in Matthew and fullness in Colossians and Ephesians. He ends by drawing those insights together with implications for the current debate. The last paragraphs of this section seem to offer Wood's position of a fulfilment theology: Christ is the fulfilment of the spiritual longings of humankind; fulfilment is also about discontinuity which Wood interprets as "radical transcendence"; we need to maintain a creative tension between continuity and discontinuity (p.187-188) There follows a final chapter on how dialogue should function in the mission of the church given this view of continuity and discontinuity.

This is a fine book with a lucid narrative, careful descriptions of leading thinkers, and deft analysis of various positions that together open up the important insight that the way we relate continuity and discontinuity will have an impact on our missional posture in a pluralistic society. Yet in the end I found Wood's position unconvincing. He does not really find a way beyond Cragg and Newbigin, but appears to be much more at home in the fulfilment position of Cragg. Alternatively I confess that I find the Kraemer and Newbigin approach to be more cogent. Theirs is not simply a position of radical discontinuity but a fine integration of continuity and discontinuity within the notion of what Kraemer calls "subversive fulfilment." He distinguishes between a religious consciousness which expresses the universal religious longings and aspirations of humankind, on the one hand, and the way those religious longings have been given empirical embodiment in the various religions of humankind, on the other. The gospel fulfils the religious longings of humankind but contradicts and subverts the way those longings are concretely expressed in the various religions of the world. Given Wood's express purpose of resolving the issue of continuity and discontinuity with the notion of fulfilment, it is surprising he doesn't engage the concept of "subversive fulfilment." Perhaps such an engagement would have led him to move beyond a description of Kraemer and Newbigin in terms of discontinuity and to struggle with the adjective "subversive" in order to distinguish it from the way he'd modify that fulfilment. Moreover, maybe this engagement would have led to a further elaboration of his tantalising comment that the cross "contradicts" the way the religious longings are fulfilled in the world religions (p. 187), a word that begins to move his position on discontinuity beyond transcendence toward the way that both Kraemer and Newbigin qualified fulfilment.

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