
E. Theodore Bachmann

Introduction

An older generation still recalls how epoch-making for the perspectives of historiography was Kenneth Scott Latourette’s History of the Expansion of Christianity,* whose seventh and final volume—fittingly entitled, “Advance through Storm”—appeared in 1945 as World War II was ending and a new era beginning. Earlier perspectives were changing and horizons widening as successive conferences on world mission accentuated the global outreach, the imminent rise of indigenous churches, and the mobilization of persons in many lands who were volunteering for the missionary task. Latourette’s own aborted experience in China (1910–12), when illness made him a “detained volunteer,” rerouted his career but also gave him a vision. It overlapped all his subsequent activities as it gave global significance to the local and fitted the familiar and daring the untried. In his compelling synopsis, the more accelerated because of the immense changes obliterating the local into an international design.

The pace of history is relentless. Its course since 1945 appears the more accelerated because of the immense changes obliterating the familiar and daring the untried. In his compelling synopsis, Ralph D. Winter’s The 25 Unbelievable Years (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1970), has updated the Latourette perspective. But again, Winter’s work already lies more than a dozen years behind us. Not only so. The very nature of the Christian mission is to reach out and by the power of the gospel to create change; a change itself subjective to the reactive environment.

When, during my last year at theological seminary, I came upon the first volume of Latourette’s monumental opus (1937), it captured my imagination. Five years later, this one and the successive volumes became embodied in my teaching of church history with a missionary dimension. I marveled at his amassed sources and judicious use of them; at his interrelating of individuals and continents; at his fitting the fragments into the ever extending mosaic of mission. At times I was impatient with what appeared an uncritical assessment or an unfortunate omission. But these occupational hazards underscored for me, as for others, the essential interdependence of scholarship amid the astounding complexity of the Christian world mission.

In quantity, if not always in quality, missionary research has advanced greatly since 1945. Well may we marvel at Latourette’s vast reading and marshaling of references; a majority of these works are housed in Yale’s Day Missions Library—one of the greatest of its kind. Today, however, we must marvel at an ensuing phenomenon: the vast production of graduate doctoral dissertations in the field of mission as well as in areas adjunct to it. The degrees involved include the Ph.D., Th.D., S.T.D., plus an occasional Ed.D. The more recently devised professional degrees, notably the D. Miss(iology) and the D. Min(istry), have grown increasingly profuse. Many of the thesis and dissertation projects associated with these degrees also represent important contributions to knowledge, but they are not included here.

This present list is only a beginning. It cannot pretend to have covered the field and captured every eligible title. Besides, it would have been fascinating to provide some sort of annotation for each entry so as to hint more broadly at the nature of the research topic. Present space requirements, however, have imposed limits. The data for each entry are: author, title, degree, year, and institution. The listing is alphabetical by author. A topical/subject index is included.

The purpose of this compilation is multiple: (1) to supply an inventory of graduate dissertations from North American graduate schools that are relevant to Christian mission; (2) to identify such dissertations as may be required for scholarly undertakings; (3) to show what has already been done and thus to minimize duplication of effort; (4) to encourage further research; (5) to lift the sights of the user beyond individual performance to a panoramic view of what has already been done; and (6) to disclose a global dimension of the People of God as set purposefully within the human family.

Because it was agreed that the end of World War II would be a good chronological starting point, this listing runs inclusively from 1945 through 1981, a period of thirty-seven years. Out of a total of 934 entries, almost half (462) were produced during the single decade of the 1970s. And, at the pace set in 1980 and 1981, the decade of the 1980s promises to yield a similar number. This burgeoning output certainly does not support the widely-held view that mission and missiological studies are waning concerns of our era. (The number of dissertations produced during the decade of the 1970s was 20 percent greater than the number produced in the previous two and a half decades, 1945 through 1969!)

Twelve percent of the authors are women (112). Twenty-three seminaries and 122 universities appear in the list, giving a total of 145 institutions.

Twenty-eight institutions granted ten or more doctorates in the course of the thirty-seven years covered in the listing. Of these, ten institutions granted 25 or more, while of these ten, three granted 40 or more. The three institutions at the top of the list are Boston University, with 54, the University of Chicago, with 49, and Columbia University, with 42. The twenty universities that granted ten or more doctorates account for 387 dissertations, while all universities together account for 678. The latter figure represents almost 73 percent of the total—a remarkable index of the level of interest expressed by the North American university community in the world Christian mission. At the same time, the twenty-three seminaries in the list, that account for less than 16 percent of the institutions, produced more than 27 percent of the dissertations.

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In 1978, E. Theodore Bachmann completed a term of nearly five years in Geneva, Switzerland, as editor of Lutheran World, the quarterly journal of the Lutheran World Federation. Before going to Geneva he served as executive for theological education of the Lutheran Church in America. Prior to that he taught for sixteen years in Lutheran seminaries in the United States and Brazil. He is the author of Lutheran Churches in the World (Geneva: LWF, 1979), and did the English translation of Heinrich Bornkamm, Martin Luther in der Mitte seines Lebens (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

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