

Reviews

*Christina Burrows, president of the
Association of Covenant Spiritual Directors,
adjunct faculty member,
North Park Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois*

*Prajakta David-Kelly, director of
global advancement and mobilization for the
Evangelical Covenant Church, Chicago, Illinois*

*Michael D. Thomas Jr., lead pastor and church planter at
Radiant Covenant Church, Renton, Washington*

Susan L. Maros, Vince L. Bantu, and Kirsteen Kim, eds. *Power, Agency, and Women in the Mission of God: Interdisciplinary, Intercultural Conversations* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2024), 257 pages, \$37.

“Dream, girl, dream. What’s the future going to be?”
— Mercy Amba Oduyoye¹

Our vision as Covenanters and mission friends is to join God in God’s mission to see more disciples among more populations in a more caring and just world. In this volume, the editors provide us with ways we can dream and move toward this vision together, with a focus on empowering and giving agency to women as co-laborers with men in the mission of God.

¹ Mercy A. Oduyoye, “Be a Woman, and Africa Will Be Strong,” *Inheriting Our Mothers’ Gardens: Feminist Theology in Third World Perspective*, edited by Letty M. Russell et al., (Louisville: Westminster, 1988), 35, quoted in Musa Dube, “In the Circle of God’s Mission: Power, Agency, and the Mission of God,” paper presented at the Fuller Missiology Lectures at Fuller Theological Seminary, Online, October 2022.

The book presents lectures delivered during the 2022 Missiology Lectures at Fuller Seminary on the theme of “Power, Agency, and Women in the Mission of God: A Scholar-Practitioner Conversation.” Amos Yong, dean of Fuller Seminary’s School of Mission and Theology, describes the conversation as “less an apologetic for women in ministry...than intended to spark the imagination by exemplifying what women are already doing in mission” (xiii).

This intellectually robust and lively resource is an interdisciplinary, intercultural conversation among fourteen contributors. They are a diverse group of female and male scholars and practitioners representing various ethnic backgrounds and denominations from around the world.

The book is split into five conversations. Conversation One focuses on women in global Christianity, including a case study from Musa Dube of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, a conversation I found particularly encouraging in the way these women collaborate in scholarship and practice. Conversation Two discusses sexism in multiple frameworks, including “benevolent sexism,” for example protecting women from “dangerous” activities. The presenters highlight the need to recognize those practices that have a negative impact on the capacity and competencies of women. Conversation Three addresses #MeToo and #ChurchToo. This conversation speaks to our need to respond to the horrors of the physical and sexual abuse of women. Conversation Four explores models of women’s power, responding to dominant white, male, Western views, seeking to dismantle barriers for BIPOC women into academic spaces. Conversation Five centers on women’s leadership, looking at ways women lead even within the constraints of traditional roles, as well as ways that we can help to develop women in leadership roles.

Yong suggests that “the contributors to this volume open us up to diverse and creative possibilities of women’s responses to God’s missional call, including their forging of new forms of church and ministry that explode or navigate around the conventions of maleness-and-femaleness we have inherited from our forebears” (xv).

A few recurring themes stand out to me as I listened to the lectures presented online via the Fuller Studio YouTube channel² and read the book. First, is the centering role of the mission of God and the desire of all the contributors to inspire others to join in God’s mission. Second, is a sense of hope in the metanarrative of Scripture, that even though

² The video lectures from the 2022 Missiology Lectures at Fuller Seminary can be accessed at <https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/fullerdialogue/power-agency-and-women-in-the-mission-of-god/>.

women's stories are not often at the center, God calls and anoints women throughout the Scriptures to fulfill God's kingdom purposes. Third, is a repeated call to love God and to love our neighbor. This is what the reign of God looks like, wherever we are in the world. Patrick Reyes says that "to lead with love as the divine loved humanity is leadership" (173).

Those of us who live and serve in North America tend to have a North American-centered lens on the world and can forget that the hub of global Christianity is currently in the Global South. This volume reminds us of the powerful movement of the Holy Spirit across the globe in drawing people to God, and that we get to take on the humble posture of a cultural learner as we observe global missional leaders.

