To Evangelize or Proselytize?

Are Western Protestant missionaries who work in areas of the world where Christian churches date back many centuries evangelizing or proselytizing?

Proselytism has been characterized as "the corruption of witness." But as Cecil Robeck observes in our lead article, "One group's evangelization is another group's proselytism." For three decades the problem of proselytism has been the special concern of ecumenically minded Protestant, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic leaders. Robeck's survey of the process brings us to a significant new development: an invitation to those most often charged with proselytism—evangelicals and Pentecostals—to join the discussion.

In an in-depth study of the situation in the Middle East, or "West Asia/North Africa," David Kerr, quoting a Lebanese theologian, asserts that in a truly ecumenical environment, the evangelizers would find opportunity to revive nominal Christians "in and for their own traditions." But in the absence of healthy ecumenical relationships, "evangelism itself . . . becomes the casualty of 'sheep-stealing' mission."

Miroslav Volf analyzes the situation in Eastern Europe, as seen by the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches: Protestant missionaries, "equipped with the latest fishing gear, are eagerly fishing for poor souls in the Orthodox pond, left partly unattended during decades of Communist rule." Protestants, however, see such objections as confirmation of the need for their gospel witness. Responding to Volf, Leonid Kishkovsky adds that abusive criticism of Orthodox theology, worship, and witness "is often the first point of Protestant witness made in an Orthodox context."

Eugene Heideman's biblical study revolves around the distinction between "convert" and "proselyte." He concludes that the situations we face today find little parallel in the New Testament era. He also concludes that the Christian convert who succeeds in avoiding being labeled a proselyte may nevertheless face the dilemma of cultural and religious alienation. A convert's experience may mirror that of Jesus himself, who "came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him."

There is a growing consensus today that proselytism is a kind of evangelistic malpractice, and that it continues to be a widespread problem. But as Paul Lößler has cautioned, despite agreement in principle, "the distinctions [between proselytism and evangelism] are not so easily drawn in practice" (Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, 1991). We offer this issue of the INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN in hopes of moving the discussion forward.

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Mission and the Issue of Proselytism

Cecil M. Robeck, Jr.

Proselytism is a blight on the veracity of the Christian message and on the effectiveness of Christian mission. Almost weekly one can pick up a local newspaper or Christian periodical and find a story in which the members of one group are charged with attempting to lure members of another group into their ranks. The heat and animosity generated by such allegations and activities hold explosive potential in many parts of the world.

Proselytism, as G. R. Evans observes, “is a sign that the sense of sharing a common mind has broken down.” This breakdown may be observed at two levels. First, it can be seen in the multitude of Christian communities that do not respect or recognize the genuineness or fullness of ecclesial claims made by other communities that call themselves Christian. Second, it can be observed in our inability or unwillingness to work together on a common definition of terms. To date, one group’s evangelization is still another group’s proselytism.

Besides the disparity between definitions of the problem, even the assumptions that undergird certain definitions are not shared by all. Evans argues, “If I think you are already in Christ in his Church where you are, I shall not want to win you for my Church. Indeed, I shall regard you as already a member of it.” But many of us can think of situations in which this basic assumption is not shared, and evangelistic or missional activity continues unabated. As a result, sincere efforts of Christian witness may be seen as proselytism, creating division rather than reconciliation.

What is proselytism? How is it being defined? And who is defining it? It is not my concern to redefine or to do away with the term “proselytism” but to explore its common usages in such a way as to preserve the legitimate place for a noncoercive, sensitive evangelism.

In January 1994 Armenian Orthodox Catholicos Karekin II visited the United States. While he was in Southern California, he shared some of his concerns about the interface between the Orthodox and evangelicals. Since the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe, he reported, many evangelicals have made trips to that region of the world to engage in what they call evangelism. Some of them met with Catholicos Karekin himself. When they did, they found him dressed in clerical attire, wearing a cross. Although they knew who he was, they nevertheless pressed him on the question of whether or not he knew Jesus.

“They ignore the fact that Eastern Orthodox Christians are just that—Christians,” he protested. He went on to point out that “Christianity is not something we have inherited from the West but something that has been with us since the beginning of the Christian era.” Such stories are common among Orthodox leaders in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, and they serve notice to evangelicals on the whole that they could use some lessons both in theology and church history—not to mention the kindness and common courtesy of 1 Corinthians 13:4-5.

Evangelicals know remarkably little about Eastern Orthodoxy. But this is not the total story. The Orthodox know far too little about evangelicals. One need only note the action of Archbishop Iakovos, archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, who issued an encyclical letter in September 1994 declaring Seventh-day Adventists, the Assemblies of God, and Pentecostals to be “religious groups which are not of the Christian tradition.” Fortunately, the damage has been somewhat ameliorated through the issuance of a corrective that declares that “most congregations of the Assemblies of God, Pentecostals and Seventh-day Adventists are of the Christian Tradition. Some are not.”

Much more positive is the work undertaken in a joint evangelization project called Mission Volga. Beginning in the spring of 1992 some leaders in the Russian Orthodox Church and a number of evangelical parachurch leaders worked out an evangelistic program that resulted in 100,000 people responding to invitations; through a series of televised events, Mission Volga was seen by some 25 million people.

The ignorance of some evangelicals often leads to what can only be called proselytism. On other occasions, such as occurred with Mission Volga, there may be cooperative efforts that are both evangelistically effective and successful in avoiding the proselytism label. But in still other situations, the charge of proselytism would appear to be unwarranted. Rules that are unilaterally declared regarding geographic or cultural boundaries are clearly debatable. Consider, for example, unchurched Hispanic Catholics who are contacted by evangelizing Protestants. On one hand, any charge that such Protestants do not take...
In more recent years, the Orthodox Church throughout Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union has been deeply troubled by what it perceives to be an invasion of groups bent upon proselytizing those whom it understands to be part of its legitimate flock. Many groups—from historic Protestant denominations to younger churches, independent evangelists, parachurch organizations, and so-called sects, cults, and new religious movements—have rejoiced at the new freedoms available in the whole of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, or Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Many have taken advantage of the situation to carry their message into Eastern Europe and the CIS. Sometimes they are sensitive to the cultural and religious histories of the region, but often they are not. Zeal frequently outruns knowledge.

It is equally clear that the Orthodox Church, dominant in this region for a millennium, counts on its cultural link with the past to move ahead after the era of Soviet suppression. Yet the seventy-year presence of Communism, with its intense persecution of the churches, has produced an enormous spiritual vacuum. The national churches, Orthodox and otherwise, find themselves with inadequate resources to fill this vacuum. Protestant and other groups from the West are entering the region with a distinct advantage. They are often able to afford to do things that the Orthodox churches can still only dream of.

As a result of this “invasion,” the primates of the Orthodox churches issued a formal statement on March 15, 1992, in which they charged that the traditional Orthodox countries are now being viewed as “missionary territories” by a variety of groups that are setting up missionary networks and proselytizing. Of particular note in this statement is the reference to the then-unresolved Uniate issue in the Ukraine, Romania, East Slovakia, and the former Soviet Union, zeal outruns knowledge.

spans more than a century and a half. As Norman A. Horner has noted, the charge of proselytism may have emerged when Protestant missionaries were disappointed in their efforts to evangelize Muslims, so that they turned their attention instead to members of the various Orthodox communities already present in the region. A number of studies on the subject have been undertaken by the Middle East Council of Churches and individual members of the council.

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The cultural and ecclesial insensitivity of some contemporary groups has been extremely disturbing to Orthodox and other Christians who paid a severe price for their faithfulness in the midst of Communist oppression. Such insensitivity needs to be challenged.

But it also appears that the Orthodox, who admittedly are ill
prepared to rush into a fully democratic, societal pluralism, have overreacted. In late 1994 the theological commission of the Russian Orthodox Church recommended to the governing synod that it withdraw from membership in the World Council of Churches "in protest over continuing 'missionary intrusions' in Russia by other churches." Their claims seem to overlook the impact of the seventy-year reign of atheistic ideals, as though to deny that it had any effect. The region is claimed as "Orthodox," which must be understood as "Christian," merely because in times past the Gospel has been preached there, the culture has been Christianized, and the Orthodox Church is entitled to cultural hegemony. The Orthodox have essentially defined proselytism so broadly that any missionary or evangelistic activity undertaken by non-Orthodox within these countries is labeled illegitimate, and those who are active in such practices are frequently described as thieves.

**Roman Catholics and the Issue of Proselytism**

A similar situation exists in Latin America, where it is the Roman Catholic Church that raises the charge of proselytism. The arguments used by Roman Catholics in Latin America, which are deeply rooted in claims to cultural hegemony, are similar to those used by the Orthodox elsewhere. Similarly, alleged proselytizers are accused of theological and cultural insensitivity.

At Vatican II, the Roman Catholic Church condemned proselytism. In its "Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity" *(Ad gentes)*, the council noted, "The Church strictly forbids that anyone should be forced to accept the faith, or be induced or enticed by unworthy devices." No one should be "forced to act against his convictions nor is anyone to be restrained from acting in accordance with his convictions in religious matters."

It is noteworthy that while the council wished to safeguard people from coercion, inducements, and enticements, it did not wish to discourage mission. This is stated clearly in the "Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People" *(Apostolicam actuositatem)*. "A member who does not work at the growth of the body to the extent of his possibilities," the bishops noted, "must be considered useless both to the Church and to himself" *(italics mine)*. Members were encouraged to engage in evangelization as well as acts of charity. In order to safeguard these acts of charity from criticism such as the charge of proselytism, the bishops encouraged members to look for the *imago Dei* in those to whom they sought to minister. "The liberty and dignity of the person helped must be respected with the greatest sensitivity," they argued. "Purity of intention should not be stained by any self-seeking or desire to dominate. The demands of justice must first of all be satisfied."

In 1993 Cardinal Cassidy, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, made a helpful distinction between "sects" and those who may at times exhibit sectarian attitudes. This distinction, he noted, was made as a result of two important dialogues that have included evangelicals and Pentecostals.

In spite of these welcome and obvious changes at the upper levels of the Roman curia, the word on the street is that evangelicals continue to be viewed and treated as though they were proselytizing sectarians, especially in Latin America. A speech that John Paul II gave on October 12, 1992, in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, as he began the Episcopal Conference of Latin American Bishops, clearly employed the language of "sects" to describe non-Catholic movements. While it is unclear whether the pope intended to include evangelicals and, in particular, Pentecostals in the category of "rapacious wolves," other Catholic voices certainly did. Evangelicals and Pentecostals are viewed as the most substantive part of the "problem of the sects" in Latin America. Pentecostals are especially singled out by the bishops of California and of the Sonoran region of Mexico as being among the "sects or new religious groups . . . most aggressive in their proselytizing." As such, they would be viewed and treated according to the 1986 Vatican report *Sects, Cults, and New Religious Movements*.

This stance is grounded in the assumption of historical and cultural continuity. "Many . . . Hispanic people have lived all their lives in a thoroughly Catholic environment and have been formed as Christians by the tradition, culture, piety and religious practices of the Catholic Church." But this is an unfair judgment on two counts. First, it does not take seriously the presence of evangelicals who are themselves Hispanic and who have been part of the Hispanic culture for a century or more. Second, evangelicals are being told that even though vast multitudes of Hispanic people rarely ever darken the doorway of a church, they should be considered Christian; they remain Roman Catholic and are therefore off-limits to non-Roman Catholic mission. "We feel," write the bishops of Alta and Baja California, that evangelicals display "a lack of understanding and appreciation both of the rich history of the Catholic faith in Hispanic culture and of the theology of baptism."

Over against the "sects" the bishops list the "historic churches"—the Orthodox Church, Protestant churches stemming from the Reformation, and the Anglican Church. These are viewed as ecumenical because of their search for Christian unity and their respect for "all religious beliefs." This suggests that very little, if any, evangelization is being undertaken by these churches in Latin America, which may account for their relative lack of growth as compared with evangelicals throughout that region. These churches do not challenge Roman Catholic claims to cultural hegemony and thus do not threaten the place of Roman Catholicism in Latin American life.

Latin America is not the only region of the world where the Roman Catholic Church has been concerned about the issue of proselytism. In preparation for the special synod of African bishops in 1994, a working paper titled "Evangelizing Mission of the Church in Africa" astutely described both the problems and the possibilities for the evangelization of Africa by Roman Catholics, one of the problems being the rapid growth of what are termed "sects and new religious movements." Among these groups are included the many African Independent Churches, which are accused of embracing an "unyielding fundamentalism or aggressive proselytizing." Other groups are also charged with proselytism, defined as "pressuring people to conversion by methods unworthy of the gospel, and offensive propaganda against fellow Christians." Competition between groups is also portrayed as problematic within the African context, especially in relation to such things as "initial proclamation [evangelization], rivalries over schools, the siting of churches and the presenting of candidates for public office."

Two documents produced over the past decade—one officially in relation to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and the other a more recent and unofficial statement produced in the United States—have addressed the subject of proselytism. In each of these cases, evangelicals have contributed to the discussion in significant ways. The second of the two statements, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium," has produced considerable reflection, discussion, and consternation on the part of the con-
sttuencies of both traditions. It is obvious from the wording of the title that the drafters capitalized on some of the hard work done by certain bilateral texts and on some of the documents of Vatican II. The document charges both evangelicals and Catholics with attempting “to win ‘converts’ from one another’s folds.” It condemns the practice of “sheep stealing” because it undermines Christian mission, reflects poor stewardship, and involves practices that violate the Gospel. The drafters recognize that both faith communities possess the “opportunity and means of growth in Christian discipleship.” They call for respect for those who are “active adherents of another Christian community” and for the decisions made by people who have joined one group or the other. They condemn various forms of coercion, the bearing of false witness, the presentation of unjust and unbalanced caricatures and stereotypes, and other unworthy practices. Also condemned is “denominational or institutional agrandizement,” examples of which are not given; this is a charge, like the use of coercion, that shows up repeatedly in recent documents on proselytism.33

In some respects, the earlier document, Evangelical–Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission (ERCDOM), is more thoughtfully constructed. Proselytism, according to ERCDOM, is a perversion of genuine evangelism, a form of “unworthy witness.” The drafters explore the reasons for proselytism, including definitional problems over categories of church members such as “lapsed,” “inactive,” and “nominal,” and the problems inherent in the ecclesiological distinction between the “visible” and the “invisible” church. Finally, drawing from the 1970 document “Common Witness and Proselytism” (produced by a joint theological commission of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches), they emphasize three aspects of the document. Proselytism occurs wherever the evangelizer’s motive is unworthy, the methods are unworthy, or the message is “unjust or uncharitable” in its portrayal of the other’s faith community.34

Proselytism and the World Council of Churches

Proselytism has been on the agenda of the World Council of Churches at least since 1954. Following the Evanston Assembly, the Central Committee of the WCC appointed a commission to study the subject of proselytism and religious liberty. This was undertaken because of “difficulties which had arisen affecting relationships between member churches.”35 The commission produced its report in July 1956. It was revised by the Central Committee, July 28–August 4, 1956, and finally passed at the New Delhi Assembly in 1967 and published that fall under the title “Christian Witness, Proselytism, and Religious Freedom.”36

Providing the groundwork for continuing discussions within the council itself, “Christian Witness” also held implications for the relationship between council members and churches that were not part of the council. Proselytism, which was termed a “corruption of witness,” included such actions as cajolery, bribery, intimidation, placing an organization’s success before Christ’s honor, comparing one’s strengths with the weaknesses of others, bearing false witness against other churches, and the replacing of love for souls with self-aggrandizing motives.37 It is worth observing that this paper was adopted by the WCC at a time when a number of Orthodox groups joined the council and when the International Missionary Council was incorporated within the structure of the WCC.38

The WCC continued to work on the topic throughout the 1960s, in particular, with the Roman Catholic Church immediately following Vatican II. In May 1970 a Joint Theological Commission released “Common Witness and Proselytism: A Study Document” and recommended that it be studied by the Joint Working Group, which had been established in 1965 to facilitate common agenda items between the WCC and the Vatican. The Joint Working Group went on to recommend that the member churches of the WCC also examine the document.39

