A few years ago our colleague Donald R. Jacobs, visiting the World Council of Churches headquarters in Geneva, looked across the dining room and recognized Dr. W. A. Visser ‘t Hooft, the former general secretary of the WCC. Jacobs recounts how he approached Visser ‘t Hooft and, after introducing himself, ventured to ask, “What is the major issue in missiology today?”

Visser ‘t Hooft replied without hesitation, “The uniqueness of Christ.” And with eyes alight he explained to Jacobs his concern that “if Jesus is not unique, there is no gospel.”

The publication of The Myth of Christian Uniqueness, edited by John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Orbis Books, 1987) demonstrates the validity of Visser ‘t Hooft’s concern. The magnitude of shift in Christian belief that is proposed by the authors of The Myth volume constitutes what has been described as crossing “a theological Rubicon.” Langdon Gilkey, one of the co-authors of the book, allows that this effort “toward a pluralistic theology of religions” represents “a monstrous shift indeed,” from an affirmation of the uniqueness of Christ and Christianity to some sort of parity of religions. Gilkey acknowledges that “this is real relativism” and it “involves all theological doctrines, not just some of them.”

Voices of theological relativism have always been around the churches, usually at the fringes. What is new today is that some of these voices and views are found in the World Council of Churches’ Program on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths. Concern about these developments and their meaning for the future of the World Council is widespread as the council prepares to hold a World Mission Conference in San Antonio, Texas, in May, and anticipates its next general assembly in Canberra, Australia, in February 1991.

In this issue of the Bulletin two veteran missiologists and longtime supporters of the ecumenical movement express their deep disquiet. Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, a former director of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches, says that if the council goes along with these trends, it will “become an irrelevance in the spiritual struggles that lie ahead of us.” Dutch missiologist Johannes Verkuyl predicts that the drift toward religious universalism and theological relativism in the dialogue program “will pose more and more serious questions not only about the credibility of the WCC, but even about its survival.”

The Christian world mission cannot afford to cross the theological Rubicon proposed by the authors of The Myth. Rather, we need to affirm again that unique “Rubicon-crossing” event of twenty centuries ago: the redemptive entering of the Creator into human history in the person of Jesus Christ (Heb: 1:1-3). Without the uniqueness of that person and that event, there is no gospel and no mission.
Religious Pluralism and the Uniqueness of Jesus Christ

Wesley Ariarajah's work speaks of a current that is about to become a flood, exercising an overwhelming pressure on people of all religions to become aware of and to cope with a religiously plural world. That pressure has already led a group of well-known Christians to announce—under the title The Myth of Christian Uniqueness—their conclusion that the claim for uniqueness must be abandoned. The July 1988 issue of the International Review of Mission (IRM), containing addresses and discussions centering on the celebration of the jubilee of the 1938 Tambaram Conference, gives further evidence of the power of this current. It is fed, of course, not only by arguments that are, properly speaking, theological and philosophical, but also by the pervading feeling of guilt in the world of Western Christendom, and by the overwhelming sense of need to find a basis for human unity in an age of nuclear weapons. As always, there is a strong temptation to go with the current, but even a small acquaintance with history is enough to remind us that what seem to be overwhelmingly powerful movements of thought can lead to disaster. Critical reflection is in order.

No persons in their senses deny the need for human unity. Our world is in fact torn apart by rival programs for human unity. Washington and Moscow are both convinced that we need one world. Many years ago André Dumas drew attention to the obvious fact that any proposal for human unity that does not specify the center around which unity is to be constructed has as its hidden center the interests of the proposer. The Myth of Christian Uniqueness provides rich illustration of this. Gordon Kaufman in his essay starts from the need for human unity and takes it for granted, without argument, that the Christian gospel cannot provide the center. He goes on to say that "modern historical consciousness" requires us to abandon the claim to Christ's uniqueness and to recognize that the biblical view of things, like all other views, is the product of a particular culture (pp. 5-6). It is of course true that the biblical view of things is culturally conditioned: that does not require us to say that it is not true. "Modern historical consciousness" is also a culturally conditioned phenomenon and does not provide us with a standpoint from which we can dispose of the truth-claims of the Bible. Recognition of the culturally conditioned character of all truth-claims could lead to the abandonment of all belief in the possibility of knowing the truth; that is what is happening in contemporary Western culture. But this recognition provides no grounds upon which it is possible to deny that God might have acted decisively to reveal and effect the divine purpose for human history; and such a revelation would, of course, have to be culturally conditioned, since otherwise it would not be part of human history and could have no impact on human history. There are certainly no grounds whatever for supposing that "modern historical consciousness" provides us with an epistemological privilege denied to other culturally conditioned ways of seeing.

As Alasdair MacIntyre so brilliantly documents in his book Whose Justice, What Rationality? the idea that there can be a kind of reason that is supra-cultural and that would enable us to view all the culturally conditioned traditions of rationality from a standpoint above them all is one of the illusions of our contemporary culture. All rationality is socially embodied, developed in human tradition and using some human language. The fact that biblical thought shares this with all other forms of human thought in no way disqualifies it from providing the needed center.

The authors of The Myth would go some way to accept this. For Paul Knitter, "Pluralism seems to be of the very stuff of reality, the way things are, the way they function... There can never be just one of anything." So there are no absolute values given to us; we must create them, but this must be a collective enterprise in which we all share. In similar vein Stanley Samartha calls upon Christians to contribute "to the pool of human values such as justice and compassion, truth and righteousness in the quest of different people for spiritual and moral values... to hold together different religions, cultures, languages and ethnic groups" (IRM, p. 323) and that "to claim that one religious tradition has the only answer to such a global problem [as the nuclear threat] sounds preposterous" (IRM, p. 315).

These and similar statements bring us, I think, to the heart of our matter, revealing as they do that loss of faith in the possibility of knowing objective truth, which is at the heart of the sickness of our culture. In the first place it is, of course, not true that the modern worldview of physics removes all absolutes. There are such absolutes as the speed of light and the value of Planck's constant. One might well say that it seems preposterous that these figures should be just so, no more and no less; but it is so. These are what we call in our culture "facts," about which we are not pluralists. It is in the realm of "values" that we are pluralists. Values are matters of personal choice; they are what people want. And human wants conflict. The idea of contributing to a shared pool of "values" conveys no coherent meaning. The question that has always to be addressed, surely, is the question about the facts, the question "What is the case?"—and on that question some answers will be true and others false. Rational people will see to it that their "values" are based upon what is the case, upon reality. "Values" that are not so based are merely personal wishes, and human wishes collide. It is precisely for "justice" that nations go to war.

The course of the present debate has illustrated the retreat from objectivity into subjectivity of which I speak. In his well-known use of the Copernican paradigm, John Hick advised us that we should learn to see God as the center of all reality, and abandon our culture-bound vision of Jesus as the center. Paul Knitter and others now suggest a further move, beyond a Christocentric and even a theocentric view to one that might be called soteriocentric—for why indeed should belief in God be the clue to reality? Thus Christopher Duraisingh writes: "It is not through our a priori doctrinal formulations on God or Christ, but rather through our collective human search for meaning and sacredness that the 'universe of faiths' could be adequately understood," and he goes on therefore to say, in agreement with Paul Knitter, that our approach to other faiths must be neither theocentric nor Christocentric, but must start from soteriology (IRM, p. 399). In Paul Knitter's words, interfaith dialogue "should not revolve...
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Muslim (IRM, p. 382). But does that apply to all those who claim to have a mission from God? Hitler, for one, was certain that he had a mission from God; do we take his word for it? If not, on what grounds do we deny his testimony? When Christians do evil things in the name of God, as they do, we can confront them with the figure of Christ in the Gospels and require them to measure their actions and motives against that given reality. But if it is denied that there is any such divinely given standard available to us as a part of our human history, what grounds are there for passing a judgment that is more than ad hominem?

This is not a merely rhetorical question. In The Myth of Christian Uniqueness one writer faces up to it. Langdon Gilkey asks the question: How, in a pluralist world, do we respond to a phenomenon like Hitler? His answer is interesting. He says that for such situations we need an absolute; only something like the Barmen Declaration is an adequate response. But the necessity for this absolute is a relative one. Gilkey’s key sentence is: “paradoxically, plurality, precisely by its own ambiguity, implies both relativity and absoluteness, a juxtaposition or synthesis of the relative and the absolute that is frustrating intellectually and yet necessary practically” (pp. 45-46). Gilkey endeavors to cope with the intellectual “frustration” by appealing to “the venerable, practical American tradition” of pragmatism, and I confess I am simply unable to follow him. He is, of course, profoundly right in drawing attention to what he calls the demonic possibilities of pluralism. But I remain totally unconvinced by the idea of an absolute that is available on call when it is relatively necessary.

The point is that we do not need to go back to Hitler to find evidence for the demonic possibilities of pluralism. We surely know that our contemporary Western culture is in the power of false gods, of idols; that people are seeking salvation through the invocation of all the old gods of power and sex and money—“star wars,” the “nuclear shield,” the free market, the consumer society. There will come a point, perhaps not far in the future, when Christians will realize that something like the Barmen Declaration is needed. What deeply troubles me about the contemporary output of the “interfaith industry” is that it is destroying the only basis on which such a declaration could be made. There is certainly a common search for salvation; it is that search that tears the world to pieces when it is directed to that which is not God.

But Wilfred Cantwell Smith says that there is no such thing as idolatry. In The Myth volume he restates his familiar view that all the religions have as their common core some experience of the transcendent; that whether we speak of images made of wood or stone, or images in the human mind, or even of Jesus himself, all are the means used by the transcendent to make himself or herself or itself present to us humans. To claim uniqueness for one particular form or vehicle of this contact with the transcendent is preposterous and blasphemous. Much rather accept the truth so beautifully stated in the Bhagavadgita and in the theology of Ramanuja, that God is so gracious that he (or she or it) accepts all worship whatever be the form through which the worship is offered. Here clearly “the transcendent” is a purely formal category into which one can put any content that the mind can devise. Once again it is clear that we are in the world of pure subjectivity. There can be no such thing as false worship because no objective reality is involved. The question “True or false?” simply does not arise. We are witnessing the collapse of the whole glorious human enterprise of seeking to know the truth, to make contact with reality, to know God as God truly is. It is the mark of a culture that—in the words that Gilbert Murray used to describe the end of the glorious civilization of Greece—has lost its nerve. We are in the midst of a dying culture.

When the Greeks, worshiping “an unknown God,” were confronted by a not very impressive man (see 2 Cor. 10:10) who told them, “What you worship as unknown, that I proclaim to you,” they were naturally inclined to laugh. And of course God was not wholly unknown, otherwise there would have been no altar. And if God had been truly known, there would have been no need for many altars to many gods. God has indeed made the divine known in some way and in some measure to all human beings. Why, then, speak of one unique revelation? Eck tells us that her Hindu teacher was astonished to learn that Christians acknowledge only one avatar, and she goes on to say that while some Christians believe this, to many other Christians it is folly (IRM, p. 384). With Cantwell Smith, she deplores the idea that God’s revelation is locked away in the past, and she quotes Smith as writing, “God is not revealed fully in Jesus Christ to me, nor indeed to anyone that I have met; or that my historical studies have uncovered” (ibid). Now surely every Christian must confess that he or she has not fully grasped the length and breadth and height and depth of God’s revelation in Jesus, and is seeking to comprehend more. Truly God makes the divine known in the soul and conscience and reason of the human person, but not in a purely inward spirituality, which is separate from the public history that we share. The Hindu can speak of many avatars, because none of them is part of public history; they are all ideas in the mind. There is no event in public history that can or could replace those events that we confess to have taken place under Pontius Pilate. It is because of those events that we can recognize and rejoice in the intimations of God’s presence in the experience of men and women of many religious traditions and (especially!) men and women who make no religious profession. What is here in question is not merely an inward experience of “the transcendent” but a series of events in public history by which the human situation is decisively changed. We enter into and grow into the inward experience of God’s love and truth through participating in the rational discourse of the community that takes its rise from these events. This tradition of rational discourse enables us to find in these events not only the source of a growing inward experience of God, but also the clue by following which we are enabled to make sense of the world, to grasp its real nature with growing (though always very partial) sureness.

Of course, it is always possible to deny that these events have this significance. One might almost say that it is normal to deny it. There are no external proofs by which it could be shown to be indubitable. But every form of rationality or of spirituality is socially embodied in a particular tradition and language, and rests ultimately upon presuppositions that cannot be verified by reference to some reality external to it. The idea that the universe is so constructed that we can enjoy indubitable knowledge without the risks of personal commitment is an illusion, but this illusion is used to discredit the claims of a specific tradition of rationality such as is embodied in the Christian community. “True knowledge,” says Paul Knitter (quoting Cantwell Smith), “is that knowledge that all intelligent men and women . . . can share, and can jointly verify, by observation and by participation” (No Other Name? p. 11). But truth is not the possession of majorities—even if the vote is unanimous. All knowing of real-
Rev. Emendi Mwenebenga, church planter in Zaire, says, "We know how to reach people and help them become new disciples; but how do we make them strong, thoroughly Christian disciples?"

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ity, and supremely when the reality in question is God, is the work of people nurtured in a tradition of rational discourse. The fact that the Christian affirmation is made from one such socially embodied tradition in no way discredits its claim to speak truth. To pretend to possess the truth in its fullness is arrogance. The claim to have been given the decisive clue for the human search after truth is not arrogant; it is the exercise of our responsibility as part of the human family.

There is, of course, one final objection. It was classically expressed in the saying attributed to Rousseau: "If God wanted to say something to Jean Jacques Rousseau, why did He have to go round by Moses to say it?" Why Moses and not Socrates or Confucius or Gautama? Why one people and not another? Should not "the transcendent" be equally and simultaneously available to every human being? Very clearly there lies behind the complaint that very ancient belief to which I have referred: the belief that in the last analysis I am a solitary soul with my own relationship with the Transcendent—whatever he, she, or it may be. And that belief is false. It rests upon an atomistic spirituality that contradicts what is most fundamental in human nature, namely, that our life is only fully human as we are bound up with one another in mutual caring and responsibility. When Stanley Samartha, in the Tambaram discussion, attacks the traditional work of missions because "conversion, instead of being a vertical movement towards God, a genuine renewal of life, has become a horizontal movement of groups of people from one community to another" (IRM, p. 321), he demonstrates his captivity to this illusion. We do not know God, in the sense of true personal knowledge, except as part of a community. The fact that the confession of Jesus as unique Lord and Savior is made by a particular human community among other communities provides no ground for denying its claim to speak truth. God's action for the salvation of the whole human family cannot be a series of private transactions within a multitude of individual souls; it is something wrought out in public history, and history is always concrete and specific. It is possible, as it has always been possible, to deny the truth of the Christian claim, as these writers do. But it is not possible to claim that the denial rests upon a kind of rationality superior to that which is embodied in the Christian tradition.

I think it is fair to say that the writers whom I am criticizing are not wholly to blame for this individualist perspective. I think that the whole debate about the uniqueness of Christ has for many decades been skewed by the notion that the only question at stake is the question of the fate of the individual soul in the next world. It is assumed that those who speak of the uniqueness of Jesus are saying that only Christians will be saved in the next world—which of course opens the way to destructive debates about who is a real Christian. It is enough to say that this way of thinking has lost contact with the Bible. This individualism, with its center in the selfish concern of the individual about personal salvation, is utterly remote from the biblical view, which has as its center God and divine rule. The central question is not "How shall I be saved?" but "How shall I glorify God by understanding, loving, and doing God's will—here and now in this earthly life?" To answer that question I must insistently ask: "How and where is God's purpose for the whole of creation and the human family made visible and credible?" That is the question about the truth—objective truth—which is true whether or not it coincides with my "values." And I know of no place in the public history of the world where the dark mystery of human life is illuminated, and the dark power of all that denies human well-being is met and mastered, except in those events that have their focus in what happened "under Pontius Pilate."

There is indeed a powerful current in our time that would sweep away such a claim and insist that the story of those events is simply one among the vast variety of "religious experience" and that it can be safely incorporated into a syllabus for the comparative study of religions. The current is strong because it is part of the drift of contemporary Western culture (of what in every part of the world is called "modernity") away from belief in the possibility of knowing truth and toward subjectivity. The World Council of Churches has been asked, at two general assemblies, to accept statements that seemed to call in question the uniqueness, decisiveness, and centrality of Jesus Christ. It has resisted. If, in the pull of the strong current, it should agree to go with the present tide, it would become an irrelevance in the spiritual struggles that lie ahead of us. I pray and believe that it will not.

Notes


3. All quotations from the International Review of Mission (IRM) cited in the text of this article are from the July 1988 issue.


Mission in the 1990s

Johannes Verkuyl

I was born in the first decade of this century, two years before the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference of 1910, where it was affirmed that every generation has the obligation to preach the gospel in word and deed to its contemporaries.

Now we are approaching the last decade of the twentieth century. In this “century of catastrophes” I have seen all the suffering and wickedness of which Jesus spoke in Matthew 24 and Mark 13, but I have also seen something of the positive promise in those same chapters: “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations” (Matt. 24:14). When I think about the harvest of the storms in this century in regard to that promise, I would mention three items about which a consensus developed in the earlier decades of this century, not only in the official world mission conferences but also in local and national settings all over the world.

