

Book Reviews

To the Nations for the Earth: A Missional Spirituality, Charles J. Fensham, Toronto: Clements Academic, 2013. 182 pp. Paperback. USD 19.95. ISBN-10: 1926798090. ISBN-13: 978-1926798097

In the last two or three decades, we have witnessed a renewed interest in spirituality in Christian academic circles. More recently, we have also seen a growing number of publications on the mission and missional church—both on popular and academic levels. While one can easily find many quality works on Christian spirituality and some decent books on mission/missional church, one would only find a few works that combine both themes in a single volume. In this work, Charles Fensham, professor of theology at Knox College, Toronto, attempts to do just that—as one may discern from the book’s subtitle: *A Missional Spirituality*. As such, this book addresses those who have interest in spirituality and/or in mission but particularly to those who would like to see how biblical missional impetus shapes a particular understanding of Christian spirituality.

I use the word “biblical” not only because the mission is everywhere in the Bible, but also and primarily because Fensham attempts to ground his whole argument in a thorough engagement with biblical texts. So, for instance, chapter one can be seen as the extended discussion on the creation story in the book of Genesis, whereas chapter two is a sort of theological-spiritual interpretation of Romans 12. Thus, students of the Old and New Testaments who are interested in reading Scripture in light of missional-spiritual lenses may find this volume valuable. However, as Fensham himself hinted, those who would find this book most helpful are *Christian leaders who seek to understand what it means to be*

spiritual leaders who lead people of God in their spiritual journey.

To perceive spirituality as a journey is precisely Fensham’s central thesis. As the title of the work suggests, this journey is *a journey to the nations and for the earth*. Furthermore, the journey is a community journey that is framed doxologically—that is to say, in the context of worship. Accordingly, he made the structures of the book in a classic liturgical order—though he creatively adds “journey” right in the middle of the traditional fourfold *ordo* of worship: (1) the Call to worship; (2) [listen to] the Word; (3) [Journey]; (4) the Sacrament; (5) the Sending. By framing the journey in the language of worship, Fensham calls to God’s supremacy, over and against humans, as the primary subject of theology and spirituality. It is ultimately God’s mission (*missio dei*) that we are concerned with, not ours—human. We are only called to participate in God’s ongoing mission to the world.

Moreover, right from the onset, he reveals his Reformed heritage by clearly distinguishing God as the Creator and the rest of creation as creatures. However, Fensham quickly adds, this is not the dualism of body and soul saturated in too-many circles of the modern pietistic-evangelical spirituality. “Matter matters” is one of the catchwords that he frequently utilizes to remind us of his theological-spiritual stance. Indeed, the whole book can be read as a thorough critique of the other-worldly, saving-soul-only, disembodied spirituality. As an alternative, Fensham’s is a creation(al)

spirituality grounded in God's big story of creating, sustaining, fellowshiping, and redeeming all things in Jesus the Messiah.

Fensham argues that his emphasis on spirituality as a communal enterprise is rooted in the very being of God itself—hence, the close connection between spirituality and theology. As the Trinity, God is relational in his very being. Advocating the social Trinitarianism à la Moltmann, he proposes that this relationality means that God is always for the other: first, each person of the Trinity is for the other person of the Godhead (*perichoresis*); second, God as Trinity is for the other being, which is creation. This view of divine being, in turn, leads to a particular understanding of human personhood: to be a person is to be relational. In other words, relationality—not rationality—is the *imago dei* in the human person. Individuals should always be understood as an individual-in-community, which reminds one of John Zizioulas' theology of personhood: being as communion. Drawing from (or better: mediating) Barth and Tillich, Fensham then works out the question of identity-based on his theological anthropology laid before. With Barth, he contends that one's identity is discerned not by self-referencing and self-reflection process, but by encountering the Other, which is Jesus Christ the God-Man. With Tillich, however, he wants to qualify this encounter as always mediated through our fellow humans. It seems that Fensham is closer to Tillich than to Barth in this respect. Indeed, based on his reading of Matthew 25, Fensham goes so far as to suggest that one can *only* encounter Christ through journeying to the neighbor, especially to the most vulnerable neighbor. He writes, "Our journey to the neighbor as a journey to Jesus the Messiah and God, is a journey that falls under the rubric of the love of God and neighbor, and it is in this journey and encounter, enlightened by the Gospel narratives, that we find ourselves. This is the heart of theological anthropology of formation for Christian spirituality" (82). For Fensham, the neighbor is all people regardless

of their race, social status, gender, sexual orientation, or even religion. It can, and should, be extended to the whole families, or people groups (*etne*), which recalls God's blessing to all people when God made a covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12. Hence, the epithet: "To the Nations."

