

Harefa, Oinike Natalia. *Evangelism as Storytelling: A Reconstruction of Evangelism from a Feminist Postcolonial Missiological Perspective*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2024. 156 pages. \$23.00. ISBN: 9798385221271

The history of Christianity in Asia intertwines with colonialism as Western missionaries are conceived as the main protagonists who worked painstakingly to spread the faith. This fact generates two issues for Christians living in today's postcolonial context as they struggle with the entanglement of colonial heritage in doctrines, teachings, practices, and so on. First, evangelism is perceived as identical to Christianization, which positions non-Christians as objects, and the benchmark for success is the increase in quantity. Second, figures attributed to the success of evangelism are usually male missionaries. Oinike Natalia Harefa addresses these two issues in her book *Evangelism as Storytelling*.

Echoing several critics of the mainstream evangelism and mission narratives imbued by patriarchy, Harefa promotes the need to incorporate the feminist postcolonial missiological perspective in understanding evangelism. She does that by analyzing the lack of appreciation and recognition of women's roles and contributions in the history of church and mission in the context of Banua Niha Keriso Protestant (BNKP), one of the mainstream Protestant denominations in Nias Islands, Indonesia. She argues that authentic evangelism is incompatible with the idea of dominance and subjugation promoted by patriarchy and colonialism. Instead, she writes, "[e]vangelism is expected to be able to answer today's challenges to achieve liberation, justice, and equality, especially for women. The church needs an evangelism concept that provides greater space for women and local traditions to have their voices heard" (p. 4). This understanding becomes the basis for formulating the idea of evangelism as storytelling centered around the narrative of the Triune God who shares the gifts of love and invites humans to act accordingly. Storytelling — or *famanö -manö* in the Nias language — has the dimension of witnessing, sharing, and acting and focuses on invitation, not coercion. Harefa highlights how women are at the forefront of evangelism and mission because they share their lives as testimonies to the Triune God (p. 5).

The book is organized into four chapters to develop the thesis on evangelism as storytelling, including an introductory chapter. Chapter two explores theological views on evangelism, mainly by comparing two models provided by Evangelism Explosion (EE) and the World Council of Churches (WCC), as stated in the document *Together towards Life* (TTL). EE is an evangelism model that appeals to Christians in many countries, including Indonesia in general and BNKP in particular. After a thorough analysis, Harefa criticizes the EE model for failing to provide space for women's experiences and voices due to the strong emphasis on imitation and repetition directed to add the numbers instead of promoting justice and equality (p. 25). The TTL document has a more robust theological understanding, including evangelism as "sharing the gift," and could potentially enrich the EE model. Still, it fails to pay special attention to women.

The author delineates her understanding of a postcolonial feminist missiological perspective in chapter three. She emphasizes women's significant influence and involvement in evangelization. However, patriarchal culture recognizes only male missionaries' contributions, while their female counterparts are primarily seen as complementary, such as "sisters" or missionary wives (p. 51). Second, evangelism for the sake of conversion, as developed during the colonial period, disrespects local culture and spiritual tradition and situates Christianity in the superior position. This posture is unfortunate because local beliefs and traditions contain appreciation for women, which can serve as sources for empowering women in Nias. For instance,

the myth of Adu (statues where the spirits of ancestors reside) reveals how Nias women possess a source of strength within themselves. Other stories portray women's central role in leadership (p. 58–59). Last, Harefa is aware of the problematic binary language in postcolonial feminist discourse and thus offers her own approach as a Nias woman.

Chapter four discusses several elements of a postcolonial reconstruction of evangelism: reconfiguring Matthew 28:19–20 as a postcolonial narrative, developing the Trinity as a model for communities, and rethinking martyrdom as friendship. Harefa argues that the whole narratives in the Gospel of Matthew should be considered, so verses 19 and 20 can be seen as a call to create a community of disciples amid Roman colonial power. Instead of domination, she states, “The community of followers of Jesus must be characterized by service, compassion, reconciliation, and forgiveness” (p. 75). Next, the ongoing inequality suffered by female pastors in the context of BNKP reflects the dominant theological paradigm of the church. To transform this unjust structure, the author promotes the doctrine of the Trinity “to convey the essence of God's heart to be in a relationship with humans; that there is no room for separation, inequality, injustice, or hierarchy in God” (p. 82). In other words, the concept of the Trinitarian God challenges the urge to dominate others in evangelism and replaces it with the relational character to establish equal relationships. Based on this, Harefa rethinks martyrdom in evangelization as life-giving and love-sharing in the framework of friendships. The personal narratives of missionaries, including women, disclose this notion of martyrdom as friendship (p. 96).

In chapter five, the author develops the idea of evangelism as storytelling by narrating stories of female missionaries as testimonies of the Triune God's work. She draws insight from Asian theologians such as Kosuke Koyama and Choan-Seng Song, who highlight the power of stories to carry various human experiences and sources for empowerment (p. 100). There are five women's stories in the chapter. The first is Hanna Blindow, a missionary from Germany, who started a girls' school in Nias on June 5, 1931, and, later, the Christian Women's Course. Dorothea Richter, also from Germany, served in Nias from 1959 to 1991. She continued Blindow's work with girls and women in Nias and was instrumental in expanding education and opportunities for them. The third figure is Sonia Parera-Hummel, an Indonesian woman from Maluku who came to Nias as a missionary's wife. Her life story embodies the fact that a missionary's wife is a missionary. Parera-Hummel formed a support group for women pastors, led the Hanna Blindow Kindergarten owned by BNKP and implemented a cross-subsidy system to allow children from precarious families to attend the school, taught at the local BNKP seminary in Nias, and organized female pastors to elect a female representation on the synod board leadership. Next is the story of Marial Zebua, a Nias woman who became a missionary to the Manobo people in the Philippines. Fifth is Destalenta Zega, a Nias woman working at an interdenominational mission agency focusing on reaching tribes who have not heard the gospel outside Indonesia. Last, Harefa features Yani Saoiyagö, a BNKP pastor and missionary travelling around Nias to carry out different evangelism programs.

This book is well-structured, and its arguments are easy for readers to follow. However, several areas require improvement for clarity. First, the author rightly notes how the colonial paradigm of mission shapes the church's hostility toward local beliefs by labeling them as “pagan” (p. 121). However, the book lacks concrete plans for steps to repair the relationships with and recover cultural elements from indigenous traditions and spirituality. Further, women missionaries might inherit and perpetuate the colonial mission paradigm in their teaching and ministry as they emphasize proselytizing. While it is true that these women can share their life stories and inspire other Nias women, doing a mission with a colonial paradigm contradicts the theological

foundations established by the author in chapter four. Although she alluded to this problem near the end of the book, I wish her repudiation of proselytizing that undermines local beliefs would be more explicit. Second, featuring more women in different local contexts of Nias would strengthen Harefa's arguments. These women might not be called "missionaries," but they share their lives with the community they serve, whether as pastors or lay leaders. If missionaries are people who partake in God's mission, then acknowledging the contribution of these women's ministries to the church and broader society would make the author's argument more compelling.

Although the book focuses on the Nias context, Harefa's insightful critique of the colonial paradigm of mission—which prioritizes men's contribution while marginalizing women's—resonates across various church contexts in Indonesia, Asia, and beyond. By amplifying the voices of scholars in mission studies and World Christianity, she calls for greater recognition of women's role in shaping and sustaining Christian communities. The book challenges readers to critically examine how local churches' understanding of mission may perpetuate injustice and exclusion. In contrast, it advocates evangelism as storytelling, presenting it as a more equitable and inclusive approach to fostering just Christian communities.

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