1. The goal of mission is the kingdom of God, and the communication of the gospel of the kingdom has four dimensions: proclamation, diaconia, fellowship, and participation in the struggle against all kinds of injustices and for righteousness and peace.

2. The task should be fulfilled in cooperation among churches in all six continents; communication of the gospel means a task in, from, and to all six continents.

3. We need each other not only in theological developments, but also in the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom, in the diaconate, in the building of “koinonia,” and in the struggle against injustices and for righteousness and shalom. We cannot say to each other, “I do not need you.” “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ” (1 Cor. 12:12).

As we enter the last decade of this century, we confess that the task of world mission is unfinished and our common calling is to carry on with this task. When we consider the unfinished task we see challenges and hindrances to which we should give attention.

1. The Unreached

The gospel of the kingdom should be preached from decade to decade, from culture to culture, from continent to continent. In every nation there are thousands and even millions of people who have not been reached with the gospel. I never understand why “ecumenicals” and “evangelicals” do not cooperate more to reach the unreached. There are many consultations—national, regional, continental, worldwide—among churches. But in ecumenical circles these consultations concentrate mostly within the ecclesiastical network to strengthen internal church structures. Why don’t we ask each other: What can we do to assist each other to reach the unreached in our countries?

2. The Crisis in Interfaith Dialogue

Everyone who has followed the discussions and developments in interfaith dialogue in recent years should be aware that there is a crisis in interfaith dialogue.

The International Review of Mission of July 1988, with the theme “Tambaram Revisited,” demonstrates this crisis most clearly. The debate between Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Lesslie Newbigin at the Tambaram anniversary celebration in 1988 illustrates the crisis, but the symptoms were evident throughout the consultation, as they are evident in many parts of the world. Harvey Cox, who has not only a remarkable feeling for what is in the air but also a charisma to call a spade a spade, has written about the crisis in interfaith dialogue. I think there are many reasons to speak of a crisis, and it is better to admit it than to hide it with sophisticated words.

What is the crisis? It is the tendency to play down the centrality, the decisiveness of the person and work of Jesus Christ, in interfaith dialogue, and to move from the Christocentric and trinitarian basis of the World Council of Churches (WCC) to a so-called theocentric point of view. In one of the last letters I received from Dr. W. A. Visser ’t Hooft before his death, he wrote that in his long lifetime, again and again he saw the rise of a wave of theological relativism, and that he saw such a wave coming again. He expressed the hope that the WCC would stand firm on its theological basis in the midst of this new wave of relativism.

There is indeed a new drift now toward religious universalism and theological relativism, especially in the dialogue program, that will pose more and more serious questions not only about the credibility of the WCC, but even about its survival. The San Antonio World Mission Conference should help us in this impasse between mission and dialogue.

It is my conviction that the nature of dialogue should be that of dialogue, as was properly formulated and expressed at the World Mission Conference in Mexico City in 1963: “Whatever the circumstances may be, our intention in every human dialogue should be to be involved in the dialogue of God with men, and to move our partner and ourselves to listen to what God in Christ reveals to us, and to answer Him.”

We not only need dialogue for mutual understanding and

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cooperation, but we also need missionary dialogues that involve the triad between God and ourselves with people of other faiths. The San Antonio Mission Conference must address the impasse and crisis in interfaith dialogue. It must also clarify the relation between the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME), and the subunit on Dialogue in such a way that the WCC does not speak from both sides of its mouth, but speaks on the basis of our common trinitarian confession of faith.

3. The Issue of Religious Liberty

After World War II, the Commission on International Affairs of the WCC-in-process-of-formation was deeply involved in the formulation of the Declaration on Human Rights of the United Nations. Under the able leadership of O. Frederick Nolde, this commission was also deeply involved in the struggle to integrate religious liberty in the constitutions of the emerging and independent states in Asia and Africa. I saw Nolde at work in Asia in those crucial times. There was reason for optimism in regard to the implementation of this fundamental right in practice.

Afterward, it was stressed—and rightly so—that we should not forget the interrelation between religious liberty and social, economic, and cultural-ecological justice. But nowadays we realize that contemporary history cannot be compared with a daybreak in this field. In many parts of the world we see a cloud coming up from the side of totalitarian political systems and "religious" states, which try to maintain control over their citizens with oppressive state power.

There is an unbelievable threat to human rights in general and religious liberty in particular. Theo van Boven, the former director of the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations, wrote recently: "Fundamentalist movements in religion are a threat and a menace to the universality of human rights in general and for religious liberty especially."

This topic should have high priority on the agenda of the San Antonio Mission Conference as a topic for serious discussion. The proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom does not depend on the implementation of human rights, but this proclamation should nonetheless be protected by law. This issue had high priority immediately after World War II, and it is time to give it careful attention again.

4. Participation of the Churches in the Western World in the Unfinished Task of World Mission

More and more there is a tendency to write off the participation of churches in the Western world in the unfinished task of world mission. The churches in the Western world are deeply thankful for this miracle and they are also humbled by God's judgment over their triumphalism. But now we see this tendency among some influential Westerners to write off the Western churches in terms of any further role in the task of world evangelization.

I do not underrate the "cancer of the soul" in the Western world, and the moral and spiritual decline in the Western part of the "global village." I believe that Alan Bloom is right when he writes about the loss of orientation and the loss of living belief in the Western world. The analysis of Lesslie Newbigin in his Foolishness to the Greeks is full of shameful truth. Movements like "New Age" are a sign that thousands in the Western world seek an answer to the deepest questions of human life but do not seek the answers anymore in the message of the Christian tradition and the churches. Sometimes Western critics of the Western missions remind me of the flagellants of the Middle Ages in Europe, with the difference that the flagellants of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries flagellated themselves; whereas the modern Western flagellants flog the old missionary personnel and pray: "God, we thank Thee that we are not like those old missionaries." Then they go away and do nothing.

I place my hope on a younger generation of women and men in the Western world who are humble enough to assist their Asian, African, and Latin American colleagues, and I hope that friends from other continents will help us in the West to assist the Christian minority in the toughest mission field of the world: the North Atlantic world. But we should not be desperate or discouraged.

Lamin Sanneh from the Gambia, who is the new professor of mission and world Christianity at Yale Divinity School, has written about the "guilt-complex of western missionaries." He encourages us to do our homework in our own nations, and he encourages the younger generation to participate in world mission in new ways.

Not long before his death, Stephen Neill gave an analysis about the self-criticism in Western churches, and he discussed the many reasons for that self-criticism and for penitence. Self-criticism of Western missions is necessary, but it should not lead to defeat and paralysis. Rather, it should foster renewal and new initiatives in mission for our situation today.

5. Rapprochement between Evangelicals and Ecumenicals Is Needed for the Unfinished Task of World Mission

One of the most noteworthy developments in the 1980s was the document "Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation," approved by the WCC Central Committee in July 1982. This "ecumenical affirmation" was the result of close cooperation between ecumenicals and evangelicals, and it has been widely used as a study guide for congregations. It is my conviction that every evangelical (in the New Testament sense of that word) should be an ecumenical, and every ecumenical (in the biblical sense and also in the sense in which it was used by the pioneers of the ecumenical movement) should be an evangelical.

Today, however, the distance between evangelicals and ecumenicals is growing wider, and we are faced with the threat of polarization between these two traditions. What we need in the 1990s is not polarization but rapprochement. It is time to get serious about this problem and to take deliberate steps at bridge-building.

At a time when the Vatican is moving more and more in the direction of a new "counter-Reformation," it is ironic that many mainline ecumenical Protestant churches cooperate more closely
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with the Vatican than with Protestant evangelicals. We should be grateful for the many contacts between the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church during and after Vatican Council II, but it is likely that the official trend in the Vatican in the 1990s will continue more in the direction of counter-reformation than co-reformation. We should certainly continue official contacts with the Vatican, but on the national, regional, and continental levels we should strengthen our relations with those groups within the Roman Catholic Church that, in spite of heavy pressure from the Vatican, are still moving in the direction of a co-reformation.

Mission in the 1990s needs Christians and churches that work in the spirit of the document “Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation.” Our task now is to put flesh on the spirit of that document, in our words and deeds.

The Lord’s Promise

Jesus promised to be with us “all the days,” to the end of time (Matt. 28:20). This promise is related to the unfinished task of world mission. Therefore we must always ask: Which day is it today? What is the importance of this decade for the Christian world mission?

The Roots of African Theology

Kwame Bediako

Pre-Christian Africa: A Religious “Tabula Rasa”?

In his Duff Lectures of 1935, subsequently published as Africa and Christianity, Dietrich Westermann took the view that in Africa the transposition of Christianity ought to entail the complete elimination of all that went to form the pre-Christian religious tradition. “However anxious a missionary may be to appreciate and retain indigenous social and moral values, in the case of religion he has to be ruthless. . . . he has to admit and even to emphasize that the religion he teaches is opposed to the existing one and the one has to cede to the other” (Westermann, 1937:2). In short, for Westermann, “giving the new means taking away the old” (1937:2).

The response to Westermann would come thirty years later. In a series of lectures given at Cambridge University and subsequently published as Christianity in World Perspective, Kenneth Cragg countered Westermann’s view and suggested: “On the contrary: it means harnessing its possibilities [i.e. of the old] and setting up within it the revolution that will both fulfill and transform it. For if the old is taken away, to whom is the new given?” (Cragg, 1968:57).


Accordingly, when seventy years after the Edinburgh Conference the expression “Christian Africa” becomes current in a major publication of a leading African theologian (see John Mbiti, 1986), it may be worthwhile to investigate whether it is the view at Edinburgh, Westermann’s judgment, or Cragg’s intuition that has prevailed. What, insofar as it can be discerned, underlies the African apprehension of Christianity at the specific level of religious experience? What are the theological roots of Christianity in Africa as a historical reality in African life, as African Christians themselves, and particularly African theological writers, perceive them?

African Theology: The Pre-Christian Past as a Prime Concern

These are not idle questions. For when one turns to the academic

Notes

literature of African theology since its first flowering in the late 1950s, one of the more difficult problems is how to account for the fact that "the chief non-biblical reality with which the African theologian must struggle is the non-Christian religious tradition of his own people" and that African theology early became "something of a dialogue between the African Christian scholar and the perennial religions and spiritualities of Africa" (Adrian Hastings, 1976:50f.). Hastings even ventured to suggest that one effect of this concentration of interest was that "areas of traditional Christian doctrine which are not reflected in the African past disappear or are marginalised" (ibid.).

These observations were confirmed in a survey article on "Research in the History of Religions in West Africa" by Kwesi Dickson of Ghana. Dickson expressed regret that West Africa had not produced enough researchers in the area of "biblical ideas and customs." The favored fields of study were, rather, African traditional religion and ethics, interaction of religions and the Independent Churches (Dickson, 1975).

There is probably no issue more crucial than the need to understand this heightened interest in the African pre-Christian religious tradition if Africa's theologians are to be interpreted correctly and their achievement duly recognized. What is the explanation for the extraordinary fact that the very religious traditions that were previously deemed to be of scant theological significance should now occupy "the very centre of the academic stage"? (Hastings, 1976:50).

A glance at the bibliographies of the continent's leading theological writers will confirm Andrew Walls's observation that "Each . . . was trained in theology on a Western model, but each has moved into an area for which no Western syllabus prepared him, for each has been forced to study and lecture on African traditional religion—and each has found himself writing on it" (Walls, 1981:49).

However, it has not been generally recognized that the kind of study that the African theologian makes of African traditional religion cannot be compared with "a clinical observation of the sort one might make about Babylonian religion," because "he is handling dynamite, his own past, his people's present" (Walls, 1981). In the process, African theologians have arrived at a generally more sympathetic view of the pre-Christian tradition than the Western missionary interpretation of Africa, with its basic cultural and theological presumptions, could do. There could be no more eloquent statement of this African theological perspective on the pre-Christian tradition than the following appraisal of the achievement of African theology by Archbishop (then Bishop) Desmond Tutu at the 1975 Jos (Nigeria) Conference on Christianity in Independent Africa:

"African theologians have set about demonstrating that the African religious experience and heritage were not illusory and that they should have formed the vehicle for conveying the Gospel verities to Africa. . . . It was vital for the African's self-respect that this kind of rehabilitation of his religious heritage should take place. It is the theological counterpart of what has happened in, say, the study of African history. It has helped to give the lie to the superficial but tacit assumption that religion and history in Africa date from the advent in the continent of the white man. It is reassuring to know that we have had a genuine knowledge of God and that we have had our own ways of communicating with deity, ways which meant that we were able to speak authentically as ourselves and not as pale imitations of others. It means that we have a great store from which we can fashion new ways of speaking to and about God, and new styles of worship consistent with our new faith. [Tutu, 1978:366.]"

African Theology: Identity as the Hermeneutical Key

To the extent that this "anthropological" concern of African theology "to rehabilitate Africa's rich cultural heritage and religious consciousness" (Tutu, 1978:366) has been made as a self-consciously Christian and theological effort, it can be said to have been an endeavor to demonstrate the true character of African Christian identity. For looked at from the context of African theologians themselves (that is, as Christian scholars), the traditional religions of Africa belong to the African religious past. Yet this is not so much a chronological past as an "ontological" past, which, together with the profession of the Christian faith, gives account of one and the same entity—namely, the history of the religious consciousness of the African Christian. in this sense the African theologian's concern with the pre-Christian religious heritage becomes an endeavor to clarify the nature and meaning of African Christian identity. If, as E. Fasholé-Luke (of Sierra Leone) has argued, "the quest for African Christian theologies amounts to attempting to make clear the fact that conversion to Christianity must be coupled with cultural continuity," then it becomes understandable that "what African theologians have been endeavouring to do is to draw together the various and disparate sources which make up the total religious experience of Christians in Africa into a coherent and meaningful pattern" (E. Fasholé-Luke, 1975:268, italics added). It is the quest for what Kenneth Cragg, in another connection, has described as "integrity in conversion, a unity of self in which one's past is gen-

"The very issue of identity becomes the single most helpful tool for interpreting the early literature of African theology."

unely integrated into present commitment. Thus the crisis of repentance and faith that makes us Christian truly integrates what we have been in what we become" (Cragg, 1980:194).

Perhaps the real significance of the concentration of interest on the African religious past in African theology has been to make the issue of identity itself into a theological and Christian problem. It constitutes the African response to the earlier widespread identification of Christianity with European values in the missionary history of African churches. Ten years ago Andrew Walls made the following incisive observation on African theology:

"... no question is more clamant than the African Christian identity crisis. It is not simply an intellectual quest. The massive shift in the centre of gravity of the Christian world which has taken place cannot be separated from the cultural impact of the West in imperial days. Now the Empires are dead and the Western value-setting of the Christian faith largely rejected. Where does this leave the African Christian? Who is he? What is his past? A past is vital for all of us—without it, like the amnesiac man, we cannot know who we are. The prime African theological quest at present is this: what is the past of the African Christian? What is the relationship between Africa's old religions and her new one? [Walls, 1978:13.]"

As a result, the very issue of identity becomes the single most helpful tool for interpreting the early literature of African theo-
ogy. For identity thus took on the importance of a theological as well as a methodological principle. This entailed confronting constantly the question as to how and how far “the old” and “the new” in African religious consciousness could become integrated in a unified vision of what it meant to be African and Christian. The issue of identity also forced the theologian to become in himself the locus of this struggle for integration through a dialogue, which, if it was to be authentic, had to be an inner dialogue and so became infinitely more intense and personal. This is what gives to the early literature of African theology so much the character of an apologia pro vita sua. It is another way of saying that in African theology, certainly in its formative stages, the theologian would not stand over against his subject; rather, the development of theological concern and the formulation of theological questions became linked as the unavoidable by-product of the process of Christian self-definition. Here, in fact, is the answer to Adrian Hastings’s complaint that “areas of traditional Christian doctrine which are not reflected in the African past disappear or are marginalised.”

It was by ignoring the issue of identity as outlined above that Benjamin C. Ray, though rightly recognizing the “primary theological purpose” of the studies on African traditional religion by John Mbiti (of Kenya) and E. Bolaji Idowu (of Nigeria), yet failed to appreciate their positive value for understanding African religious life. It would seem as if the writings of Mbiti and Idowu—probably the two most influential figures in the early development of African theology—were regarded as less helpful precisely because they were attempting to lay the basis for a distinctively African theology by blending the African past with the Judeo-Christian tradition” (Ray, 1976:15).

**Mbiti and Idowu as Two Representative Figures**


Very early in *African Religions and Philosophy* Mbiti acknowledged that he might be venturing forth as an innovator: “Our written knowledge of traditional religions is comparatively little, though increasing, and comes chiefly from anthropologists and sociologists. Practically nothing has been produced by theologians, describing or interpreting these religions theologically” (p. 1). But if one expected to find a treatment in depth of the particular and complex religious traditions of Africa, one would be looking in the wrong place, for that was not the author’s intention. Rather, taking the view that “religion permeates into all departments of [African] life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it,” Mbiti posited the methodological principle that “a study of these religious systems is, therefore, ultimately, a study of the peoples themselves in all the complexities of both traditional and modern life” (p. 1). Thus the merit of the book lies in Mbiti’s perception of the close connection between the religious concepts and practices that he discusses, and the peoples whose religious lives embody them.

