

enlarged the summertime Pioneer Camps (these often accommodated pre-university students). Not to be overlooked was his founding of *HIS*, the magazine of IVCF. Its subscription list soon included thousands. Woods maintained that IVCF's expansion in both numbers and depth would have been impossible without it. And while "Urbana" has taken on near-legendary status for university students who trek year after year to the University of Illinois to hear stellar addresses from evangelical luminaries, the fact is that the first of those missionary conferences was held not in the American Midwest, but at the University of Toronto in 1946.

Having cemented IVCF into the major universities of North America, Woods moved to western Europe in order to preside over the International Federation of Evangelical Students. Under his leadership IFES took over Schloss Mittersill, an Austrian castle that had been damaged by fire in 1938, had been occupied by German forces throughout World War II, and needed huge retrofitting. Having calculated that the financing was manageable, Woods struggled, scabbling money where he could, only to find the problem overwhelming and retirement looming. Yet Schloss Mittersill remained (according to MacLeod)

the crowning event of Woods's career on account of its connection with IFES — which organization continues to thrive. (MacLeod's book was published for the 40th anniversary celebration of IFES held at Tyndale University and Seminary, Toronto, in July 2007.)

MacLeod's book leaves readers soberly considering Luther's remark, "God can draw a straight line with a crooked stick." It also challenges readers to hear afresh the charge with which Woods's father startled the young man: "Stacey, the great thing is to understand the movement of the Holy Spirit in your day and then pray that God will catch you up in His purposes..." (p.35).

— Victor Shepherd

**A TROUBLED FAITH:
Do We Really Need God?
by Alan Reynolds
Winnipeg: Word Alive
Press, 2006, 181 pages**

Alan Reynolds, a retired United Church minister from B.C., wrote this book as an *apologia*, a defense of the truth and relevancy of Christian faith in today's world (p. 2). He begins with an overview of

some of the philosophical and scientific challenges to Christian faith in the 20th century. To the popular mind, he writes, it seemed that Marx removed God from human history, Darwin from nature, and Freud from the soul (p. 10). This intellectual shift, along with dissatisfaction over church leaders caused by both scandals and controversies, has led to dramatic numerical declines in most of the mainline churches, and troubled the faith of those who remain. Responding to this situation, Reynolds offers a volume to show that Christian faith can make sense and stand up to serious questions.

Reynolds' believes there is something inherently religious in the human condition, which is ignored only at the cost of our true humanity. He notes the widespread tendency to elevate things unworthy of our worship, even our religiosity, to the status of god, thereby falling into the sin of idolatry. Seeking after God is to approach the matter from the wrong direction, he points out, when in fact God is seeking after us through Jesus. He includes thoughtful discussions of the nature of faith, the problem of suffering, views of the resurrection, and incarnation. He concludes the book with a meditation on the importance of story and narrative, and seeing ourselves as part of the story of faith.

One of the strengths of the book is the erudition that Reynolds brings to his argument. Time and again, I found myself marking pages and planning to mine them for future sermon material. The chapter "Do We Really Need God?" for example, quotes the novelist Douglas Copeland, theologians Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich, the sociologist Emil Durkheim, a variety of poets from T.S. Eliot to Archibald MacLeish, along with secularists like Julian Huxley and Pierre Simon de Laplace.

In spite of his wide reading, there is a strange gap. I feel confident that Reynolds would have had something interesting to say about the challenge of pluralism and the daily encounter with people of other faiths, but there is no mention of it. Surely one of the factors most troubling to Christians in our multicultural societies is how we commit to one faith tradition in the midst of a society where we are regularly exposed to many different truth claims.

A Troubled Faith is a fairly traditional presentation of Christian faith. Reynolds does not, for example, regularly cite feminist, liberation or other theologians who take seriously the contextual situation of the author and audience. Consequently, his response to the troubles of modern faith suggests that Christian faith addresses the

human condition in a universal way. This approach surely has merit, but it also has significant dangers, as we have learned through the legacy of colonialism. Reynolds acknowledges these dangers when he discusses the problem of idolizing our own nation, culture and faith tradition, but fails to situate his response clearly in a contextual setting.

I found myself from time to time tantalized by Reynolds' references to his own doubts and struggles to develop his faith, but was disappointed that such references weren't developed more fully. That kind of discussion would have given the book more emotional power, and made it more readable for those without a theological education who are troubled by the questions it poses. As it is, the book engages the reader at a rational level and will be of most benefit to those who can engage it there.

In *A Troubled Faith*, Alan Reynolds offers a thoughtful, pastoral response to some of the great challenges to Christian faith in our times. No single book will be able to meet these challenges, but Reynolds' effort is a worthy one. It bears witness to a faith that is both reasonable and responsive to the yearnings of the human heart. Reynolds' gentle but confident style will be helpful both to those whose rational doubts keep them from

embracing Christian faith, and to those who are committed, but who want to deepen their ability to respond to these troubles.

— Ross Smillie.

**SPIRIT AND THE
POLITICS OF
DISCERNMENT
Minneapolis: Fortress
Press, 2007, 250 pages.**

In this book, Sharon Betcher, of the Vancouver School of Theology, applies the category of disability to discussions about Christian resistance to empire. Writing of her own experience as an amputee, she weaves this into conversation with disability studies, especially as it converges with postcolonial theory. She engages political, economic, bio-medical, and theological discourses that marginalize persons with disabilities, proposing an alternative "physics of Spirit" that affirms disability.

The book begins by exposing the roots of conventional notions of health in "hegemonic ways of seeing" (Franz Fanon). Considering health a modern ideology connected to global capitalism, Betcher highlights its orientation toward controlling bodies, its way of "seeing" wholeness in terms of efficiency, productivity, and autonomy. This pathologizes