Murray Thurston Titus belonged to that breed of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century missionaries who started work on the mission field as evangelists and teachers. When confronted by Islam, Hinduism, and other religions, they tended to become scholars. They saw their scholarship as an intellectual tool to be used in the service of the Gospel. Henry Martyn, Temple Gairdner, J. N. Farquhar, and Samuel Zwemer are names that come readily to mind. Others, less well known, are Edward Sell, L. Bevan Jones, J. W. Sweetman, Dwight L. Donaldson, J. N. Hollister, and Murray Titus, whose life and work is considered here.

Carol Pickering, the daughter of Murray T. Titus, was born and brought up in India and now lives in Cambridge, England.
Born in Batavia, Ohio, on November 5, 1885, the son of Frank M. Titus and Lottie Harrison, Murray T. Titus was educated at Batavia High School and at Ohio Wesleyan University in Delaware, Ohio, from where he graduated in 1908.

While at university he heard the appeal to the young people of America, made by the well-known international missionary John R. Mott, that they should dedicate their lives to missionary service abroad. Titus responded to the appeal and made a decision to give his life to this enterprise. Consequently he applied to the Methodist Board of Foreign Missions and was accepted for service in India.

He was married in July 1910 to Olive Glasgow, who was also keen to work as a missionary, and together they sailed for India in August of that year. Their initial appointment was to Reid Christian College in Lucknow, United Provinces, where Murray taught philosophy and English. They remained in Lucknow for three years. After his ordination in 1913 they were appointed to district work in the Methodist Episcopal Church of North India, where they lived in several districts of the United Provinces doing evangelistic work in the villages. Murray was the district superintendent and ex officio manager of mission boys’ schools in these places. In addition he was elected mission treasurer of the North India Conference in 1914, and some years later he was appointed treasurer of the Executive Board of the Methodist Episcopal Church in India, a position he held for the remainder of his years in India.

In 1941 he was appointed principal of Lucknow (formerly Reid) Christian College, where he remained until 1943, when he returned to America on furlough. While in America he was made an associate secretary to the Board of Missions of the Methodist Church in New York City, being responsible for the work in India, Burma, and Southern Asia.

In 1945 Titus returned to India to take up a new appointment, that of associate secretary of the National Christian Council of India, Burma, and Ceylon at Nagpur, capital of the Central Provinces (now Maharashtra). He remained with the NCC until 1948, when he and his wife returned to the United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh).

In 1951 the failing health of his wife necessitated their early retirement from India. On their return to the United States he was invited to be professor of missions and world religions at Westminster Theological Seminary in Westminster, Maryland, from where he retired in 1955.

Throughout his married life he was greatly sustained and supported by his wife, Olive. Her work always complemented his, whether of teaching, of correspondence to raise money for the support of school boys and girls, for pastors and catechumens, or for founding a primary school for boys in Moradabad. As in all missionary households, there were always visitors. Olive provided the strong home base to which Murray returned from conferences or committee meetings in India or abroad.

Academic Achievements

It was through the influence of Samuel Zwemer, the great American missionary to the Muslim world, who had presided over the Conference of Mission to Muslims, held in Lucknow in 1911, that Murray Titus was inspired to “go and do likewise” and decided to become a missionary specifically to Islam in India.

Titus was soon involved in all that was going on in work among Muslims. He attended the international conferences on mission work in Muslim lands organized by John R. Mott and held in Jerusalem in 1924 and 1928. During the 1924 conference a suggestion made by Murray Titus brought into existence the Newman School of Missions in Jerusalem (a school to help missionaries in the realm of linguistics and relevant studies). He was appointed secretary of the National Christian Council of India, Burma, and Ceylon for work among Muslims, an office he held from 1927 until 1931. In this capacity he helped to organize institutes for workers among Muslims and conducted public evangelistic meetings for Muslims. He was a member of the international committee that prepared a survey of Christian literature in Moslem Lands in Cairo in 1932. He was also secretary for the Central Literature for Muslims Committee of the Indian National Christian Council.

The Henry Martyn School of Islamic Studies was founded in Lahore in 1930 (later transferred to Aligarh and now in Hyderabad) by William Paton, L. Bevan Jones, and Murray Titus. As one of its Board of Managers and one of the lecturers in its Summer School in Landour, Uttar Pradesh, Titus had new opportunities to interest Christians, both missionary and Indian, in the study of Islam. Furthermore, there were now more occasions for dialogue with Muslims.

In 1926 Titus became an associate editor of the Moslem World (later the Muslim World). From 1958 until his death in 1964 he was an advisory editor. He was also an associate editor of the Religious Quest of India series. He was granted a Ph.D. degree in 1927 by the Kennedy School of Missions at Hartford, Connecticut. He had been working toward this degree during his first and second terms of service in India. On his return to the United States on furlough in 1926, he and his family stopped in Cairo for several weeks, as guests of the Zwemers. Titus used this time to improve his Arabic, a necessary preliminary to the completion of his thesis, which in 1930 was published as Indian Islam: A Religious History of Islam in India. A new, revised edition, Islam in India and Pakistan, appeared in 1959. This revision was necessary because, with the partition of India and the birth of Pakistan in August 1947, a wholly new situation with reference to the Muslims of the subcontinent had come about.