Seen from this angle, the true character of *African Religions and Philosophy* becomes apparent. It can be regarded as a religious history of African societies taken together as a cultural unit within humanity. The preponderance of material relating to “traditional” (as against Christian or Muslim) Africa is legitimate, since it indicates the main substratum of later developments in African religious tradition. The inclusion of Christianity, Islam, and other religions in the treatment is also justified, for they too flow into the overall history of African religion. Mbiti rightly stresses, therefore, that “both Christianity and Islam are ‘traditional’ and ‘African’ in a historical sense, and it is a pity that they tend to be regarded as ‘foreign’ or ‘European’ and ‘Arab’” (1969:xii).

In the final analysis, Mbiti’s interpretation is determined by his Christian theological commitment and is motivated by the thesis that all the religious traditions of Africa, other than the Christian, constitute in their highest ideals a praeparatio evangelica. Convinced that “the religious traditions of Africa contain the only lasting potentialities for a basis, a foundation and a direction of life for African societies,” it is through the Christian faith—and supremely through Jesus Christ—that the African quest for identity and “the freedom . . . of mature manhood and selfhood are attainable.”

The strength and uniqueness of Christianity do not lie in the fact that its teachings, practice and history have all the major elements of the other religious traditions. . . . The uniqueness of Christianity is Jesus Christ. . . . It is He . . . and only He, who deserves to be the goal for individuals and mankind. . . . I consider traditional religions, Islam and other religious systems to be preparatory. . . . But only Christianity has the terrible responsibility of pointing the way to the Ultimate Identity, Foundation and Source of security. [Mbiti, 1969:277.]

Perhaps even more than *African Religions and Philosophy*, Mbiti’s *Concepts of God in Africa* shows the depth of the author’s commitment as an African Christian scholar. Concerned to set forth the evidence of the African pre-Christian reflection about God contained in African wisdom sayings, myths, ritual pronouncements, and prayers, Mbiti offered no apology for suggesting that many of the African concepts bear striking resemblance to biblical ideas, particularly those of the Old Testament. Several African societies speak of God as “Creator,” “Father” (and Grandfather), and a few as “Mother” and “Friend,” while some understand themselves to be “children of God.” Countless simple acts and expressions, especially in relation to worship, provide the evidence for Mbiti’s contention that religion is the richest and most profound part of the cultural heritage of African peoples.

The finest illustration of Mbiti’s evaluation of African traditional religion as praeparatio evangelica is found in *The Prayers of African Religion*. Its merit lies in its theological interpretation of the prayers in African pre-Christian religious life. It was important for Mbiti that the majority of the prayers preserve religious traditions that dated from well “before the penetration of Christianity into the interior of Africa” (1975:x). For this meant that the overwhelming theism of the prayers constituted a significant corrective to the earlier assumption about the African sense of God held by European interpreters of Africa. Thus, without polemical engagement, Mbiti was able to let the prayer literature of African societies speak for itself; the result is a collection of the spiritual riches of African pre-Christian religious tradition, and for Mbiti, a worthy foundation for, and an integral element of, African Christian spirituality (Mbiti, 1978).

These three books need to be taken together in order to appreciate Mbiti’s contribution to the establishing of African theology. It is equally important to recognize the sense of movement and the sharpening of focus that occurs through them. For they represent the outworking of Mbiti’s own perception of the fun-
The fundamental task of the African theologian. Commenting on the place of the traditional religions of Africa in relation to the coming of Christianity, Mbiti had earlier written:

The number of full adherents of the traditional religions in Africa by 2000 A.D. will be almost negligible. In their traditional settings these religions will have dwindled numerically though not in their beliefs, but they will have bequeathed to Christianity some of the riches of African traditional religiosity. As such, Christianity will have become an agent of fulfilment in the sense that it will not destroy Traditional Religions as such, but it will have superseded them by bringing into them other dimensions of religion which they lack and which are not opposed to the traditional religiosity. In missiological jargon, these Traditional Religions will have been a real praeparatio evangelica (preparation for the Gospel); and it is now up to African theologians to interpret the meaning of that preparation for the Gospel, in the African context of not only the past, but today and tomorrow [1970b:36.]

It is not surprising that having articulated the components of “that preparation for the Gospel” in African pre-Christian religious tradition, Mbiti should subsequently turn his attention to questions that arise from the ongoing life and witness of the Christian church in Africa. This he has done in his most recent major publication, Bible and Theology in African Christianity (1986).

Before John Mbiti’s major books began to appear, Bolaji Idowu had already become well known as a leading advocate of a “theology which bears the stamp of original thinking and meditation of Africans,” having devoted a whole book to the subject in his Towards an Indigenous Church (1965). Though he addressed himself primarily to the church in his native Nigeria, Idowu had little doubt that his conclusions had a relevance for the wider African church.

It is indicative of the range of Idowu’s concerns that he treated as “concrete examples” of areas that needed attention, the Bible in Nigerian languages, the language of evangelism, theology, liturgy, dress and vestments; but not surprisingly, his fullest treatment came under “theology.” It is of the nature of a theology that bears “the distinctive stamp of indigenous originality” that it should arise from Christians in Africa doing their own thinking and grappling “spiritually and intellectually with questions relating to the Christian faith” as their own questions (Idowu, 1965: 23). Accordingly, what was needed in the Nigerian church was that “Christian Nigerians must be able to say if Christ has become real to them. The Church in Nigeria can only develop a distinctive theology in consequence of their own personal knowledge of God and personal appropriation of the Lordship of Christ” (1965: 24).

Had Idowu left the question there, he would have contributed little beyond stating the obvious handicap of a Christian church that seemed to have learned the gospel in predominantly “loan words.” However, Idowu then transposed this need for
"a distinctive theology" in African terms into the much wider issue of the "question of God's revelation" in the pre-Christian past and its relation to the Christian present. Thus Idowu was posing the question of indigenization in an entirely new light. He was also, perhaps unwittingly, answering his own query as to why the church in Nigeria had not developed an indigenous theology. Could it have been because hitherto "the revelation already vouchsafed to Nigerians" had not been "linked with Biblical revelation"? (1965: 26). Therefore, for Idowu, the problem of theology in the African church came to center on "finding 'the bridge' between the old and the new" (1965: 26) in African religious experience. By conceiving of the problem in this form, Idowu brought the issue round to the question of the identity of the African Christian or, as he would put it, the "Christian African." But behind the matter of identity lay the more insistently fundamental question of the continuity of God in the total African religious experience: "... where, ethnically, [do] Nigerians come in in this one world which belongs to God ... ?" (1965: 24).

In saying "God," Idowu meant "God as revealed in the Biblical religion" and who "so loved the world that he sent His only begotten Son to redeem it" (1965: 24, 26). But for Idowu, "God" meant also Olodumare, God as known and experienced in Yoruba pre-Christian tradition. It is in the interplay of these two concepts, and how they in fact become one reality, that we may locate Idowu's most enduring theological interest. For it is in relation to the question of God—God in African pre-Christian tradition—that Idowu considered the problem of indigenization to be at its sharpest. This was, for him, the "fundamental question":

... whether in the past pre-Christian history of Nigerians, God has ever in any way revealed Himself to them and they have apprehended His revelation in however imperfect a way; whether what happens in the coming of Christianity and as a result of evangelism is that Nigerians have been introduced to a completely new God who is absolutely unrelated to their past history. [1965: 24.]

And for Idowu the irreplaceable raw material for resolving this question one way or the other was the revelation contained in the "heritage from the past." Hence the primary theological task in Africa became the theological interpretation of African traditional religion: "The materials gathered from the study of the indigenous beliefs of Nigeria," in order to ascertain "what God has done, in what way He has been known and approached in the past and present history of Nigerians, ... will form a basic raw material for Christian theology in Nigeria" (1965: 25).

Idowu's two other major publications, Olodumare—God in Yoruba Belief (1962) and African Traditional Religion—A Definition (1973), may be regarded as the logical outworking of this principle. Olodumare, the substance of his 1955 doctoral thesis presented to the University of London, treats the problem posed by the presence in Yoruba religion of a multitude of divinities who "so predominate the scene that it is difficult for the casual observer to notice that under them, there is one vital cultic basis" (1962: 141). Idowu's solution was to reduce radically all "divinities" to the status of manifestations of Olodumare, "His ministers, looking after the affairs of His universe and acting as intermediaries between Him and the world of men" (1962: 62). This enabled him to establish conclusively that "the religion of the Yoruba ... consisted in a 'Primitive Monotheism,'" but a "diffused monotheism"; so that "if we speak of the 'religion of the Yoruba' we can only do so in reference to the fact that Olodumare is the core which gives meaning and coherence to the whole system" (1962: 202-4). Idowu's solution to the problem of "the one and the many" in Yoruba religion may constitute his most valuable theological insight into African religious tradition, and can be compared to similar results in studies on African traditional religion by writers working without their presuppositions as an African Christian theologian (cf. E. Evans-Pritchard, 1956; G. Lienhardt, 1961).

In African Traditional Religion—A Definition (1973), which Idowu described as "definitive and interpretative" (p. xi), his viewpoint on the question of God in traditional religion had become quite certain: "African traditional religion cannot be described as polytheistic. Its appropriate description is monotheistic, however modified this may be. The modification is however inevitable because of the presence of other divine beings within the structure of the religion" (1973: 168). Furthermore, the significance of African traditional religion had grown and deepened in Idowu's thought: "African traditional religion is the religion practiced by the majority of Africans" (1973: 208), for "in strictly personal matters relating to the passages of life and the crises of life, African traditional religion is regarded as the final succour by most Africans" (1973: 206).

Thus Idowu could state quite confidently, "It does not yet appear what we shall be," quoting 1 John 3:2, but applying the biblical text not to the church in Nigeria, but to the prospect of African traditional religion (1973: 208). The task of vindicating and securing the grounds of an African identity and selfhood, which in Towards an Indigenous Church was laid upon the Christian church, now came to be entrusted to the old religion revitalized with its "God-given heritage of indigenous spiritual and cultural treasures" (1973: 205).

And yet it would be misleading to conclude that Idowu had therefore obliterated Christianity from African religious life. What can be said is that in the development of his theological thought, the sense of the continuity of God's revelation had the effect of placing African traditional religion and Christianity in a continuum of revelation that secured for the indigenous religion a permanent place in African religious experience. However, the way this continuity was perceived by Idowu has meant also that he has since never clarified what constitutes the "newness" of the gospel for Africa.

The perspectives of Božaji Idowu and John Mbiti on the pre-Christian religious heritage represent two divergent answers to the question of identity as it lies at the root of all the theological reflection that has emerged in the African church in the post-missionary era. Almost every major African theological writer of the period in the field of religions has addressed the issue in one form or other; for instance, Charles Nyamiti (1984); Kwame Bediako, (1984), biblical interpretation (O. Bimwenyi-Kweshi, 1981), and theological education in the context of the life of the churches (K. Dickson, 1984). But the identity question still underlies these newer explorations.

African Theology and Indigenous Languages

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African theology make the needed impact within its own African world without taking more seriously than it has done so far the indigenous languages in which the vast majority of Africa's Christians hear and live the word of God? Since Christianity rejects the notion of a special sacred language and instead affirms the Scriptures in whatever language to be the word of God, it is reasonable to expect that the rich linguistic heritage of Africa should provide singular opportunities for developing indigenous Christian theologies. Indeed, John Pobee of Ghana has argued: “Ideally, African theologies should be in the vernacular” (1979:23). Yet it is European languages that have been the medium for the reflections of the continent’s leading theological writers.

“There has in fact taken place a deep religious apprehension of Jesus Christ in African terms.”

The question is whether an African theology that is “controlled in language and methodology by its European medium” can give adequate account of the apprehension of Christ at the “living roots of the churches” (Hastings, 1976:58), “where the faith has to live” (Balz, 1984).

It is a sign of hope, therefore, that John Mbiti who, like Idowu, earlier lamented the African church’s lack of “theological consciousness” (Mbiti, 1969:232; 1972:51; 1978:188) has later felt able to write not only that “the Christian way of life is in Africa to stay,” but also that “much of the theological activity in Christian Africa today is being done as oral theology (in contrast to written theology) from the living experiences of Christians” (Mbiti, 1986:229). Indeed, evidence such as Afua Kuma’s Jesus of the Deep Forest (Twi prayers and praises of an illiterate Christian woman from Ghana, which have now also been published in German) indicates that there has in fact taken place a deep religious apprehension of Jesus Christ in African terms, mediated through an African reading and hearing of the word of God in indigenous African languages. It may be the special task of Africa’s academic theologians also to be in touch with this theology—to share in it and to explicate its significance within the total theological enterprise of “thinking through faith in Christ” in African terms (Dickson, 1984:8).

It is possible to see the success of African theologians at vindicating the pre-Christian religious roots of Africa as analogous to the achievement of the early Hellenistic Christian theologians, who also claimed the best in their cultural and intellectual heritage for the gospel. If such is the case, then to those who in twentieth-century Africa would speak the language of Celsus and seek to set aside Jesus Christ as an alien, intruding figure on the African scene (Okot p’Bitek, 1970; Ali Mazrui, 1980), the theology at the “living roots of the churches” may yet prove the most effective response, affirming Christ again, in the words of Justin Martyr, as “the expectation of the nations” (I Apology 32, 1–4).

“He [Jesus] is the one who cooks his food in huge palm-oil pots. Thousands of people have eaten, yet the remnants fill twelve baskets. If we leave all this, and go wandering off—if we leave his great gift, where else shall we go?”

[Afua Kuma, 1981b:38]

References


The Legacy of Roland Allen

Charles Henry Long and Anne Rowthorn

Roland Allen served briefly as an Anglican missionary in China at the turn of the century and even more briefly as a parish priest in England. He never held important office in church, mission, or academic institutions, yet few men have had such broad and lasting influence on movements for renewal and reform in Christian mission. His prophetic message was largely ignored in his own day, but subsequent generations have rediscovered the legacy of his writings on such themes as Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours? and Spontaneous Expansion of the Church and the Causes Which Hinder It. These small books contain a radical criticism of missionary policy and practice current at that time and set forth an alternative vision of what might be done to establish truly indigenous, self-supporting churches.

A Sketch of Allen’s Life

Roland Allen was born in Bristol, England, on December 29, 1868. He was the youngest of five children; his father was an Anglican priest who died when Allen was quite young. He attended St. John’s College, Oxford, on a scholarship and came under the influence of F. E. Brightman, the great liturgist at Pusey House, whom Allen considered “my great father in God.” After Oxford, he was steeped in Anglo-Catholic tradition at Leeds Clergy Training School. He was described by the principal, Winfried Burrows, as being “a refined intellectual man, small, not vigorous, in no way burly or muscular. He is not the sort of man to impress settlers or savages by his physique.”

In 1892, while at Leeds, Allen had applied to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), because “I am simply thirsting to go to the foreign mission field, and I am ready to go wherever and whenever the Society has a vacancy. . . . From my earliest years I was as firmly convinced of my vocation as I was of my existence.” After serving as a curate in Darlington, Allen’s request was granted and he joined the North China Mission in 1895.

It was intended that he take charge of a small school in Peking “to train men for a native ministry.” While preparing himself for the task and learning Chinese he served as chaplain to the British Legation. In that capacity he had a firsthand view of the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 when the entire foreign community came under siege at the British compound until their rescue by foreign troops. Allen kept a diary, which he later published as The Siege of the Peking Legations (1901).

Following the defeat of the Boxers, Allen went home on furlough. He met and married Mary Beatrice Tarlton, daughter of an admiral and a keen supporter of the SPG. They later had a son and a daughter. In 1902 he returned to North China, as priest-in-charge of a rural mission in Yungching. This lasted only a few months as his health broke down and he had to return again to England with his wife and child.

Allen then took a parish in Buckinghamshire, Chalfont St. Peter, but resigned in 1907 on a matter of conscience. The rules of the Church of England required priests to baptize any infant from the community “on demand” without regard to the parents’ Christian commitment or lack of it. He could not believe it to be right to extend the sacraments of the church to those who gave no evidence of faith. After this crisis he never again held
any formal ecclesiastical office or missionary appointment but became a voluntary priest, earning his living by writing or in other ways until his death forty years later. In the last years of his life he exercised his priesthood only in the celebration of the Eucharist at home for his family and close friends.

A Literary Legacy

This brief missionary and parish experience led Allen to a radical reassessment of his vocation and theology, much as in the 1950s the Communist Revolution and the difficulties of re-entry to ordinary church life at home changed the lives and thoughts of many young China missionaries. In 1930 Allen wrote:

I have been a stipendiary missionary in China where I tried to prepare young men for the work of catechists with a view to Holy Orders; and there I learned that we cannot establish the Church widely by that method. Then I was in charge of a country district in China; and there I learned that the guidance of old experienced men in the Church, even if they were illiterate, was of immense value. Then I held a benefice in England and there I learnt the waste of spiritual power which our restrictions involve at home.