All of us who are pastors and leaders can seek to empower women to live into their gifting and calling as co-laborers with men in the mission of God. This volume provides us with "actual and yet possible contributions of women to our common missional efforts" (xv). Those who listen to the voices from the 2022 Missiology Lectures will be inspired and equipped to explore new, creative ways of engaging in advocacy and empowerment for women in our own contexts and spheres of influence, wherever they are in the world.

CHRISTINA BURROWS

Andrea Nelson Trice, *Strong Together: Building Partnerships across Cultures in an Age of Distrust* (Sutton, UK: Global Resilience Publishing, 2023), 295 pages, \$21.

In *Strong Together* Andrea Nelson Trice addresses the tensions between indigenous leaders from the Global South and Americans from the Global North in development work. Drawing on her expertise, she examines the root causes of these tensions and offers ways to address them constructively. Trice provides practical strategies for fostering stronger collaboration that can lead to mutual transformation for all involved—if they are open to it.

The author excels in her research, incorporating diverse voices that enrich the conversation around global partnerships. She moves beyond surface-level analysis, exploring how different communities' assets can work together to foster transformation. A key strength of her work is her critical examination of power dynamics, acknowledging how power imbalances and impacts trust.

Trice emphasizes the strengths and challenges each community brings to the table, avoiding the narrative that one group holds all the answers and assets. By addressing cultural differences, she highlights the importance of understanding, stressing that lasting partnerships require time and commitment to community buy-in rather than quick solutions.

The author also provides practical guidance on how outsiders can engage in partnerships, emphasizing the need to prioritize active listening to local leaders and responding to their invitations. She explores the differences between collectivist and individualistic cultures, and how these differences impact partnerships. Her focus on humility and self-awareness is central to her argument that understanding one's own strengths and limitations is essential for building effective and sustainable partnerships.

She also critically addresses how Americans have been shaped by media, foreign policy, and a "hero complex" as they approach global partnerships. By confronting these issues, Trice encourages readers to engage with humility and shared responsibility, laying the groundwork for more authentic and transformative partnerships. Overall, the book offers a nuanced and respectful approach, recognizing the complexity and depth required to build successful global partnerships.

While the author does name important issues such as power dynamics and cultural differences, she often stops short of fully exploring the "why" behind these realities. Trice tends to stay at the surface of cultural exploration, missing opportunities to dive deeper into the complexities of global cultures. Many assumptions are made, particularly about Western entrepreneurialism, that fail to acknowledge the broader picture. For example, the idea that entrepreneurship is primarily a Western trait overlooks the reality that people in many parts of the world are equally entrepreneurial. In various regions, individuals start working at a young age, selling goods or providing services to meet immediate needs.

Additionally, *Strong Together* does not consider the issue of survival in many global contexts, where people are focused on securing basic necessities rather than pursuing ambitious dreams. The assumption that everyone has the luxury to dream and innovate ignores the significant economic disparities that shape cultures and limit opportunities for many. As well, the book makes some problematic generalizations, such as categorizing certain cultures as more masculine or feminine, which oversimplifies complex cultural traits and can reinforce stereotypes.

The author misses the chance to delve deeper into how issues of colonialism, race, class, and historical inequities affect individuals' ability to succeed and how systems continue to favor the privileged not only around

the world but also in the United States. A more nuanced exploration of culture would recognize that opportunities for success, innovation, and growth are shaped by much more than location—they are determined by access to resources, government systems, and historical context.

In conclusion, *Strong Together*, by Andrea Nelson Trice, offers a thoughtful and valuable exploration of the complexities involved in cross-cultural partnerships. While the book excels in highlighting key issues of power dynamics and cultural differences, it falls short of fully addressing deeper systemic factors. Nevertheless, this is a significant contribution to the conversation on development, encouraging readers to engage more thoughtfully in global partnerships.

PRAJAKTA DAVID-KELLEY

Peter Wohlleben, *The Hidden Life of Trees: The Illustrated Edition* (Vancouver, BC: Greystone Books, 2018), 165 pages, \$35.