In “Common Witness and Proselytism” the definition of proselytism focuses on “whatever violates the right of the human person, Christian or non-Christian, to be free from external coercion in religious matters, or whatever, in proclamation of the Gospel, does not conform to the ways God draws free men to himself in response to his calls to serve in spirit and in truth.” The document describes various actions that should be avoided, actions thus identified as proselytizing activities. Included is the condemnation of coercion, whether physical, moral, or psychological, which would tend to deprive human beings of freedom of choice and full autonomy. Here the document points out that “certain abuse of mass communications can have this effect.” Offers of aid, whether “open or disguised,” given with the expectation that someone would receive them if he or she converts, are condemned. The offering of inducements, exploitation of weakness, the raising of suspicions about others, improper motivations linked to “social, economic, or political pressure,” and the use of “unjust and uncharitable references” about other religious communities are also included in the broader definition of proselytism.40

A decade later, Norman Horner authored a helpful historical overview of discussions on proselytism. He concluded that especially in the Middle East, where the Orthodox had lived for centuries as a highly restricted minority, other Christians, including Catholics, Protestants, and what he called a “a variety of small, sectarian groups,” needed to develop better definitions for evangelism and proselytism, and a better understanding of the culture in which these ancient Orthodox churches exist.41

In 1988–89, Raymond Fung, secretary for evangelism for the WCC, published a series of letters on the topic, which have now been collected in his book Evangelically Yours. He began by noting that proselytism constitutes “sheep-stealing or coercive

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and improper attempts to convert.” Fung went on to ask also about the concrete circumstances that give rise to proselytism. His collection of letters from Ethiopia, the United States, Costa Rica, the Philippines, Pakistan, and the Netherlands is revealing. Fung concluded his study by referring to the 1970 document “Common Witness and Proselytism” and by offering several observations. He suggested that as the issue of common witness is emphasized, there will be a corresponding decrease in proselytism. He called for theological and missiological exchanges on the subject. And he urged his readers to engage in preaching the Gospel without worrying about whether one’s own group would grow as a result.42

During the 1990s, the World Council of Churches has been engaged in another major study on the issue of proselytism. Certain staff members of the WCC met in the Orthodox Center in

January 1996
Chambésy, Switzerland, on February 24–27, 1993. The results of that meeting were subsequently published under the title “Towards Responsible Relations in Mission.” The group stated that “commitment to evangelism is inseparable from the commitment to the unity of the Body of Christ.” Of most significance is the claim that participants in this study group “shared the reality of the pain that unilateral and insensitive mission activity has caused.” “Invasion” language is used to describe the “proselytizing activities of sects and new religious movements” and the “unilateral mission work by churches, groups and agencies who are not members of the WCC.”

The report attempts to think theologically about the relationship between proselytism and “communion of churches.” One result is that if the idea of koinonia is allowed to serve as a basis for understanding the church, “competition in mission activities, proselytism, the creation of parallel church structures and interference in the life of already existing churches would be avoided.”

In August 1993 the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order of the WCC convened in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, with the issue of proselytism again on the agenda. Perhaps more than at any time since 1970, new concerns were factored into the discussion. The idea of a fuller koinonia was central to the meeting. Proselytism was viewed as including the use of coercive and manipulative methods in the act of “evangelism” that lead to the distortion of “the real though imperfect koinonia Christians already share.”

The conference delegates proposed that the WCC undertake a new study of “mission, evangelism, and proselytism,” for which they offered a four-point rationale. First, Christians who are not part of the WCC are often charged with proselytism, but seldom are they part of the discussion in which such charges emerge. This needs to change. Second, those who have succumbed to the “proselytizing” efforts of others are seldom if ever debriefed by the community they leave. Representative “proselytes” should be included in future discussions; their testimony may have value. Third, churches that are losing their sheep need to have an opportunity to ask why. Fourth, a forum is needed in which the accusers and the accused may face one another in a constructive way such as is outlined in Matthew 18.

Finally, two affirmations emerged from the group. First, it was affirmed that most persons engaging in proselytism “do so out of a genuine concern for the salvation of those whom they address.” Second, it was acknowledged that churches that show signs of spiritual vitality in “faith, life, and witness” appear to be relatively immune to losses resulting from proselytism.

Georges Lemopoulos reports that, in follow up to the meeting in Spain, the WCC’s Unit II has pursued the subject, and that, in cooperation with Faith and Order and Unit II, the Joint Working Group has completed a study document titled “The Challenge of Proselytism and the Calling of Common Witness.”

The WCC and Interreligious Proselytism

In spite of all these conferences and study groups, proselytism persists as a major concern. This is true for two reasons. First is the collapse of Communism in the former Soviet Union and the changing social and religious landscape that has followed. Second is the transformation or broadening of ecumenical commitments by some members of the WCC to include Jews and, for that matter, members of other world religions. In the first instance, we can see the rise of concern as is evidenced by the cries of the Orthodox. In regard to the second, we need to look briefly at the issue of what might be called interreligious proselytism.

A troubling understanding of proselytism is one that is receiving considerable attention within many conciliar and Roman Catholic circles and that is also beginning to receive discussion in evangelical circles. It involves the idea that the evangelization of people of other living faiths may ultimately prove to be an act of proselytism. Certainly within countries such as those in which Islam is the dominant religion, anti-Christian evangelization laws exist. The Islamic majority clearly labels violations of these laws as acts of proselytism. But it is troubling that many Christians seem to be coming to similar conclusions.

Evangelicals, however, are bound to insist that the message of the Gospel is intended to go out both to the Jew and to the Gentile (Rom. 1:16–17). Evangelicals hold, therefore, that the message of God’s salvation, made available uniquely and ultimately in Jesus Christ, is something to be proclaimed to every person and to every race. The Jewish people, and peoples of other living faiths, are no exception to Jesus’ Great Commission in Matthew 28: 19–20.

The World Council of Churches clearly held to this position in the past. In its 1948 Assembly convened in Amsterdam, the WCC received a report entitled “The Christian Approach to the Jews,” in which this issue was spelled out explicitly: “All of our churches stand under the commission of our common Lord, ‘Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.’ The fulfillment of this commission requires that we include the Jewish people in our evangelistic task.”

Because the Holocaust lay in such close proximity to the founding of the WCC, it is understandable that the WCC and its various constituencies should seek greater understanding of the Jewish people and their faith. Dialogue between a number of different WCC member denominations and the Jews, as well as between Roman Catholics and Jews, has raised a number of very important questions about the covenantal relationship between God and the Jews, between God and the church, and between the church and the Jews before God. But the verdict is still out on whether, on theological grounds, Israel still has a “valid covenant with God” or whether the churches may need to “proscribe all proselytism of Jews.”

The latter position, set forth by Allan Brockway, is at best premature, but it is not difficult to detect movement in this direction by some of the member churches of the WCC. Simon Schoon observes that in recent years “the WCC and its member churches [have moved] away from the missionary approach to the Jews towards a dialogical relationship between the churches and the Jewish people.” For many, this has been accompanied by a parallel movement away from direct missionary effort. Dialogue, as the Presbyterian Church (USA) noted in its 1987 study “A Theological Understanding of the Relationship Between Christians and Jews,” “is not a cover for proselytism.”

The idea that proselytism and dialogue—real, genuine, give-and-take dialogue—could go hand-in-hand violates the meaning of both terms.

From an evangelical perspective, the point of disagreement comes when evangelization and proselytism are equated. In an increasingly pluralistic world, when dialogue is set against a negative idea such as proselytism, and when proselytism is viewed as a synonym for evangelism, the implications are entirely unacceptable to evangelicals.

Eugene Stockwell has recently noted that the issue of pluralism is posing a whole new set of questions for the church. If dialogue qua dialogue replaces evangelism or mission, one must ask, Does the missionary mandate of the church get lost? Do the exclusive claims of Jesus Christ, and therefore the claims of the
Gospel, get lost as well? What happens if some churches or even the WCC ultimately decides that a “pluralism of faiths” is actually God’s intention rather than the long-held idea that God intends “that everyone on earth should be a Christian”? Is the next step to suggest that the evangelization of people of other “living faiths” is in fact proselytism and therefore ought to be banned?

Conclusion

Speaking from an evangelical perspective, I conclude with five observations. First, definitions and applications of the term “proselytism” differ, depending upon who defines them and where they are applied. Second, those who use the term have defined it for evangelicals rather than with evangelicals. Third, when the term is defined for another group and then unilaterally applied to that group, the issue becomes one of ecclesial oppression. Fourth, since those who most frequently invoke the charge of proselytism against younger churches were themselves in earlier times engaged in similar activities, the older churches may well run the risk of self-incrimination. Fifth, it would be wrong to judge evangelicals as not having any sympathy for the wrongness or inappropriateness of proselytism, for they have publicly recognized its evils.

I believe that most evangelicals would agree that those who have a demonstrably active living faith in Jesus Christ should not be treated as persons to be evangelized. I also believe that evangelicals would agree that any form of evangelization that is coercive, deceptive, or manipulative in nature is unworthy of the name and should be labeled as proselytism and condemned. The term “proselytism,” however, cannot be applied indiscriminately to all evangelistic activity. Space must be left for legitimate evangelistic efforts directed at persons of other religious communities when the affiliation of such persons is merely nominal.

Notes


2. In particular, I think of recent attempts to pass legislation in the Commonwealth of Independent States that would restrict a great deal of evangelization and that would have the potential of aiding more repressive elements in the current parliament.


4. Ibid.


6. Archbishop Iakovos to the Pastors and Reverend Priests of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America as well as the report of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, “Uniatism, Method of Union of the Past, and the Present Search for Full Communion,” Ecumenical Trends 22, no. 8 (September 1993): 4–7.


11. In the Old Testament the original proselyte was a Gentile foreigner and came under the protection of God in the midst of Israel (Exod. 22:21; Deut. 29:10–15). Later, as they assimilated into the whole of Israel’s life, proselytes were seen as Gentiles who believed in Israel’s God, with or without the mark of circumcision. The term appears in the New Testament only four times (Matt. 23:15; Acts 2:10; 6:5; 13:43). Only in Matt. 23:15 is there a negative connotation to the term.


15. George Otis, Jr., and his staff at the Sentinel Group in Seattle, Washington, gave a report, “The Holy Spirit Around the World,” in “Rebuilding the Fires of Faith,” Charisma 18, no. 6 (January 1993): 55–56, 58–59, in which the breadth of work undertaken in the whole of Eastern Europe by new groups is displayed. The work of Pentecostal and charismatic groups is viewed as evangelism and mission activity. It is noted, however, that “proselytizing by cults is another problem in the former Soviet republics. Mormon, Hindu, Baha’i and Buddhist groups are recruiting members, as are various proponents of occult and New Age doctrines” (p. 59).


17. “Message of the Primates,” p. 58. Since the message was issued in 1992, the Uniate problem has been largely resolved. See the work of the Pontifical Commission for Russia, “Principles and Norms: Evangelization and Ecumenism in Former Soviet Territories,” Origins 22, no. 5 (June 11, 1993): 301–4, as well as the report of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, “Uniatism, Method, Union of the Past, and the Present Search for Full Communion,” Ecumenical Trends 22, no. 8 (September 1993): 4–7.

18. “Message of the Primates,” p. 58. Leaders from two former Soviet republics, the Ukraine and Armenia (the one political, the other ecclesiastical), have made similar comments in the American press. Mary Mycio quotes Dmytro Karchynsky of the Ukrainian National Assembly as ridiculing the missionaries who preach on Kiev’s TV stations: “They use Russian translators” (“America Losing Luster in Ukraine,” p. H2).


22. Dignitatis humanae (“Declaration on Religious Liberty”) 2.


24. It is indeed gratifying and significant to note Cardinal Cassidy’s informed and carefully nuanced distinction between “sects or new religious movements” that do not participate in ecumenical dialogue and those groups that have participated in ecumenical dialogue,
even if on a relatively limited scale. He notes, "We must be careful, however, not to confuse the issue by lumping under the term 'sect,' groups that do not deserve that title. I am not speaking here, for instance, about the evangelical movement among Protestants, nor about Pentecostalism as such. The Pontifical Council has had fruitful dialogue and significant contacts with certain evangelical groups and with Pentecostals. Indeed, one can speak of a mutual enrichment as a result of these contacts" (Edward Idris Cardinal Cassidy, "Prolusio" [given at the Meeting of Representatives of the National Episcopal Commissions for Ecumenism, Rome, May 5–10, 1993], in the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity's Information Service, no. 84 [1993/III–IV]: 122). While the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity has made it clear that many evangelicals and Pentecostals do not fall under the categories that are the focus of the 1986 document Sects or New Religious Movements: Pastoral Challenge (Rome: Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, May 3, 1986), much of the language of the document leaves open the possibility that bishops may apply this work to evangelicals and Pentecostals. This seems particularly the case in Latin America. See "Vatican Reports on Sects, Cults, and New Religious Movements," Origins 16, no. 1 (May 22, 1986): 2–10. Haynes, "Brazil’s Catholics Launch ‘Holy War,’" highlights the work of Bishop Sinesio Bohn in this regard. Quite understandably, Latin American Protestants resent being referred to as sects, a term they reserve for groups such as the Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses.


20. John Paul II, "Opening Address to Fourth General Conference of Latin American Episcopate," Origins 22, no. 19 (October 22, 1992): 326, sec. 12. In an interesting exchange on this issue, one of which I have been a part, Edward L. Cleary, O.P., wrote "John Paul Cries ‘Wolf’: Misreading the Pentecostals," Commonweal 119, no. 20 (November 20, 1992): 7–8, in which he lamented the pope’s language, which tends to feed old stereotypes, especially about Pentecostals. In response, I wrote a letter to the editor that was printed under the title "What the Pope Said," Commonweal 119, no. 22 (December 18, 1992): 30–31. In my letter I affirmed Cleary’s point and applauded the pope’s recommendations to his bishops on steps to stop the problem of "fleeing sheep." The pope had suggested that the flock was not receiving adequate feeding from the church. I argued that the very issues the pope addressed to the bishops were the issues that Pentecostals and evangelicals had lifted up throughout this century. A rebuttal to my letter came from James Chichetto, C.S.C., "Dubious Tactics," Commonweal 120, no. 2 (January 29, 1993): 2, in which he argued that evangelicals and Pentecostals are indeed "rapacious wolves" bent upon "destructive proselytism." Cleary submitted a subsequent edition printed under the title "El maltrato de la jerarquia," the bishops have suggested. See "Perspectives on Koinonia," Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies 12, no. 2 (Fall 1990): 125–31, especially secs. 41, 47–51. See also Cecil M. Rebeck, Jr., and Jerry L. Sandidge, The Ecclesiology of Koinonia and Baptist: A Pentecostal Perspective, Journal of Ecumenical Studies 27, no. 3 (Summer 1990): 504–34.


30. Ibid., p. 11, sec. 8; pp. 18–19, sec. 27. See also p. 17, sec. 25.


34. Ibid., p. 238.


36. Ibid., p. 257.

37. See, for instance, the review article by John G. Stockhouse, Jr., "Evangelicals Reconsider World Religions: Betraying or Affirming the Tradition?" Christian Century 110 (September 8–15, 1993): 858–65, in which the author studies the recent thought of Clark Pinnock and John Sanders.


39. This action is suggested by Allan Brockway in "Final Reflections," Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People, p. 186.

40. Ibid., pp. 173, 114.

41. The Presbyterian Church does not employ “evangelization” and “proselytization” synonymously. Brockway, who at the time this book was published was program secretary for Jewish-Christian relations at the WCC, appears to be at odds with the Presbyterians in this matter.

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Proselytism, Mission, and the Bible

Eugene P. Heideman

The charge of proselytism is frequently raised against churches and mission agencies, typically coming against those involved in explicit evangelistic outreach. In suspicion about another's motives, however, it may also be leveled even against those who are involved in relief and development activities. "In discussion of the issue, proselytism is often given a very broad definition, such as: Proselytism embraces whatever violates the right of the human person, Christian or non-Christian, to be free from external coercion in religious matters, or whatever, in the proclamation of the Gospel, does not conform to the ways God draws free men to himself in response to his calls to serve in spirit and in truth."¹

Convert versus Proselyte

In the following study of biblical evidence, we take note of a dictionary's distinction between a convert and a proselyte:

"Convert commonly implies a sincere and voluntary change of belief; it is, therefore, the designation preferred by the church, the party, or the school of thought of which such a person becomes a new member. . . . Proselyte may suggest less a reverter or convicted and voluntary embracing than a yielding to the persuasions and urgings of another, be it an earnest missionary or zealot or someone with less praiseworthy motives. . . . Proselyte is often the designation chosen by the members of a church for one formerly of their number who has been converted to another faith."²

We can easily agree that the exercise of coercion and the violation of the rights of human persons is not consistent with the Gospel. The most heated objections to proselytism arise when persons are understood to transfer their loyalty and membership from one religious community or church to another. Are such persons converts, or are they proselytes?