In 1912, just two years after the celebrated World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh, Allen published his most enduring work, a brief but serious criticism of Western mission policy, Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours? The year 1913 saw the publication of his Missionary Principles. In 1914 he met a wealthy congregationalist layman, Sidney J. W. Clark, who recruited him to work for a proposed Survey Application Trust and its publishing arm, World Dominion Press. Inspired perhaps by the detailed field surveys that preceded the Edinburgh Conference, Clark was keen to establish a continuing missionary research group, not tied to anyone missionary society but dedicated to measuring the spread of Christianity and providing the facts upon which a more efficient deployment of missionary resources could be based. Although the start of the new venture was delayed by World War I, Clark became Roland Allen's patron and friend for most of Allen's remaining working life. Although he helped with some of the surveys, Allen had little enthusiasm for that side of the task. "What is the use of discovering and entering new fields to make the old mistakes?" The Trust attracted him first of all because it "was designed to be a perpetual challenge to the tendency of Missions to get into a rut and to follow conventional methods and principles." Allen contributed to that challenge through a series of books and articles, including Pentecost and the World: The Revelation of the Holy Spirit in "The Acts of the Apostles" (1917), Educational Principles and Missionary Methods (1919), The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church and the Causes Which Hinder It (1927), and The Case for Voluntary Clergy (1930), a revision of two earlier books on the same theme published in 1923 and 1928.

Allen's ideas were far ahead of their time. He himself understood this and once predicted that his work would not be taken seriously until about 1960! Nevertheless he grew increasingly isolated and embittered. In 1932 he moved permanently to Kenya to be near his son, then working in Tanganyika. He learned Swahili and did some translations from English. Allen died in Nairobi on June 9, 1947.

The Major Themes of Allen's Teaching

David M. Paton, an authority on Roland Allen and editor of posthumous editions of his work, has summarized Allen's basic ideas as follows:

1. A Christian community which has come into existence as the result of the preaching of the gospel should have handed over to it the Bible, the Creed, the ministry and the Sacraments.

2. It is then responsible, with the Bishop, for recognizing the spiritual gifts and needs in its membership and for calling into service from that membership priests or presbyters to preside at the Eucharist and to be responsible for the Word and for pastoral care.

3. It is also required to share the message and the Christian life with its neighboring communities not yet evangelized.

4. The Holy Spirit working on the human endowment of the community's leaders is sufficient for its life. Don't "train" these leaders too much. Don't import from the outside.

5. A Christian community that cannot do these things is not yet a church, it is a mission field.

6. The Bishop and his staff (cf. Timothy, Titus, etc.) are crucial, both for oversight and to serve as visible links with the rest of the Church.

Each point represents a question Allen raised against the accepted policy and practice of his day. He did not intend to outline a complete theology of mission or a strategy for planting the church in every situation. On the contrary, Allen took seriously what we would call the cultural and historical context for the preaching of the gospel and the priority that needed to be given to developing an indigenous and self-reliant church from its very beginning. This was a radical note in an era of missionary triumphalism and continuing colonial expansion, when the responsibilities of "Christendom" and the intrinsic moral superiority of Western culture were taken for granted. Missions were directed by the policies or actual presence of a generation of pioneers, tough-minded and dominating personalities as they were and had to be. They felt they had to maintain control of every aspect of the organization and development of a young church in order to preserve pure doctrine and also to prevent relapses into paganism and superstition. To such persons and to those with a strong sense of their accountability to supporters at home, Allen's ideas about "handing over" responsibility to new Christians and trusting the Holy Spirit seemed not only radical but irresponsible.

His attack on the structures and policies of churches and missionary societies was based on the distinction he made, with St. Paul, between law and gospel. Under the law, Allen said, the letter is communicated. This means fixed rules for external obedience, numbers to measure achievement and hierarchies of responsibility and accountability. Under the gospel the Spirit is communicated, God takes command of one's heart, unites one to the whole community of believers locally and worldwide, and empowers the community with freedom, wisdom, and adaptability for the work of true evangelism.

The task of church leaders was, as Allen saw it, to help the church discern the Spirit and to submit themselves to the "administration of the Spirit" and not only to be administrators of the law. Allen would have appreciated the distinction between
Tradition and traditions that developed later in the theological work of the World Council of Churches. He saw that the Tradition of the gospel kerygma was often confused with or submerged in loyalty to the particular traditions of particular churches. Where the church was well established, as in the West, the preservation of that established order became an end in itself. In missionary work overseas, concern for “traditions” made missionaries reluctant to hand over real responsibility to indigenous leaders and often confused the Tradition of the gospel with the particular traditions of the church and society from which the missionaries came.

Allen questioned the assumption that the church in its fullness had not been planted and was not ready for independence until there were professionally trained, salaried, full-time ministers, a faithful and literal translation of Western hymns and liturgies, and churches erected on Western architectural lines, not to speak of robed choirs, Mother’s Unions, and other details of “normal” parish and diocesan organization. These were expressions of the law that might even be a hindrance to the gospel.

Now that the myth of Christendom has been exposed and we begin to recognize that the church everywhere, including the West, is in a missionary situation, we need to reread Roland Allen in the light of our own experience and new opportunities. The discernment of the gifts of the Spirit, the renewal of lay ministry, reshaping theological education for laity and clergy alike, rethinking the meaning of baptism, the role of bishops and the structuring of congregations for mission—all are themes on which Allen had original and trenchant things to say. Above all, he challenged his readers to examine their assumptions concerning the relation of the gospel to culture and tradition both in their own societies and among the people to whom they are sent.

By going back to the New Testament models of self-reliance, Allen sought to help the church escape from the economic straitjacket in which progress was dependent on money—mostly from abroad. There would never be enough money from abroad to support both expanding educational and medical work and the numbers of full-time pastors needed for a growing church. And what would happen if all funds were cut off, and the supply of missionaries as well? Allen’s experiences of antiforeignism and the first stirrings of modern Chinese nationalism led him to predict that the day would come when all foreign missions would be excluded from China and perhaps from other parts of Asia and Africa. Thus he came to question the church’s reliance on an biblical, peculiarly Western pattern of professionally trained full-time clergy. Again and again he tried to put the case for “voluntary clergy” who would be selected and trained in local congregations and continue to earn their own living in the community.

It was Allen’s conviction that if Christianity were to spread, the faith would have to be carried by natural leaders, by missionaries among their own people. Using the example of St. Paul, he contended that every Christian community would develop the persons with the necessary gifts to sustain it and that clerical leadership could not be externally imposed (as by the importing of English or American priests). Leadership, Allen maintained, sprang up out of the midst of the religious community. Furthermore, such church leaders would also be leaders in the wider community. Allen described such “natural leaders” in this way:

The man lives before our eyes. He is a man of mature age, the head of a family. . . . His wife and children and household are well-governed and orderly. He is a man of some position in the community. Strangers and visitors . . . are naturally directed to his house. . . . He is a man of certain gravity and dignity whose words carry weight. He can teach and rebuke those who would slight the exhortations of a lesser man. . . . He is a man of moral character. . . . He is sober-minded and just. He is a Christian of some standing. He has learned the teaching of the apostles. . . . He can teach what he has learned.

Allen also questioned the priority given to schools and similar institutional work over evangelism. By establishing schools and hospitals and committing to them, rather than to the churches,

“Allen sought to help the church escape from the economic straitjacket in which progress was dependent on money—mostly from abroad.”
The Rediscovery of Roland Allen

So far as is known, Allen's ideas had little influence on Anglican missions during his lifetime. His Spirit-centered ecclesiology seemed idealistic and impractical to the leadership of a highly institutionalized church closely associated with the British empire. His exposure of conscious and unconscious paternalism, clericalism, and colonialism did not make friends for him either. His arguments from the New Testament must have been exasperating to those who saw themselves engaged in a far more complex enterprise than the original itineration of St. Paul. His stress on indigenization and the handing over of responsibility to new churches at an early stage implied a willingness to take risks and a respect for "pagan" cultures not shared by many of his contemporaries.

Because Allen was a prophetic and seminal thinker rather than a systematic theologian, his influence can be measured less by the actual applications of his ideas than by their power to inspire critical reflection on existing policies and theological systems. From the first, pentecostal Christians, some of whom were associated with the Survey Application Trust, claimed him as their own; though he was in fact neither a pentecostalist nor a radical

"Often the influence of Allen has been indirect and fortuitous but no less significant for that."

Protestant. His principles were basically Anglo-Catholic. He believed in the necessity of episcopacy and the centrality of the Holy Eucharist in the life of the church as strongly as he believed in the Bible and in the Holy Spirit.10

As to the application of his ideas, the real difficulty seems to be that Allen set forth a model for beginning new work but gave little guidance for changing long-established policies and practices. For example, in the 1950s the Episcopal priest and sociologist Joseph Moore tried to apply the Roland Allen model to rural parishes in southern Indiana. In this and in later experiments in Nevada and Alaska, resistance to change came chiefly from the local congregations used to a dependency model of church life and from other clergy who saw traditional standards for training and ordination being reduced in the new plan.

Allen's ideas remained alive in seminars and missionary training programs and influenced a wide variety of developments, from the Church Growth Movement led by Donald McGavran, to the pioneering work among the Masai in East Africa undertaken by the Roman Catholic missioner Vincent Donovan. Bishop R. O. Hall of Hong Kong successfully adapted Allen's vision to staff virtually his whole diocese with voluntary clergy who were also highly qualified in other professions and leaders of the community. Bishop K. H. Ting has stated that the Three-Self Movement in China owes much to the thinking of Roland Allen. In the United States the Student Volunteer Movement was nourished particularly by Allen's most popular books, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church and Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?*

Often the influence of Allen has been indirect and fortuitous but no less significant for that. The eminent Islamic scholar Kenneth Cragg once gave a series of lectures on Roland Allen to a group of missionaries in training. Among them was George Harris who was inspired to purchase and take with him to the Philippines all of Allen's books he could find. In 1960 another American Episcopal priest, Boone Porter, discovered the books while visiting Harris in Sagada. Porter in turn spread the word to David Cochran, a missionary to Native Americans in South Dakota, and to William Gordon, a priest in Alaska. Gordon, Cochran, and Harris later followed each other in becoming bishops of Alaska and were instrumental in establishing what was then a radical plan for the development of an indigenous ministry among Native peoples in Alaska, following many of Allen's ideas.

With Porter and others they pressed the General Convention of the Episcopal Church to revise its canons, to provide far more flexible standards for the selection, training, and ordination of clergy to serve, often on a voluntary or part-time basis, isolated congregations and ethnic congregations, not only overseas but in the United States.

One consequence has been to make possible an intentional application of Roland Allen's ideas to Episcopal missions in Central and South America and a rapid development of indigenous churches where for many years there had been little growth. In Ecuador, for example, under the leadership of Bishop Adrian Cáceres, the Episcopal church has grown from 394 members (and no local clergy) in 1971 to two dioceses, 240 congregations, and 20,000 baptized members served by 48 indigenous clergy in 1988. Bishop Cáceres says that this has happened because he took seriously the challenge in *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church* to experiment with different forms of ministry, to put emphasis on "a flexible, locally contextualized and indigenous church," and to give priority to "the formation of Christians and their leaders."11

Do You Deliver?

This, says David Paton, is the perennial question that Roland Allen addresses to the church. Paton writes:

St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that he had delivered what he had received. When the postman hands over a parcel to me, he loses nothing and I am enriched. The museum curator or the librarian, on the other hand, hands over nothing. If I want to keep something from the museum I must learn it by heart or buy a copy. The postman delivers, the museum curator hangs on to what has been delivered to him. Both do their duty. But which is the image that symbolizes the missionary church? or the missionary? or ourselves? in theory and in practice?12

Notes

2. Ibid.
4. Allen, quoted by McLeish, "Biographical Memoir."
5. Ibid.
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Posthumous Publications


Materials of Related Interest


Legacy,” delivered at the Pacific Basin Conference 1984 and reported in Setting Free the Ministry.

12. From unpublished address cited above, n. 10.
My Pilgrimage in Mission

Harold W. Turner

My first "exposures" to the missionary theme must have been receiving Blaikie's *Life of Livingstone* as a Christmas present when I was about ten years old; or hearing missionaries on deputation at our Presbyterian church in Napier, New Zealand; or learning in Sunday school of heroic figures like Mary Slessor. I can trace nothing back to these, but who can tell? Nor in 1930 was it due to any understanding of what mission meant when, after a first year as a university engineering student in Christchurch, I switched to an arts degree to prepare for full-time Christian mission service overseas. This was due more to youthful rebellion against the complacencies of a society that had already had every chance, as I saw it, to hear the gospel. It was the most radical service I could then imagine. And it never happened, in the literal vocational sense; nor can I claim to be a missiologist. So am I an interloper in this series? Let what follows decide.

None of the major influences of my nine student years involved direct concern with mission. There was work on a master's thesis in moral philosophy, relating W. D. Ross's *The Right and the Good* to Nicolai Hartmann's three-volume *Ethics*. This led to study of the conflict in our moral experience between the absolute obligation of duties and "the right" as against the similar demands of the values expressed in "the good" and the summum bonum, something that no ethical theory can ever reconcile. In this impossible situation the Christian walks by faith and lives by forgiveness. Since then so much that one hears in Christian ethics seems to ignore this inescapable moral impasse, which is something deeper than mere moral weakness. The more conservative concentrate on the absolutes of right and wrong, become legalist, and get written off by those more "open" and culturally "with it." These concentrate on values and "the good," speak of "situation ethics," and recognize the plurality of cultures; in a permissive society they lack cutting edge and soon represent little more than a sanctified version of whatever goes.

And what of missions? To see the gospel and its ethic only in terms of the absolutes of right and wrong makes it unworkable, especially when it comes to mission to other cultures; to be aware only of the relativities of situation and culture is to cut the nerve of mission—why bother, why interfere? To see the Christian faith as the answer to the moral impasse in which all humanity is caught is to see it as indeed a gospel and hence as call to mission, whether to tribals or modern Westerners. I did not see this then, but a foundation was laid for part of a theology of mission, and now I realize that no part of the theological encyclopedia is irrelevant to mission.

The other major influences also seemed equally far from the mission theme. Chief of these was my association with the remarkable group of young Presbyterian ministers who led a theological revival and liturgical reform in their own church and gave strong leadership in the infant ecumenical movement and in the Student Christian Movement (SCM). Their dynamic derived from the neo-orthodox theological movement sparked off by Karl Barth and from the kindred rediscovery of their own roots in John Calvin. This amounted to a heady discovery of classic theology in the midst of the world economic depression and the debates raging around pacifism fueled by the rise of Hitler. But again there was no hint of mission, and the apparently negative attitude of the entirely European Barth to all human religions did little to encourage missions. But in retrospect I might transfer to missiology Barth's comment that the best apologetic is a sound dogmatic. For that is how I feel it has been for me: another foundation had been laid that has never had to be uprooted.

In the second half of the 1930s an apparently totally different influence arrived—the Oxford Group movement of Frank Buchman. Its four "moral absolutes" and its practice of "guidance" seemed opposed both to what I had learned about ethics and to my newly acquired theology. But then in 1936 I discovered Emil Brunner's *The Church and the Oxford Group* explaining his own identification with the movement, and a few of the theologically minded ministers and a number of us theological students (as I was by then) found in the Oxford Group (OG) the more intimate personal conversion that complemented our theological enlightenment. This was my first experience of a highly controversial "new religious movement," the area that later engaged me so substantially. But was this mission? Yes, in the form of evangelism that reached out in unconventional ways to all classes in society, and that led to Alcoholics Anonymous and to its manifold imitators. In 1939 I was at the OG world assembly in Switzerland where the name Moral Rearmament was adopted. The movement then began to operate increasingly in the public spheres and across cultures and with other faiths. Church historians and missiologists have yet to reckon with this astonishing movement, to which I am permanently indebted for another layer in the foundations.

My student preparation was rounded off by a short period under John Baillie in Edinburgh, whose personal faith and balanced Reformed theology, as expressed the following year in his *Our Knowledge of God*, have affected me ever since. It was his key concept of the sacred and the secular being related in terms of a "mediated immediacy" that solved the basic problem that soon faced me in the 1940s.

The newly formed National Council of Churches in New Zealand had decided upon a campaign—not back to God or come to church, but a sustained Campaign for Christian Order in the life of the nation, surely an inspired phrase for the purpose of mission to a nation within the Christian tradition when the religiously plural situation had not yet arrived. But was this just a revamped social gospel of the 1920s? Becoming heavily involved, I needed a theological mandate. And this was to hand: in Calvin's emphasis on the sovereignty of God and the lordship of Christ over all spheres of life, and in the sacredness of the secular calling, in Brunner's ethic with its divine ordinances, such as the state, the arts, the family, as given public structures for human existence, and above all in Baillie's formula of a "mediated immediacy" as the way revelation is related to creation.

For work in the 1940s I was therefore equipped with a gospel that embraced both the private and the public spheres. Further support came from the discovery of P. T. Forsyth, perhaps the
greatest theologian in England in this century, with his combination of a high Christology and a theologically based concern for the common life. My mission field (although I did not call it that) turned out to be in tertiary education, especially the university. As the first full-time and ecumenical chaplain to the academic community in Dunedin there was teaching and pastoral work for me, especially through the SCM then in its heyday. There were also various forms of service that could be seen as working toward "Christian order" in one of the divinely given "ordinances"—the academic world.

The problems of student accommodation led to my appointment as the first university lodgings registrar, and to the founding of halls of residence. These aimed to steer between overly ordered residences as desired by zealous teachers' college authorities, and the lack of social and educational order that marked some university secular halls. In the event our two Christian-based halls developed through a remarkable partnership between a voluntary Christian body and the public education authorities, and included the first co-residential hall for men and women in the Commonwealth. And when an ideologically controlled bookshop was established by leftist university members to serve the intellectual community, I was able to gather a group of Christian academics to sponsor, not an opposing Christian bookstore, but a genuinely "university" one that Sir Stanley Unwin, the publisher, described as one of the three best in the country. It is still there, much enlarged, as the only one on the campus.

