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Review

God of the Remnant; The Plight of Minority Ethnic Groups in Africa:

Agang, Sunday, HippoBooks: Bukuru, Plateau State, Nigeria: 2021, ISBN 9781839730580, 88p.

Review by Prof HJ (Jurgens) Hendriks¹

Agang, General Editor of “African Public Theology” (HippoBooks, 2020), is not writing to a secluded academic guild. He is, however, writing theology that is contextual to the African continent and its people. Reading “God of the Remnant” reminded me of the way in which Jesus Christ taught the multitudes.

The book is about the plight of minorities, the struggle and pain that millions of our people are experiencing. The first paragraph of the preface is powerful. It is a testimony and it brings you into the orbit where the struggle takes place:

“I know from my own experience that life is not easy as a member of a minority group in Africa. Your options are limited and you and your people are at the mercy of majorities who control all aspects of community life. Sometimes, your group is made the scapegoat for problems in the community. You may even endure severe persecution. At best, you may hope to be ignored, and you have resigned yourself to spare-tire status as a permanent second-class citizen.”

Statistically, Africa may be the “most Christian continent”, but the stark reality of suffering, poverty, corruption, ethnic violence and the worst possible leadership put a question mark behind “Christian.” Hope vanish.

“God of the remnant” rekindles hope. It goes back to basics. It revisits human identity, covenant and the unconditional love of God that is there for all humans, irrespective of whatever may be the differences between us. In short

¹ University of Stellenbosch

clear strokes, like a master painter, the author takes one through biblical history and the world as we know it. It reminded me of the blind man whom Jesus healed. The eyes of the reader can suddenly see the patterns of history, the patterns repeated to this very day in the world and, sadly, in the church too. Once you are able to see, hope is rekindled.

The book explains the role of the remnant. The strength of the church never was in being a majority, not in numbers. The strength of the church is in being called and in setting out on a journey. It lies in being a blessing to the world and all its peoples. The remnant concept is explained by illustrating it in the lives of minorities. It started with Abraham and his family being called to the final illustration in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who, with twelve disciples and an undisclosed number of women changed the world.

Scripture functions throughout the book as the basic platform from which the ever-present pattern of the covenantal relationship, with its ups and downs, is portrayed. Through faith and obedience, a remnant always survived and returned to the promised land (OT) to the faith community that followed Christ (NT). One begins to understand the concept of a “promised land” that is more than an earthly abode.

The book also illustrates how paradise is lost, how exile happens, how power corrupts... the myriad ways of losing your way and ending in misery.

Thus, by looking at biblical and ecclesial history, one discerns how spiritually and existentially dangerous the power of being part of a majority is. The author could have illustrated this concept with the biblical principle that there is no peace without justice. There is no future without justice to all, to all minorities.

The book provides guidance for minorities. Hate and revenge do not lead to peace and justice. Here the author could make use of Desmond Tutu’s “No future without forgiveness.” (Tutu, Desmond M., 1999, No future without forgiveness, Doubleday, New York.)

One aspect of the book that I found particularly helpful was the emphasis on assumptions. We are not always aware of our assumptions. Quite often assumptions are not in line with the basic Christian values. Both ethnic majorities and minorities have to scrutinize their assumptions. In this respect

the author could have strengthened his argument if he emphasized the importance of crossing boundaries and listening to “the other.” It is very difficult to recognize one’s own assumptions if you grew up with it and never “crossed boundaries” to understand something of the plight of people on the other side. Jesus helped his disciples to deal with wrong assumptions by taking them to the other side.

“The God of the Remnant” is a most valuable contribution to the theological discourse of our continent. It is a testimony that the remnant’s road is often the one less travelled ... but it is following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

Addresses to order from:

- Africa Christian Textbooks (ACTS), TCNN, PMB 2020, Bukuru 930008, Plateau State, Nigeria. <https://www.actsnigeria.org>

- Langham Publishing, PO Box 296, Carlisle, Cumbria, CA3 9WZ, UK. <https://www.langhampublishing.org>