

## Book Review

*Theology Out of Place: A Theological Biography of Walter J. Hollenweger*

Lynne Price

Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series 23 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002) viii + 169 pages. \$29.95, paper

Reviewed by James H. Railey, Jr., D.Th., Professor of Theology  
Assemblies of God Theological Seminary

---

Walter J. Hollenweger looms large on the landscape of Pentecostalism, challenging it to greater correctness in its worship and praxis, openness beyond limited and parochial boundaries, and precision in its scholarship. Lynne Price, in this monograph, provides a “theological biography,” a unique literary blend of biography and theological analysis. The book’s thesis is introduced by the Introduction’s description of the contemporary “postmodern, post-colonial, post-literary and post-Christian” world (1). In such a world, Price contends, traditional Western academic theology fails to meet expectations for clarity, functionality, or relevance. By contrast the theological agenda followed by Hollenweger does have the necessary relevance to speak to such a world. Price identifies Hollenweger’s approach as one that unites scholarship and relevance, moving from life to theology, providing the path from academic endeavors to Christian thought and action in the world.

Price begins with a biographical account of Hollenweger’s life and ends with a summary evaluation of his work. The biographical account traces the Hollenweger story through his ministries as a Pentecostal pastor, Pentecostal scholar, Evangelist/Administrator at the World Council of Churches, and Professor of Mission at the Selly Oak Colleges of the University of Birmingham. After exposing

the reader to the biographical details, Price moves to illustrate the ways in which Hollenweger, methodologically, addresses the society, the academy, and the world.

Price identifies Hollenweger’s basic approach to doing theology as narrative exegesis. This is other than the narrative theology of Frei, *et al.*; it is the presentation of theology in story and drama rather than only in propositional form. The nature of Hollenweger’s theology is described as “intercultural;” that is, theology is done with the recognition and involvement of the entire world and not merely the Western part of it. The missionary focus of Hollenweger’s work is summed up by Price with Bonhoeffer’s phrase, “the Church for Others.” Such a missionary focus leads naturally to Hollenweger’s pneumatology, which sees the Spirit universally active.

There are three observations about Price’s book that need to be made. First, the use of David Tracy’s “three publics” schema with which to elucidate Hollenweger’s theological method is very helpful. Tracy asserts that every theologian must address the society, the academy and the church.<sup>i</sup> Not only does Price adequately show that Hollenweger does address these “publics,” the necessity of all theologians to do so is clearly asserted. To the degree that the Western academic theological tradition fails

to speak adequately to these three, it fails to be relevant and applicable.

Second, Price helpfully links Hollenweger's narrative exegesis with his intercultural theology. The use of literary forms other than those of the propositional and didactic fits well into the concern for taking seriously the global perspective of doing theology. While it was never true that Western thought forms exclusively conveyed gospel truth, it certainly is not the case now. Engagement with the multifaceted cultural milieu of twenty-first century Christianity is vital for expressing theology that communicates and has relevance. The reality that the biblical writers themselves were struggling with the world in which they lived, and included narrative (analogy, parable, etc.) to express the reality of their experience with God, challenges the contemporary theologian and practitioner to emulation.

Price, third, points out the pneumatological focus of Hollenweger's missionary endeavor. Hollenweger sees the Holy Spirit active in the entire world, including the non-believer; thus, the Church must direct ministry to others instead of being inwardly and institutionally focused. Such a focus of the Church, which acknowledges the expression of the Spirit in all people, gives missions its rationale and goal and allows for a more contextualized and non-colonial approach to evangelism.

Lynne Price has provided a valuable and accessible entree to the theology of Walter Hollenweger. The book, *Theology Out of Place*, is worthy of careful reading especially by those who are struggling to find ways to do theology in an increasingly global and post-modern age. The great value of the book is to be found in its encouragement to engage the thought of Walter Hollenweger through reading his writings, and Price provides ample

bibliographic data to guide the interested minister.

---

<sup>i</sup> David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (London: SCM Press, 1981), 51.