In the Greek Old Testament prosēlytos (proselyte) occurs frequently and is used to translate the Hebrew gēr, which means "resident alien" or "sojourner in the land." At this point "proselyte" had not yet taken on the religious meaning it later acquired. Within Israel, there was to be one law for both Israelites and the gēr / prosēlytos (Lev. 24:22). The Israelites were to love the aliens in their midst (Deut. 10:19) and were not to oppress them (Lev. 19:33-34). Uncircumcised aliens were not to be permitted to partake of the passover (Exod. 12:48-49). We note, then, that while the gēr was to have full rights to hospitality and justice in Israel, they were not proselytes in the later sense of the term.

By the time of the intertestamental period, the meanings of gēr and prosēlytos had changed. Both were employed to denote "those Gentiles who undertook the complete observance of the Jewish law and were admitted into full fellowship with Israel. For proselytization three things were necessary, (1) circumcision (in the case of males), (2) baptism (for ritual purification), (3) the offering of sacrifice."³ Proselytes were no longer seen as Gentile "strangers" but as "newborn" members of the Jewish community.

Prosēlytos occurs four times in the New Testament, always with reference to Gentiles who are recognized by the Jews to be proselytes. Three of the references are to persons who have responded favorably to the gospel message (Acts 2:10; 6:5; 13:43). The fourth reference, Matthew 23:15, is Jesus' objection to what the Pharisees do to a proselyte in making the person a slave to their laws. (In these texts several recent English translations render prosēlytos as "convert." This blurs the distinction between "convert" and "proselyte." An individual may become a Christian convert without changing his community identity; a proselyte, however, is one who, by definition, cannot convert without leaving his former community and entering a new one.)

Full-blown proselytes, in the New Testament sense of the word, are remarkably few in the Old Testament. There is not a single report of a male born outside Israel who was circumcised and joined the life of the covenant community; the two most prominent outsiders to enter fully into the life of Israel were women—Rahab the prostitute of Jericho (Josh. 2:1-3; 6:22-25) and Ruth the Moabitess (Ruth 1:6-18; 4:7-22). Another case of Gentiles joining the covenant community involves the Gibeonites, who succeeded in doing so only through trickery (Josh. 9:3-27) and apparently were not circumcised.

We can perhaps account for this lack of examples of proselytes becoming incorporated into the household of faith by circumcision by the fact that the Jewish Scriptures do not anticipate that the people of other nations will become proselytes within Israel. Rather, the expectation is that the nations will accept the wisdom of the Torah (Deut. 4:6-8). Through the Torah and the seed of Abraham, God will bless all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:3). People of other nations are not called upon to enter into the people of Israel; the call to them is, "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the lands! Serve the Lord with gladness" (Ps. 100:1-2). Israel is to "declare God's glory among the nations" (Ps. 96:3). In this context we can understand Jonah's call of Nineveh.

¹ Eugene Heideman, Secretary for Program, Reformed Church In America (retired), was a Reformed Church missionary in south India.

² Webster's New Dictionary of Synonyms, 1984
to repentance. Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, who confesses that he will serve the Lord (though his theology is not a paragon of orthodoxy), is not required to be circumcised before he returns to Syria. He is simply told, “Go in peace” (2 Kings 5:1–19). Conversion to the God of Israel does not require becoming a proselyte. Converts may remain in their original community.

The call to conversion in the New Testament is similarly not a call to a change of community so much as it is a call to new obedience to God in Jesus Christ. During the years of the ministry of Jesus, followers of Jesus continued to live as members of their own communities, whether Jews, Samaritans (John 4:27–30), or Syrophoenicians (Mark 7:24–30).

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter calls upon the crowd of Jews and proselytes “from every nation” to repent and be baptized, but there is no indication that they are expected to change their community identity. On the contrary, the members of the early Christian church continue to frequent the temple in Jerusalem and the synagogues to worship (Acts 2:46; 3:1; 14:1; 21:26). The Ethiopian eunuch, following his baptism, returns to Ethiopia to serve his queen (Acts 8:39). Cornelius, the Roman centurion, receives the Holy Spirit and is baptized, but he continues to live and serve as a Roman military officer (Acts 10:44–48). The Gentiles in Antioch of Pisidia believe the Gospel without a sense of having changed their community loyalties (Acts 13:48–49). Such biblical evidence leads to the conclusion that contemporary objections to proselytism reflect situations that did not come to the fore in the biblical era.

Contemporary Issues

We note three complaints about proselytism. First, in the contemporary world one hears the complaints of one set of Christian churches against the aggressive evangelism or churchmanship of other Christians, who are often charged with “sheep-stealing.” One also meets the charge, especially on the part of ancient and often persecuted churches, that newer Protestant sects and evangelists are arrogant and lack respect for the centuries-long faithful witness and worship in those churches. In the New Testament era, these long-term faultlines in the church had not yet arisen. In our modern era, we must continue to heed Paul’s admonition not to be trapped into divisive loyalties to Cephas, Apollos, Paul, or Christ (1 Cor. 1:10–17)—or by those divisions that have developed in subsequent history. We must continue to pray with Jesus that his followers will all be one, that the world may believe (John 17:21).

Second, the objection in the Western world to proselytism has shifted from being a political/cultural issue to being a moral issue. In Europe before the seventeenth century, when the religion of the prince was the religion of the people, a change of religious community was a political matter. During the Enlightenment, when men such as Lessing and Locke knew all too well the sufferings of nations and a world torn apart by religious strife, issues of personal liberty and tolerance came to the fore. Aggressive evangelism or public religious pressure began to be viewed as disruptive of peace and thereby bordering on immorality. To the extent that we are children of the Enlightenment, we feel that we are being placed on the defensive on moral grounds when charged with being proselytizers.

Third, objections are raised by followers of non-Christian religions. Their objection often is particularly related to their fear of disruption of their cultures and personal relationships, with special force at the point when persons are baptized and are understood to change loyalty from their own to the Christian community, often accompanied by a change in political allegiance. (In my work as a missionary in India, it was often the case that comparatively little objection was raised when persons of other faiths professed admiration for and even faith in Jesus and participated in Christian worship. But the minute such persons were baptized, a storm would erupt.) The New Testament does not provide us with much, if any, information about the reaction of friends and relatives of Greeks and Romans to the baptism of converts, although it does inform us about the reaction when economic interests were threatened (Acts 19:23–40).

What Does Conversion Entail?

In light of the above, we must now turn our attention to the question, To what extent should conversion to Jesus Christ entail or require a change from one human community to another?

Conversion and baptism did not mean a change in human community or citizenship in the New Testament. As we have already noted, throughout the New Testament, Jews who are baptized remain Jews and continue to identify with the temple and the synagogue. The Samaritans, the Ethiopian eunuch, and Cornelius the Roman do not change citizenship when they become followers of Jesus. Rather than a change of affiliation in the human community of converts, the underlying idea of being “in Christ” is to experience a new birth “from above” (John 3:3) and to gain citizenship in heaven (Phil. 3:20).

Baptism today is often viewed both within the church and by those outside as the rite that symbolizes the breach in relationships whereby a person leaves one community to become a member of another. Baptism in the New Testament, however, did not have that character.

In the case of Jesus himself, baptism is said to be a baptism “to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15). Jesus’ words can be understood to mean that in his baptism, Jesus was totally identified with his people in their sins rather than cut off from them by his sinlessness. His baptism was a baptism into solidarity and identification with the people rather than a distancing from his people. Baptism for Jesus was thus an “ecumenical” rather than a “sectarian” rite.

In baptism the followers of Jesus become united with him in his mission of salvation and redemption (Mark 10:38–39; Rom. 6:1–4). In their union with Christ as the Servant and Son of God, they participate in his ministry of justice to the nations (Isa. 42:1–4; 49:6), bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, and setting the oppressed free (Luke 4:18–19).

Likewise, those who are joined to Christ are not to cut themselves off from their own communities and families. On the contrary, they are to consider their baptism the beginning of a mission of solidarity with Christ and with others.

How, then, are we to deal with the dilemma that becomes apparent when conversion to Christ entails a way of life that may

In the New Testament era, conversion and baptism did not mean a change in human community.
threaten vital interests and arouse opposition? Within the Jewish community in the New Testament era, the issues revolved around circumcision and the law (Romans 2–3). In the Gentile communities, issues of sexual ethics, worship of idols, eating meat became flash points. Apart from the tension that might arise over these issues, the followers of Jesus were constantly urged to seek peace with their neighbors, to live obediently to the laws of the land, and to pray for the emperor. Their suffering should be for the sake of faithful witness to Jesus Christ alone (1 Peter 4).

In conclusion, the New Testament evidence can be said to (1) encourage the followers of Jesus to bear faithful witness to Christ and his righteousness; (2) call people to repentance, conversion, and baptism into the name of Jesus Christ; (3) encourage people to participate in the koinonia around the Lord's Table and to build up the life of the church; and (4) to live as obedient, peaceful, and fruitful members of the human community and the communities in which they have their family and social relationships.

Nevertheless, believers may be faced with the reality of being cut off by their own communities as they identify with Christ. On the one hand, we must oppose the sectarian spirit that calls people to leave their human communities in order to join us. On the other hand, to be converted to Christ is also to enter into the koinonia of the church and to encourage cultural, social, and political patterns of life at odds with one's native culture and nation—sometimes even with the Christian denomination or church in which one was raised. This dilemma cannot be avoided so long as the City of Man remains intermingled on earth with the City of God.

Notes


Mission and Proselytism: A Middle East Perspective

David A. Kerr

The approximately 10–12 million Christians of West Asia/North Africa (i.e., of the so-called Middle East) represent a kaleidoscope of Christian churches and cultural traditions.1 The great majority are Orthodox, members of the Oriental and Eastern Orthodox churches, which account for more than 75 percent of the total Christian population of the region. Catholic churches of both Eastern and Western (Latin) rites account for about another 20 percent. The evangelical or Protestant churches form a minority of between 3 and 4 percent.2 These figures, based on David Barrett’s calculations, relate to the churches that are today members of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), probably the world’s most inclusive regional ecumenical council. Successor to the predominantly Protestant Near East Council of Churches, it embraces four families of churches (Oriental Orthodox, Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant), with the Assyrian Church of the East (so-called Nestorian) possibly joining in the future as a fifth family.3

This ecumenical achievement is a positive sign of reconciliation between the indigenous churches, which for centuries have lived in disunity and mutual mistrust. It expresses their growing willingness to resolve historical problems of division by a concerted witness to the Gospel’s power of renewal and reconciliation in a politically torn region.

Among the ecclesial issues on the MECC agenda is the problem of proselytism. This was the subject of a special report, Proselytism, Sects, and Pastoral Challenges: A Study Document, which the Commission on Faith and Unity prepared for the MECC’s Fifth General Assembly in 1989.4 As the most ecumenical document on the issue in the West Asian/North African perspective, it provides an appropriate starting point for this essay.

Proselytism: The MECC Definition

The MECC study document defines proselytism as “a practice that involves attempts aimed at attracting Christians from a particular Church or religious group, leading to their alienation from their Church of origin.” It is treated as an issue of ecumenical malpractice that contravenes biblical understandings of how God relates to humankind, how Christians relate to one another, and respect for the human right to be free from coercion in religious matters. The problem is analyzed as having psychological roots in “individual and group egoism,” political manifestations in “feelings of cultural, political and economic superiority,” and institutional dimensions in “an overtrust in one’s present methods and programmes.” It is perpetuated by ignorance of Christian traditions other than those of one’s own cultural or political background, and it may include the willful “dissimulation of the truth about them.” Proselytism is therefore seen as the underlying assumption is that a missionary vacuum exists throughout the Middle East.

Notes

opposite of authentic evangelism, which emphasizes “confidence in God and His economy” as the basis of mission.  

The MECC document addresses two dimensions of the issue. In historical terms it is related to the “western missionary strategy” of the medieval Catholic missions and their Protestant successors. The contemporary dimension is identified mainly with “sects”—by which the MECC means millenarian or messianic groups, independent “neo-missionary” groups of fundamentalist persuasions, groups that represent syncretistic forms of religious universalism, charismatic renewal movements within established churches, and new religious movements that claim to draw upon Asian forms of religious spirituality. While proselytism in West Asia/North Africa occurs unconsciously as well as consciously, its underlying presupposition is that a missionary “vacuum” exists throughout the region, where indigenous churches are considered to be lacking missionary motivation and resources.

With this understanding of proselytism, the present essay will examine manifestations of the problem in the complex history of the Eastern churches’ experience of the Western church and its missions. It will then review contemporary initiatives in intra-Christian dialogue, one of the benefits of which has been the emergence of a clearer understanding of how the Orthodox churches understand Christian witness. Attention will be given to the MECC’s suggested remedies, and in conclusion we shall examine some of the contextual issues that shape the identity of Eastern churches.

Historical Dimensions

Eastern patriarchates. For the indigenous West Asian/North African Christian communities, it is a matter of historic pride and contemporary self-understanding that Christianity has been continuously present throughout the region since apostolic times. The cities of Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, and Etchmiadzin are quite as important for Christians as are Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem for Muslims, and Jerusalem for Jews. They are the places where the apostles proclaimed the Gospel and founded the first churches that carried forward the Christian mission.

In ecclesiastical language, they constitute the “patriarchates” of the East. They have always seen themselves as existing in an equal apostolic relationship with the Western patriarchates of Rome and Constantinople. From the fourth century, Rome was accorded a spiritual primacy as primus inter pares, though without the universal authority that Catholics later invested in the papacy. Constantinople (originally known by its Greek pre-Christian name of Byzantium) held political primacy within the Byzantine Empire, to which most of the Eastern churches belonged. But in ecclesiastical terms the Easterners have always insisted on the coequal autonomy of each patriarchate as the institutional reality of the biblical conception of the universal church; as the human body is made up of many members, so the apostolic churches are the members of the body of Christ.

The patriarchates have always been the centers of Eastern Christian liturgy, theology, witness, and church administration, expressed in their ancient ethnic languages (Syriac and Aramaic in Antioch and Jerusalem; Coptic in Alexandria). This continued to be true long after the seventh century, when the rise of Islam, its military conquests, and the extension of its political power under the Islam caliphate reduced the Eastern patriarchates socially to the role of Christian minorities in increasingly Muslim societies.

To the northeastern frontier of the Byzantine Empire lay the kingdom of Armenia. Here the church traces its foundation to the apostles Thaddeus and Bartholemew. The Armenian monarchy recognized Christianity as the national religion from the beginning of the fourth century, even before the conversion of the Byzantine emperor Constantine. Armenian Christians have even since looked to Etchmiadzin as the seat of what they call their “catholicosate,” which, in terms of Armenian canon law, has higher authority than a patriarchate.

Despite the diversity of cultural, linguistic, and social characteristics that they represented, the five patriarchates and the Armenian catholicosate preserved the common faith of the Nicean Creed (325) until the early fifth century. This is remembered as the period of “the undivided church.” Over the following centu-

The refusal of one church to recognize the validity of another is the soil in which proselytism is seeded.
the past, have grown more intimate through a series of pan-
Orthodox conferences that began in Addis Ababa in 1965.

Eastern Catholics. This historical survey has so far exposed
factors that resulted in the disunity of the Eastern churches. The
refusal of one church to recognize the ecclesial validity of another
is the soil in which proselytism is seeded. It was with the
extension of Western Catholicism into West Asia, in consequence
of Rome’s denial of the ecclesial integrity of the Eastern patri­
archs under what it deemed as their heretical doctrines, that
the growth of proselytism began.