Author Peter Wohlleben is a prominent forester in the Eifel mountains of Germany. He wrote this book to provide people a different lens with which to view trees. Industrial engineer and footwear designer Salehe Bembury said, “The most beautiful things are natural and things that we don’t tend to focus on.” I think that gets to the heart of the author’s intent with this book: to help us really see trees, to be fascinated by all they bring to this world, and to illuminate aspects of their beauty that often go unseen.

Wohlleben confesses that this book reveals his discovery of what he thought he already knew after decades as a forester. Yet he found he was only scratching the surface of understanding trees. He had simply understood the suitability of trees for harvesting, milling, and marketing. Leading tourists into the woods for survival training began to illuminate an entirely different perspective concerning the vast depth of trees.

The Hidden Life of Trees invites readers into the joy that trees can bring. We enter into the beautiful world of trees and encounter the wonders of their ecosystem. The invitation is to re-enter our own world with refreshed perspectives on what has been out of focus or entirely hidden—elements of life that can help us flourish and remain stable throughout life’s storms.

Wohlleben sets the stage by introducing the concept of community when it comes to the forest. He describes the deep diversity of trees and the ways they organically work as a community. The concept of

community is actually how they live so long and thrive. Trees work together, share resources, and have networks within the forest that provide mutual nourishment. This left me wondering about the Church: Why do churches operate so independently? How can the Church be more of a network and organically work as a community? Wohlleben emphasizes the magnitude of community by reporting how trees that have been cut to a stump can still live five hundred years because of the forest's communal nature to share resources in coexistence.

In chapter 2 Wohlleben examines the “life lessons” of trees. One of the most profound lessons is recognizing that trees have a family way of existing. Specifically, young trees instinctively attempt to grow up fast, presuming youthful vitality will be unending. But the mother and father trees—yes, that’s a thing—parent wisely by ensuring the young grow slowly and healthily, prepared for life’s storms. They do this through “light deprivation” (43), a process of restriction that allows the young tree to live to a ripe old age.

In chapter 3 we learn about the realities of aging and why decay can be a good thing. This thought continues the theme of embracing new perspectives. We learn that just as it’s a good thing for human beings to shed dead skin in order to keep our bodies in good condition, so too it is with trees and their bark. It is possible to see beauty in death. When a tree completes its life cycle and dies, the nutrients it releases into the air and underground through its roots are vital for the flourishing of the forests. This reminds me of Jesus’s words in John 12:24: “Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

Chapter 4 gives us strategies for survival. The ways trees rest (a form of Sabbath) in different seasons and store up what is needed to face harsh winters are both fascinating and transferable to how we should approach surviving and thriving over the course of our own lives. I never knew that when trees’ leaves change color in the fall, each color is an indication of when they are ready to rest.

Chapter 5 challenges us with troubling realities regarding the planting of trees in urban environments. While there is beauty and benefit in this practice, it creates a scenario where these trees have limited lifespans. They are disconnected from each other and must rely upon unnatural interventions for vitality that do not last.

The final chapter feels like a sermon of hope in which Wohlleben inspires us to envisage a world where trees could grow without limits. Not only do flourishing, healthy trees combat climate change, but they

also literally enhance the global atmosphere for the better. This chapter pushes us to consider the potential of trees and how the world can benefit from them.

I read this book during my recovery time from a fourth foot surgery within a year's time span. A fellow colleague in ministry who inspires me to go deeper into a life of spiritual direction and rhythms of Sabbath encouraged me to read something different as part of my self-care. Reading this book was transformational for me. I believe every pastor should add this amazing book to their library because so much of it translates into how we approach the "tree" of church. Through this unlikely resource, we stand to gain a healthier perspective on the church and our cooperative work within it.

This book also has given me a profound appreciation for Psalm 1:1-3.

Happy are those
who do not follow the advice of the wicked
or take the path that sinners tread,
or sit in the seat of scoffers,
but their delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law they meditate day and night.
They are like trees
planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
and their leaves do not wither.
In all that they do, they prosper.

MICHAEL D. THOMAS JR.