

Iain S. Maclean, ed., *Reconciliation, Nations and Churches in Latin America* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. xi + 268, £50.00, ISBN 0–7546–5030–8 (hbk).

Iain S. Maclean's edited volume, *Reconciliation, Nations and Churches in Latin America*, addresses the important intersection between religion and reconciliation in the reconstruction of nations. To their credit, the authors understand that, while truth commissions and other methods used to build a sustainable peace have emerged in the past twenty years as important areas of study among political scientists and students of international development, there remains a lack of research on the role of religious leaders; specifically theologians, churches and religious movements, as both social and political actors in post-conflict transitions. Since religion does play a vital role in virtually all transition processes, and because research on the subject continues to lag behind other approaches to post-conflict reconciliation, this book is both timely and significant.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part, 'Nations and Reconciliations', consists of five chapters that examine examples of national commissions that took place in Latin America. The focus of these chapters is primarily on the role that religion and religious organizations played in instituting and conducting various transitional processes. The first chapter, written by Maclean, provides an overview of official truth commissions in Latin America. The following chapters address truth commissions in countries such as Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala and Brazil. Part two, 'Churches and Religious Reconciliation', consists of two chapters that focus on Christian understandings of reconciliation, while the third part, 'Nations and Churches in the Future', draws on lessons learned from past truth and reconciliation commissions and points to possible directions for future studies. Chapters eight and nine, which deal specifically with South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), are strangely out of place in a book about Latin America. With little explanation given, it seems as though the TRC is offered as a 'best practice' model that could be used to gauge Latin American experiences of similar mechanisms. The last chapter, by Nelson Madonado-Torres, stands as a conclusion for the book and emphasizes the importance of addressing decolonization.

This collection contains a number of very good chapters, such as the one by David Tombs, which focuses on how the El Salvadorian and Guatemalan truth commissions dealt with sexual violence; also, the chapter by Margaret R. Pfeil that examines Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as a practice of social reconstruction in response to social sin. In spite of these strong chapters, though, this volume suffers from some uneven scholarship and a general lack of coherence. For example, Maclean opens the book with a discussion on truth commissions and explains that the book came directly out of the growing interest in such processes (p. xi). His introduction is followed by a chapter providing an historical overview of Latin American truth commissions. Based on the introduction and chapter one then, one might conclude that the book is about official truth commissions, but that would be a false conclusion. It

is not until chapter five, Margaret Eletta Guider's excellent chapter entitled 'Reinventing Life and Hope: Coming to Terms with Truth and Reconciliation Brazilian Style', that the focus of the book finally becomes clear; it is actually exploring alternative mechanisms to reconciliation and nation building. The chapters on South Africa, although an attempt to demonstrate how different commissions have 'influenced each other nationally and across national boundaries' (p. xiii), draw such connections only weakly. Furthermore, the concluding chapter, by Madonado-Torres, actually raises more issues than it resolves, despite his assertion that a critique of colonization is one element that ties the different chapters together.

Typical of many studies in post-conflict transition, the strength of this collection is in case studies and field research, but its weakness is in a lack of theory. Indeed a theoretical discussion of the role of religion in political reconciliation and nation-building is almost non-existent. In the recent literature on international conflict resolution, there is an emerging field of study that focuses on the role of religion in political processes and conflict resolution. This alternative approach, sometimes referred to as religious peacemaking or religious conflict resolution, directly challenges political realists who deem religion to be irrelevant and thus unwanted in politics and law. Furthermore, what is lacking in this collection is a frank discussion about how to balance justice and reconciliation at the crucial point of transition, which, I would maintain, is essential to discussions on nation building, reconciliation and churches in Latin America and elsewhere.

Despite the lack of coherency and theoretical framework, as well as a number of typographical errors, this text is an important contribution to the study of the role that religion has played in post-conflict reconstruction in Latin America. It reveals the varying roles churches and religious organizations played in different truth commissions and peace processes in Latin America; more important than ever in the post-colonial, post-Cold War era we find ourselves in today. For these reasons, this book should find a receptive audience among, not only politically engaged theologians, but also leaders in international governance, development and conflict resolution.

Megan Shore
King's University College at
University of Western Ontario

Copyright of International Journal of Public Theology is the property of Brill Academic Publishers and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.