In addition to four books, Titus also wrote, between the years 1922 and 1961, some thirty-nine articles and numerous book reviews. Many of these were for the Moslem World; others were for church papers in India and in the United States.

Ideas

In the face of the emerging worldwide challenge to Christianity from Islam, Titus did his best to encourage understanding between Christians and Muslims by urging missionaries and Indian Christians alike to read as widely as possible about Islam and to make use of the Henry Martyn School of Islamic Studies in Lahore. He believed understanding should begin early—hence his book Islam for Beginners (1930) for use by Christian
students in Indian high schools and colleges, and *The Young Moslem Looks at Life* (1937), a study book for young people in America.

Despite his liberalism, his thought reflected a deep concern about panreligion. In “Thoughts on Re-thinking Missions” he claimed that the Laymen’s Appraisal Commission was not sufficiently realistic in its assumption that it would be a simple matter to find many leaders of other faiths eager to enter a panreligious fellowship. He felt that too much importance had been attached to the development of a “world culture.” His Christocentric outlook made him reject any possibility of some sort of panreligion (pp. 3–5). Although he saw the danger of secularization swamping religion, yet at the time at which he was writing, India had not yet been greatly affected by its inroads. The religions of India were still vigorous and able to guard their religious and cultural heritage, nor had the problem of the relation of Christianity to other religions undergone any marked change. But the earlier aggressive attitude of missionaries toward other religions was increasingly giving way to the exposition of the Christian way of life.

He believed that there was more danger in exclusiveness among Christians than there was in adopting a courageous openness toward non-Christian faiths. He advocated orientation courses for missionaries to prepare them for dialogue with people of other religions, and he urged that a school, similar to the Henry Martyn School of Islamic Studies, be organized at Benares for the study of Hinduism and its culture.

He pointed out that Islam had been in contact with Hinduism in India for twelve centuries. Differences of belief and communal aspirations on the one hand contended with an instinct for communal preservation on the other, and this had been the cause of much friction between the communities through the centuries, continuing to the present day. The only way that India could ever hope to achieve national unity would be if the two great religious communities, which shared so much—language, blood relationship, and native land—could overcome the impasse in which they found themselves.

He held the conviction, like so many optimistic Christian thinkers of his day, that once Christ is fully understood by the people of other faiths, he will be readily accepted by them. The conviction that the story of Christ in itself is the instrument of conversion appears often in his writings, for example, in “Thoughts on Re-thinking Missions,” and in a lecture “What Christianity Teaches;” delivered in 1929 at a meeting to celebrate the golden jubilee of the Arya Samaj.

Again, in the article “Thoughts on Re-thinking Missions,” Titus took issue with the theology of liberalization and humanism and stated that it had not sufficiently stressed the doctrine of the new birth, the work of the Holy Spirit, or the death and resurrection of Christ. He saw the church as a body of people who had a common bond of commitment to Christianity and who contributed their full share toward making it an embodiment of the ideas and ideals for which Christ lived and died.

Allying himself with many other Protestant missionaries, he considered that their aim should be to establish a fully self-supporting church under the control of local Christians. Once again to quote from the article “Thoughts on Re-thinking Missions,” he said, “It is generally agreed that we [i.e., the church in India] should be better off today than there been less of paternalism and more definite insistence on self-support from the very beginning” (pp. 13–14).

The imperative of the Gospel was the mainspring of his life. The charge to go and preach could never be rescinded or modified out of recognition. He was certain that a missionary should never hesitate to carry out Christ’s commission literally. But he felt that Christians and the missionary enterprise had failed. In an article “Facing the Future” (1944), he regretted that in so many places the missionary method and approach had been ineffectual because missionaries had not appealed to the Muslim heart and had failed too often to make friendly and loving contact in simple human terms. “Islam still stands as the supreme challenge to all the genius, ability, faith, hope, love, devotion and consecration that the followers of Christ can mobilize. To this end it is clear, therefore, that we desperately need a re-vitalizing of our entire approach to the Moslem peoples” (p. 164).

**Assessment of His Life**

In the *Muslim World* in 1963, a year before his death, Murray Titus was described by Dwight M. Donaldson as a missionary who exhibited in his life and work the process of specialization while he was actively engaged in educational work. In order to “make Christ better understood by his Christian and non-Christian friends” he sought to master the language, history and something of the literature of the people with whom he was to work” (p. 324).

At a more personal level, Henry Wilson wrote in *The Indian Witness* (1964) of Murray Titus’s love for the people of India and for his fellow workers. He could spot able young people and tried to push them forward in the service of the church. He ends his testimony with the words: “The influence of Dr. and Mrs. Titus on my life was so much that I feel that what I am today is mostly due to their influence. There must be scores of other such examples in Indian Methodism. Titus was a builder in the real sense.”

Murray Titus was dedicated to spreading the Christian Gospel because of a profound conviction of the sovereignty of Christ. Although he took this unequivocal position, he was also eager to examine with great care the truth claims of other religions, particularly those of Islam. In order to promote honest dialogue between people of different faiths, he wanted Christians and non-Christians alike to study critically their own and other religions. He saw this as a crucial part of the task in Christian mission.

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