All this might be seen as mission through diakonia in one key sector of society. It was constantly fueled by J. H. Oldham's Christian Newsletter, with its concern for a new social order to emerge from postwar reconstruction, and which led to our own local imitation called Interpreter. There was also the inspiration of the Christian discussions of "the idea of the university" represented by Sir Walter Moberly and others connected with the SCM—something that now has to be done all over again. My own thinking issued in a small publication, A Christian Education, and later in a volume for the Educational Research Council, Halls of Residence. Looking back I wonder how I would write them now; the plural society is so much more complex and my contributions seem too tinged with Constantinianism, or with John Baillie's answers in his What Is Christian Civilization? (1945). And yet can we escape these when we look at the alternatives of a new Christian culture or an openly pagan one, as presented in T. S. Eliot's The Idea of a Christian Society in this same period? The issues are perhaps no different as we now face the new "mission to Europe."

The "academic-mission" decade led me to three years in parish ministry, migration to Britain, and then a decade in West Africa, not as a missionary but in secular appointments as university teacher of theology and then of religious studies. The chief new influence was from my colleague Andrew Walls, who arrived in Sierra Leone in 1957 to discover his own life work on Christianity's history as cross-cultural expansion through mission, and to link me to the best in the "evangelical" tradition.

My own discoveries in Africa were threefold, intertwined and quite unexpected. There was first my casual conversation in 1957 with an unknown African on the beach, which led to my involvement with the independent churches and other new movements in Africa and later in all continents. The man was Adeleke Adejobi of the Church of the Lord (Adalura). I have written so much on all this elsewhere that here I merely say that "accidental" meeting changed the course of my life, and opened up a new kind of mission, that of bridge between the older churches and strange new forms that eluded their understanding. The Centre for New Religious Movements at the Selly Oak Colleges is one instrument in this mission-cum-diakonia.1

The second and again "accidental" discovery was of the work of Mircea Eliade, first through his Myths, Dreams and Mysteries. This led on to the great European phenomenologists of religion—W. B. Kristensen, Friedrich Heiler, G. van der Leeuw, Joachim Wach, and Rudolf Otto, to whose Idea of the Holy I was later to write a guide. From this impressive body of European study of religion came the tools needed for understanding the

Noteworthy

Personalia

Orbis Books has appointed William R. Burrows as Managing Editor. A former missioner in Papua New Guinea, Burrows has a Ph.D. in theology from the University of Chicago. An Orbis author, his book New Ministries: The Global Context (1980) was awarded a prize from the Chicago Institute for Theology and Culture for the best contribution to contextualization of theology. His article "Tensions in the Catholic Magisterium about Mission and Other Religions" appeared in the January 1985 INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN OF MISSIONARY RESEARCH.

American Leprosy Missions has elected Thomas F. Frist as President, effective July 1st, upon the retirement of John R. Sams, the President since 1984. Frist, 43, has a Master of Public Health degree from Yale University and since 1976 has directed a Brazilian vocational and social rehabilitation agency for people with severe disabilities. He is married to the former Clare Strachan, an MK from Latin America.

Shoki Coe (C. H. Hwang), former Principal of Tainan Theological College, Taiwan, and Director of the Theological Education Fund, died October 28, 1988. He is credited with contributing the term "contextualization" to the vocabulary of theological education.

Richard W. Taylor, 63, Methodist missionary in India for 33 years, died October 19, 1988, in Srinagar, India. He was on the staff of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society for 25 years, and authored numerous books and articles on church and society in India.

J. Herbert Kane, a highly respected and influential North American evangelical missiologist, died December 5, 1988. Born in 1910 in Montreal, Canada, he did his undergraduate work at Moody Bible Institute and Barrington College. He received an M.A. degree from Brown University and a Doctor of Humane Letters from Barrington College. Kane served in China with the China Inland Mission from 1935 to 1950. After his return from China he taught hundreds of missionary trainees at Barrington College (1951–1963), Lancaster Bible College (1963–1967), and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (1967–1980). In his "My Pilgrimage in Mission" article in the INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN OF MISSIONARY RESEARCH (July 1987), he remarked, "Old

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religions of Africa around me, and the new movements born of their own interactions with the Christian faith.

These tools were employed in three religious studies departments, in eastern Nigeria, in Leicester, and in Aberdeen. In teaching the distinctives of the Christian religion from the phenomenological viewpoint I always felt that I was privileged to fulfill part of the task of mission in a public and secular context; the Christian faith needs no favored position but only the opportunity to be seen for what it is. The one area in the phenomenology of religion that opened up for me has been that of sacred space, with a study of places of worship across all faiths including my own. This led to what I feel is perhaps the most relevant contribution I may have made to missiology as such, but I cannot blame the fraternity for not discovering what lies behind a title like From Temple to Meeting House! What seems to concern only architecture and worship proved, and again quite unexpectedly, to supply such theology of religions as I possess, and I may refer the incredulous to the last chapter of that work and especially to the last ten pages.

It may seem inconsistent for one so influenced by Karl Barth to be taking religion itself so seriously and positively. But the theology of religions that emerged from the study mentioned above proved to be identical with what Barth was really saying about "religion." It was John Carman, the translator of Kristensen, who provided the clue in his discussion of the background meaning of the term aufheben, which has been translated as "abolition" in English. Apparently this traces to a South German dialect where it refers to the process of preserving or canning fruit, which can therefore be regarded as destroyed in order to be preserved and transposed to a higher form. This is exactly the process I was able to uncover in the history of the temple type of place of worship when it was replaced by the "New Temple" in the form of Jesus-in-his-community. Barth's theology here combined unexpectedly with the results of a phenomenology-of-religion study.

A second religious aspect of the spatial dimension opened up equally unexpectedly. When I came to make a large-scale religious map of eastern Nigeria, the peculiar distribution of the various denominations planted by missions could not be explained by tribe, language, political unit, or anything else, but only by the location and course of the main rivers, a simple geographical factor. Further studies revealed the fascinating interrelations between religions and geography: not only the geographical factors at work in the history of all faiths, but also the reverse effects of the religions upon the use of the land, the spread of plants and animals, and the shaping of such areas as Christian and Muslim, landscapes and townscape, and so forth.

This interrelationship of religions and land use is almost entirely overlooked in our concentration upon the historical or temporal dimension of religions and our consequent neglect of the geographical or spatial dimension. The chief permanent deposit for me is again somewhat astonishing—that the model for discussion of the interrelations between two "independent variables," whether geography and religion or any other, lies in the four parameters set forth in the Chalcedonian Creed: the divinity and the humanity must be discussed without separation, confusion, division, or change from their proper nature. Believing as I do that Christ the God-human is definitive for all life and thought, I should not be surprised that thinking about Christ's nature gives us guidelines for all human thinking about relationships. And now I have to discover how to apply this guide to the question of interfaith relations and the dialogue process. Missiology has more resources than it has yet dreamed of!

professors never die; they just live on in their students." Always solid and considerate in style and substance, Kane's place in the North American mission community was consistently marked by an irascible spirit. He served both as President of the Association of Evangelical Professors of Missions (1972) and the American Society of Missiology (1976).


Announcing

The American Society of Missiology will hold its 1989 annual meeting at Techyni Towers, Techyni, Illinois (near Chicago), June 16-18, on the theme "Good News for the Poor?" The Association of Professors of Mission will meet June 15-16 at the same place in conjunction with the ASM. Their theme will be "Globalization and Its Implications for Teaching Mission." Professor Alan Neely of Princeton Theological Seminary is President of the ASM, and Professor Stephen Bevans of Catholic Theological Union is President of the APM for 1988-1989. Registration for both meetings is handled jointly by the Secretary-Treasurer of the ASM, Professor George R. Hunsberger. Inquiries may be addressed to him at: American Society of Missiology; Belhaven College, 1500 Peachtree Street, Jackson, MS 39202.
My third discovery was of the primal faiths as authentic religions with their own spirituality. It was Eliade who opened their religious structures for me. Since then I have been exploring the affinities between Christianity and the primal religions, attested in their structures and intentions, in their relational worldviews, and in the history of Christian expansion. From this base one can examine the radical transpositions (aufheben again!) needed in conversion because one understands what is to be transposed. Since folk forms of the universal religions have much in common with the primals, here is a whole religious world awaiting further understanding in service of the mission task.

My two years at Emory University (from 1970) gave opportunity for the addition of the American Indian dimension to my concern with Africa’s primal religions and new movements. These interests were consolidated at Aberdeen in the 1970s, and it was there, in 1978, that another world for mission opened up, and again unsought. Another casual encounter, this time with a Unification Church member selling literature at my door. Here was a third kind of new religious movement, the “sects and cults” of the West. My reflections on engagement with this expanding range of new movements have been presented elsewhere. Here I confine myself to emphasizing this opportunity for mission, and of the duty of diakonia. The opposition from Christian quarters of the West. My reflections on engagement with this expanding

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Notes

1. See the thematic issue of Missiology 13, no. 1 (January 1985).
The Excitement of a Good Novel.  
The Insight of a Good Documentary.

**ANOTHER GOSPEL** Alternative Religions and the New Age Movement  
From the Mormons to Rajneesh, heterodox religious movements have flourished in North America. In *Another Gospel*, historian and award-winning author Ruth Tucker tells the story of these varied groups.

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Good Words from Good Friends.
Reflections on Missionary Historiography

Eric J. Sharpe

Ever since Luke compiled his "orderly account" of Jesus' ministry and of the progress of the early Christian church from Jerusalem to Rome, missionary history has been an important subdepartment of Christian literature. Dealing as it does with the transmission of the gospel, with the planting of churches, and with longer or shorter periods of initial growth, eventually missionary history passes into church history. Missionary history, however, has a very special interest and, for some, fascination, not least because of the great demands it makes: the ideal missionary historian will be to some extent a social, political, and economic historian; a geographer, ethnologist, and historian of religions; as well as a Christian historian in the more usual sense. Attention must be paid not only to the Christian message as delivered, but to the message as received (or not received, as the case may be). Missionary intentions must be weighed against consequences, successes against failures. There are ironies, ambiguities, and tragedies to be taken into account. The expectations of the sending agencies have to be borne in mind, along with the role of the missionary movement in the internal affairs of the home churches. The list of desiderata might be prolonged.

The researching and writing of missionary history therefore should never be undertaken casually or on too narrow a front. It is doubtful whether there are any techniques that the missionary historian does not share with other historiographers; however, because missionary history is always intercultural and in some sense interreligious, it requires a breadth of interest, competence, and (not least) sympathy that is unique. I am not here talking about the writing of missionary chronicle: that is easy enough, given time, industry, and access to the relevant material. But when the chronicler simply gathers material and organizes it in sequence (admittedly a necessary first step in the writing of all history), chronicle becomes history only when an element of interpretation is added to the chronological record.

Although a vast quantity of missionary history has accumulated over the years, most of it during the last century or so, there would seem to have been very little reflection on the quality of missionary historiography, and almost no attempt to formulate a methodology for the writing of missionary history. The question "What happened?" has been asked and answered often enough; what would seem hardly to have been asked at all is, Why has the missionary record been written up in the way it has, and in response to what impulses and constraints?

Problems of missionary historiography are of two general kinds. One is factual, and has to do with the recording, as fully and accurately as possible, of the Christian past in its missionary aspect. The other concerns the events themselves than their successive interpreters, less the history than the historians. Who were they? How did they approach their task? How did they select and record their material, and with what end in mind? Historiography may or may not communicate accurate information about the past, but for those with an eye to such things, it reveals a vast amount about the state of mind, both of the individual historian and of the society (or church, or culture) to which he or she belongs. Every age and every society believes substantially what it wants to believe about its own past, and on that belief (among other things) shapes its cultural identity. Historiography therefore is about the events and personalities and "facts" of the past only in part; in another sense it is a cumulative cultural barometer and a repository of images of the past. The facts are open to one kind of historical investigation; to trace and grasp the significance of the images, something more is needed.

This article is not in any way intended as a systematic analysis of historical writing on missionary subjects. How vast that corpus is, the bibliographies show. It is, however, not all of a piece. There are, on the one hand, the narrowly focused micro-histories, covering missionary societies, areas, churches, individuals, periods, and issues. On the other, there are the macro-historical studies—those grand surveys of the Christian mission as a factor in world history, which seek to estimate its significance as well as to chart its progress. Although the seam is by no means worked out, macro-history provides the historian with what many regard as insurmountable difficulties. At least the writing of macro-history requires something more than industry. In either case the nature of the material poses substantially the same range of historiographical problems, albeit on different scales. First, though, we must consider the word "historiography" itself.

The Meanings of "Historiography"

"Historiography" is a word having one literal and at least three derived meanings. In its literal sense it corresponds to the German Geschichtsschreibung, "the writing of history." To this the Concise Oxford Dictionary adds a second sense: the writing of official history by special commission, and clearly, therefore, under certain constraints. All missionary history belongs in the first of these classes, and a proportion of it in the second.

But the word "historiography" can carry two other meanings: first, the chronicling of the work of previous historians on a given subject; and second, the in-depth analysis of those same historians' work in relation to time, place, and function. In an important article from the late 1930s Carl L. Becker drew attention to this distinction, in terms directly relevant to the analysis of missionary history. On one level, historiography may aim no higher than the supplying of students with "manuals of information about histories and historians" telling them what has been written, by whom, and when. But above and beyond this fairly mechanical exercise there was, Becker maintained, another historiographical level, which he described (or outlined) in these words:

"Every age and every society believes substantially what it wants to believe about its own past."
At this level, historiography should be something more than an estimate of the contributions of historians to present knowledge. It should be in some sense a phase of intellectual history, that phase of it which records what men have at different times known and believed about the past, the use they have made, in the service of their interests and aspirations, of their knowledge and beliefs, and the underlying presuppositions which have made their knowledge seem to them relevant and their beliefs seem to them true.\textsuperscript{5}

The historiographer in this sense must, Becker went on, possess above all the gift of “imaginative understanding”—understanding of past historians as well as of past events. And it might, he thought, be worthwhile “to forget entirely about the contributions of historians to present knowledge and to concentrate wholly upon their role in the cultural pattern of their own time.”\textsuperscript{16}

Later I shall suggest that this type of historiography is one to which missionary historians might profitably pay rather more attention than they appear to have done in the past.

Returning briefly to the more straightforward senses of the word “historiography,” the first need not detain us for long. All missionary history, unless it is hopelessly incompetent, conveys some information and tells us something about its subject, on the one hand, and about the writer, on the other. Either or both may be important. In the second sense of the word we have to reckon, in addition, with the ideals and interests of whoever may have commissioned the history in the first place. This is not to say that “official” missionary history is simply written to order, still less that it is written in bad faith: merely that the official historian is seldom altogether a free agent. An official war historian, by analogy, would hardly contrast the virtues of the enemy with the incompetence of the homeland’s generals and the cowardice and lack of discipline of its common soldiers; nor would an official history of socialism normally highlight the generosity and benevolence of industrialists and landowners.\textsuperscript{7} An official missionary historian, similarly, will be working in accordance with a scale of values not necessarily altogether his or her own, but will have little freedom to call them seriously in question.

The capacity of churches and missionary societies to impose an extremely firm censorship on the material printed and distributed to local congregations is too well known to require comment. On one level, therefore, missionary history written entirely on a basis of printed and officially distributed material may turn out to be very inadequate history, since it may provide an extremely lopsided picture of events, issues, tensions, and the rest on the evangelistic front. It may, on the other hand, prove to be a most valuable source of insights into the missionary aspect of Christian life on the home front. This aspect of missionary historiography would seem to have attracted very little scholarly attention: What was the popular image of mission at pew level, and saying of great men of the past, and of our own nation in particular,” whether disciplinary, national, denominational, or sectarian. This tendency was less than ideal from the point of enough to have access to good missionary libraries have the assistance of the Bibliographia Missionaria, the International Review of Mission(s), and the like. Specialist books on missionology list many histories of mission(s).\textsuperscript{8} Nonspecialist bibliographies are seldom helpful, on the other hand. Charles J. Adams’s A Reader’s Guide to the Great Religions, for instance, devotes only one page out of 475 to “Christian missions” and mentions only ten books.\textsuperscript{9} But merely to list authors and titles is of very limited usefulness if no effort is made to evaluate them as sources of information, on the one hand, or to place them within an intellectual framework, on the other. On both counts there is need for a historiographical tool, a guide through the bibliographical thickets and a work of evaluation.

Missionary history as a literary category is like every other branch of historiography in that it is written at a specific point in time and within a specific spiritual, cultural, and intellectual setting. The missionary historian, like every other historian, has a social function and, as societies change, so too does the nature of that function. Societies require a vision of their own past, a tracing of their roots, an assurance of a commission faithfully carried out, and occasionally a hair shirt for penance. A heroic age will require of its historians tales of heroes; a disillusioned age will prefer satire and spite and “investigative journalism.” Later we shall see how perceptions of the missionary past have slipped from images of success to images of failure (or at least ambiguity). For the moment, though, we may just note that even the recording of “the past” is not so much a record of events as it is a record of perceptions of events; and where different interests have been involved in them, there will be an inevitable plurality of versions of what has taken place. The question then becomes: Who is prepared to believe whose version of the missionary past (which is not quite the same thing as asking whose version is the most accurate), and for what reasons? This brings us to the heart of the problem where missionary historiography is concerned.