To avoid generalization, it is important to emphasize at the
outset of this discussion that the oldest and largest indigenous
community of West Asian Catholics are the Maronites. Exactly as
we have seen to be the case with the Oriental and Eastern
Orthodox sense of ethnic identity, the Maronites have strong
ties to Lebanon, where land and faith have combined in
the Maronite sense of being a national church. Their union with
Rome was gradually consolidated from the era of the Latin
Crusades (between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries), and
though their ecclesiastical customs were subject to extensive
Latinization, they never lost their original Syriac identity, which
today they often proudly reaffirm.

In contrast to the Maronites, who claim to have been Catholic
from their origins between the fifth and seventh centuries, other
other Catholic communities have sprung up as the result of the later
missionary activity of the Western Catholic church. Following
the mutual anathemas exchanged between Rome and
Constantinople in 1054 and the subsequent failure of the Council
of Ferrara-Florence (1437–39) to heal the rift between Latin
Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, the Catholic Church devel­
oped a strategy for reunion with the East by the conversion of the
Eastern patriarchates, Rome claimed to be reuniting the church. IS
these Catholic patriarchates are defined by the Second Vatican
Council as part of “the divinely revealed and undivided heritage
of the universal Church.”

The Vatican designates these churches as Eastern-rite Catho­
lie, in distinction from the Roman (or Latin) Catholic rite of the
West. This label emphasizes the Catholic view that they enrich
the universal Catholic Church by preserving distinctive ele­
ments of their original canonical traditions. Their alternative
designation as “Uniate” churches (i.e., united with Rome), while
having long historical currency, emphasizes rather the fact of
their conversion, which incurs the Eastern and Oriental Ortho­
dox charge of proselytism. The very existence of these churches
is therefore problematic; what the Catholics have regarded as a
symbol of reunion, the Orthodox have treated as “a major ob­
stacle to the progress of the dialogue” with the Catholic Church.

The fact that significant progress has recently been made in this
dialogue is an ecumenical achievement to which we shall return
later in this article.

Evangelical churches. In the nineteenth century, Eastern
churches, led by the Maronites, joined cause in laying the charge
of proselytism this time against the evangelical missions that had
arrived in West Asia. In 1823 the first missionaries of the Amer­
ican Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission (ABCFM)
began evangelistic work in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. The
Maronite patriarch greeted them with an encyclical that con­
demned their version of the Bible and forbade Maronites to
associate with the English bibliyuyu (“biblicists”). In May of that
year, Pope Leo XII backed the patriarch by issuing a further
condemnation of “a certain Bible society” which had printed and
distributed a corrupt version of the Scriptures.

The aim of the missionaries was the revival of “nominal
Christians,” who, by becoming “Christian in heart,” were ex­
pected to advance the evangelization of Muslims and Jews. The
initial ABCFM policy was stated by Rufus Anderson as follows:
“not to subvert them [the indigenous churches]; not to pull them
down and build anew. It is to reform them; to revive among them
. . . the knowledge and spirit of the Gospel. . . . It is not part of our
object to introduce Congregationalism or Presbyterianism among
them. . . . We are content that their present ecclesiastical organi­
sation should remain, provided the knowledge and spirit of the
Gospel can be revived under it.”

This statement did not prevent the emergence of separate
evangelical churches. Some of the missionaries found it impos­
sible to credit the indigenous churches with any spiritual vital­
ity. Orthodox and Catholic Christians who associated with the
evangelical missionaries were ostracized by their church hierar­
chies, the case of the Maronite As’ad Shidyqa becoming the cause
celebree when he was imprisoned by the Maronite patriarch and
died in jail (ca. 1823).22 When in 1826 two Armenians, Gregory
Wortabet and Dionysius Carabet, asked to be received into an
evangelical fellowship, the missionaries decided to form them­
selves into a church.

The first evangelical church was established in Beirut. “Be­
ing desirous of enjoying Christian ordinances,” its founding
members determined (in the words of their charter) “to adopt
with some variations, the Articles of Faith and the Form of
Covenant, used by the First Church in Hartford in Connecticut,
U.S.A., to be publicly read on the admission of members.”
Increase in the number of converts during the mid-nineteenth
century and the need for an appropriate form of institutional
organization within the Ottoman millet system of religious com­
unities encouraged the missionaries to develop a fourfold
policy: the conversion of indigenous “nominal” Christians, the
organization of convert evangelical churches, the training of an
indigenous ministry, and the publication of Christian litera­
ture. Anderson acquiesced in the missionaries’ practice as a
result of his 1844 visit through the region, and his original policy
of nonproselytism evolved to “the restoration of pre­
Constantinian and primitive (Pauline) Christianity . . . [by] the
formation not only of exemplary individuals in [their] . . . the
Eastern churches’ midst but of exemplary communities as well.”
But he recognized the consequence of this policy change when he
later wrote: “This admission of converts into a church, without
regard to their previous ecclesiastical relation, was a practical
ignoring of the old church organizations in that region. It was so
understood, and the spirit of opposition and persecution was
roused to the utmost.”

The ABCFM policy in this regard is but a concise example of
the practice of the nineteenth-century Anglican, Lutheran, and
Reformed missions in Turkey, Palestine, and Egypt. An Anglican
bishops was established in Jerusalem in 1841 largely through
the efforts of Britain’s Church Missionary Society. German mis­
sionaries created the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan
around 1860. In addition to the work of the ABCFM in Lebanon,
which gave rise to the present National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon, its activity in Turkey spawned an Armenian evangelical congregation in 1846, which has grown to become the Union of Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East. American Presbyterians in Cairo founded the Coptic Evangelical Church in 1853, which is today the largest and most influential Protestant denomination in the region.27

In his discussion of the evangelical churches of West Asia, Norman Horner notes that “the vast majority of their membership came originally from Orthodox and Eastern-rite Catholic churches. This has left a residue of mutual suspicion and ill will that can be overcome only by more creative ecumenical relationships than yet exist, especially between Protestant and Orthodox churches.”28

**Intra-Christian Dialogue**

Our overview of centuries of church history in the West Asian/North African region will have served its purpose if it illustrates the ubiquity of intra-Christian proselytism as an issue with which the contemporary churches must deal. It sets disconcerting questions against the cherished Western maxim that the modern ecumenical movement evolved from the history of missions. The Western trajectory of mission has been experienced as profoundly antiecumenical by the Eastern churches, compounding the disunity that already existed and arguably weakening the situation of Christian minorities within Muslim societies.

Against this background the ecumenical achievements of the MECC are the more remarkable. Mutual recognition among the different member families of churches has offset the absolutist demands that continue to be heard in other regions affected by similar historical problems (e.g., the demand by some Orthodox that Uniatism be abolished by the absorption of the Uniates into the Latin rite of Roman Catholicism).29

The process of healing these historical wounds can be illustrated by two significant examples, both of which have had a positive impact on the life of the MECC, though the initiatives originated elsewhere. The first involves the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, which, since 1990, have been trying to resolve the issue of the Eastern-rite Catholic (Uniate) churches. Their joint “Statement on the Subject of Uniatism,” published as the Freising Declaration of 1990, became the basis of a continuing dialogue in which it has been agreed that while the Eastern-rite Catholic churches have come into existence as part of the historic search for unity, Uniatism is no longer a model for ecclesial understanding that Uniatism is no longer a model for ecclesial understanding that Uniatism is no longer a model for ecclesial understanding.30 It explores aspects of Orthodox theology that evangelicals find difficult (e.g., works/faith relationship, the Eucharist, Mariology and the communion of saints, apostolic succession) and develops a frank discussion of differences between their respective understandings of salvation and spiritual renewal. It is especially helpful in showing how Orthodox spiritual renewal draws inspiration from the Orthodox liturgy of worship.

These examples show evidence of a process of reconciliation at least between churches (Catholic-Orthodox) and mission groups (Western evangelicals) whose understanding of mission centers upon the church and the local Christian community. It must be admitted, however, that these positive developments have little impact on those groups that, as noted above, the MECC terms “sects.” From the EMEU perspective, Donald Wagner has expressed concern about what he sees as “the western orientation and cultural insensitivity” of the evangelical AD 2000 movement. He also subjects the theology and policies of the International Christian Embassy-Jerusalem to critical scrutiny, concluding that it “allows the gospel and lordship of Jesus Christ to become subservient to the modern political ideology of Zionism … reducing the Christian church to a mere ‘parenthesis’ and rejecting the local Christian community.”31

**Orthodox Understandings of Mission**

Perhaps the most sensitive issue for continuing dialogue between Western and Eastern churches is the nature of mission itself. On grounds that the ethnic identity of Eastern churches is assumed to deprive them of a real sense of mission, evangelicals sometimes continue the nineteenth-century practice of justifying a proselytizing evangelism of Eastern Christians so that they might become effective channels of indigenous evangelism. Orthodox response to being treated as terra missionis often caricatures Western missions as a continuation of the medieval Cru-
sades and has resulted in denunciation of the word "mission." With its Latin connotations of "sending forth," they associate mission negatively with their historic experience of the imperial ambitions of the Holy Roman Empire and its successor European states.

Orthodox churches generally prefer the Greek term martyrion (witness). The following paragraphs attempt to summarize the content that modern Orthodox have given this term in their recent missiological writings and consultations.

Witness as liturgy. The heart of the Orthodox understanding of witness is the liturgy. "The Liturgy," writes Metropolitan Anastasios of Albania (formerly professor at the University of Athens), "is a continuous transformation of life according to the prototype Jesus Christ, through the power of the Spirit. If it is true that in the Liturgy we not only hear a message but we participate in the great event of liberation from sin and of koinonia (communion) with Christ through the real presence of the Holy Spirit, then this event of our personal incorporation into the Body of Christ, this transfiguration of our little being into a member of Christ, must be evident and be proclaimed in actual life. The Liturgy has to be continued in personal, everyday situations. Without this continuation the Liturgy remains incomplete."35

Liturgy after the Liturgy. The idea of continuity between the liturgy and witness in life is expressed in the phrase "liturgy after the Liturgy." Ion Bria, the Romanian Orthodox theologian who served as Orthodox adviser in the World Council of Churches’ Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, explains it thus: "The mission of the Church rests upon the radiating and transforming power of the Liturgy. It is the stimulus in sending out the people of God to the world to confess the Gospel and to be involved in man’s liberation."36

Liturgy as witness/mission means the church being in the midst of the human community it serves in order to transform it into the Christ-like image and likeness of God (theosis). This necessitates the radical conversion of societies and individuals whose lives are characterized by sin, separation from God, and submission to the evils of idolatry (social and political as much as religious). Accordingly, a group of Orthodox theologians who met in Bucharest in 1974 to discuss the topic “Confessing Christ Today” analyzed witness under its “vertical” (divine-human) and “horizontal” (social-individual) dimensions. They emphasized that “the first method of evangelistic witness is the sharing of love by those who have acknowledged the love of God for them.” They argued that this primary expression of witness, this self-giving quality of Christian lives that invite emulation, is a more effective way of transforming human communities than “the bold announcement of Christ as Saviour to a world which has already heard the words and still remains unresponsive.”37

The context of witness. The ethnic and national identity of Orthodox churches means that the primary context of their witness is their own people and nations. For much of the twentieth century, Orthodox churches living under the restrictions of Communist regimes had no opportunity to witness beyond their own societies. But contemporary Orthodox theologians insist that their understanding of witness is not contingent on a particular sociopolitical circumstance. It flows from the Orthodox ecclesiology, which identifies the church with the people (laos) as "the people’s church."38 This understanding gives missiological priority to the indigenization of faith in a particular culture so that the latter is transformed by gospel values. The Orthodox consultation “Confessing Christ Today” identified four dimensions of such indigenous evangelization: (1) the evangelization of those who are Christian in name but ignore their baptism either deliberately or through indifference; (2) the penetration of superficially Christian cultures with the transforming power of the Holy Spirit reaching into “every nook and cranny” of national life; (3) the evangelization of “the structures of this world,” especially in the social, economic, and political spheres, where the church should give voice to the poor and oppressed; and (4) the evangelization of secularized men and women for whom transcendence, forgiveness, and the sacramental have no meaning.39

Evangelism. The notion of the people’s church must at the same time be understood within the historic order of the ministries within the Orthodox Church. The primary evangelists are the bishops, their presbyters and deacons, and the monastic orders. The monastic community has the specific evangelistic role of living as “a sign, a paradigm, an anticipation and foretaste of the Kingdom,” sanctifying time and seeking the renewal of the inner life through unceasing prayer.40 Modern Orthodoxy is rediscovering the power of the laity, especially through the development of various Orthodox youth movements. Given the persecution that many Orthodox churches have experienced from hostile political authorities, it is important to recognize the evangelistic value of the faithful who suddenly find themselves called to physical martyrdom. Evangelism, therefore, while the calling of the whole church, is effectively exercised by particular representatives who witness “from within the faith and truth of the body of the Church.”41

Cross-cultural witness. The Orthodox churches’ firm emphasis on culturally indigenous witness may seem to beg the question, often asked by Western missionaries, of the place of cross-cultural witnessing in Orthodox priorities. However, Orthodox history proudly records the evangelization of the Slavs by the ninth-century Greek brothers Saints Cyril and Methodius. This century has seen innovative forms of intra-Orthodox missionary cooperation in Africa, Alaska, and the Far East, regions of what is sometimes called the Orthodox diaspora. Cross-cultural evangelism has not figured significantly in the witness of Orthodox churches living under restrictive political (e.g., the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe) or socioreligious (e.g., Islam) conditions, which we have already acknowledged. Recent political change in Russia and Eastern Europe opens new opportunities, though the recurrence in Eastern Europe of previously suppressed animosities between Eastern-rite Catholics and Orthodox, on the one hand, and evangelicals and Orthodox, on the other, has revived Orthodox suspicions of mission as involving one church transgressing the ethnic context of another. Where cross-cultural evangelization is possible, Orthodox agree that its subjects must be non-Christians, not Christians from other Orthodox, Catholic, or evangelical churches.42

Christian witness within Islam. Since the seventh century, Islam has provided the social, cultural, and political framework of Orthodox presence in West Asia and North Africa. It exceeds the scope of this article to review this long history of Orthodox-Muslim relations.43 The contribution of Father Joseph el-Za'haloua,
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an Antiochian Orthodox living in Lebanon, to the compendium Your Will Be Done: Orthodoxy in Mission offers a good example of a contemporary Orthodox whose concern is with witness in the context of Islam.44

Rejecting the view that the Orthodox communities have been introverted by the social experience of Islam, el-Zahlaoui have contributed to the cultural, ideological, and scientific renaissance of Arab societies in different periods of their history. His general point is that “Christianity became an essential spiritual force in the cultural, social and political life of Arab Muslims.”

The contemporary resurgence of conservative religious trends throughout the region confronts all minorities with difficult problems. Many Christians feel threatened, even to the point of fearing for their survival. As in previous times of crisis, many Christians opt to emigrate out of the region, usually to the West, with the result that the remaining Christian presence is seriously weakened. Hard as this situation makes it for many Christians to give confident witness, el-Zahlaoui insists on the responsibility of the church to relate the Gospel to this crisis. “The witness of the Gospel challenges us to transform the prevailing destructive suspicion between the minorities and majorities into constructive confidence.”

In practical terms, this means that the church must identify with the cause of all victims of injustice in “a fidelity to Christ who calls us to assume on behalf of everybody all true human solidarity.” In the Lebanese context el-Zahlaoui emphasizes the church’s medicosocial and educational services, through which it witnesses the presence of God within human suffering and manifests the reconciliatory power of the Incarnation.45

The most serious impediment to effective Christian witness is the disunity of Christian churches. “Where the Church should be a manifestation of God’s love to all human beings and a united community in God’s peace, it often appears as a gathering of sects, mutually exclusive of one another.” Such disunity invites the criticism of Muslims whose scripture, the Qur’an, argues that disunity is a sign of God’s punishment upon Christians who have neglected their divine covenant (5:15).46 The challenge of Christian witness within Muslim societies, el-Zahlaoui concludes, demands concerted “spiritual and theological reflection on the meaning of our faith and of our beliefs in the Islamic context in which we live.”47

A Pastoral Approach to Issues of Proselytism

The MECC document with which this essay began calls for “a pastoral agreement” among churches for the resolution of historical and contemporary problems of proselytism.48 The key to this approach is “a dialogue of love”49 in which Christians of different traditions learn to listen to one another in their search for mutual correction and enrichment. The examples we have given point to the growth of such dialogue between churches and with missionary agencies that operate with an ecclesial commitment, however varied this may be. The MECC study document lists several issues that call for discussion under the category of “unconscious” proselytism, such as religious freedom and the freedom of conscience, the issue of “returning to the mother church,” mixed marriages and religious education, and the evangelization of nominal Christians.