Fensham, however, does not stop here—to the nations, to the human race. He adds the whole creation as the goal of our spiritual-missional journey. God calls us to a love journey not only to our neighbor but also to the whole cosmos. Fensham believes that a robust theology of creation and a cosmic view of redemption of all things in Christ will lead to this conclusion: "to realize that the broken human community, *and* the broken whole of creation is now the object of God's redemptive mission that we are called to join." Furthermore, "A theology of the human person that remains only human-focused will miss the important place and role, and thus the meaning, of whom we are created to be. We are created for community, *and* we are created to serve and to protect creation" (88; his emphasis).

By way of evaluation, let me begin by saying that it is very refreshing to read a work of a *theologian* who wrote an account of *spirituality* with a *missional* focus grounded in *biblical* exegesis and framed in a *liturgical* language. It is a rare and a needed combination, indeed. I appreciate his attempt to engage various disciplines and to be as academic and practical at the same time. I concur with some of his post-modern instincts: to give emphasis more on, for instance, practical knowledge (*phronesis*) than theoretical knowledge; on narrative/story than on mere concept/propositions; on relationality than simply on rationality; on community than on individuals; on the notion of journey (as a dynamic process) than on the static result; and on sacraments/symbols along with words/concepts. I genuinely like all this—except for the fact that it can create another unhealthy and unnecessary dichotomy if pressed too far. While he tries to be balanced

in many respects, at times, Fensham does fall to emphasize one at the other's expense. For instance, Fensham is to be applauded for his critique to the other-worldly, individualistic, disembodied spirituality of some pietistic branches of evangelicalism. He is right to stress that body is as essential as the soul in the Bible. There is simply no such thing as "disembodied souls." This emphasis on the body, in turn, leads to a bodily spirituality that results in a *proper* appreciation of the notion of justice, social action, inclusivity, care for creation, and many others. This is all well and good—except that Fensham barely deals with the soul dimension of a person. He touches a bit about evangelism and sharing the Gospel's message, but that is it—only a bit. Furthermore, his concept of witnessing the Gospel is unsurprisingly focused on loving deeds, hospitality, and community development. Again, I am all for this (too often neglected) dimension of evangelical spirituality. However, I am also convinced that the scriptural understanding of the Gospel is for the *whole* person, body, and soul. To overemphasize one at the expense of the other is to fall into the same trap as those that Fensham fervently and rightly criticizes. To put it in a question mode: In Fensham's account, is there a room to incorporate the best of the pietistic-evangelical spirituality without succumbing to its weaknesses?

Another way to frame my criticism of the book is to say that it feels, at the end of the day, too one-sided, and thus, it seems reductionistic at best. Fensham's project is to look at spirituality from the creational theological perspective, whereas those (pietistic-evangelicals) who overemphasize soul to body regard theology of redemption as their starting point of Christian reflection on spirituality. It should be noted here that Fensham does discuss the theology of redemption quite substantively, too. Nevertheless, again, the lens he uses to construct his soteriology is his doctrine of creation. This is, of course, one possible way to do a theology of spirituality. However, one

