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Christian Hospitality and Muslim Immigration in an Age of Fear (Book Review)

Abby M. Foreman
Dordt College, abby.foreman@dordt.edu

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BOOK REVIEWS

Christian Hospitality and Muslim Immigration in an Age of Fear. Matthew Kaemingk. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2018. 296pp. ISBN: 978-0802874580. Reviewed by Abby Foreman, Professor of Social Work, Dordt College.

In his insightful new book on immigration and Christian responses to it, Matthew Kaemingk formulates an accessible and thorough explanation of pluralism while examining the timely and important issue of Muslim immigration. Using the Netherlands as a historical and contemporary case study, Kaemingk presents a powerful critique of liberal, modernist and right-wing, nationalistic responses to immigration as well as issues of religious, social, and political diversity. For Kaemingk, both ideological impulses are flawed and limited by an inability to account for and truly respect deep differences. Using similar points made in John Inazu's book *Confident Pluralism*, Kaemingk's book makes a strong case that religious differences between Muslim immigrants and residents of their host countries are real and might not be resolved. Nevertheless, also like Inazu, Kaemingk argues that there should be hospitable, public space created and maintained to respect and allow for these differences. Religious groups should be free to live out their faith, not only in private but also in public space, allowing for the establishment of organizations, places of worship, and schools that are aligned with their religious beliefs and identity.

By going back to explore the history of the modernism project in the Netherlands, Kaemingk skillfully demonstrates how the spirits of our age seek to dominate and achieve cultural hegemony. He uses the story of the brutal and public slaying of artist Theo van Gogh by a Muslim man, angry about van Gogh's uncharitable characterization of Islam, to begin to explain that all is not well in the celebrated land of tolerance and multiculturalism. The Netherlands has historically been known for its fair treatment of minorities, in part due to a unique period of history in the first half of the 20th century in which cultural and political power was shared through *verzuiling*, or the pillarization of society: "From 1900 to 1960, the Netherlands, broadly speaking, became a nation of four equal power bases or subcultures (liberals, socialists, Calvinists, and Catholics). None of the four was permitted to dominate, assimilate, or direct the others" (40). In this era, one can notice the ideas of

pluralism that were advanced by Abraham Kuyper and his adherents. Beginning in the 1960s, however, liberalism emerged as the dominant ideology, intended to advance the nation together under a shared progressive vision for the future.

"Shared vision" is a perhaps a too-hopeful term that belies the necessarily coercive forces in a dominant ideology that will eventually lead to forceful measures to achieve uniformity. Lip service to accepting and celebrating difference falls short when religious minorities, such as Muslims or conservative Christians, hold on to their socially conservative views of morality, family, or sexuality that are outside of the wider culture's beliefs on such issues. Kaemingk highlights how, in the Netherlands, the current atmosphere towards Muslim immigrants is much less hospitable as the liberal, multicultural paradigm has proven not to account for deep differences that were assumed to eventually disappear once groups were properly educated and assimilated. As a result, some have latched on to populist, nationalist movements that support a harder line towards immigrants and minorities. Anyone following the current developments in the United States is likely to recognize the parallels between the political and social realities in the Netherlands and those in the United States on these issues.

In this current time of ideological, political and social conflicts, the author provides a poignant reminder to Christians that we should never feel too at home among the political and social ideologies of our day. We should be loath to underestimate the power of sinfulness present in our own fearfulness and in our desire to use the state for our own hegemonic purposes. Kaemingk speaks directly of our sinful desire to want to gain control, no matter the ethical and moral costs to our devotion to the risen Lord. This prophetic word is one that Christ-followers must hear and reckon with especially today and with each subsequent issue of public justice. Among individuals, groups and organizations affected by sin, there is always the sinful tendency to want to control, to dominate, to snuff out the other.

The middle section of the book is an excellent

primer for those who yearn for an approach to public life that respects difference while remaining unapologetically convicted as to Christ's sovereignty in all areas of life. For those familiar with concepts of pluralism and Kuyper's thought, this section presents pluralism in a fresh, articulate, and accessible way. Kaemingk's views can easily be used to approach any number of pressing social and public issues with a posture of thoughtfulness, respect, and civility. The insights and approaches he provides in this book can and should be applied by those who face problems where a temperate view of the state and the role of other actors must be considered carefully.

In areas of immigration, refugee resettlement and protection of religious liberty, the state is necessarily involved in protecting and enforcing boundaries. In his careful exposition of Kuyper's and, to a lesser extent, Herman Bavinck's thoughts on the role of the state, the church, and other spheres, Kaemingk emphasizes that the role of the state should be limited. Kuyper warns against the use of the state to force one particular ideology onto everyone via law and regulation, and he also warns against the use of the state to enforce morality or create theocracy. For believers who may desire to use the state to enforce a theocracy, Kuyper says that this use of the state denies the true power of Christ since He, not the state, is the one who is capable of saving others and transforming lives. The state should instead play the role of protecting freedom and integrity of the various spheres in life. Instead of looking to the state or ideology for solutions, the reader is urged to look to Christ and his cross to govern our approach to diverse religions and worldviews.

Kaemingk crafts a picture of pluralism centered on Christ that expands on the thoughts of Kuyper and Bavinck. He rightfully critiques the tendency of Reformed pluralism in particular for focusing almost solely on Christ as King, forgetting the other aspects of Christ. As Kaemingk says, sometimes we fail to understand that "following Jesus requires more than simply a thirst for justice and liberty. Jesus is depicted in the Gospels, not only as a king, but also as a prophet, a servant, a friend, healer, reconciler, liberator, advocate for the weak, teacher, priest, and dinner host" (160). Kaemingk urges the readers to expand their notions of their public selves and collective public responsibility to one another to include concepts of hospitality, reconciliation, grace and the like.

Likewise, he describes how the cross represents hospitality, grace, and justice. These principles of hospitality, grace, and justice should guide the interactions of Christ-followers in public and private life: "The only reason Christians could ever make space for a Muslim is because Christ first made space for them" (187). This notion of the hospitable King, which Kaemingk argues for in the chapter "Pluralism and Christ," requires that Christian disciples take seriously the example of hospitality set forth by Jesus' example.

The final chapters of the book include many practical steps that Christians can take to embrace hospitality towards those different from themselves. One of the key points made in this section is the importance of public space for Muslim immigrants. It is important for Christians to have our own space and our own organizations in our country. Likewise, it is important that we recognize the same possibility for other religions such as Islam. This view, according to Kaemingk, is not only hospitable but also crucial for a pluralist approach in a free country in which religious freedom is not just for us but for all groups. Kaemingk's project in this book is aptly articulated by his suggestions about what should be done: "I suggest that we think about a movement of pluralism, justice, and hospitality as something more than simply political activism—it is a way of life. I want to suggest that raising children, worshipping in church, going to work, volunteering in schools, taking in a refugee, inviting neighbors over for coffee can all be potent actions for pluralism. My desire here is not to demean the importance of overtly political action but to honor and raise up the thousands of small ways in which a healthy political culture can be protected and cultivated" (237).

In a time of increased social isolation, tribalism, and a lack of civility in our public lives, Kaemingk is right to draw our attention to actions and notions of hospitality that can build bridges between human beings in ways that affirm our humanness, and our shared likeness, as image bearers. His attention to hospitality is important, as is his success in articulating a vision of pluralism that will be accessible to most readers. This work is an important contribution to contemporary discussions about religious liberty, pluralism, and public justice.