Is dialogue possible with what the MECC terms “sects,” for which, in its judgment, “proselytism is a constitutive element of their identity”? If the MECC has less confidence in dialogue in this respect, there being “not enough basis for a constructive dialogue,” it nevertheless recommends “a pastoral strategy” that specifically rejects the option of trying to suppress the freedom of sects to operate. No haven is offered to the argument that civil law should be invoked against the sects. On the contrary, the study document insists that the freedom of the sects to operate must be upheld, as also the right of the individual to choose his or her religious affiliation.49

A pastoral approach to the sects should include challenge in

Noteworthy

Personalia

We are pleased to announce the appointment of David A. Kerr as a contributing editor of the INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN OF MISSIONARY RESEARCH. He is Professor of Christianity in the Non-Western World in the Faculty of Divinity, University of Edinburgh, Scotland, where he also directs the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World. He previously held appointments as professor of Islam and Christian-Muslim relations at Hartford Seminary, Hartford, Connecticut, and in the Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, U.K., where he directed the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations. He is a graduate of the Universities of London and Oxford. His latest contribution appears in this issue, “Mission and Proselytism: A Middle East Perspective.”

Announcing

The American Society of Missiology will hold its annual meeting June 20–21 at the same place in conjunction with the ASM. The theme of their meeting will be “Classroom and Practice: Is Mission Teaching Credible?” Dean S. Gilliland of Fuller Seminary School of World Mission, Pasadena, California, is president of the ASM, and Edward Poitras of Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, is president of the APM for 1995–96. For further information and registration for both meetings, contact George R. Hunsberger, Western Theological Seminary, 86 East 12th Street, Holland, Michigan 49423.

A team of international scholars is planning a Dictionary of African Christian Biography. The dictionary will cover the whole field of African Christianity from earliest times to the present and over the entire continent. Broadly interconfessional, historically descriptive, and exploiting the full range of oral and written records, the dictionary will be simultaneously produced electronically in English, French, and Portuguese. Not only will the dictionary stimulate local data gathering and input, but as a nonproprietary electronic database, it will

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two senses of the word: challenge to the sects by monitoring their activities and raising “awareness of the religious and human threats of this phenomenon”; and the challenge of the sects, in that the churches should be energized for renewal, expressed in “a more efficient pastoral work that ‘recaptures what has been lost’ and immunizes (the) faithful against the temptations of ‘religious consumerism.’” Without elaborating further, the document emphasizes the need for continuing renewal of religious education, ministerial formation, pastoral care, and “the balance between participation and the need for leadership” (which this author reads as meaning the new relationship between clergy and laity).

Issues for Intra-Christian Dialogue

The MECC’s call for dialogue between Eastern and Western churches implicitly requires us to consider the sociopolitical context in which proselytism continues to evoke contentious argument. At least three dimensions of Christian identity need to be kept in mind.

Christian religious identity in West Asia/North Africa. The Lebanese theologian George Sabra reminds us that religion continues to function as a primary factor of social identity throughout the West Asian/North African region. He draws a helpful distinction between the “denominational” (or sociological) identity of a Christian community and the “ecclesial” (or faith) commitment of its members. These two dimensions may be continuous with each other. But modern forces of secularization have tended to erode the ecclesial vitality of many Christians who nonetheless continue to be socially defined by their denomination. In this context, Sabra argues, the purpose of evangelization is to enhance the ecclesial identity of individuals and communities. He then poses the question, If the faith renewal of an individual or group leads to a change of ecclesiastical affiliation, is this evangelization or proselytism?

Two variables tend to influence the way this question is answered. Where continuity between church and ethnicity is strong (e.g., in the Oriental Orthodox churches and the Maronite church), change of ecclesiastical affiliation from the mother church is unconscionable and treated as a betrayal of community. In cases where ecclesiology has reduced or eliminated the sense of ethnicity (e.g., in Protestant churches), the quality of personal faith commitment/salvation is the primary value of evangelism.

Here the second variable becomes evident. Where faith is understood in individualistic terms as a personal relationship with God, freedom of religious conviction and the right to change religious affiliation tend to be given priority. This is typically the case with Protestant Christianity, which has been so much influenced by principles of the Western Enlightenment. A quite different worldview pertains among those churches that are historically rooted in the cultural and intellectual traditions of West Asia/North Africa, where community provides the social and spiritual context within which individual faith is nurtured. This is at the heart of the monastic tradition of Christianity and is inherent in the shape and content of the liturgy. In different ways it is no less evident in the Islamic religious consciousness, which has influenced the social character of indigenous Christianity. Evangelism in this context is understood in terms of the renewal of an individual’s ecclesial identity within his or her denominational identity, not in separation from it. Orthodox witness makes this very clear and amounts to a conceptual (and

For the ancient Eastern churches, community provides the social and spiritual context within which faith is nurtured.

constitute a uniquely dynamic way to maintain, amend, expand, access, and disseminate information vital to an understanding of African Christianity. Being nonproprietary, it will be possible for material within it to be freely reproduced locally in printed form. Being electronic, the material will be simultaneously accessible to readers around the world. Contributors will be drawn from academic, church, and mission communities in Africa and elsewhere. To ensure realization of the dictionary’s full potential, financial support for the project is being negotiated. Suggestions relating to potential subjects and contributors are welcome. For further information, contact: Jonathan J. Bonk, *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*, Providence Theological Seminary, Otterburne, Manitoba R0A 1G0, Canada; telephone: 204-433-7488; fax: 204-433-7158.

The Eastern American Province of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate announced in February 1995 the establishment of the Oblate Center for Mission Studies within the Oblate College Graduate School of Theology, Washington, D.C. Appointed by the Eastern Province as codirectors are Father James Sullivan, O.M.I., a veteran of forty-two years of missionary service in Brazil and a specialist in working with ongoing formation in religious communities, and Father Harry Winter, O.M.I., Ph.D., an ecumenical theologian who served as associate director of the Texas Conference of Churches (1977-79) and then spent twelve years in Appalachia. Further information is available from Oblate Center for Mission Studies, 391 Michigan Ave. N.E., Washington, D.C. 20017-1586; telephone: 202-529-5244; fax: 202-636-9444.

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), meeting at Cincinnati, Ohio, in mid-July 1995, commissioned 464 new mission workers to serve in thirty-five countries. It was the largest number of long- and short-term Presbyterian missionaries ever recognized at a General Assembly. Also recognized were 56 “global partners” from various nations serving in mission to the United States.
The wealth of Christian theological writing from the mid-eighth century in Arabic as well as in their ethnic languages is a literary monument of their linguistic traditions. Sydney Griffith, a leading scholar of this genre of Christian literature, observes that Christians “actually adopted a way of presenting the traditional teachings of the church in an Arabic idiom conditioned by the Islamic frame of reference in the midst of which they lived.”

Rarely have Western missions been sensitive to this achievement. Indeed, if recognized at all, it has usually been regarded with suspicion as an incipient paganism that must be expunged. The conversion of indigenous Christians to Western forms of Christianity has had the effect of deracinating them from their home”f” and burdening them with the criticism of being cultural “aliens at home” and for their own (ecclesial) traditions.”

Christian political identity in West Asia/North Africa. Under the Ottoman Empire the Christian communities of West Asia/North Africa were recognized for legal and political purposes as millets—autonomous minorities within Muslim society, represented by their clerical hierarchies. For four hundred years (early sixteenth to early twentieth centuries) this was the juridical framework of George Sabra’s sociological category of “denominational” identity. While the millet system has been formally abandoned in the constitutions of the modern Arab states, it continues to exert informal influence in terms of political psychology and practice. This is strikingly evident in Lebanon, where a “confessional” system of public life guarantees (in theory) that each religious community in the state is represented proportionately to its size in relation to the other religious communities. While political leadership is exercised on constitutionally secular lines, confessionalism allows the religious hierarchies of both Christian and Muslim communities to continue to exert considerable influence behind the scenes, and openly if political life breaks down in civil or military disorder.

Against this background the antagonism of indigenous churches to proselytism has certain political resonance. This may be construed as a case of clerical hierarchies protecting their political influence from further erosion. But since this is how the political culture continues to operate, it can also be argued that a politically influential clergy is a positive asset for Christian minorities in societies that are themselves undergoing various forms of Islamic religious and social renewal. Burdened by a feeling of vulnerability, many Arab Christians look for the strengthening of their traditional institutions of leadership and feel politically undermined and endangered by proselytism.

Notes

1. The author acknowledges indebtedness and expresses gratitude to Carolyn Sperl, coordinator of Reference and Interlibrary Loan Services, Hartford Seminary, for assistance in researching the disparate literature relevant to this study. The colonialist associations and geographic ambiguities of the term “Middle East” and its variant “Near East” call for the less prejudicial (albeit less elegant) terminology “West Asia/North Africa,” which will be used throughout.


3. For the MECC’s account of the churches of its region, see “Who Are the Christians of the Middle East?” MECC Perspectives (Limassol, 1986).

4. The preamble of the document reads: “After a discussion process
started in December 1986, the Commission on Faith and Unity studied in its last meeting (July 1989), before the Vth General Assembly, a third draft. It has agreed that it should be considered "A Study Document" submitted to the Executive Committee of the MECC and to the Churches and made available to institutions, groups or individuals concerned."


7. Ibid., paragraph 39.

8. Ibid., paragraphs 20–29.

9. King Tiridate’s conversion to Christianity at the hands of St. Gregory the Illuminator in 301 predates the baptism of Emperor Constantine around 337.

10. In Armenian canon law the catholicosate has global authority over Armenians, in contrast to the patriarchate, which has only regional jurisdiction. The church comprises two patriarchates (Jerusalem and Constantinople), which are dependent upon the catholicosate of Etchmiadzin. In the fifteenth century a second catholicosate was created for the Armenian diaspora in Cilicia, Syria (modern-day Lebanon).

11. The name "Assyrian" reflects their claim to descend from the ancient people of Nineveh. Alternatively, they call themselves "Chaldean." In either case they reject their designation by other churches as Nestorian, after the fifth-century theologian Nestorius, whom the Council of Ephesus condemned for allegedly teaching Dyophysitism, the view that the person of Jesus Christ included two separate natures.

12. The doctrinal issue turned once again on the problem of defining the person of Jesus Christ. Was he of a single divine nature as the Orientals were alleged to have asserted (Monophysitism), or of two natures that were united without confusion, change, division, or separation as the Western Christians insisted (Chalcedonianism)?

13. The recovery of the theological output of these churches within Muslim societies and culture is the goal of important contemporary research, much of which has been pioneered by Samir Khalil. For a recent example of this in English, see Samir Khalil and Jorgen Nielsen, eds., Christian Arabic Apologists During the Abbasid Period (750–1258) (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994).

14. The Arabization of the episcopate and election of the first Arab patriarch at the end of the nineteenth century stands as one of the early milestones of Arab nationalism.

15. In fairness to the Roman position, it must be acknowledged that Rome viewed the Eastern-rite churches within the Catholic communion as symbols of the full communion with the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches that is yet to be achieved. They were provisional models of reunion, or as the Second Vatican Council stated: "All these directives of law are laid down in view of the present situation, until such time as the Catholic Church and the separated Eastern Churches come together into complete unity" ("Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches," in The Documents of Vatican II, ed. Walter Abbott [New York: Guild Press, 1966], p. 385).

16. Created by the Latin Crusaders after their conquest of Jerusalem in 1099, this patriarchate did not survive the end of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem but was reconstituted by the Vatican in 1847.


21. For example, see Henry Jessup, The Greek Church and Protestant Missions; or, Missions to the Oriental Churches (Beirut and New York: Christian Literature Company, 1891).

22. A contemporary American missionary, Isaac Bird, was the first to write on this incident in his Martyr of Lebanon (Boston: American Tract Society, 1864). Rufus Anderson later wrote a chapter "The Martyr of Lebanon, Assaad Shidyak" (History, 1:52ff.).

23. Badr, "Mission to ‘Nominal Christians,’” pp. 100–102; cf. Semaan, Aliens at Home, pp. 82–85. The missionary significance of the First Church in Hartford lay in its minister from 1818 to 1867, Joel Hawes, who played a leading role in the Second Great Awakening. Hawes was a friend and supporter of Rufus Anderson, as well as his traveling companion on an extended visit to West Asia in 1844. On Joel Hawes, see George Walker, History of the First Church in Hartford, 1633–1883 (Hartford, Conn.: Brown & Gross, 1884).


25. Ibid., p. 264.


27. See Horner, Guide to Christian Churches in the Middle East, pp. 65–79, for a full list of Anglican and Protestant churches in West Asia/North Africa.

28. Ibid., p. 72.

29. Zissis, "Uniatism," p. 22. Defining uniatism as no more than "a method of proselytizing the East," Zissis argues that it is a "fraudulent union" that should be abolished, asking that "the Uniates ... be incorporated in the Latin rite of Roman Catholicism."

30. Documents of Vatican II, p. 34 ("Dognatic Constitution on the Church").


33. David Teague’s phrase, which he uses as the title of the chapter in which he speaks of what he learned through personal encounter with Coptic Orthodoxy in Egypt (Turning Over a New Leaf, pp. 63–84).

34. Wagner, Anxious for Armageddon, pp. 181, 96–113.


36. Bria, Martyria/Mission, p. 68.

37. Ibid., p. 226.

38. Ibid., p. 10.

39. Ibid., p. 228.


41. Ibid., p. 230.

42. Case studies of cross-cultural witness appear in George Lemopoulos, For a Full List of Anglican and Protestant Churches in West Asia/North Africa.


45. David Teague’s phrase, which he uses as the title of the chapter in which he speaks of what he learned through personal encounter with Coptic Orthodoxy in Egypt (Turning Over a New Leaf, pp. 63–84).


48. Bria, Martyria/Mission, p. 68.

49. Ibid., p. 226.

50. Ibid., p. 10.

51. Ibid., p. 228.

52. On the role of monastic witness in Orthodoxy, see ibid. pp. 243–48.


45. For further information, see Milia Khouri, “The Mission of the Orthodox Youth in Lebanon,” in Your Will Be Done, ed. Lemopoulos, pp. 181–83.

46. Qur’an 5:15: “For those, too, who call themselves Christians, We did take a Covenant, but they forgot a good part of the Message that We sent them. So We estranged them, with enmity and hatred between one and another, to the Day of Judgment. And soon will God show them what they have done” (Yusuf Ali, The Holy Qur’an: Text, Translation, and Commentary, pp. 245–46).


48. MECC study document, paragraphs 34–37.


50. MECC study document, paragraphs 61–64. On this point, George Sabra argues that an appeal to secular authorities, or to the courts other than in cases where proselytizing groups breach national laws, infringes the religious rights of individuals, denies the spirit of the Gospel, and betrays the witness of the earliest Christians, who courageously stood for freedom of faith against the political, legal, military, and social pressures of the Roman Empire (“Proselytism, Evangelization, and Ecumenism,” pp. 26–28).


53. See Semaan, Aliens at Home, a socioreligious study of the evangelical church in Lebanon.


55. Ibid., p. 33.

Response to David A. Kerr

Gabriel Habib

I agree with the historical and conceptual analyses conveyed in “Mission and Proselytism: A Middle East Perspective.” I would make only the following minor clarifications.

1. Referring to the doctrinal divergence produced by the Council of Chalcedon (451), Kerr mentions the Copts, the Syrians of Antioch, and the Armenians on the one hand, and the churches of Constantinople and Rome on the other. In this regard I would suggest that “of Constantinople” be replaced by “coordinated by Constantinople.” This change would help preserve the integrity of the autocephaly of the Orthodox churches of the East, which viewed the patriarch of Constantinople only as primus inter pares.