wonders whether creation is the best starting point to do such a task. At this juncture, I would like to briefly bring in mind the "ecclesiocentric" turn in recent theological development. The advocates of this "movement" (many postliberals—such as Stanley Hauerwas—and evangelicals alike—such as Simon Chan—and others in the so-called "Ekklesia Project") argue that the church has an ontological priority over the world. Creation, in other words, is the backdrop of the church, and not the other way around. This order seems to agree with Ephesians 1:4 (the church is 'created' before the world's creation/foundation). This, of course, does not mean a return to the apocalyptic, other-worldly theology or spirituality. Rather, this ecclesiocentric understanding of the church-and-world-relationship emphasizes the church as the center of God's engagement with the world, and thus everything, including creation, should be seen and interpreted within the framework of God's relationship with his body, the church. The church is, in other words, the main locus of Christian spirituality. Fensham considers the church as playing a significant part in spiritual formation, as his emphasis on community clearly shows. However, his communal spirituality is (what I call) "cosmocentric," rather than ecclesiocentric, in its basic orientation. This present review is not the place to make an argument for or against each view. However, I am curious to see how these two views can meet and sit together to discuss what it means to live a spiritual life as a church in this created world of the Triune God. I hope in the future Fensham would take this task to make his already-rich-and-interdisciplinary account of missional spirituality even more affluent—and more theologically, i.e., ecclesiocentrically, oriented.

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Christian Worldview, Herman Bavinck, diterjemahkan dan diedit oleh Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, James Eglinton dan Cory C. Brock, Wheaton: Crossway, 2019. 144 halaman. Hardcover. USD 17.87. ISBN-10: 1433563193. ISBN-13: 978-1433563195

Setiap orang Kristen diperhadapkan dengan berbagai macam pilihan pandangan di gelanggang kontestasi wawasan dunia dalam menjalani kehidupan ini. Buku ini menunjukkan pemikiran Herman Bavinck di dalam menjawab tantangan dari berbagai macam wawasan dunia yang berkembang hingga masanya. Menariknya, Bavinck mengusulkan suatu “*wawasan dunia-dan-kehidupan*” (*world-and-life view*) dari perspektif iman Kristen. Buku karya Bavinck ini diterjemahkan dari buku “*Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing*” edisi kedua (1913). Kehadiran buku ini di dalam bahasa Inggris tentu menjadi kabar sukacita bagi penggemar studi wawasan dunia Kristen (*Christian worldview*) dan teologi Reformed. Lagipula, tim penerjemah mencantumkan istilah asli dalam bahasa Belanda, sehingga pembaca yang tertarik dapat menelusuri kembali istilah-istilah yang tidak mudah untuk diterjemahkan.

Di bagian pengantar dijelaskan bahwa struktur buku ini didasarkan pada paradigma filosofis-teologis berupa tiga pasang ragam pertanyaan, antara lain: *thinking and being* (epistemologi), *being and becoming* (perubahan, unitas, multiplisitas), dan *becoming and acting* (etika). Setiap orang mencari koherensi antara kepala dan hati dengan mengombinasikan pertanyaan-pertanyaan seperti ini yang membentuk suatu “*wawasan dunia-dan-kehidupan*” (*world-and-life view*). Ketiga pasang pertanyaan tersebut menjadi ketiga bab yang menyusun isi buku ini.

Peralihan dari abad ke-19 ke abad ke-20 ditandai dengan problem disharmoni antara pikiran dan perasaan, antara kehendak dan tindakan, antara agama dan budaya (hlm. 22). Di dalam konteks sejarah perkembangan filsafat dan sains, Bavinck mengamati adanya pemisahan yang tidak harmonis antara pikiran dan perasaan, antara sains dan kehidupan. Ia

menyimpulkan bahwa dibutuhkan “*wawasan dunia-dan-kehidupan*” yakni: suatu cara pandang yang secara komprehensif mencakup dunia dan kehidupan yang dijalani seseorang secara bermakna. Pertanyaan-pertanyaan yang muncul dari pencarian ini, misalnya: siapa saya, apa itu dunia, di mana tempat dan apa tugas saya di dalam dunia? Menurut Bavinck, pemikiran otonom tidak menemukan jawaban memuaskan untuk pertanyaan ini, sekalipun berayun antara materialisme dan spiritualisme, antara atomisme dan dinamisme, antara nomisme dan antinomianisme. Namun, kekristenan menjaga harmoni di antara itu semua dan menyingkapkan suatu hikmat yang merekonsiliasi umat manusia dengan Allah, dan melalui ini, dengan diri sendiri, dengan dunia, dan dengan kehidupan (hlm. 29).