**Changing Attitudes to the Missionary Past**

Inevitably an essay of limited size on a very general subject is going to contain many generalizations. In moving to a rapid survey of changing attitudes to the missionary past, and the way in which these have been reflected in historical writing, we come to a vast field in which generalization is perhaps even more of a danger. This, however, is to some extent deliberate—a sketch of ground to be covered rather than detail of any individual part of it.

Beginning with Luke-Acts, the church has always been well supplied with records of its own expansion—“orderly accounts” written for Theophilus and his kind, “that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed” (Lk. 1:3f.). But this was in the very early days, when there was relatively little to record, and only the members of the community wished to be informed. However, for the better part of nineteen centuries substantially the same pattern was maintained, of an “in-house” record designed to inform, certainly; but also to entertain and inspire the faithful, at various levels, from royalty down. Bede’s History of the English Church and People in the eighth century was, for instance, written in response to the request of King Ceolwulf for information about “the doings and saying of great men of the past, and of our own nation in particular.”\textsuperscript{10}

Each community qualified the record with its own “in particular,” whether disciplinary, national, denominational, or sectarian. This tendency was less than ideal from the point of view of the missionary historian. If missionary origins and development are to be charted, we need either a first-hand account of events or the records of archives from the field, not the anonymous and occasionally biased reports of bishops and churchmen. Even in ancient times, however, the relationship was not always a simple one. Sometimes the church authorities were the actual workers in mission fields; sometimes they were not. Moreover, the church’s role in mission was sometimes confirmed by the absence of any record at all. The early record of mission in the west is as good an example as any. It is only within the last century or so, as the number of churches and missionary societies increased, that missionary history has become a subject in its own right.
view of modern concepts of universality; but those concepts have a very short history, being brought into play only in the wake of the Enlightenment. And where the humanistic values of the rationalists did not apply, most historiography preserved a "family" quality.

This is not the place to enlarge on the gradual changes that had come over the craft of historiography in the post-Renaissance period, or on the refining of the tools that made precise historical writing possible—libraries, archives, printing presses and publishing concerns, coupled with the requisite training in church and university. The outcome, of course, was the emergence of the ideal of the historian as a "scientist," bent on tracing empirical cause-and-effect relationships on a basis of hard documentary evidence, and without reference to any supernatural agency. The scientific historiography was finally made in the last quarter of the nineteenth century—as it happens, in parallel with developments in the comparative study of religion and during Europe's higher achievements and values. And since to post-Darwinian Christians the motion of the escalator was an expression of the will of God, while requiring human participation in its functioning, "history" took on a vast new meaning. So between the 1880s and the 1914-18 war, mission and colonial politics, mission and social development (normally expressed in the language of the kingdom of God as a social organism) went very much hand in hand; the history of the missionary movement as a totality was of far greater significance than the sum of its parts; put the little family and local chronicles together and the history of the world might emerge in a new light.

All this was a matter for awed pride in the past, and for hope in even greater things to come. The title of Henry Ussing's Danish-language history of 1902 sums it all up: "The triumphal march of missions throughout the world."13 God was surely working out the divine purpose as year succeeded to year. "March we forth in the strength of God, with the banner of Christ unfurled," the missionary meetings sang. In 1910 John R. Mott told the Edinburgh Conference, "The end of the Conference is the beginning of the conquest."14 As to history, what could it show but the record of hard campaigning on the way to final triumph? Meantime, the study of history would have many lessons to teach—for instance, that Christianity alone, "of all religions, is capable of satisfying the needs of every member of the human race," and that sooner or later, Christianity would become "the religion of the whole world."14

From the end of World War I to the mid-1960s is a long step to be taken as abruptly as we are compelled to take it here. The great empires were now no more. The old-style missionary, whether pioneer, church-builder, or "the statesmen of the Kingdom of God" of whom Henry Drummond had spoken in 1890,15 was now becoming a relative rarity. So too were "mission-fields." It was no longer fashionable in many quarters to speak of "missions" (plural) as opposed to "mission" (a single function of the church). Yet the Christian world had been through one upheaval after another—social, political, economic, and hence inevitably intellectual.

Of the many casualties of a half-century of constant conflict since 1914, none, perhaps, was more serious than the notion of historical progress and an inevitable evolution of all things human from lower to higher forms. Technology aside, of what was trench warfare an evolution? But discard the idea of progress, and you have cut the nerve of one of the main justifications for writing history. If social and political developments have in addition convinced many that the missionary past was by no means a matter to be contemplated with unqualified pride, what then of missionary historiography? Perhaps discard it altogether and thereby save oneself a good many awkward explanations. Perhaps make of it a cautionary tale of colonialist exploitation and a warning of what must not under any circumstances be allowed to happen again. But however it might appear to the anticolonialists (chiefly of the political left), it was by no means certain that the record of the missionary past was as uniformly bad as some in the 1960s were disposed to believe.

In the mid-to-late 1960s there were not a great many missionary historians writing. In Uppsala, Sweden, Bengt Sundkler was telling his postgraduate seminar that if we did not produce good history, the story would be told by others far less sympathetic to the missionary ideal.16 (Gunnar Myrdal was, in a manner sounding (at times) a note of ambiguity: that history, he wrote, must not conceal...
the weakness of human endeavour—the sinfulness and pettiness of the agents, the blind selfishness of the Churches, the niggardliness of the support that they have given to the work of the Gospel, the mistakes that have been made, the treacheries, the catastrophes, the crimes by which the record is sullied.¹⁹

In the same year, 1964, a disciple of Hendrik Kraemer, A. T. van Leeuwen, was calling for an “ecumenical theology of history” but it was not large. At a consultation in Selly Oak Colleges, and present, discerning the signs of the times in the prophetic light of the dawning Day of the Lord.²¹

Common to these and similar statements was the generally optative mood in which they were couched. Historiography it seemed had been more and more laid aside under the pressure of current concerns. Missiology still had a historical component, but it was not large. At a consultation in Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham in 1968, R. Pierce Beaver drew attention to what one might perhaps call the secularization of missionary historiography, lamenting that while secular missionary historians may do good work up to a point, few of them have “an adequate understanding of the aims, goals and motives of the missionaries or understand the enterprise in its totality and its unity.”²²

It would be tempting at this point to reflect further on what these and other writers understood “history” to be; and on the gulf that appeared already to have opened up between history-as-theology and history-as-remembered-past. But to do so would open up an issue too complex to be dealt with here. It is, however, clear that amid all the ambiguities of the missionary record itself, missionary historiography was acquiring some serious ambiguities of its own.

The Secularization of Missionary Historiography

Where an earlier tradition of missionary historiography had tended to base its accounts on images of success—or at least measurable progress—and for a time there emerged an admission of ambiguity in the record, in recent years images of failure have tended to push historiography to a position almost diametrically opposed to that of, say, 1910–14.

When and where it first came to be accepted that religions are, so to speak, culture-bound, and that they wither and die when transplanted into alien soil, is not something we can discuss here; but it was being stated by Ernst Troeltsch in the early 1920s. Europe’s Christianity, he stated, “is bound up with elements of the ancient and modern civilizations of Europe. . . . It stands and falls with European civilization”²² What applies to Christianity applies by the same token to every other religious tradition; each has a cultural matrix, from which it cannot be safely separated—at least not without changing its character altogether. Indeed, from one point of view, “religion” actually is an aspect of culture (an amalgam of history, environment, language, law, and custom). Therefore even to attempt to transplant a religious tradition from one culture to another is doomed to failure. To do so is to uproot indigenous cultures, perhaps ultimately to destroy them, replacing them with something alien.

One should not underestimate the power of this theory. One finds it everywhere. The focus may shift slightly, but always the thrust is the same: mission is, and always has been, alien, intrusive, destructive, and morally wrong.

To take only one fairly recent example, Paul Johnson’s A History of Christianity (1976) draws attention only to the distortions and failures of the missionary enterprise. It was, wrote Johnson, the inability of Christianity to change, and above all to de-Europeanize itself, which caused it to miss its opportunities (in Asia). Far too often the Christian Churches presented themselves as extensions of European social and intellectual concepts, rather than embodiments of universal truths.²³

I do not wish on this occasion to argue either for or against this view or those who take it.²⁴ My point here is simply that it is now as proper to cast missionary history in terms of failure (and to produce a crude theory to account for it) as it was once proper to draw attention only to successes. From confident assurance before 1914, the record has proceeded by way of paradox and ambiguity in a general direction of a gloomy but superficial catalogue of failure. In the first phase, the missionary seemingly could do no wrong; in the last, one sometimes wonders whether the missionary can ever be given credit for doing anything right.

Paradoxically, it may be that the secularization of missionary historiography has been of benefit at this point. I do not want to suggest that the missionary historian is necessarily a better (or for that matter a worse) historian for not actually being a Christian. Equally persuasive arguments can be brought either way—none of which holds good in every case. But whereas in the past secular history has often offended friends of missions by its refusal to take the missionary enterprise seriously, or in some cases even to acknowledge its existence, today the shoe may to some extent be on the other foot. Arguably there was a time when missionary historians tended to overestimate the impact on the world of what they were recording, and needed to learn caution. Now, when the winds of opinion have shifted, it may be possible for the secular historian to persuade (and demonstrate to) those who wish to denigrate the whole of the record on what are argued as being theological grounds that the record was no more one-sidedly negative than one-sidedly positive. As usual, the opposite of an error is less a truth than an opposite error.

Colonialism and Christian Mission

The missionary historian whose “period” is the past century or so can hardly avoid becoming involved in the whole question of colonial politics, and may find reaching a balanced judgment on either generalities or details extraordinarily difficult. He or she is walking a minefield of conflicting ideals and aspirations, quarrels and controversies, some of which divide communities in the 1980s almost as they did in the 1930s. The great historical question concerns the nature and extent of Christian missionary agencies’ involvement with the colonial enterprise; the great moral question has to do with the standards on which one proposes to evaluate either involvement or noninvolvement (whichever may be the case).

Thirty years ago the British historian Richard Pares wrote a short article on “The Revolt against Colonialism,” in which he observed:

It will be the historians of Asia and Africa who will have the power to prejudice the next generations for or against us. . . . If we can admit mistakes and crimes where mistakes and crimes have been committed, there is some chance that they will admit, and will teach their posterity, that our connexion with their countries has not been an unmitigated misfortune.²⁵

The historiographer who is concerned only to describe “what happened” in this period of missionary history has the initial problem that almost all the earlier material was generated (or at least chosen for preservation) by the missionaries themselves, and that its function in Western church life ensured that “mistakes and crimes,” though they undoubtedly happened, did not as a
rule find their way into print. The whole of the story therefore is not told. But that does not render the part that is told any the less important, provided that it can be estimated for what it is, and not for what it is not.

Historiography in the analytical sense is concerned with the analysis of the story as told by different tellers, and only in part with whether or not they are actually telling the truth. The African or Asian or Melanesian Christian will tell a different story, some of the contents of which will not correspond to earlier missionary versions. But to analytical historiography, however many versions there are, all are equally important as insights into the way in which the mission has functioned and been perceived.

Lest I should be suspected of saying that the truth actually does not matter, let me hasten to say that of course it matters; but that in very many cases there is a gap between event and perception. The eyewitness can record only the perception, and two eyewitnesses may well perceive differently, especially when they belong fundamentally within different cultural spheres. Therefore it is of the utmost urgency that the missionary view of the founding of churches in the non-Western world should be fully complemented by writers having the kind of in-depth knowledge of cultures and communities that no missionary can ever be guaranteed to possess. This, I trust, goes without saying. But it would be wrong, I believe, for a new generation of historians in Asia or Africa or Melanesia to dismiss the older historiographical tradition as being of no further relevance; or to exchange one mode of Western historiography (say, the post-Enlightenment intellectualist) for another, (neo-Marxist.)

Carl Becker used the words "imaginative understanding" to label a virtue to be added to "precise knowledge" as a prerequisite for successful historiographical research and writing. If this operates at all (a matter on which opinions may differ), it would seem to operate in more than one direction. No doubt it is unreasonable to expect a new non-Western tradition of missionary historiography always to be kind or coolly impartial in its assessment of what may well be seen as the religious face of colonialism. It is still too soon for that. It is not, on the other hand, too soon for a historiographical analysis to be attempted—for the sake of Christian communities the world over.

The Historiographer as Interpreter

Missionary historiography may be undertaken in either a theological or a secular mode, either with or without reference to a final source of authority and to an absolute truth. And although the historian is neither better nor worse as a historian for taking up the one position rather than the other, the question of natural versus supernatural criteria of explanation is bound to arise sooner or later. Recently I happened upon a book review in which the issue was stated. Reviewing a recent Anglican diocesan history, an evangelical churchman had this to say:

While it is possible to describe the events of the world without reference to God . . . is it possible to write a history of the church without reference to God? Will this not be a distortion of perception? If the gospel is truth, then sociological forces are not the key factors in understanding the development of church life. God may be using these sociological factors, but his real agency is the preached word and the work of his Spirit in the lives of people. 26

The missionary historian is apt to be caught in the tensions and demands of dual citizenship, with the empirically verifiable ("the facts of the case") pulling in one direction, and "the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1) pulling in another. Either may tempt to special pleading; either may challenge the final authority of the other. It may well be that social, economic, political, and other factors (in the review lumped together as "sociological factors") do not provide a final key to the assessment of any missionary situation, and that without a theological perspective, the Christian missionary historian will feel that the main point has been missed. But not all missionary historians are Christians; and those who are, are not identical Christians. Theological assessments are legion. At the risk of sounding overly dogmatic, I would state my own opinion that unless the "sociological factors" have been understood—thoroughly understood,
on a basis of all the available evidence—the superimposition of the will of God upon the record may remain arbitrary.

Missionary historiography is not altogether an art; usually it is not precise enough to serve as a science. It is, on the other hand, based on the mastery of a craft over which is extended the canopy of a serious moral responsibility.

The historiographer has a responsibility to the past: to investigate it as minutely as circumstances permit, and not to bear false witness against those no longer able to defend themselves; to the present: to give it the opportunity to listen once more to the voice of the past; and to the future: because a good story well told will often, whether true or not, far outlast the brief life of the teller. The historiographer has the added responsibility that comes of the power to choose what to tell, to pass or not pass judgment, to enthuse or to prejudice a reader, and perhaps even in some cases to alter the course of history itself.

The missionary historian cannot relive or recreate the past. But he or she is able to do something that is at the same time more fruitful or more dangerous, by creating images of the past. Images of the past may, like Camelot, be more attractive than the reality could possibly have been; or the opposite, like the Viking reputation. That of course is the stuff of legend—a core of fact embroidered upon by successive generations of interpreters to the point where no one can be sure what originally happened, when, or where. The missionary record is unlikely ever to produce cycles of legend and myth of King Arthur, Robin Hood, or Davy Crockett proportions. It has, however, attracted to itself stereotypes—missionaries and cannibals, missionaries and sexual repression, missionaries and cultural vandalism—which, having once been created, seem almost impossible to dislodge. Missionary historiography is therefore more than the simple purveying of information. For better or for worse, every historian has the opportunity to leave a legacy of understanding or misunderstanding, fact or fantasy—not to mention the praise or blame that can so deeply influence the reader. The missionary historian must of necessity be a storyteller, and is fortunate if possessing some of the qualities of the bard. Far too often, though, missionary history, while scoring high marks for earnestness, has failed most dismal as literature. I began by saying that in my view, the researching and writing of missionary history should never be undertaken casually. I am tempted to say in conclusion that all the industry in the world where the research is concerned is not going to compensate for the inability to communicate one’s findings. Further than that I had better not go.

One last word. In this essay I have quite deliberately avoided discussing in detail the intricate question of the *theological* dimension of missionary historiography, chiefly because I am myself far more of a historian than a theologian. Missiologists do not always appear to be at their best where history is concerned, and it is my impression that even theologians are on unsafe ground if and when they generalize about history without descending to historical particulars. But the history of missionary historiography, with which I have been chiefly concerned here, has serious theological implications, and I would not wish my inability to deal with it here to be construed as deliberate neglect. I may perhaps have the opportunity to return to this theme on some future occasion.

The historiographer is most of all an interpreter. It may, then, be not inappropriate to close with the Interpreter’s parting words to Christian in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*: “Well, keep all things so in thy mind that they may be as a goad in thy sides, to prick thee forward in the way thou must go.”

Notes

2. To be precise, the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines “historiographer” as: “Writer of history, especially official historian of a court etc.” It does not define “historiography” other than as: “Writing of history.”
4. Ibid., p. 66.
5. Ibid., p. 68.
7. Cf. John A. Moses, *The Politics of Illusion* (London: George Prior, 1975), pp. xiv., “Historiography is without doubt related to national politics. Indeed, the historiography of a particular country is a sensitive barometer to the political pressures within that country.”
17. Myrdal, great economist as he undoubtedly was, could never see religion as anything other than a brake on progress and a “tremendous force for social inertia.” Cf. his *Asian Drama* (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1968), pp. 103ff. 729, 1621££., etc.

April 1989
Book Reviews

Mission in Christ’s Way.


Your Will Be Done: Mission in Christ’s Way. Study Material and Biblical Reflection.