2. Referring to the Oriental churches, Kerr rightly points out that sociologically these churches can be described as ethnic churches. However, since these churches consider that the identification of the faith with a people and its culture is a logical outcome of the Incarnation, it would be better to follow their preference in speaking of local, rather than ethnic, churches.

3. The references made by Kerr to the Eastern Catholics and the phenomenon of Uniatism are clear and most helpful. I would like only to add that the commission for dialogue between the Orthodox and Catholic churches met at the Orthodox University of Balamant, Lebanon, in June of 1994 and declared that proselytism between these churches should be avoided. Moreover, the commission affirmed that Uniatism should no longer be considered a normal pattern of relationships between the Catholic and Orthodox churches.

4. I also agree with Kerr’s approach to witness within Islam. However, I would add that the future continuity of presence or even survival of Christianity in the Middle East does not depend, as some would think, on Christians belonging to the land, but mainly on the shared monotheistic ethos or revelation given by God to the common father Abraham. Therefore, the challenge of Christian witness within Muslim societies demands concerted “spiritual and theological reflection on the meaning of our faith,” not only “in the Islamic context in which we live,” as Joseph el-Zahlaoui of the Orthodox Church of Antioch says (“Witnessing in the Islamic Context,” in Your Will Be Done: Orthodoxy in Mission, ed. George Lemopoulos [Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1989], pp. 103–4), but also in the common monotheistic (Jewish, Christian, Islamic) ethos that motivates our life and relationships.

Gabriel Habib, Lebanese, a member of the Orthodox Church of Antioch, resides in Cyprus. He served the Middle East Council of Churches as general secretary from 1977 to 1994.
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Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission: 1996

David B. Barrett

The table opposite is the twelfth in an annual series describing statistics and trends in world mission. This year we attempt to answer the questions, How many persons down the ages have committed themselves to Christ's mission to the world? How many missionaries have ever served? How many Christians, whether professionals or laypersons, have lived their lives active in mission? The diagram below reports the answers.

The wedge represents the world's total force for mission divided into 8 mutually exclusive columns labeled M-1 to M-8. The shaded part (M-1 to M-7) represents all persons active in mission. M-1, M-2, and M-3 represent foreign missionaries in Worlds A, B, and C respectively. M-4, M-5, and M-6 represent home missionaries and pastoral workers. M-7 represents the lay active in mission. M-8 represents Christians inactive in mission.

Above the wedge in capital letters are eight cumulative varieties of mission recognized by the churches. Below the wedge are fourteen categories used by the churches to report on mission, with 1995 statistical data.

At the bottom of the page is a box giving each column's totals of persons at ten points during twenty-one centuries of Christian mission, followed by three lines giving annual changes in 1995. "Losses" are due to retirement, deaths, or changes of vocation. "Gains" represent the annual number of new personnel who joined each category in 1995. "Increase" gives the overall totals, defined as gains minus losses. The final line in bold type gives the cumulative grand total of all persons ever involved in each column's variety of mission—all who have ever served as missionaries or been active in mission.

Across twenty centuries, disciples active in Christ's mission have numbered 27 percent of all Christians. That proportion has now risen to 36 percent of all Christians living today.

David B. Barrett, a contributing editor, is Research Professor of Missiometrics at Regent University, Virginia Beach, Virginia. Sources and definitions as given in INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN OF MISSIONARY RESEARCH 18, no. 1 (January 1994): 24.

#### World Population by Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Urban Dwellers (urbanites)</th>
<th>Rural Dwellers</th>
<th>Adult Population (over 15 yrs.)</th>
<th>Literates</th>
<th>Nonliterates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>1,619,886,800</td>
<td>2,332,694,900</td>
<td>1,387,191,900</td>
<td>1,025,938,000</td>
<td>286,705,000</td>
<td>739,233,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>3,697,141,000</td>
<td>3,152,784,000</td>
<td>2,344,230,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>5,804,121,000</td>
<td>2,650,326,000</td>
<td>3,153,795,000</td>
<td>3,960,498,000</td>
<td>2,386,428,000</td>
<td>1,374,070,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>6,158,051,000</td>
<td>2,926,306,000</td>
<td>3,231,747,000</td>
<td>4,242,897,000</td>
<td>3,003,971,000</td>
<td>1,238,926,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>2025</td>
<td>8,294,341,000</td>
<td>3,952,088,000</td>
<td>3,231,747,000</td>
<td>4,242,897,000</td>
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#### Global Christianity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Christians (total all kinds)</th>
<th>Pentecostals/Charismatics</th>
<th>Practicing Christians</th>
<th>Affiliated Church Members</th>
<th>Great Commission Christians (active)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>588,056,300</td>
<td>3,700,000</td>
<td>26,925,700</td>
<td>521,563,200</td>
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<td>1970</td>
<td>1,245,934,000</td>
<td>74,352,000</td>
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<td>1996</td>
<td>1,955,229,000</td>
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<td>172,000,000</td>
<td>1,782,809,000</td>
<td>300 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2,119,342,000</td>
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<td>300,000,000</td>
<td>1,888,270,000</td>
<td>554,157,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>2025</td>
<td>3,058,229,000</td>
<td>1,140,000,000</td>
<td>400,000,000</td>
<td>2,589,206,000</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

#### Christian Finance (in US $ per year)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Christian Causes</th>
<th>Churches' Income</th>
<th>Parachurch and Institutional Income</th>
<th>Commercial Book Titles</th>
<th>New Non-Christian Urban Dwellers</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>8 billion</td>
<td>7 billion</td>
<td>1 billion</td>
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<tr>
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<td>120 billion</td>
<td>180 billion</td>
<td>140,000</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2025</td>
<td>870 billion</td>
<td>300 billion</td>
<td>360 billion</td>
<td>600,000</td>
<td>6,200 million</td>
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#### Membership by Ecclesiastical Bloc

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Catholics (non-Roman)</th>
<th>Average Christian Martyrs per Year</th>
<th>Great Commission Christians (active)</th>
<th>Literates</th>
<th>Megacities (Over 1 Million Population)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>3,210,000</td>
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<td>2025</td>
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<td>3,000 million</td>
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<td>333 million</td>
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#### Membership by Continent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Continent</th>
<th>Total Christians</th>
<th>Practicing Christians</th>
<th>Affiliated Church Members</th>
<th>Great Commission Christians (active)</th>
<th>Average Christian Martyrs per Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>33.7</td>
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#### Status of Global Mission, 1996

<table>
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<th>Status of Global Mission</th>
<th>1996</th>
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<tr>
<td>Christian Finance</td>
<td>$870 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megacities</td>
<td>650,000,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Megacities</td>
<td>650,000,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Literates</td>
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January 1996
Fishing in the Neighbor’s Pond: Mission and Proselytism in Eastern Europe

Miroslav Volf

A good way to describe the situation in Eastern Europe today is to say that yesterday’s dreams have turned into today’s nightmares. This holds true not only in politics and economy but also in church life. One need not be an expert in Eastern European Christianity to know that at the very center of the religious turmoil are the issues of mission and proselytism. What precisely is the problem? One way to put it is to say that what Protestants (mainly of the evangelical kind) consider to be legitimate mission Catholics and Orthodox (whom I will refer to as established churches) consider to be illegitimate and culturally damaging proselytism.

For all churches in Eastern Europe the peaceful revolution of 1989 seemed a dawn of a new era. They had been discriminated against and even persecuted under Communist totalitarianism; now under democracy they were hoping for unhindered flourishing. Instead, new conflicts emerged, this time not with the government, but with each other. Churches were now politically free to pursue their respective goals, but they became trapped in the battle over their own colliding goals.

Catholics and Orthodox were hoping that some of the significant social influence they had before the Communists came into power would be regained. After all, for centuries they served as guardians of various Eastern European cultures, preserving the identity of their peoples. Hence to be Croatian was to be a Catholic Christian, to be Serbian was to be an Orthodox Christian, and so forth. Yet the years of Communist domination had partly de-Christianized Eastern European cultures. Moreover, the new democratic order has brought a wide variety of other cultural shapers (both Christian and non-Christian) into play and indeed guarantees them the right of existence. The same historical change that freed established churches to exert themselves again as a major cultural force has provided space for a wide variety of other forces that compete with the established churches. Conflict was preprogrammed. It was only a question of how it would be carried out: within the bounds set by the new democratic order, or using the skills honed in the totalitarian past; through civil dialogue, or through brute force; with regard and love for one another, or with indifference and even hate.

Evangelical Protestants, always a small minority in Eastern European countries, also had great hopes for democracy. Above all, they wanted freedom to worship God and proclaim the Good News to non-Christians. The trouble was that their definition of who were non-Christians included most members of the established churches. What compounded the trouble, however, was the zeal of various Christian groups from abroad who saw the lifting of the iron curtain as the unique opportunity to proclaim Jesus Christ within what they used to call an “evil empire.” In a 1993 study, the Center for Civil Society in Seattle determined that approximately 760 different Western religious groups, churches, and parachurch organizations were at work in former Communist nations of Europe. There were 200 to 350 different groups in the Commonwealth of Independent States, for instance, and 120 to 200 in Romania alone.

The following statement by Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow and All Russia at the Conference of European Churches in 1992 expresses well the sentiment of the established churches:

We thought with certitude that after we received freedom, the solidarity of our Christian brothers in the West would help us to organize and restore our witness to Christ in our country, and our catechetical and missionary work in order to enlighten those educated in atheism and still ignoring Christ. And this would be in the spirit of the manifestation of the “joint witness” to Christ excluding and condemning any proselytism. . . .

And the long-endured [anti-religious system] and desired changes for the best came. The atheistic totalitarian system of prohibiting the free witness to Christ broke down. And what happened?

When the territories of central and eastern Europe were opened for the public missionary endeavor and evangelism, the peoples rooted in millennial Orthodox traditions became objects of proselytism for numerous zealots calling themselves missionaries and preachers who came from outside to the new markets. We had a different idea about the joint Christian witness and the brotherly solidarity in strengthening our preaching of Christ and promoting cooperation in the ecumenical community in conditions of freedom. . . . Of course our people will also survive this invasion, as it survived even worse times of persecution and attacks from the atheist propaganda. We withheld at that time, we shall withstand also now, since God was with us at that time and will be with us now?

From the perspective of the established churches, foreign missionaries, equipped with the latest fishing gear, are eagerly fishing for poor souls in the Orthodox pond, left partly unattended during decades of Communist rule. It is understandable that the primates of the Orthodox churches would issue a message stating that “the consideration of these [Orthodox] countries as ‘terra missionis’ is unacceptable, since in these countries the Gospel has already been preached for many centuries” and insisting that genuine mission is properly “carried out in non-Christian countries and among non-Christian people.”

From the perspective of Protestants, however, the negative reaction of the Orthodox and Catholics to what evangelical missionaries present as the Gospel just confirms the conviction that they need to be evangelized. When the statements by patriarchs are given political legitimacy by legislation that prohibits

In Eastern Europe, Western missionaries are seen as eagerly fishing in the Orthodox pond.

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or strongly curtails work of evangelical groups, then these groups feel that their fears are confirmed—the "black Mafia" may turn out to be more hostile to genuine Christianity than the "red Mafia" ever was; the established churches are interested in democracy only when it serves to consolidate their power.

Before identifying some significant differences between Protestant and established churches in Eastern Europe that contribute to the conflict over mission and proselytism, I want to underline that the problem of proselytism in Eastern Europe is not confined to the encounter between evangelicals and the established churches. On one hand, there are non-Christian religious groups (like the Moonies) seeking a foothold in the space that has been opened after the fall of the iron curtain. Here proselytism is an interfaitb issue involving encroachment by non-Christian sects with established churches sometimes unable or unwilling to distinguish between evangelical organizations and the non-Christian sects.

On the other hand, a good deal of proselytizing occurs within the Protestant churches themselves. Pastors of Baptist and Pentecostal churches often complain about independent charismatic churches coming into their cities, enlisting their best (or the most troublesome) coworkers, and stealing their sheep, especially the young ones. In the process the old sheepfold is maligned as unspiritual and culturally backward (because the shepherds in charge do not believe in quite the same amount of miracles as the newcomers and will not tolerate some contemporary styles of worship and dress). Here, for the most part, the problem of proselytism is an issue of personal power, cultural taste, generational difference, and financial independence; differences in theology are secondary.

Differing Perspectives

The most disturbing problems surrounding the issue of proselytism in Eastern Europe involve fundamental differences in perspective. First, there are differing perspectives on the relation between church and culture. Established churches consider themselves as guardians of the existing cultures and peoples, who need to be freed both from Communist and negative Western influences. They want to preserve the Orthodox or Catholic character of their cultures. In sharp contrast, Protestants in Eastern Europe tend to see themselves as addressing individuals, often with the purpose of freeing them from the weight of traditional culture. They see the Gospel for the most part in contrast to existing culture.

Second, there are differing perspectives on the relation between church and state. Established churches in Eastern Europe have, for the most part, not yet consciously accepted all the implications of democracy as a political system such as cultural pluralism and a free market of goods and ideas. They are not prepared to see themselves as simply one among many players in the social game.

Evangelical Protestants, I believe, are split on the issue. Those more rooted in Eastern European traditions tend to welcome democracy because it means freedom, but at the same time they desire to have it without pluralism and competition; their understanding of the basic pattern of church/state relations is the same as that of the established churches, even if they find themselves on opposite sides of particular issues. Those evangelicals more influenced by Western ideas tend, in contrast, to accept plurality as a good that needs to be protected, and competition of ideas as a value to be cherished. Their understanding of the basic pattern of relations between state and church tends to be different from that of the established churches.

Third, there are differing perspectives on what it means to be a Christian. Established churches are like mothers who embrace all children born to them—that is, all those who were baptized. There are various degrees of belonging to the church. There is a place for saints, and there is a place for sinners; are all welcome. Protestants, however, are like stern fathers and accept only those who behave—who actively believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord and act in accordance with their belief. Hence for Protestants, all those who do not “behave”—believe and act—are legitimate objects of evangelization. Moreover, they ought to be encouraged to leave the places where they are not challenged to behave and join the communities of behavers—the true believers.

Fourth, there are differing perspectives on the church. For established churches, on the one hand, the church is one, and it is visible. If there is in fact more than one church, or bodies that call themselves church, this is a serious problem that must be overcome by ecumenical efforts (or, in some more conservative circles, by all others joining the one true church that has existed through the centuries). Switching from one church to the other is not allowed on theological grounds. For Protestants, on the other hand, the church that is one is invisible. There are many visible churches. Some are bad and ought to be left; others are good and can be joined if they suit one’s personality, interests, and needs. Switching from one church to the other, provided the new one is “Bible believing,” is not unlike switching from Pepsi to Coke (or, as many Eastern European Protestants might say, from Budweiser to Heineken).

These major differences of perspective are not simply theological in nature; they have an important sociological dimension. The internal culture and institutions of the established churches in Eastern Europe are to a large extent still more fitted to premodern than to modern societies, which is exactly opposite for the evangelical churches. Since the Eastern European societies are caught in transition from premodern to modern societies, social conflicts involved in such transition are also felt in the life of the church. Some conversions, though authentically spiritual, are also triggered by important social factors—they are protests against the old social status quo in favor of more flexible and pluralistic democratic social structures.

Instead of addressing these major differences between established and Protestant churches in greater detail, I want to indicate three related tasks facing Protestant churches in Eastern Europe. I believe that if we as evangelical Protestants pursue the mission of proclaiming Christ along with these tasks, there is hope that the conflict between established churches and Protestants over mission and proselytism will be significantly reduced.

Contextual Theology

Protestant churches in Eastern Europe need to develop a theology that, in addition to being rooted in the Scriptures, is sensitive
to the needs, struggles, and aspirations of the churches and the peoples in diverse Eastern European countries. This will be a contextual theology.

When we talk about contextual theology, I find it helpful to make a simple but important distinction between "contextual products" and "contextual advertising." For example, an international firm such as Coca-Cola or McDonalds comes to Eastern Europe with a ready-designed product that it wants to sell. In order to sell it, however, it has to persuade locals to buy it. So it may use local people and local symbols to lure people into buying a nonlocal product. This is contextual advertising. In contrast, a contextual product is one that a firm in Romania or Russia designs and makes for use in Romania or Russia.