Di dalam bab 1, “*Thinking and Being*,” Bavinck membahas pertanyaan epistemologis mengenai alam (*nature*) dan kapasitas rasio manusia dalam memahaminya. Menanggapi empirisme dan rasionalisme, Bavinck menegaskan bahwa agama Kristen mengetahui dan mempertahankan kebenaran sebagai suatu realitas objektif yang bereksistensi secara independen terhadap kesadaran (*consciousness*) kita sebagaimana ditunjukkan oleh karya Allah dalam alam dan anugerah. Karena itu, setiap orang berangkat atas dasar keyakinan bahwa dunia objektif bereksistensi di luar dirinya dan kemudian dikenali lewat persepsi (hlm. 33). Bagaimana dengan korelasi antara alam dan persepsi indra manusia? Pengakuan terhadap Allah Sang Pencipta menopang korespondensi antara alam ciptaan dan persepsi indra. Bahkan pengakuan ini sesungguhnya merupakan fondasi bagi seluruh pengetahuan dan sains (hlm. 38). Eksistensi kosmos dan kapabilitas persepsi indra manusia tidak berdiri secara otonom karena keduanya ada dan dimampukan berfungsi oleh karena Allah sendiri yang menopang (bdk. Ibr. 1:2b-3a).

Baik eksistensi semesta maupun kapasitas rasio manusia bergantung kepada hikmat Allah yang menciptakan alam semesta dengan firman-Nya.

Di bab 2, “*Being and Becoming*,” Bavinck mengangkat pertanyaan tentang perubahan (*change*) dan tensi antara kesatuan (*unity*) dan keberagaman (*multiplicity*) dalam memandang dunia ini. Meskipun dunia terkesan sebagai “*a chaotic multiplicity of phenomena*,” semangat untuk unitas dan harmoni bagi tujuan dalam multiplisitas tetap ada dalam diri manusia. Sejarah filsafat menunjukkan dua ekstrem: (1) mengakui hanya ada *being* dan tidak ada *becoming*, dan (2) mengakui hanya *becoming* yang nyata. Ekstrem pertama memandang perubahan sebagai “topeng” (*facade*), sementara ruang dan waktu hanya cara berpikir yang subjektif. Ekstrem kedua memandang *being* tidak lebih dari objek pemikiran, sementara perubahan adalah hal yang absolut (hlm. 57-58).

Pada dasarnya, pandangan tentang *nature* telah direduksi menjadi pandangan dunia mekanistik dan segala penjelasan supranatural ditolak (hlm. 69). Sebaliknya, Bavinck mengajukan wawasan dunia organik (*organic world-view*) yang mengakui keberagaman sebagaimana yang ditunjukkan di dalam dunia ciptaan dan tidak membatasi fenomena fisik ke dalam sistem mekanis (hlm. 73). Pandangan organik Bavinck bergerak dari kesatuan kepada keberagaman dan fenomena yang majemuk tetap terhubung sebagai harmoni. Kehendak Allah yang menyatu dengan hikmat Allah memungkinkan keberagaman dan energi dalam ciptaan menjadi terarah (hlm. 80). Sebaliknya, dalam wawasan dunia mekanistik, tidak ada titik awal maupun tujuan yang memungkinkan perubahan untuk terjadi, karena tujuan melekat kepada prinsip (*nature/principium*) dan prinsip itu melekat kepada hikmat dan kuasa Allah yang absolut (hlm. 81-82). Hikmat dan kuasa Allah yang memungkinkan perkembangan atau perubahan di dalam dunia sampai mencapai arah tertentu yang ditentukan oleh

Allah. Wawasan dunia Kristen menunjukkan bahwa *telos* memiliki dasar dalam kehendak, pikiran dan kuasa Allah, sedangkan wawasan dunia mekanistik tidak memiliki tujuan.

