

Boekbesprekings / Book Reviews

Geiko Muller-Fahrenholz — God's Spirit: Transforming a World in Crisis

Geneva: World Council of Churches. 175 pages. Price: US \$17.95

Reviewer: Dr Johan Buitendag

The theme of the book is one of the more popular subjects in recent theology, namely creation and ecology. The author deals with this subject from a pneumatological perspective, interpreting the term not in the individual and private sense of the Spirit as an esoteric experience in the reborn heart, but as the cosmic Spirit transcending time and space. This results in a global perspective evoking the whole of creation. The renowned expression of *Veni, Creator Spiritus* corresponds therefore with *Maranatha*, creation to salvation.

Taking this point of departure, the author finds himself firmly within the current theological trend to understand reality. Contra Karl Barth, the author sees the *ruach* in Genesis 1:2 already as the *Spirit of God* and understands the 'activity' in this verse as possibly suggesting the hatching of the primordial egg. (The author pays tribute to and sees an analogy in the painting 'The great Family of the Belgian artist, René Magritte, as a mythic and visionary image of the moment at which creation began.) This spirit of God hovering over the surface of the waters', is the motherly energy of God, the inspiration and soul of the earth.

The relevance of the theme is self-evident. The author addresses the current world crises with regard to ecological and social disequilibria and interprets them anew. He succeeds in maintaining the delicate balance inherent in the church's *identity-involvement-dilemma*. On the one hand we need new visions for 'household politics' (*oikodomia*), and on the other hand a reinterpretation of the traditional 'aliens in a foreign land' (*paroikia*). The constructive and immanent thrust of *ecodominical* communities must incorporate the element of critical non-conformity. This demands a new paradigm.

In his introduction the author himself draws attention to three aspects of his personal background: his work at the World Council of Churches in Geneva, his pastoral work in the Lutheran Church in Germany, and his lectures in ecumenical and ecological ethics in South America. These correspond roughly with his approach in the book to an interwoven understanding of society, psychology and nature.

Moltmann has indisputably had an influence on his thoughts. The train of thought, especially in the two books by Moltmann on *Creation* and on *Christianity*, is pursued from beginning to end. The author reminds us that the world is hallowed as creation primarily through the Sabbath. The creation finds its *apex* (according to the Priestly account of the creation) not in man, but in the institution of the seventh day as God's own day of rest.

This book is a translation from the original German but has been substantially abbreviated. Although traces of original German filters through in certain expressions, the book reads well and the message is clear. The book comprises twenty-three short chapters, many of which are introduced by an epigraph. These introductions are theologically interpreted to form the background for certain classical dogmas, which in turn are reinterpreted and applied at the end of the chapter. The classical *ordo salutis* with its well-known concepts is understood in terms of concepts such as solidarity, endurance, forgiveness, networking and promising. The author's exposition of the *munus triplex* as truth, solidarity and perseverance is a refreshing take on the more conventional.

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Not only does the author to a certain degree succeed in bridging the traditional schism between the evangelicals and ecumenicals, but between the inner and outer realms of existence as well. In his own words: 'The, "outward" threats correspond with the "inward" fatigue and restlessness'. This point coincides with the defining of stress as the inner side of the ecological crisis; of stress and the ecological crisis as individual and collective pathology of discrepancy of the inside and the outside, as presented in the reviewer's dissertation in 1985.

The author's discussion of the concept of *numbing* is particularly noteworthy. Numbing refers to the human response of the 'killing of feelings' (Robert Jay Lifton) as survival mechanism. The only way to overcome the pain of others is to make oneself *insensitive* to the onslaught of painful images, to reduce the range of feeling, to go numb. The author, however, proffers forgiveness as an alternative response. Chapter 20 deals most satisfactorily with this issue.

A highly recommended book for all who seek a fresh interpretation and application of pneumatology today, especially in South Africa. *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)* of the government and all its hearings could be understood and evaluated against this background.