What we need, I propose, is not a Coca-Cola or McDonalds kind of contextualization, not contextual advertising, but contextual—local—products. Our theological schools should not be simply import agencies and local advertising firms for foreign theological companies. I am not suggesting that we should not import, translate, and publish important works produced elsewhere. But this is not all we should do, and this is not the main thing we should do. We must learn from our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world, from those who have a centuries-long and rich tradition of Protestant theological reflection (as in the West) and from those who live in contexts similar to ours (those in the so-called Two-Thirds World). For a while it will be good to have some of them on site as expert consultants. We cannot isolate ourselves from others, because there is only one Lord, and the church of Jesus Christ around the world is one. But in communion with all the saints, we should create and disseminate our own products. If we do not, we will rightly be criticized by our compatriots as foreigners or, in some countries, as Westernizers. Our churches and theological institutions should be places where local products are developed, products that can be shared with the rest of the world.

In a very important sense, though, we followers of Jesus Christ are not supposed to be inventing anything. The Gospel is one and the same for the whole world. It is the story of our Lord Jesus Christ, who came into the world to proclaim and enact the Good News, to die and rise for the salvation of the world. When we talk about contextual products, we need to keep in mind that the Gospel is first of all something given to us rather than created by us. Yet, our own context requires that we preach the one Gospel in our own language and think with our own heads how the Gospel intersects with the specific cultures in which God has placed us. The voices that respond to the voice of the one Good Shepherd are shaped by the cultures from which they come. I was at one of the many conferences organized in the wake of the downfall of Communism whose purpose was to explore the mission in Eastern Europe. I profoundly appreciate the enthusiasm and efforts of such gatherings, though occasionally the zeal is misplaced. A first-rate video presentation was shown at one of the conferences I attended. A line from it stuck with me. With pictures of Red Square with its beautiful church on the screen, the narrator insisted with much passion that we "need to bring Jesus" to Russia. That was probably an innocent comment, but is set me thinking about how Western Christians talk about the mission and how they sometimes carry it out. I understand, I thought to myself, the need to preach the Gospel in Russia. But what kind of a poor little Jesus would that be whom we would have to bring to Russia (or to any other part of the globe for that matter)? Shall we put him in a box like some dumb idol, write on it "Fragile, handle with care," and transport him over, hoping for his safe arrival? I could not help wondering who is serving whom when people carry their gods into foreign lands.

Even in the furthest regions of the world, Jesus Christ is already there before we ever set foot on them, though he may not be recognized or worshiped. In Eastern Europe Jesus Christ has been not only present but also worshiped by millions of people for centuries. Maybe he was worshiped in a wrong way, maybe only half-heartedly, maybe even only with lips. Yet he was there, and he was worshiped. Jesus does not need to be brought to Eastern Europe. What we need to do is to wash the face of Jesus, that beautiful face that has been dirtied not only by Communist propaganda but also by so many compromises our churches—both the established and evangelical—have made through the centuries.

If one aspect of our mission is to wash the face of Jesus, an important aspect of our evangelical theologizing must be to rediscover the authentic Eastern European faces of Jesus. Does Jesus have Eastern European faces, a Moldavian or a Macedonian face, you may ask? Yes, he does. He is "the true light, which enlightens everyone"; he is the unconquerable light that "shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it." When he comes into any culture, he does not come to a strange land but "to what is his own." This holds true even if that culture holds him a stranger, even if only a few receive him and "believe in his name" (John 1:5, 9, 11, 12). The eternal light of God shines in the darkness of our world refracted through the prisms of our multiple cultures. To change the image, our task is not to import Jesus, like some exotic article from a foreign land. We must proclaim Jesus and, in obedience to his message of salvation, (re)discover the Croatian, Slovakian, Hungarian, or Serbian face of Jesus.

Hearing and Speaking the Truth

The need to (re)discover the Eastern European faces of Jesus brings me to the second task for evangelical Christians. It concerns the religious context in Eastern Europe. The culture of most Eastern European countries has been shaped profoundly and indelibly by Orthodox Christianity and Catholicism. Since I am dealing here mainly with Eastern Europe (as distinct from Central Europe), I will concentrate my comments on the relation between Protestants and Orthodox. Similar observations apply in other settings, however, for the relation between Protestants and Catholics.

There are many reasons for the tensions between the Orthodox Church and various Protestant churches in Eastern Europe. Some are theological, others sociological, one of them being the uncertainty of the Orthodox Church in dealing with the processes of democratization. How can we as Protestants deal with the tensions?

In the heat of the battle, especially when one is part of a weak minority, it is difficult to do anything other than fight back. But we are the followers of the Messiah who, when abused, did not abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten (1 Pet. 2:23). We should have both the courage and the strength not to cross swords with our presumed enemy but to extend our hand. It is sometimes tempting to repay theological abuse with theological abuse. Orthodox believers call Protestants intruders and innovators; they will not recognize Protestants as a church, insisting that they are a dangerous sect. What do we do? We accuse Orthodox priests of being power-hungry, denounce them as promoters of false human traditions, and insist that they are part of an apostate church.

I think Protestants need to do all they can to resist being
drawn into such an exchange of theological abuses. We should rather suffer violence than inflict it; we should return insult with blessing (1 Pet. 3:9). From the perspective of pop psychology or quasi-revolutionary rhetoric, such a refusal to fight would be at best described as unhealthy and at worst thought of as worthy only of "despicable rubble," as Karl Marx put it. In fact, it speaks of sovereign strength and sets a profound and genuinely Christian revolution in motion. In all our relationships we need to be trained in this revolutionary refusal to let our behavior be defined by our enemies but to follow in the footsteps of the crucified Messiah.

Most Protestants in Eastern Europe would agree with this exhortation. They know better than to go after the Orthodox with the sword in their hand. But I am not so sure that they are willing to extend to them a brotherly or sisterly hand. The impression one gets from various publications and speeches is that evangelical theology stands in almost complete opposition to Orthodox theology and that evangelical churches stand in total opposition to Orthodox churches. To pick up the terminology from 1 Peter that I used earlier, Protestants do not abuse them as the Orthodox seem to abuse Protestants, but neither do they bless them. What would happen, however, if we repaid the seeming abuse with blessings, as 1 Peter teaches us? What would happen if we started praying for a spiritual renewal within the Orthodox church, a renewal that would not be without precedent in Orthodox history? What would happen if we praised them for preserving the memory of some profoundly Christian men and women whom we would do well to emulate?

We should rather suffer violence than inflict it; we should return insult with blessing.

One theme touching social involvement I do not find addressed by many Protestants, but it is absolutely crucial in Eastern Europe today. Our churches must be training grounds for humble, discerning, and courageous people who will fearlessly put their minds in the service of God's kingdom for the good of God's people and of culture at large.

Breaking Down the Dividing Wall

With respect to culture at large, many Protestants in Eastern Europe highlight the need for moral education and social involvement as the key issues that need addressing. They are right. However, the question is, What should we do with these differences? One thing we certainly should not do is pretend that they do not exist or that they are unimportant. Whoever disregards differences in the name of some superficial love will trip over those differences in surprising places. Yet the way to deal with differences is not to state what we believe and tell the Orthodox Church that we are absolutely right and they are absolutely wrong. Even if God's Word is absolute, our knowledge of God's Word is not. We are not gods but limited human beings, and sinful ones at that.

How, then, should we proceed? First we need to listen. We need to listen to what the Orthodox Church says about itself. If we disagree with Orthodox theology, we should disagree with what they actually believe, and not with what we imagine they believe, or even with what we have read in one or two of their books. Moreover, as we want to portray to them the best possibilities of our theology, we should listen to the best presentations of their theology (while not disregarding how sometimes good theology gets corrupted when translated at the popular level). In addition to listening to what they say about themselves, we should listen carefully to what they say about us, to their criticism of our theology and practice. Often those with whom we are in conflict distort our image, but sometimes in such distorted images we can discover a truth about ourselves that we and our friends are too blind to see or too cowardly to say.

Second, we must testify. This second step is as important as the first. We must testify to the Orthodox Church about what we believe to be the truth of God's Word as intelligently as we can, as gently as we can, and above all as faithfully to the Gospel of Jesus Christ as we can. Jesus said: "My teaching is not mine but his who sent me" (John 7:16). How much more is this true of us, his disciples! Our teaching is not ours but belongs to the one who sent us. We are not at liberty to change what we believe to be true in order to reach some cheap consensus; we have a mandate "to testify to the truth" (John 18:37), not to find the least common denominator. Truth does not necessarily lie halfway between two opposing opinions. And it does not necessarily lie in either of the opinions, or (as some master dialecticians would want us to believe) in both of them. Truth lies where it lies, and our task is to point to it, wherever it lies, with us or with others. For it is the truth that will set us free.

If we put together the need to listen and the need to testify, and apply them not only to the Orthodox Church but to culture at large, the results will be astounding. If we are persistent, there will emerge among us indigenous theologies that let the Romanian or Russian face of Jesus Christ shine upon Romanian or Russian lands. The question is, Do we have enough humility, discernment, and courage to speak the truth and to hear the truth when spoken to us? It is the possession of the theological virtues of humility, discernment, and courage, more than the right perspectives on any single theological issue, that we need in Eastern Europe today. Our churches must be training grounds for humble, discerning, and courageous people who will fearlessly put their minds in the service of God's kingdom for the good of God's people and of culture at large.
believe that the problem of proselytism is closely related to this matter. As James H. Billington observed recently about the Russian context, authoritarian nationalists “want to build on the privileged position that orthodoxy obtained in the late Soviet period to become a force for social discipline and for the periodic purging of corrupting foreign influences.” The pressures in the direction of instrumentalization of the established churches are present in many countries of Eastern Europe. To the extent that local governments give in to such pressures, any presence of non-Orthodox (or non-Catholic) forms of Christianity would be unwelcome, any public proclamation of the Gospel by evangelicals construed as proselytism, any of their attempts to influence public affairs understood as unwelcome foreign intrusion.

As is well known, ethnocentrism of nation-states is one of the most dangerous political phenomena. It breeds totalitarianism in which the priests of the nationalistic ideology are ready to place everything on the altar of national interests. In relation to other states, writes Nicholas Woltersstoff, nationalist totalitarianism “acts solely in its own self-interest, breaking treaties when it sees fit, waging wars when it finds the advantage, thumbing its nose at international conventions and organizations. National self-assertion is its only goal. All that restrains it is a balance of terror.” Within its own state, nationalist totalitarianism knows only of the rights of a particular nation, not of the rights of individuals—not of the rights of individuals that belong to the dominant ethnic group, and even less of the rights of those who belong to ethnic minorities. Ethnic minorities, who live mixed with the dominant population in all nation-states, are left with “only two choices: either to emigrate, under varying degrees of duress, or to accept the status of second-class citizens, with varying degrees of deprivation of rights and repression. There is never any other choice.”

What we need is an effective response to the problems of ethnic and ethnic conflicts that are tearing Eastern European societies apart and leaving a trail of blood and ashes. This is not a place to develop a theology of ethnicity. I should say here only that in addition to theological explorations of this topic, we need common church commitments, something like the Barmen Declaration, produced by the Confessing Church under the leadership of Karl Barth in the struggle against the Nazi regime. How would a confessional statement, addressed to the problem of ethnic conflict, read? I suggest something like the following:

“You were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9). “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

All the churches of Jesus Christ, scattered in diverse cultures, have been redeemed for God by the blood of the Lamb to form one multicultural community of faith. The “blood” that binds them as brothers and sisters is more precious than the “blood,” language, customs, political allegiances, or economic interests that may separate them.

We reject the false doctrine that a church should place allegiance to the culture it inhabits and the nation to which it belongs above the commitment to Jesus Christ and the brothers and sisters from other cultures and nations, servants of the one Jesus Christ, their common Lord, and members of God’s new community.

Imagine the impact on Eastern European societies if all our churches, established and Protestant, were to adopt and act in accordance with such a confession.

Patterns of Conformation

We Protestants need to discover the Eastern European faces of Jesus. I have argued; we need to listen to what our brothers and sisters in established churches have to say to us and testify to them to the truth of the Gospel; we need to break down the wall of hostility between cultures and nations. If we attend to these theological tasks, our mission in Eastern Europe will be enriched, and we will find ourselves more at peace with our neighbors who belong to Orthodox and Catholic traditions. In conclusion, let me point out one major danger that lurks in a project of discovering the Eastern European faces of Jesus.

When I was a boy, I used to read the Old Testament and be amazed at how easily the Israelites would abandon Yahweh and follow after strange gods. “How could they do such a thing, after God has led them through the Red Sea, settled them in the land where milk and honey flowed, and took such good care of them?” I used to ask myself. Little did I know how dangerous my question was. Simply to ask means to be blind about ourselves. For the question is not “how they could do such a thing” but “how we repeatedly do the same.”

When I was a young student of theology, I was shocked to find many theologians giving up basic Christian doctrines. I used to ask myself, “How could these ‘liberal’ theologians accommodate so shamelessly to the spirit of the age when the plain truth of the Gospel has been revealed to us in God’s Word?” Little did I know that the question of the student about “liberal” theologians was as dangerous a question as the boy’s about the faithless Israelites. I thought accommodation was the problem of liberals not of conservatives. I did not realize that whereas I saw their accommodation clearly, I was either blind or very lenient toward my own.

No doubt “liberals”—and in Eastern Europe, Protestants would say, Catholics and Orthodox—have accommodated too often. I am sorry for their accommodations, but what I fear more are our own accommodations as conservative evangelicals. Let me take an example from a different part of the world—the question of race in such a good evangelical denomination as the Assemblies of God in the United States, as analyzed recently by Cecil M. Robeck in a paper entitled “Historical Roots of Racial Unity and Division in American Pentecostalism.” In 1945 the denomination made an official resolution “that we encourage the Colored People will...
in its first years. “People of all nations came and got their cup full,” we read in a book from 1915. Though even then “some of our white brethren” had “prejudice and discrimination,” the movement insisted that “we must love all men as Christ commands,” a Christ who “takes in all people in his Salvation” and who “is neither black nor white man, nor Chinaman nor Hindu, nor Japanese, but God.”

As the Pentecostal movement grew, however, it started moving away from its original gospel vision of racial unity toward conformity to U.S. social practices of racial segregation. What is equally disturbing as the insistence on separation and division is the kind of justification given for this in the official documents of the church: “Conforming to American Law and society our work amongst the Colored People will remain distinct and separate,” the minutes read. The original holy conformation to the gospel vision has been replaced by the godless conformation to “American Law and society,” and this was done in good conscience by good Christians who believed in the Bible as the infallible Word of God, affirmed all evangelical doctrines, and desired to live holy lives. They accommodated, and they even explicitly stated that they accommodated, yet they seemed to have been unaware of doing so. They were trapped inside their own culture but believed they were free followers of Jesus Christ alone. Being trapped inside our own cultures and our prejudices with the Bible in our hands is what I fear for Protestants in Eastern Europe.

Conflict over mission and proselytism in Eastern Europe is unlikely to go away any time soon. We need to work to overcome these conflicts because they are a counterwitness to the world. If the church is itself profoundly divided, it cannot be a sign of God’s reconciliation in a world torn apart by social and ethnic hostilities. Our goal must therefore be to end the strife of churches over mission and proselytism and proclaim together the message of Jesus Christ as the one Lord of the one world.

We must ensure that our continuing disputes over mission and proselytism are not over our prejudices but over the truth of the Gospel, and that all encounters are carried out in the spirit of humility appropriate to the followers of the crucified Messiah.

Notes

1. This essay was prepared for a conference at the Overseas Ministries Study Center, New Haven, Connecticut. Some portions were originally presented at the Consultation on Theological Education and Leadership Development in Post-Communist Europe, October 18, 1994, in Oradea, Romania. The proceedings of that conference will be published under the title “Eastern European Faces of Jesus.” When I speak below about Eastern Europe, I am referring primarily to the eastern portion of the region marked by the former iron curtain, that is, exclusive of Central Europe.


