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**McKay, S & Silman, J, 1995 — The First Nations: A Canadian experience of the Gospel Culture encounter**

Geneva: WCC Publishers. 53 pages. Price: Unknown

**Bria, I, 1995 — Romania: Orthodox Identity at a Crossroads of Europe**

Geneva: WCC Publishers. 54 pages. Price: Unknown

**Reviewer: Rev P C Swanepoel**

The focus of the World Council of Churches' 1996 world conference on mission and evangelism was the question: '*How is the one gospel related to the many cultures of the world?*'. These two pamphlets deals with that question, each from its own perspective.

*Pamphlet 2* deals with the question from the perspective of the so-called 'First Nations' of Canada, the aboriginal communities. The authors of this pamphlet, McKay and Silman, are both members of the aboriginal communities and ministers of the United Church of Canada.

Their approach in dealing with the above question is an interesting one. They tell the story of the mission to the aboriginals in Canada in the form of a conversation between them. By doing this they are being faithful to the oral tradition of their people.

The story (of the history of mission in Canada) is a sad reflection on the mistakes made by the Christian Church in its missionary endeavour. One of the mistakes that comes to the fore in the pamphlet is that 'Christianity' and 'civilization' were considered to be inseparable. 'The predominant ideology and theology seemed to be a complete fusion of Christianity with the Anglo-European way of life'. (16)

The authors recall the historical effort to take away the language, tradition and culture of the aboriginals in the effort to christianize them. But they also tell the story of the re-emerging of language, tradition and culture of the aboriginal people and of the very conscious effort to integrate their culture with the story of the gospel. They tell of the 'newness that Christianity brings' (48) to their traditional ways, and that newness is Jesus Christ! But then this is a Jesus who is not distorted by a 'Western civilized' image, but a Jesus as the Bible reveals him and interpreted by the aboriginal culture for the aboriginal people.

The story of the 'First Nations' is the story of a people's struggle, 'because we could no longer tolerate living under paternalism, in which others spoke for us and refused to hear our stories'. It tells the story of people who long for their own language, culture and tradition, and of their need to govern themselves.

In 1986 the United Church of Canada issued a public apology for (amongst other things) imposing their civilization as a condition for accepting the gospel. One of the results of this public apology was the forming of the All Native Circle Conference (ANCC) in 1987.

McKay states that 'In a sense, the ANCC is a form of apartheid in the church ... these moves toward self-government in the church are about separation, but in another way they are about survival'. (38)

In *Pamphlet 3* we get a different perspective from Ion Bria of the Romanian Orthodox Church on the question of the relationship between the one gospel and the many cultures of the world. He briefly sketches the history of the Romanian people and the Romanian Orthodox Church. One clearly gets the impression from this perspective of the very strong historical bond that exists between the people and the Orthodox Church in Romania. The history of the Romanian people and the Romanian Orthodox Church are intertwined, as Bria points out. 'By the end of the ninth century, the process of ethnic formation, with a specific language and religion, had been completed .... What is important here is that the ethnic formation of the Romanian people took place simultaneously with the penetration of the gospel' (1, 2).

Thus, for the Romanian Orthodox Church (which comprises 90% of the Romanian population), gospel culture and tradition are not to be separated from each other. Bria states that 'Culture is an integral part of faithfulness to a particular tradition; thus the nature of tradition is an essential part of the gospel-culture debate'. (37) It is therefore understandable that the decision to leave Romania within the 'orbit of the Stalinist empire, Soviet imperialism and Marxist ideology' after the second World War had very serious implications for the church, its mission and culture. 'The Communist government obliged the Romanian Orthodox Church to limit its proclamation of the gospel to the Sunday worship service and reduced to a minimum its opportunity to act in solidarity with society at large'. (23)

Bria pointedly states that 'In the clash between Marxist ideology and Romanian culture, values were supplanted by force. The church was turned into a museum, liturgy into a show, aesthetics into politics, philosophy into ideology'.

Now that the Communist era has passed, the profile of the present culture remains undefined, but, according to Bria, at least three problem areas have already been identified:

- Young people seem to have lost their religious and moral bearings;
- there is a general lack of interest amongst intellectuals in religious themes, and;
- there is no real desire to reconstruct society.

Solving these problem areas is indeed a daunting challenge for the post-Communist Romanian Orthodox Church!

What is the role of the Orthodoxy in a thoroughly secular society? Bria argues that the Orthodox Church cannot escape or flee from political reality, but should rather get involved — politically as well as ecumenically — in order to help shape a new society. Both these pamphlets deal with historical mistakes of the past. In pamphlet 2 it is 'cultural genocide', and in pamphlet 3 it is religious repression. But they also deal with hope which cannot, and should not, be suppressed by the mistakes of the past!

*Boekbesprekings / Book Reviews*

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The question: 'How is the one gospel related to the many cultures of the world?' is a relevant question which needs to be asked by every church which is serious about its missionary and evangelistic task. These two pamphlets not only contribute, but also stimulate that debate and are therefore recommended.

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