Kenneth Nehrbass


Kenneth Nehrbass's God's Image and Global Cultures is timely, especially that it coincides with resurgence of isolationism and ethnocentrism. In response, Nehrbass employs missiological anthropology to demonstrate the limitation of cultural anthropological accounts on human cultural-ness. He argues for "bearing God's image" as more viable explanation for human cultural proclivity, and grounds culture in the nature of the Triune God as socio-cultural Trinitarian.

The book is divided into four key parts with eleven chapters in total. Each chapter ends with a concise summary and a series of reflective questions. The first part engages "the gospel and global trends" and argues that cross-cultural encounter is the very heart of globalization. He rejects the notion that globalization is simply a continuation of imperialist projects. For him it is a non-Western empowering phenomenon.

The second part is the heart of the book with six chapters which discuss culture and theology. He argues that a theology of culture invites the church to see global cultures from the divine point of view as divine gift to humans to reflect divine qualities of governance, communication, and creativeness. Nehrbass also acknowledges the fallen-ness and sinfulness of all human cultural innovations and in need of divine redemption, and calls for holistic kingdom emphasis which does not place sharp dichotomy between heaven and earth; secular and sacred. The third part develops God's thoughts about culture. He argues that human beings can enjoy various spheres of culture such as economy, politics, beauty, family, and so on, without idolizing them but for the glory of God. The final part outlines competencies for cross-cultural impact for world changers in twenty-first century.

The book is an excellent work of research; every argument is substantiated with empirical evidence. A further strength of the book lies in its readability. Yet the underpinning theology of culture on an Evangelical norm - "world changer" - brings its own difficulties. Does theology of culture really calls us to position ourselves as "world changers" or rather to change the way we live in the world? Cross-cultural imagination has shown that we cannot change the world without changing the way we live in it, the way we perceive and interact with other cultures.

On another point, Nehrbass's critique of salvage anthropology as "irresponsible" has the potential for misinterpretation as many people from the global South resist changes imposed from outside as form of cultural imperialism.
History has shown us that imposed cultural changes have always resulted in distortion of people's cultures. What is even more interesting is that Nehrbass fails to critique power dynamics in his cross-cultural theology of culture. The goal of cross-cultural sensibility is more than just "loving the other"; rather it calls for an understanding of the complexities of cultural power dynamics, and relearning to be human in the context of pluralism. Cross-cultural theology is an invitation to life. It is a call to rediscover our humanity in one another in order to live authentic human life in the context of changing, broken and polarized world. With so many cultures intersecting in our neighborhood, cross-cultural imagination must be perceived as a next step in human evolution. Thus it must be regarded as a new lifestyle for everyone rather than a "competence" to be learned by a selected few who have a desire to work in another cultural context.

Despite these weaknesses, the book offers a creative theoretical basis and is a rich and inspiring quarry of enormously valuable insights for anyone involved in missiological anthropology, theological and cultural studies.

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Rodney Stark
Bearing False Witness: Debunking Western Myths
West Conshohocken, PA: Temple University Press

Rodney Stark, the distinguished University Professor at Temple University, has gained an esteemed reputation for his application of sociological principles to the study of world Christianity. However, Stark's *Bearing False Witness* is a cautionary tale for those interested in the history of world Christianity. Stark distinguishes clear, well-documented cases of what he calls "myths" that have been perpetuated by religious leaders and organizations, such as the Catholic Church. He presents a compelling argument supported by a wealth of evidence, including historical texts, scholarly writings, and scientific research.

The book covers a wide range of topics, from the origins of Christianity to the modern era, and includes detailed analyses of various religious movements and institutions. Stark's research is based on rigorous statistical analysis and a deep understanding of the historical context of each case. His approach is systematic and methodical, allowing him to present a comprehensive overview of the myths that have been spread about Christianity.

Stark's methodology is critically important, as it provides a framework for understanding the development of religious beliefs and practices over time. His work highlights the importance of considering the social, cultural, and political factors that have shaped religious thought and action. By examining the myths that have been woven into the fabric of Christian history, Stark provides a valuable resource for scholars, religious leaders, and anyone interested in the history of Christianity.

Despite the criticisms of his previous work, Stark's *Bearing False Witness* is a significant contribution to the field of religious studies. The book is well-written, engaging, and accessible to a broad audience. It is a must-read for anyone interested in understanding the complexities of religious beliefs and their impact on society.

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