

Bryan Stone. *Evangelism after Pluralism: The Ethics of Christian Witness*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018. 151 pages. \$21.99 ISBN 9781493414567.

Bryan Stone, in *Evangelism After Pluralism*, presents the ethics of evangelism for this pluralistic context, which he avers is a corrective to the popular Christian imagination that has uncritically absorbed values and ideologies of the secular state. He contends that Pluralism, which is the story we tell about plurality, ironically is about a unity that attempts to comprehend the many using a common denominator (10). The result is an exaltation of competition and suppression of differences for the sake of unity, a unity constructed through the lens and interest of the dominant ideology disseminated mainly through three cultural contexts: empire, the nation-state, and consumer culture. Stone's contention is that Christians' response to Pluralism should be to refrain from the competitive spirit of securing space, the hegemonic imposition of unity onto plurality, and the giving of uncritical allegiance to empire, nation, and market (12), as well as to guard against the explicit and implicit temptation to operate within the boundaries set by Pluralism's ethos. Whereas the earthly empire attempts to homogenize by imposing a totalizing order, the gospel celebrates diversity by providing an alternative story—a story that can be told by different dialects (30) without contestation or hybridization. This is the case because the gospel is the embodiment of Jesus' message that is non-coercive, non-competitive, and non-violent, but rooted in the principle of tolerance for diversity, openness to the hospitality of others, and intrinsically connected to the identity of the ecclesial body. It is the visible presentation of Christ as Lord as opposed to the emperor as Lord (34). Thus, he maintains that the moral and ethical foundation of Christian social imagination must be “fundamentally self-emptying, gratuitous, and pacifist” rather than “conquering, defending, securing, and grasping” (3).

In that light, evangelism is a call to faithfully and corporately witness the kingdom values by authentically, tangibly, and boldly embodying its beauty as opposed to propositionally establishing its authenticity (132–133). Evangelism is a subversive practice in that Christians live by the values and goals of the ecclesial community, which challenges the unjust political, cultural, and economic ambitions of the empire (126–127, 133). Rather than a mere proclamation of the gospel to procure converts or compete for space, Christians live out a radical lifestyle, part of which include violating the imperial boundary (47) or relativizing of national borders (38), abstaining from killing (74), and offering an alternative economic set-up (97). The rival values of the empire that are disseminated through the consumer market, civil religion, and the perpetual demand for chaplaincy to the empire is countered by providing different lifestyle that is anchored in the ecclesial values of plurality (chapters 3-4), non-violence (chapter 6), beauty and common good (chapter 9).

Therefore, for Stone, the logic of evangelism is the logic of exemplification, embodiment, faithfulness, and witness rather than the logic of production, competition, or winning” (17). It is witness-oriented evangelism as opposed to results-oriented evangelism (24). Hence, the end and the means are intricately connected. While we rejoice at people converting, conversion is only the secondary goal.

Stone's emphasis on the intricate connection between the means and the end, if not the conflation of the two, explains his critique of Elmer Thiessen's view for the legitimacy of proselytization. Given Stone's assumption, i.e., the Church does not *do* evangelism, but the Church *is* evangelism, his critique makes sense. Yet, Stone here imposes his category on Thiessen, who is defending the legitimacy of proselytization against secularists, liberals, and

those antithetical to gospel proclamation. While Stone has a point, I also agree with Thiessen that proselytization, in the sense of an attempt to win converts (an understanding Stone rightly attributes to Thiessen [16]), is part of our evangelistic goal. If Thiessen's model of evangelism falters on the slippery slope of a utilitarian framework, as Stone charges (23), the latter's model is also in danger of undermining the importance of conversion. Conversion may not be the main goal, but it is also a goal.

While Stone's presentation of evangelism as not merely proclamation but an alternative lifestyle is much appreciated, I wish he had been more explicit on the exclusive nature of Christian faith. Echoing others (for example, Raimon Panikkar's idea of "dialogical dialogue"), Stone contends that Christians cannot assume or condemn *a priori* the Buddhist's (or Hindu's) teachings as false. In a sense, Stone is right that we do not have *a priori* ground to reject other faiths; we can only reject something to be false after we have examined them. However, to claim the exclusivity of Christian faith thereby directly or indirectly rejecting all other religions as deficient is not purely an *a priori* claim since the truthfulness of Christianity and falsity of other faiths have been weighed by the Scripture and other Christians who have gone before us. This claim does not mean that there is no truth whatsoever to be found in other faiths; instead, it means that only in and through God's special revelation, the deposit of faith, which Christianity proclaims, is humanity able to connect with the triune God, the Creator of all humanity. Thus we do not need to adjudicate each religion individually; we are justified in proclaiming that Christianity is the only true religion not just for Christians but also for all humanity. Nonetheless, Stone's alternative version of what it means to be a witnessing community and remapping of what evangelism should look like today provides a supplementary way of understanding the topic. He offers a compelling reason to consider his proposal.

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