



Resensies / Reviews

B.J. van der Walt, a missionary of a different kind

Bishop, S., ed. 2011. *Like the first gleam of the dawn: reformational studies – a Bennie van der Walt reader*. Potchefstroom: Institute for Contemporary Christianity in Africa. 588 p. Price: R200,00. ISBN: 978-1-86822-607-8.

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Bennie van der Walt characterises himself as a philosophical missionary. This description is instructive with regards to both the selection of topics included in the reader, as well as the intended audience. What is meant by “philosophical missionary”? Someone completely unfamiliar with reformational philosophy might imagine it to refer to the substitution of the good news of the gospels with the cunning “wisdom” of men. Such an interpretation assumes that philosophy and Christian religion are mutually exclusive.

One must, however, realise that Van der Walt works in a special kind of philosophical tradition. It is a tradition in which the central relevance of the good news is acknowledged in all areas of life. It serves to honour the full scope of Christ’s claim on our life and our world. Steve Bishop, the editor of the book, explains:

Like Kuyper before him, Van der Walt ... wants to see a bold, robust and involved Christianity; one that is able to transform and shape society, and one that avoids an escapist, dualistic ... Christianity.

Like the first gleam of dawn reflects something of Van der Walt’s career as a philosophical missionary. Missionaries reach out to those who are unfamiliar with the message of God they wish to share. Not surprisingly, Van der Walt has many publications aimed

at making reformational philosophy more accessible to the uninitiated. This compilation was clearly put together with this aim in mind and can therefore be described as popular-scientific reading material. Similarly, the breadth of topics included in the reader reflects something of the message itself, namely the relevance of the Christian religion in all areas and issues of life.

The book is divided into five main parts, with each part having its own theme. The theme of part 1 is the sixteenth-century Reformation. Part 2 contains essays grouped around the theme of a reformational worldview and a reformational philosophy. Included are also some of Van der Walt's essays on central reformational figures such as Abraham Kuyper, Antheunis Janse, and D.H. Th. Vollenhoven. The people of Africa are one of Van der Walt's life-long concerns. It is therefore fitting that part 3 is dedicated to essays on Africa. The theme of part 4 is Christian scholarship and part 5 contains applications of reformational thought to concrete social issues. A total of 27 essays are thus thematically grouped into these five main parts.

As the essays were previously published, either in the form of a chapter in a book or as an article in a journal, each essay forms a more or less independent unit in the book. This fact makes the overview of the five main parts given in the introduction of the book indispensable. Those interested in further reading will also find the list of Van der Walt's English publications at the end of the book very useful.

In summary: The book is well suited as an introduction to the religious impetus behind reformational philosophy and can be recommended to anyone longing for a more "bold, robust and involved Christianity". Those very familiar with Van der Walt's publications must keep in mind that the book does not contain any new material that were not previously published in some other form. Although there are a few editing oversights, it is of minor consequence and will probably only annoy the true perfectionist.