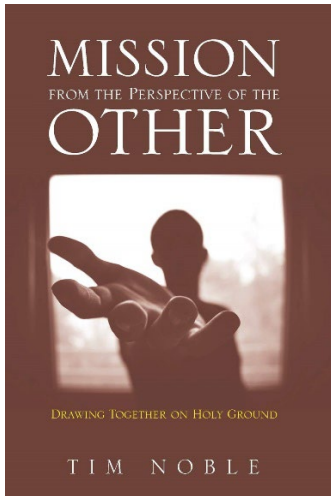


Athanasios N. Papathanasiou: Review



Tim Noble, *Mission from the Perspective of the Other: Drawing Together on Holy Ground*, Pickwick Publications, Eugene, Oregon 2018, p. 207.

British scholar Tim (Timothy) Noble is Associate Professor of Missiology at the Ecumenical Institute of the Protestant Theological School of Charles University in Prague. His work in mission studies is significant: it contributes to the fertilization of



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the Christian missionary self-consciousness and brings it into contact with fields such as modern philosophy and liberation theology, utilizing what is best from the unique missionary insight of each Christian church. Tim Noble and his lively work are one of those cases that demonstrate the dynamic nature of mission studies today, despite the gross ignorance that breeds ridiculous opinions (for or against mission) in many academic and ecclesiastical circles.

In his book, he approaches "mission from the perspective of the other." That is, he approaches mission not only from the point of view of the missionary who goes to the other's place, but also from the point of view of the missionary who welcomes the other. He approaches it from the point of view of the missionary who not only teaches, but also is taught. Here the encounter with the other is understood as an event which can deepen discipleship to the Triune God, both in the other and in the missionary himself (and a missionary is one who is on a coordinated mission, but also every Christian who, responding to the common call to the members of the body of Christ, witnesses and shares the faith, as the author notes, p. 2). It is therefore an encounter where each side shares the wisdom it has accumulated in seeking the truth and striving to receive God's activity. The playful subtitle of the book states that the other (to whom the missionary addresses him/herself) is not an inert being, but rather one who is drawing near, i.e., a convert in the original sense of the term. Thus both the missionary and the other become sojourners and ultimately fellow travelers, each having brought his own baggage for the journey (pp. vii, 74). In this setting, however, the partners are not two, but three: there is also God, the missionary *par excellence* and the very first, who (although theology and mission are articulated in his name) is often pushed into the shadow of the missionary, whenever he is treated as an object which the missionary owns and manages

(pp. 5, 54, 174, 180). This happens when the missionary, with a peculiar spirit of totalitarianism, does not really perceive God as the one who ceaselessly and everywhere acts, reveals, is revealed, and surprises.

The first chapter deals with the encounter with the other in the Bible (pp. 15-43). Here is also noted the New Testament interpretation of the convert as the one who changes his/her spiritual orientation (i.e., not only the one who draws near), which is very important in my opinion, since the concept of conversion is at the heart of the Gospel and is not only an encounter with otherness, but also a passage into otherness.

In the second chapter, with the help of the thought of philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995), Noble illuminates the concept of the other and the stranger, and emphasizes the precious truth that the two who meet remain two – they are not absorbed into an indiscriminate oneness (pp. 44-75). The author offers detailed clarifications on the advancements in missionary reflection within the intra-Christian space during the last century, as well as on the models of encounter between the Gospel and cultures, an encounter which of course includes both reception and criticism, even rupture.

We cross paths in the third chapter with the perspective of the philosopher Jean-Luc Marion (1946-) on the gift (in short, on that which comes as a gift, unconditionally), and with the perspective of the stranger as a gift (and not as an idol) through whom God, who is love, appears to us (pp. 76-92). Noble connects here an interesting approach to the concept of *missio Dei* (i.e., mission comes from God himself, it is primarily God's work), which has been discussed since the early 1950s. Human's part in mission is, he says, "to make visible God, to make possible the sight of the invisible God in his invisibility. [...] So the one who comes to us is not [...] a white canvas, but someone who comes to make God visible to us" (p. 82). Here again emerges the

importance of not losing the concept of the meeting of two alterities, two subjects, neither of which is absorbed into the other, nor is one a purpose for the other. Both have, as fellow travelers, the purpose of meeting God.

The three chapters above constitute the first part of the book, entitled "The Other." The second part is entitled "The Missionary." In it, Noble lovingly, respectfully and at the same time critically examines the theology and practice of three emblematic missionary personalities from three different Christian traditions: First, the saint of the Catholic Church Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556) and his emphasis on missionary work as an ecumenical ministry in love (pp. 95-115). Secondly, the Baptist William Carey (1761-1834), one of the founders of the modern missionary movement (at a time in which indifference to the universality of the evangelical message prevailed), and his controversial and much-discussed work (pp. 116-144). Thirdly, the saint of the Orthodox Church Innocent Veniaminov, evangelist of Alaska (1797-1879), with his extraordinary openness in accepting the other culture and in recognizing the action of the *logos spermatikos* (seminal Logos) in it.

The book has a lot to offer for discussion and delving deeply into key questions. In my opinion, it is, among other things, a noteworthy contribution to the project of Comparative Theology, in which the theologian enters the theological space of the religious other. Armed with his/her own experiences and conceptions, the theologian can then return to his/her own faith, discovering new ways of delving into it. Tim Noble ministers to the journeys we must take, and we thank him very much for that.