Here are two booklets whose relationship the one to the other is more of a coincidence than a planned correlation. Both are offered by the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches in preparation for its 1989 conference on the theme "Mission in Christ’s Way."

The Newbigin essay is made up of four Bible-study lectures delivered at a 1986 meeting of the synod of the Church of South India. It was in this communion that Newbigin had earlier rendered distinguished service first as bishop of Madurai and later as bishop of Madras. The lectures are vintage Newbigin: analytical, insightful, provocative, occasionally critical, compellingly positive. He is one writer who manages to evoke my admiration even when, as rarely, I disagree with him. Just when my hackles are about to do a vertical they are laid back by a treatment called clarification.

The first lecture elucidates the general theme through an exposition of John 20:21 and Mark 1:14–18. The kingdom of God is existentially present in Jesus Christ, then as now a reality and a mystery. The second lecture expounds the role of the Spirit (Acts 1:6–8) in the witnessing life of the church, which is not a kingdom synonym but a kingdom sign. A church motivated and activated by the Spirit of God will bear its witness to the world, not so much because it is formally commanded so to do as because it is inwardly impelled to do it.

The third lecture, leaning heavily on John 20:19–23 and 2 Corinthians 4:7–12, offers an extraordinarily sobering view of Christ’s people in mission. In the Pauline paradigm it is mission under the cross. It is mission that reflects the Passion: triumphant but not triumphantistic, assertive yet vulnerable. In this lecture the Newbigin thinking and writing are at their precise and perceptive best, as, for example: "Even if we could make all the poor coolies into rich farmers, that would not be the kingdom of God. It is the rich who are in more danger of being dehumanized than the poor" (p. 27).

In the concluding address Bishop Newbigin reflects penetratingly on Matthew 28:18–20. He measures friendly swords with the Church Growth school of thought on the concept of culturally homogeneous churches. He insists that the pre-Christian cultures from which new believers may come should not be allowed to negate the Christ-centered unity of such believers in their congregational life.

The companion piece for the Newbigin lectures is a paperback of eighty pages, subtitled "Study Material and Biblical Reflection." On first examining it, I thought it was intended to be reactions to, and reflections on, Bishop Newbigin’s book. Not so. The document to be studied and evaluated is an official statement by the World Council of Churches entitled, "Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation." Ten writers from as many different countries and communions provide comment and offer questions for discussion. In the second half of the booklet, called "Biblical Reflection," the focus shifts from the WCC document to a variety of biblical passages, again with an ecumenical assortment of writers.

The writing is of uneven quality: sometimes wholesomely provocative, sometimes provokingly fuzzy. One misses the clarity and balance and thrust of Newbigin’s theological mind.

—Paul S. Rees

Theology and Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Other Religions.


There is a certain power of simplicity in Gavin D’Costa’s display of three “dominant paradigms underlying the different Christian attitudes to other religions” (p. 18), each illustrated by one proponent. John Hick represents a “pluralist” paradigm, which maintains that “Christ’s decisiveness should be understood as a personal confession without objective or universally binding status” (p. 13). Hendrik Kraemer offers an “exclusiveist” paradigm, which believes “that Christ (or Christianity) offers the only valid path to salvation” (p. 52). Karl Rahner enters the discussion as representative of the synthetic...
"inclusivist" paradigm, the one that D'Costa embraces. The inclusivist "affirms the salvific presence of God in non-Christian religions while still maintaining that Christ is the definitive and authoritative revelation of God" (p. 80).

While D’Costa creates an interesting dialogue among these three persons and positions, his treatment is flawed in at least three ways.

1. The three people he chooses are not contemporaries. Kraemer is an anachronism. His cited works were pre-1962, those by Hick and Rahner were essentially post-1962. Kraemer could hardly be expected to engage the issues in the same terms as the other two. D’Costa’s frequent use of “exclusivist” Lesslie Newbigin to critique Kraemer and support a Rahnerian approach (cf. pp. 74–75, 105, 106, 121, 124, 136) suggests that Newbigin would have been a better, though tougher, choice.

2. The debate is skewed from the outset by setting it in Rahnerian terms. The unexamined assumption is that “the difficulties can be conveniently focused in relation to two traditionally held Christian axioms. The first states that salvation is through Jesus Christ alone” (italics his). The second axiom is that “God desires the salvation of all humankind” (p. 4; cf. p. 83). These are drawn directly from Rahner (p. 83; cf. Rahner, Theological Investigations, VI:390–98). D’Costa’s defense of Rahner’s paradigm is marred by the fact that he has assumed in advance Rahner’s way of putting the problem.

3. The discussion assumes that the narrow theological concern upon which a view of “other religions” turns is that of the destiny of the individual soul. Such a view of “salvation” is reductionistic. This leads D’Costa to establish his paradigm on too narrow a spectrum. What D’Costa gains in simplicity he loses in scope and depth.

What the title of the concluding chapter promises (“Towards a Christian Theology of Religions”) would be helpful. But unfortunately the chapter is more a discussion of “the aims and methods of dialogue and mission” based on Rahner’s perspective. The bibliography is an excellent basic guide to the field.

—George R. Hunsberger

George R. Hunsberger is Associate Professor and Department Chairman, Christian Ministries, Belhaven College, Jackson, Mississippi.

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Inheriting Our Mothers' Gardens: Feminist Theology in Third World Perspective.


Using the device of the writers of the Old Testament, a handful of women from around the world have produced a volume on feminist theology in third-world perspective through personal stories. The narratives are affectionate, appreciative, poignant, loving, and humorous, pursuing a garden theme consistently. The salutary division of the essays under three subheadings underlines the peculiar agendas of the writers.

The writers find the source and inspiration for a feminist theology in the life-gardens of their various "mothers," whose subservient and oppressed lives manifested elements of liberation. The daily dying and rising of these mothers, their struggles for humanity and dignity, their undeniable hope in change, their indestructible belief in themselves and/or a benevolent spirit are signs of the nearness of God and make them into survivors. These fruits of the gardens are transmogrified into "theologies" that celebrate community and the universal feminine. There is the gospel reality of the experience of personal liberation.

The last section raises issues for global partnership in evolving acceptable feminist theologies. The experience of working with persons who refuse to share power is one issue. Sharing power is a kocratic act: power is relinquished only after it is appropriated and experienced. Inviting third-world women from garden to table is another issue. The inherent paternalism is that only those who have tables can invite, even if it is a round table. The round-table ideal is commendably illustrated in the editorial circle of the four able and articulate writers.

The garden-tending third-world women live and function in a family-based ethos. The table-owning first-world persons guard individuality and a work-ethic that leads to competitiveness. Third-world women have experienced sitting at table and find it uncomfortable. First and third world need to sit cross-legged, together, on the hard-packed earthen floor of the gardener's hut to be able to articulate a genuine and acceptable third-world feminist theology.

This book is an invitation for further theological reflections through story-telling. The subtitle, if qualified with "an attempt at" or "search for" might have served better. The widely culled bibliography gives access to other third-world voices.

Feminist theology must needs be about the experience of the fullness of the Godhead, and the inclusive mutuality of equal partnership of women and men inherent in creation. This work demonstrates the danger of the inductive method for theological reflec­tion: it makes our God "too small."

—Padmasani J. Gallup

Evangelize! A Historical Survey of the Concept.


Cosmos, Chaos, and Gospel: A Chronology of World Evangelization from Creation to New Creation.


These two titles are the fourth and fifth volumes in the A.D. 2000 series, most of which have Barrett, editor of the World Christian Encyclopedia (WCE), for their author.

Evangelize! presents an exhaustive survey of the usage and meanings of the terms "evangelize" and "evangelization." Whereas the dictionary section of WCE appeared to favor a narrow definition of the terms, focusing on proclamation without regard to results, Evangelize! concludes with a compelling brief for the necessity of holding to both the narrow and the broader meanings: "The truth lies at both extremes. Both interpretations are entirely correct" (p. 79, Barrett's italics). Barrett's forte, statistical analysis, displays itself to good advantage as he documents the explosion of interest and involvement in evangelism since 1970. His contribution is to help us all clarify what we mean, what we intend to accomplish, and to encourage us to wade into midstream if we are not already there.

Cosmos, Chaos, and Gospel may one day be judged the most seminal of all of Barrett's work. It carries a somewhat misleading subtitle—not that it isn't a chronology of world evangelization, but that it is much more. Barrett appears, to this reviewer, to be attempting a "grand unified theory" (what theoretical scientists call "GUT") to capture God's scheme for conducting the course of the universe. The chronology begins at 19 billion B.C. with the big bang; covers evolutionary prehistory; spans all recorded history; and then spins out near-term scenarios for the next century, and—aided by a corps of science-fiction writers—alternative scenarios for the far, far future.

The common theme for all of this—the GUT—is the overcoming of chaos by cosmos. Genesis 1 provides the model. Barrett reminds us that "God's work of creation did not destroy the chaos and darkness but pushed them back and held them in check" (p. 4). Recorded human history witnesses the continuing struggle between chaos and cosmos, light and darkness, sin and righteousness. Evangelization is the core activity of the Spirit of God, working to overcome chaos.
Cosmos recounts the many beginnings and setbacks: the extinction of 90 percent of all the species that have ever existed, the rise and disappearance of numerous species of the Genus Homo prior to modern man, the many populations that once were evangelized and Christianized but that fell back into the grip of “chaos” through martyrdoms, massacres, and forced apostasy, and the probable (according to Barrett) existence of other civilizations past and present within our universe. It is a sobering story of tooth and claw, designed to help us see the relatively modest place our generation plays in the ebb and flow of world evangelization.

I found that careful, line-by-line reading of the chronology is essential if one is to feel the force of Barrett’s thesis. Unexpectedly, such a reading also raises unsettling questions about the author’s research and analytical methods. Several date entries have been revised as compared to the chronology found in WCE. For instance, five out of the ten Roman imperial persecutions have been shifted by as much as twelve years; the Great Schism between Rome and Constantinople has been redated from 1054 (WCE) to 1056 (Cosmos); and the massacre of 72,000 Huguenots has been corrected from 1547 (WCE) to 1572. (Note: I thought I could skim the chronology from the time of Christ to the present, having already seen it in WCE, but that was a mistake: the chronology in Cosmos is three times as detailed.)

Questions about internal problems arise not infrequently: (1) If the five largest cities from the early thirteenth to the end of the fourteenth century ranged from 200,000 to less than 500,000 population (see Barrett’s entries for A.D. 1200 and 1400, pp. 30, 32), how could Mongol hordes in 1258 have found 800,000 people in Baghdad to massacre? (p. 30). (2) Did Genghis Khan truly kill off 35 million Chinese in a decade? (p. 30). (The specialist I consulted states that the decline in population spanned about a century and was no doubt due to multiple causes extending long after the death of Genghis Khan.) (3) Barrett characterizes Aristophanes’ The Birds (see 414 B.C.) and Kepler’s Somnium (A.D. 1600) as early examples of science fiction. But the Encyclopaedia Britannica labels these works comedy/social satire and scientific satire, raising the suspicion that Barrett works overtime to legitimize his massive reliance on science fiction in the concluding section of Cosmos.

Still, even if all these and other queries were to prove troublesome for Barrett, the thesis of Cosmos will remain with me for years to come. It is the most ambitious effort I’ve seen to place the worldwide evangelistic mandate in its universal context, in interaction not only with history and theology but also with astrophysics, evolution, ecology, demographics, futurology, and other major disciplines. Sooner or later we shall all be compelled to deal with the issues and data that Barrett embraces in this milestone work.

—Robert T. Coote
A Missionary Pilgrimage.


The career of Charles W. Ranson was indeed A Missionary Pilgrimage. In the ordinary course of things Ranson’s life might not have been at all unusual. As often happens, however, it was his missionary engagement that made his story extraordinary.

At the close of World War II there was a “changing of the guard” in the modern ecumenical movement. The pioneers—Mott, Bell, Temple, Oldham, and others—were moving on. Among the newcomers was Charles Ranson.

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Reconciling Heaven and Earth: The Transcendental Enthusiasm and Growth of an Urban Protestant Community, Bogotá, Colombia.


Written by a missionary who has served in Colombia with the Christian and Missionary Alliance for more than twenty years, this carefully researched

James K. Mathews is a bishop of the United Methodist Church (ret.) and has served in Boston, Washington, and Zimbabwe. He was a missionary in India (1938-60), and mission executive (1946-60).
Westmeier's major thesis is that charismatization develops, especially among Colombian Protestants. Given the crises they face in migrating from the rural areas to the cities, how do they reconcile their previous understanding of life and their predominantly folk Catholicism with the agones of life in the urban slums? Westmeier's major thesis is that charismatization allows the urban dweller to transcend the grinding, futile struggle for survival and provides her or him a sense of immediacy. The new believer now is in direct touch with the supernatural. Life that before had no meaning religiously or socially now is infused with cosmic significance.

Some will doubtless read this book and question the author's conclusion, and insist that the religious phenomenon herein described represent more an escape from than an understanding of life. Such a criticism cannot be easily dismissed, given the multiple ways by which religion often is employed as an opiate rather than a stimulus for change.

I found helpful, nevertheless, Westmeier's careful description of the reasons why people who find themselves a part of an urban mass are soon affected with feelings of alienation and futility, and why life for them can have neither immanent nor transcendent significance. His explanation as to why Bogotanos are turning in greater numbers and finding solace in some form of charismatic Protestantism confirms my own observations of urban dwellers in Colombia. Once rural peasants without land, without help, and without hope, they are drawn to the urban centers only to find there for the most part a different and more degrading form of poverty, overcrowded slums, filth, disease, unemployment and underemployment, deprivation, violence, family dissolution, and individual and collective exploitation.

Westmeier's sociohistorical account is combined with an impressive array of behavioral data, all of which support his assertion that, in Bogotá, we have a concrete example wherein the cognitive and spiritual dissonance of daily life for some believers is relieved by the relationship they are convinced they have with the God who cares for them.

—Alan Neely

*Atlas of the Christian Church.*


Anyone interested in Christian missions should also be interested in geography and maps for study of the expansion of Christianity. Thus the attraction and interest when a new *Atlas of the Christian Church* appears, edited by two distinguished historians at Cambridge University.

Initially one is impressed by this large, handsome volume, lavishly illustrated with color photographs and maps on high-quality paper stock, with accompanying text in chronological sequence and with special feature articles, from the beginnings in Judea to about 1982 and the modern ecumenical movement—an "outline portrait" of the "main traditions" in church history (Preface). Upon closer examination of the text, however, it becomes apparent that this is not a reference for serious students of church history or missions; there are too many gaps and generalizations.

For instance, in articles on missions to Asia there is no mention of Burma or Adoniram Judson. In a separate article on "Christians in the Philippines Today," the only Christians mentioned are Roman Catholics; the largest non-Roman Catholic church in Asia—The Philippine Independent Church—is ignored, along with a million Filipino Protestants. A special feature article on "Christianity and the Other World Religions" is very spotty and incomplete. In discussing the...
Christian response to other religions, the text mentions discussion of this topic at "large missionary conferences held in Edinburgh 1910, Jerusalem in 1928 and Tambaram in 1938" (p. 199), but no mention of the discussion at major conferences after 1938, or of contemporary issues such as the role of dialogue.

Presumably there is a useful purpose for popular works such as this for the general public. For serious study, however, the vastly superior Macmillan Atlas History of Christianity (1976), by Franklin H. Littell, is recommended.

—Gerald H. Anderson

"For All That Has Been—Thanks!" The Life and Commitment of Daisy Gopal Ratnam.


In the mid-1970s, when the Christian Medical College and Teaching Hospital in Vellore, India, was in the crisis of an illegal strike, Daisy Gopal Ratnam presided at a meeting of the Executive Council of CMC. Unintimidated by the chief minister of the state of Madras, she led in the decision to "speak the truth to power." Later, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who was on a first-name basis with Daisy, interceded and saved the integrity of this 1,400-bed teaching hospital.

Herbert O. Muenstermann, after fourteen years of service in the New York office of the Vellore Christian Medical College Board, is now Manager of United Church Residences for senior citizens, Downers Grove, Illinois.

In those days Daisy was honorary (without salary) general secretary of the Church of South India. With regal grace she presided, and did not always side with the bishops. Daisy Gopal Ratnam knew who she was and whose she was. Widowed, with three sons to raise, she persevered through the years with uncomplaining courage. One sensed that her strength came from her faith. She was a local magistrate serving the needs of youth, a sponsor of special camps for children, a member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches and its Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, chair of the National Council of Churches in India and of the Vellore CMC Council. Daisy was and is very much a church woman. In Madras, in secular circles, she was equally involved and highly regarded.

For All That Has Been—Thanks! is a Festschrift of sorts. The book ends with the rest of the Dag Hamsarskjöld quotation: "To All That Shall Be—Yes." Today Daisy has lost one son, and another is in a coma. She has moved from Madras to join her third son during her own fight with cancer.

What are the possibilities in each new birth? What is the human potential? What can one person be? Here is one answer. Daisy has lived, has done, and has written. For All That Has Been—Thanks! records and shares from one midtwentieth-century woman, formed by the Indian culture and the Christian faith. Visit with her about women, children, the young, the church and Christian concerns, on voluntary and social service. A woman who kept bishops decent and ordered when the Church of South India did not even ordain women is one of God's persons worth getting to know.

—Herbert O. Muenstermann

The Uneasy Alliance: Religion, Refugee Work, and U.S. Foreign Policy.