Di bab 3, “*Becoming and Acting*,” Bavinck mempertanyakan adakah tempat bagi tindakan yang personal dan independen? Apakah ada ruang bagi *ethos* atau hanya ada *physis* (hlm. 94)? Tuntutan moral yang melampaui alam semesta di dalam diri manusia, seperti membuat penilaian moral, mempercayai kebaikan-kebaikan ideal, dan tidak puas dengan penjelasan kausal atas realitas empiris saja (hlm. 96). Dampak dari rasionalisme dan pengembangan sains yang kontra terhadap agama mengakibatkan fondasi segala hukum diguncang, termasuk hukum moral (hlm. 96).

Sebagai contoh, Bavinck mengkritik Kant mengenai dasar moralitas. Kant mendasarkan moralitas pada natur manusia, dan bukan pada Allah, sehingga manusia dibuat menjadi otonom dan pemberi hukum bagi diri sendiri (hlm. 98). Bavinck mengacu kepada hukum yang tertulis dalam hati manusia untuk menjelaskan obligasi moralitas (hlm. 105-106). Bavinck mengkritik Kant tentang dasar bagi tatanan moralitas dan realitas objektif (logika, etika, dan estetika) adalah Allah sendiri, bukan pada natur manusia (hlm. 106-107). Pemikiran Kant berimplikasi kepada wawasan dunia yang dualistik, sehingga menciptakan disharmoni antara sains dan agama, antara *becoming* dan *acting* (hlm. 107-108).

Bavinck mendefinisikan alam sebagai pewahyuan Allah yang menyatakan hikmat dan kemuliaan-Nya (hlm. 109). Dengan demikian, wawasan dunia Kristen secara objektif menyatakan tatanan natural dan moral, serta secara subjektif menyatukan kepala, hati, dan tangan (berpikir, merasa, bertindak) berdasarkan Allah sebagai prinsip metafisik yang mendasari segala sesuatu (hlm. 110). Wawasan dunia organik menyediakan jawaban atas diversitas dunia, dan tidak hanya personalitas manusia (pikiran, kehendak, nurani, kebebasan), tetapi

juga kedaulatan Allah atas seluruh ciptaan-Nya (hlm. 122-3).

Tujuan buku ini menunjukkan wawasan dunia Kristen sebagaimana diusung oleh gerakan Reformasi adalah jawaban terbaik yang tepat bagi tantangan zaman itu dengan segala aspirasi dan kesulitannya (hlm. 133). Menurut saya, wawasan dunia yang dipaparkan Bavinck dalam buku ini bersifat komprehensif (*world-and-life view*) dan memang menjawab tantangan *zeitgeist* yang dihadapi dalam konteksnya. Bavinck berinteraksi secara kritis dengan pemikiran para cendekiawan (ilmuwan maupun filsuf) yang berpengaruh pada masanya. Ia secara subversif menawarkan wawasan dunia Kristen yang lebih unggul daripada pandangan mekanistik-dualistik yang diusung, baik secara saintifik (Darwin dll.) maupun sosial (Marx dll.). Selain itu, semangat otonomi pemikiran yang merupakan penolakan terhadap Allah menjadi problem mendasar yang dikontraskan Bavinck dengan pandangan organik yang berdasar pada “*unity-in-diversity*” sebagaimana

ditunjukkan Allah Trinitas sendiri dalam alam ciptaan. Apa yang telah dituliskan Bavinck dalam bukunya ini telah mencapai tujuannya dengan menyajikan *wawasan dunia-dan-kehidupan* yang organik sesuai dengan Allah Trinitas yang diimani dalam kekristenan. Dengan mempelajari prinsip wawasan dunia Kristen yang dipaparkan Bavinck, pembaca dapat merefleksikan tantangan-tantangan zaman yang sedang dihadapi, seperti *post-truth* dan *disruption*. Buku ini akan sangat bermanfaat bagi pembaca yang tertarik dengan studi wawasan dunia Kristen (*Christian worldview*), teologi Reformed (walaupun buku ini tentu juga relevan bagi pembaca dari latar teologi lainnya), dan sejarah pemikiran (khususnya akhir abad ke-19 sampai awal abad ke-20).

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