Without doubt Bruce Nichols has provided a scholarly and much needed review of the history of church-related humanitarian assistance outside the United States. It is not made clear by the author the reason for using refugee assistance as the key to exploring the relationship of church and state as they go abroad. He constantly brings into consideration other forms of humanitarian assistance, which are not so tightly controlled by government restrictions. Most refugee assistance is for the purpose of resettlement into the United States, thereby calling into play many restrictions by the United States government that are not considered when the assistance is provided to refugees in another country. The line of argument has been blurred by a lack of preciseness in terminology.

The scope of the task undertaken by Nichols is immense. But he has made it more complex by dealing at length with a lesser point and referencing the key issue in a minor way. Some of the topics that have received this treatment are the following:

By noting some of the landmark court cases, Nichols goes to some length to point out the evolution of church/state relationships in the United States. This type of study has been more thoroughly done recently by A. James Reichley in Religion in American Public Life. Nonetheless, Nichols finally points out that there is a significant body of international law, protocols, and conventions that affect the conduct of humanitarian assistance to refugees and in situations of civil or political strife to a greater degree than does the legal status of church/state relationships in the United States.

A second area of interest noted by Nichols is that of the role played by the several sectors of the religious community. The three historic faiths have been noted: Jewish, Roman Catholic, and Protestant; also, the appearance of a distinction within Protestantism of mainline and evangelical. Each has developed a unique understanding of the nature of its relationship to government. These differences are subtle but too important to overlook. While one religious community has a commitment to international ties and sees itself as an expression of the doctrine of
the church universal, another religious community orients itself more closely to U.S. national interests. This theological perspective is a major factor in the determination of church-state relationships. Nichols notes the differences, makes his point, and then acknowledges that there are fundamental theological reasons at play.

A third factor that Nichols notes, which needs to be given greater attention, is the fact that the Reagan administration adhered to a far stricter interpretation of the laws and regulations governing nonprofit organizations. The laws have not been changed from one administration to this, but their application has been reinterpreted and intensified.

This reinterpretation of existing laws and regulations has brought the Private Voluntary Organization (PVO) community into conflict with the United States government. For example, the use of the term "humanitarian aid" until the Reagan administration has applied to noncombatants but now has been used for a form of assistance provided to a fighting force—the Contras. This has led PVOs to be extremely selective in their use of government funds or involvement with the United States government. At first appearance, it seems that religious PVOs have double standards when the reality is they have become very selective of the kinds of aid they will become involved with and those they will not.

For those experienced in international humanitarian assistance, there are serious shortcomings to the book. But until such a time as another is written, it will prove a useful source of historical information.

—Paul F. McCleary

**Chinese Politics and Christian Missions: The Anti-Christian Movements of 1920–28.**


Professor Lutz has used her wide knowledge of Chinese educational institutions and student movements in the 1920s to take a dispassionate and synthetic look at the whole period. Building on earlier articles on the anti-Christian movement, she broadens her scope to trace its interpenetration with other student movements and with the political rivalries of the day. Her book is one of the most comprehensive works on the period. Its detailed exposition of statements and manifestos by both the academic and the political wings of the May Fourth movement gives her writing an immediate reference to the historical passions of the time.

Several general configurations appear: the early unanimity of the anti-Christian cause eventually breaks up into disunity. Its early enthusiasm cannot be sustained. Just as the passion of the movement declines, there is a simultaneous trend toward the establishment of new political authority. Student spontaneity and activism eventually give way to the demands of government and of educators that students stick to their studies. Among the missionary educators there is a parallel development of sometimes outraged defense giving way to acquiescence and accommodation, which are aided by the fact that the Nationalist revolution of 1925–27 results in most missionary educators leaving the country while their Chinese colleagues take charge.

Historical analogy between the 1920s and the 1960s is as usual less precise than it is suggestive. Student movements once activated tend to have
a life of their own, not easily controlled by their progenitors. The ancient right of the scholar to be heard begins to clash with the equally ancient idea that youth should not lead but follow. China’s modern problem of the relationship between government authority and the student class is clearly posed in the 1920s, as in the 1960s or the 1980s. The students are indispensable to government in the long run, but often expendable in the short term.

Professor Lutz’s maturity of judgment and wide knowledge of the sources make this a valuable synthesis of the intellectual and political currents of the 1920s. One great merit is that it puts Chinese Christianity closely in the context of Chinese politics, more closely than anyone has done heretofore.

—John K. Fairbank

Mission Theology: An Introduction.


This book is intended as an introductory textbook in mission theology for students and interested laypersons. The first chapter locates missiology amid the theological disciplines, and is followed by four chapters on the meaning of mission, its theological foundations, the purposes of mission, and missionary activity. This central section of the book is intended to be ecumenical in nature, but is heavily Roman Catholic in orientation, and mainly focused on official church documents and German secondary literature. Three chapters conclude the book: one on learning from the history of mistakes in mission, one on the current context for Christian mission, and a final chapter on important missiological literature.

The book is a translation of the 1985 German edition, with some emendations. The translation itself is awkward in many spots, which makes it sometimes slow reading. The authors are all well-known German missiologists: Müller and Rzepkowski are members of the Society of the Divine Word and active at the SVD missiological institute in St. Augustin.

Robert J. Schreiter, C.P.P.S., is Professor of Theology at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.

Material is presented clearly and competently in a handbook style, and the authors are modest about the place of this work among the larger and older handbooks. For all of its value, however, the approach seems to concentrate too much on German material. The result is that it does not seem to embrace the worldwide mission of the church: one misses treatment of contemporary missiological thinkers (emphasis is on ecclesiastical documents); the treatment of Protestant thought beyond Germany is cursory, and little is said of English-speaking evangelical traditions; and one would have hoped for more treatment of current problems that mission faces. A good introductory work on missiology from a Roman Catholic perspective is needed and some of that material can be found here. But I fear we must wait for another work that is written in a wider perspective.

—Robert J. Schreiter

Against Machismo: Rubem Alves, Leonardo Boff, Gustavo Gutiérrez, José Miguez Bonino, Juan Luis Segundo . . . and Others Talk about the Struggle of Women.


First published in Spanish in 1986, Against Machismo is truly a dialogue with liberation theologians about the struggles of women in Latin America. Although only one woman, Elsa Tamez, is the partner and interpreter of the dialogue, she presents questions that are on the hearts and minds of many women. At the same time the individual theologians are also responding in the light of their experience with many women, especially those who are members and leaders in basic Christian communities. As Tamez indicates, this dialogue is but a step in the continuing conversation between women and men struggling for liberation in third-world countries (p. 133). But it represents a great step forward!

Part I of the book contains the interviews of each theologian. Tamez draws us into the conversation with a brief description of the setting and then begins with a question about the reality of the oppression of women in the Latin American context. Not sur-

Letty M. Russell is Professor of Theology at Yale Divinity School and served for many years as a national missionary of the Presbyterian Church, USA, in the East Harlem Protestant Parish, New York City.

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prisingly, they all say that women are oppressed and that poor women are doubly or triply oppressed at every level: family, church, and society (pp. 29, 96). In asking this question Tamez is clear that action to change the oppression is far more difficult than self-criticism about male privilege, but she is pushing the men at the heart of their commitment. Both she and they know that there will be no liberation in Latin America without the liberation of all oppressed groups, including women. If poor women of color are an indicator of how well the liberation struggles are going, it is time to make a stand against machismo at every level of action, analysis, and reflection.

In Part II, Tamez has the “last word” in her commentary, but the men have the “loudest word” in terms of why persons are reading the book.

Nevertheless, the theologians themselves over and over refer to the stories of women as the authority for what they say. So, in the end, it is the authority of women’s ministry that is changing the ministry of the church in Latin America and changing the minds of the men who share that ministry and commitment to liberation!

—Letty M. Russell

The Teaching of Ecumenics.


This slender volume presents an important first step in articulating a vision of responsible theological education in the contemporary Christian churches. The book brings together essays, largely Protestant, and reports from a consultation sponsored by the World Council covering such areas of ecumenical education as history, systematic, interfaith dialogue, models of unity, social ethics, and Scripture. All college or seminary theology teachers should have the opportunity of reading this material. The bibliography, course outlines, questions, and reports are particularly helpful.

The conference has intentionally put off ecumenical missiological and spirituality education to other conferences and volumes because of their importance. Nevertheless, the Asian, African, and Latin American contributions, as well as the emphasis on interfaith dialogue, make this an important work for missiologists.

The absence of significant papers from Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Evangelical perspectives is unfortunate not only because these represent the majority of Christians in the ecumene, but also because of the unique challenges and gifts these churches bring to the discussions. As is often the case in the West, ecumenical education implies learning about the Orthodox rather than learning from the tradition. Roman Catholic omission is unfortunate because of creative programs and experiences around the world, a presence in the significant programs of the World Council as well as the ecumenical movement’s need of deeper Roman Catholic commitment.

Some, like the systematic and Asian theology papers, could be considered ecumenical only if they were balanced by contributions from other contextual and confessional points of view.

The volume is important, brief, and holds out hopes and challenges for a more complete and ecumenical treatment in the future.

—Jeffrey Gros, F.S.C.

Risking Christ for Christ’s Sake: Towards an Ecumenical Theology of Pluralism.


Catholics in Vatican Council II and Protestants in the World Council of Churches recognize our age of pluralism as “a new stage in human history” (p. 15). The author seeks “to understand and interpret this pluralistic situation . . . from the standpoint of our ultimate commitment to Jesus Christ as the revelation of God” (p. 3). This involves putting our faith “alongside other faiths, and alongside rationality and other human values which we share with others,
allowing the examination of each, including our faith, in the categories of others. In this process we, as Christians, risk Christ for Christ’s sake” (p. 15).

The author traces Catholic thinking from Karl Rahner’s theory of the “anonymous Christian,” through H. R. Schlette and Hans Küng to Raymond Panikkar’s “Trinity and World Religions.” In the description of Protestant developments from Karl Barth through Hendrik Kraemer and his critics A. G. Hogg and P. Chenchiah, the author is very much in his own element. The secularism of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and A. van Leeuwen, and the positive evaluation of the Asian religious reform movements by Stanley Samartha, lead to the synthetic view of Paul Devanandan. The church is called to give witness to our creation renewed in the Risen Christ. This newness, though God’s own work, includes our faith-response, which becomes “part of a cosmic and historical process” (p. 87), and is realized in the Christian koinonia, in secular society, and also in the “world of other faiths”—in the “deep stirrings of the human spirit” (pp. 88f.).

The author points to the ecumenical significance of this development. Starting from different theological positions, Catholics and Protestants have moved toward a comprehensive understanding of the presence of Christ and his Spirit in human history, religious and secular. The new challenge becomes in fact “a problem of interchurch ecumenism at its deepest” (p. 117).

—Joseph Neuner, S.J.

Joseph Neuner, co-author of The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church, is Professor Emeritus of the theological faculty of Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, India.

A Spirituality of Compassion.


In Water and in Blood: A Spirituality of Solidarity and Hope.


However different in theme and character, these two works strikingly illustrate the part that a particular heritage can play in shaping a spiritual message. Joan Puls is a Franciscan sister, and the seven eloquent chapters in which she rings the changes on compassion are vibrant with both the tenderness and the radicality of Francis and Clare. She structures her essay around several pairs—for example, displacement and discipleship, community and church, hope and transformation—and introduces each meditation with a brief quotation from a letter received from another. She has a special gift for interspersing anecdotes and reminiscences with challenging reflections on global issues. She also has a flair for apothegm. She writes from a rich ministerial experience (inner city, overseas ministry in India, service with the World Council of Churches in Geneva). This, together with a truly global outlook and a passionate commitment to justice and peace, helps to make this volume an outstanding work that will nourish the spirit of overseas missionaries and others.

Robert Schreiter, for his part, is a well-known theologian whose previous Constructing Local Theologies made a major contribution to theological reflection on basic Christian communities. A professor at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, he is also a priest of the Society of the Precious Blood. Drawing on the charism of his religious community as well as on his professional acquaintance with the Bible, he has constructed an impressive “spirituality of blood,” which speaks powerfully to today’s situations of violence, conflict, and martyrdom. Each of the twelve chapters is focused on one or more texts of a biblical author. Thus Moses’ directives to the elders (Exodus 12) to sprinkle the doorposts with the blood of lambs, the ritual prescriptions and prohibitions of Leviticus, Paul’s use of blood imagery in speaking of redemption and reconciliation, and the several relevant passages in the Johannine corpus and Hebrews provide a basis for reflections on prayer, suffering, solidarity, and the like. In a brief epilogue Schreiter crystallizes his meditation in the triad blood of the covenant, blood of the cross, blood of the cup. His work, both theologically sound and spiritually attractive, effectively links this important scriptural symbol with the tragic and heroic shedding of blood that marks the present period of history.

—Thomas E. Clarke, S.J.

The Christ and the Faiths: Theology in Cross-Reference.


Kenneth Cragg, the doyen of Christian missionary interpreters of Islam, continues to adorn his retirement with fresh writing. He has now given us a book that extends his thinking not only to Judaism, already tackled in The Privilege of Man (1968) and This Year in Jerusalem (1982), but also to Hinduism and Buddhism. Inevitably these wider excursions are not based on the depth of knowledge and experience that he brings to the consideration of Islam. This must place a question mark over his method, which is to reflect on what he perceives as a central aspect of the faith without attempting any kind of overview of it. This key element is then contrasted with the significance of Christ in what his subtitle calls
"theology in Cross-reference," a typical verbal play.

This procedure opens Cragg to the charge, unusual for Cragg, of a polemic intention, of deciding upon an ultimate critical focus for each faith, and then subordinating every element in it to that issue. He identifies ethnicity, for example, as the clue to Judaism, an exceptionality about the people. "Conceptually and practically, the otherness exists and is decisive" (p. 123). For Hinduism the critique, focused on the historic uniqueness of Jesus, is less sharp, and Cragg is prepared to say that "divine revelation is consummated in the historical Jesus and his cross but is everywhere refracted in the human search" (p. 232). In Buddhism, which Cragg considers only in its Theravada form, he finds a radical refusal to be theological, or to find a place for "intentionality" or a sense of purpose at all.

There is much that is rich and seminal in this book, but it does seem to indicate that Cragg's theological method requires a greater engagement than he has been able to make with three of the four faiths considered here.

—Christopher Lamb

Christopher Lamb, once a missionary in Pakistan, is now Community Relations Adviser to the Diocese of Coventry, in the British Midlands, and has recently completed a doctoral study of the writings of Kenneth Cragg.

Today's Choices for Tomorrow's Mission: An Evangelical Perspective on Trends and Issues in Missions.


As a professor of missions and a former missionary to Japan, David Hesselgrave presents ten major trends and issues in missions today. His background information was derived from reading and analyzing some 1,553 articles in the International Review of Missions and the Evangelical Missions Quarterly over a period of twenty-two years. He also read 444 books or book reviews on missions and an indefinite number of related articles from a variety of sources. It is a scholarly analysis of current trends and can be

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—Justo L. Gonzalez, Adjunct Professor of Church History, Columbia Theological Seminary.

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—Charles Weltner, Justice, Georgia Supreme Court.

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Ralph E. Dodge is a retired missionary and bishop of the United Methodist Church who served in Africa from 1936 to 1980.

April 1989
profitably studied by all those involved in missions, especially new recruits.

The author finds "The challenge to Missions . . . is to keep abreast of a changing world while still embracing the eternal written and living Word" (p. 86). He stresses the importance of the study of prophecy in any program and anticipates our Lord's imminent return. Consequently, "the missionary of the future should not lose sight of two basic facts. First, Christ is building this church around the world. . . . Second, the primary missionary task is outlined in the Great Commission" (p. 196).

I find the first ten chapters of the book highly informative in the review and analysis of current trends in society and in the church. However, in the final two chapters, I was disappointed by the lack of any practical application of that information in the current practice and future planning of missions.

—Ralph E. Dodge

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**Dissertation Notices**

**Carver, E. Earl.**
"An Inquiry into the Spiritual Status of the Unevangelized."

**Goff, James Rudolph, Jr.**
"Fields White unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism."

**Isaiah, Emmanuel Sudhir.**
"Muslim Eschatology and Its Missiological Implications."

**Jones, Richard J.**
"Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Kenneth Cragg on Islam: Their Contrasting Implications for a Theology of Religion and a Theology of Mission."
Ph.D. Toronto: Toronto School of Theology, 1988.

**Kwantes, Anne C.**
"Presbyterian Missionaries in the Philippines: A Historical Analysis of Their Contributions to Social Change (1899–1910)."

**Lenk, Edward Anthony.**
"Mother Marianne Cope (1838–1918): The Syracuse Franciscan Community and Molokai Leper."

**Lumeya, Nzash U.**
"Curse on Ham's Descendants: Its Missiological Impact on Zairian Mbala Mennonite Brethren."

**Nyhus, Edward O. V.**

**Popovich, Frances Blok.**
"The Translation Process and Sociocultural Change: A Case of the Maxakali in Brazil."

**Sanders, Arden Glenn.**
"Learning Styles in Melanesia: Toward the Use and Implications of Kolb's Model for National Translator Training."

**Steuernagel, Valdir Raul.**
"The Theology of Mission in Its Relation to Social Responsibility within the Lausanne Movement."
Th.D. Chicago: Lutheran School of Theology, 1988.
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