3. In the midst of an explanation as to why he participated in a successful coup mounted against a number of older presbyters in a local Pentecostal church in former Yugoslavia, a young spiritual “revolutionary” offered to me as evidence that these people needed to be deposed the fact that one of them did not know how to pronounce “Coca Cola”—the elder man pronounced it the way the words would be read if they were Serbian words rather than the way Americans pronounce them. Never mind that the presbyter was a true saint of God who had served the church selflessly for years. He was unfit as a spiritual leader of the modern educated generation, my young friend seemed to suggest.

4. I am using here “premodern” and “modern” as descriptive rather than evaluative terms, well aware that modernity is a rather mixed blessing, and premmodernity is by no means a curse.


9. One such example of a common confession seeking to overcome racial division is the South African “Belhar Confession” (1986).

10. Quoted by Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., “Historical Roots of Racial Unity and Division in American Pentecostalism” (typescript, 1994).


Response to Miroslav Volf

Leonid Kishkovsky

The thoughtful essay of Miroslav Volf on mission and proselytism in Eastern Europe is an important contribution to a much-needed conversation. And it is precisely real conversation and genuine encounter that are needed. As Volf points out, “We need to listen.” And he goes on to say, “If we disagree with Orthodox theology, we should disagree with what they actually believe, and not with what we imagine they believe, or even with what we have read in one or two of their books.”

As an Orthodox Christian, I would like to make the same affirmation. We Orthodox should listen. If we Orthodox disagree with Protestant theology, we should disagree with what Protestants actually believe, and not with what we imagine they believe.

The perspective of Volf, appropriately and necessarily, is a
Protestant perspective. The several points I offer in response will be made from an Orthodox perspective.

1. Volf makes the reconciling argument, from Scripture, that “we should rather suffer violence than inflict it; we should return insult with blessing (1 Pet. 3:9).” He states that “Protestants do not abuse [Orthodox] as the Orthodox seem to abuse Protestants, but neither do they bless them.”

From my experience in Central and Eastern Europe—both as mediated to me by the accounts of others and as directly experienced by me—the Orthodox way of doing theology, the Orthodox way of worshiping, the Orthodox way of being the church is very often criticized harshly, even abusively, by Protestants. Such criticism is often the first point of Protestant witness made in an “Orthodox context.”

It appears to me that both Orthodoxy and Protestants in Eastern Europe must begin to recognize that both engage in hostility and abuse, and that both are abused.

2. In the question of the different perspectives on the relation between church and culture, there is much to be learned in what I hope is a future of honest dialogue. Certainly, a captivity to culture is to be noted in Orthodox cultural contexts. Sometimes, the faith is affirmed and defended more as a cultural phenomenon, more as a national religious and historic tradition, than as a phenomenon of encounter with God.

Still, one should not imagine that a Christian can simply levitate out of cultural contexts. Culture permeates human thinking and attitudes, and influences presuppositions. Even the argument against the weight of traditional culture can be—in reality or in perception—the expression of a culture, of a cultural style, of a set of cultural presuppositions. Thus, the Protestant approach to mission, worship, and Bible study often is an expression of a cultural context or climate—in this case the cultural context of Western Europe or America. For example, to watch and to hear American Christian preachers on Russian television is definitely to witness the projection of a religious and cultural style (and content?) that is thoroughly foreign in the Russian cultural context.

Volf himself makes the point that Protestants too can be trapped inside their own cultures and prejudices. I have made the point above only to support his view in this matter.

But culture is not only trap or obstacle. Sometimes, culture is so imprinted with a religious message and image that culture itself can carry the message of the Gospel and the image of Christ. I noted this during my first visit to Russia in 1978. This was a time of militant and dominant atheism, when Orthodox Christianity, along with all expressions of religion, was marginalized, persecuted, and oppressed; a time when religion was successfully rendered invisible. I visited the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow and entered the rooms in which the most famous icons of the Russian Orthodox Church were displayed. (These had been confiscated by the Communist regime many years earlier, thus depriving the worshiping community of these holy images.) The rooms in the gallery, I observed, had the atmosphere not of an art gallery but of a room for prayer, a chapel. There was a reverence in the attitudes of those who beheld the images of Christ before them.

In another room, there was a painting called Christ Appearing to the Multitude, by a nineteenth-century secular painter, Alexander Ivanov. The painting showed Christ approaching the Jordan and John the Baptist, and the people surrounding John the Baptist. In a society in which the very story of Christ was excluded from contemporary culture, in which the Scriptures could not be obtained, it was the Russian culture of the past that carried the message of Jesus Christ to the public arena, making the image of Christ an indelible presence for people who were otherwise deprived of this image and face.

Thus, culture is not “in itself” an obstacle to the Gospel, just as human nature is not “in itself” un receptive to Christ. Just as humans are called to be “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4), and are capable of this, so culture is called to bear something of the truth and love and beauty of God, and of the Gospel of Christ, and is capable of this.

Now it should be clearly understood that there is in the Orthodox faith and experience (in the Orthodox tradition, if you will) also a current that is radically culture-challenging and culture-denying. This is found in some forms of asceticism and in an Orthodox worldview that expresses the Orthodox faith and the encounter with God as “wilderness” experiences. In this way of thinking, the eschatological dimension is of primary importance.

3. In many treatments of twentieth-century history, written both from the secular and from the Christian points of view, there is a strange silence about the experience of Christian martyrs, on a massive scale, under Soviet Communism. One of the objects of the Communist genocides was the eradication of religion. In the Soviet Union this meant most especially the eradication of the Orthodox Church. Thus, among the millions of victims of genocide, tens of thousands—even hundreds of thousands—were Orthodox Christian martyrs.

That secular treatments of the Communist period are silent about the Orthodox Church’s overwhelming suffering under Communism is quite unfortunate, but not surprising. That Christians are often equally silent about this is not only unfortunate, it is inexplicable. What we do hear about frequently is the compromise of religious leaders, especially Orthodox ones, and their co-option by the Communist regimes. These compromises and co-optations did occur. They occurred among all religious groups and communities—Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist. But surely Christians should be grateful for the endurance, unto death itself, shown by countless martyrs. Should not the witness of Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant martyrs be known by all of us Christians? Should we not know about the witnesses and martyrs given to Christianity by one another’s communities under persecution?

I do not find this affirmation of the witness of martyrdom in Volf’s essay. And yet, if it is true that “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church,” then the martyrs of the twentieth century under Communism are the very soil from which mission in post-Communist Europe emerges. Orthodox martyrs bear witness to an amazing vitality of faith in the risen Christ.

4. Finally, Christians in Eastern Europe are certainly being challenged to reflect on the meaning and nature of Christian mission today, in the post-Communist European setting. This reflection will require humility, truthfulness, integrity, and real obedience to the Gospel. It will need to be done within the Orthodox, the Roman Catholic, and the Protestant churches. It will also need to be done by Orthodox, Roman Catholics, and Protestants together. I hope that not only Volf’s essay, but also my response to it, will make a constructive contribution to a deepening of the conversation among Christians, leading to deeper common reflection on Christian mission today.
My Pilgrimage in Mission

Arnulf Camps, O.F.M.

Looking back over the seven decades of my life, I realize that increasingly I have become conscious of being a pilgrim joining other pilgrims in a common journey. There have been periods of stagnancy but also moments of vision and inspiring encounters. In this autobiographical sketch I relate the various stages by which this journey has taken place.

An Orientation for Life

My surname Camps indicates that my ancestors were not Dutch. Around 1570 Pouli Camps, an officer of the Spanish army, originally from Catalonia, settled in the township of Horst in the northern part of the present Dutch province of Limburg. Both my grandfather and my father were born in Horst, but when my father, Lodewijk Camps, married my mother, Catharina Rutten, who was born at Beesel in the central part of the same province, the couple took up their residence in the city of Eindhoven, a place in northern Brabant that was then developing as an important industrial center. My father was an officer in the Internal Revenue Service. I was born in 1925, the second child of six boys and three girls, and my given name was Pierre.

As a member of a practicing Catholic family, I served as an altar boy and assisted at several first-mass celebrations in the parish church. Quite a few of these young priests were members of the so-called White Fathers, a congregation founded by Cardinal Lavijger for mission work in Africa. The impression they made upon me was intensified during a two-month stay in the hospital, where I was cared for by a nurse who had a brother belonging to the White Fathers. I shared her enthusiasm for missions, and having finished my primary education, I told my father that I wanted to go to the minor seminary of the White Fathers. My father did not agree and sent me instead to the Gymnasium Augustinianum, an excellent high school in Eindhoven. He made one concession: the topic of becoming a priest would be open for discussion after six years, when I would have completed my finals. Up to this day I am grateful for his wise decision, as I had a chance to grow up in the midst of my family and friends.

I remember that it was during these years that my father used to read to us from books he loved. At an early age I listened to several novels written by the Flemish author Felix Timmermans. One was a novel on the life of Saint Francis of Assisi: The Harp of Saint Francis. Slowly, the White Fathers vanished from sight and the Franciscans came to the fore. At the age of eighteen—in 1943, the middle of the war—I joined the novitiate and became a novice of Saint Francis of Assisi. With the help of a wise master of novices, I decided after one year to take the simple vows, and finally, in March 1945, I had left the world by following Saint Francis, and that is why I changed my name: Pierre became Arnulf from 1943 onward.

The Academic Years of Reflection

Having studied one year at the Catholic University of Nijmegen in my own country, where I took my bachelor's degree in theology in 1951, I left for the Catholic and International University of Fribourg in Switzerland. The Missiological Institute and the Anthropos Institute of the Society of the Divine Word (S.V.D.) in nearby Posieux-Froideville offered excellent possibilities for specialization. When in 1952 I had obtained my licentiate's degree in theology, I was free to specialize in missiology and to write a doctoral dissertation. Fribourg had many advantages. The professors taught in their own mother tongue (French, German, and Italian), and the international Franciscan community in which I lived broadened my outlook. From Professor Johannes Beckmann, S.M.B., who was my mentor, I learned a critical attitude concerning missionary methods used both in the past and in the present. Professor Joseph Henninger, S.V.D., taught me Islamics and Arabic. With Professor Constantin Regamey I did Persian and Tibetan, and also Buddhology and Hinduism. From Professor Georg Hölzter, S.V.D., I took lectures in cultural anthropology, with special attention to the cultures of Mexico and New Guinea. Professor Laurenz Kilger, O.S.B., introduced me to African church history, and Professor Walbert Bühlmann, O.F.M.Cap., taught me the sociology of Africa. Mission theology and history of religions were taught by Professor J. P. Michels, O.P., the director of the Missiological Institute. And finally, mission and canon law was the specialization of Professor H. O. Lüthi, O.P. In consultation with and guided by Professor Beckmann, I started collecting all the material on the Jesuit mission to the Mogul Empire in India, which lasted from 1580 until 1803. From 1953 onward I spent the summer holidays doing research in archives and libraries in London, Rome, Brussels, Munich, and Leyden. Part of the material was used for my dissertation on Jerome Xavier, S.J., and the Muslims of the Mogul

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Empire, controversial works and missionary activity, which I defended and published in the beginning of 1957.

These seven years of missiological study and research greatly extended my knowledge of the cultures and the religions of the world, and they offered me the tools and instruments to enter deeply into their innermost aspirations. I was set on a new stage in my pilgrimage. My spiritual father, Saint Francis, had opposed the Crusades and asked in his rule, written in the early decades of the thirteenth century, that his followers should go and live among people of other faiths. I was now prepared for going and living among them.

People of Other Faiths

My first appointment was to lecture at the Regional Seminary of Christ the King at Karachi, Pakistan. My subjects were missiology, Islamics, and church history. I was given permission to spend three months en route to my new destination. In Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the West Bank (as it is known today), Jerusalem, and Iraq, I visited all kinds of missionaries, centers of study, and Islamic institutions. I was especially impressed by the Institute for Christian and Oriental Studies of my confreres at Cairo, by the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in the Old City of Jerusalem, and by the Hikma University of the Jesuit Fathers in Baghdad. In all these countries I was well received by my Franciscan confreres. In Baghdad I was kindly received by the Jesuit Fathers, and in Basra by the Carmelites. But I also visited missionaries living among Muslims and Christians in Egypt, Lebanon, the West Bank, and Iraq. In the Old City of Jerusalem I met with Father Roberto Focà, a White Father, who asked me whether I had a vocation to convert Muslims. My answer was, “My vocation is to live among them and to show that I am a Christian without any conflict.”

In Karachi, where I arrived at the end of August 1957, I joined the staff of the regional seminary, all Franciscans, and the community of students of Pakistani, Indian, Indonesian, and Dutch origin. Moreover, I started meeting Muslim lecturers of several colleges in Karachi and visiting many shrines of the Pirs (leaders of religious “orders” in popular Islam) in the province of Sind. In this way the immersion in the local Islamic surroundings took place, and I began to publish on areas of my interests. The beginning of an Institute for Christian and Islamic Studies was made. A good number of the students in the regional seminary were influenced by popular Islam, and when they discovered my interest, they revealed their religious feelings to me. Thus, I met many pilgrims on the road and learned to be a copilgrim. I felt the need for a deeper theological reflection but was not yet ready for that.

During my stay in Pakistan, in 1958, I had the opportunity to go for three months to Sri Lanka, where I arrived during a horrible clash between Buddhist Singhalese and Hindu Tamils. This made my idea of what it meant to live among the people more realistic, and I tried to understand the innermost aspirations of both cultures and religions. I was greatly helped in this by the bishop of Chilaw, Mgr. Edmund Pieris, O.M.I., a pastor and a scholar.

In 1959 I had opportunity to visit northern India and to admire the cultural heritage of the Mogul emperors. In the old city of Delhi I visited Mogul palaces, tombs, and mosques. On top of the Qutub Minar I took sick, and in the hospital of the Medical Mission Sisters I learned I had contracted typhoid fever. Thanks to the good care of the sisters, I recovered and left for Bangalore in the south, where my confreres nursed me back to an active life. I enjoyed places like Madras, Cochin, Palmaner, Hyderabad-Deccan, Poona, and Bombay, where I visited seminars, universities, and holy places.

After three months I was back in Karachi and resumed my work. However, early in 1960 I became feverish again and was admitted into the Holy Family Hospital of the Medical Mission Sisters. Dr. Anna Polcino, from the United States, acted decisively and said, “Father, you go to confession, I am going to operate on you!” It was just in time, as a delay of an hour would have been fatal. Normal life started again, but in the beginning of 1961 pain and fever again returned, followed by another serious operation. Dr. Polcino advised me to return to the Netherlands, as more operations could be necessary. My pilgrimage became stagnant, and during several months I wondered what life had in store for me. I lived in the provincial house in Weert and started helping out in the mission secretariat. In 1962 my recovery had progressed well enough that, with a return to the mission field out of the question, I was appointed mission secretary.

The Dutch Franciscan province had a few hundred missionaries, and the task of the mission secretary was to assist them in setting up local Franciscan provinces and local churches. The spirit and the vision of Vatican II was already in the air in those days! It was an interesting job, and I could make good use of my studies and my experiences in Asia. Later on this developed into a fifteen-year development program for all our mission territories, so that at the end of the road all would be self-supporting, independent provinces. It is a reason for joy to see that today there are Franciscan provinces in Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Japan, and South Korea.

Intensified Reflection and New Exposures

In the second half of 1963 the professorship of missiology at the theological faculty of the Catholic University of Nijmegen became vacant, as Professor Alphons Mulders had reached retirement. The Dutch Franciscan provincial was asked to make me available for that chair. I hesitated to accept, since from the very beginning of my priestly life I had prepared myself to be a mission secretary. I accepted, however, and for the first several years I felt this change in my life to be rather painful. I missed the pilgrims on the road and daily contacts with reality. But as the years passed—twenty-seven years up to my retirement in 1990—I occupied the chair of missiology with growing satisfaction.

Many people have helped me in this growth. I had a good team of colleagues in the missiological department. To mention just a few: Dr. Hans van Pinxtener, M.H.M., an expert in African church affairs, who after his early death was succeeded by Dr. Y. Heijke; Dr. R. van Rossum, S.S.C.C., a scholar in Latin American studies and today my successor; Professor Jacques Van Nieuwenhove, W.F., well versed in African and Latin American...
situations; and Dr. J. van Engelen, who specialized in mission sociology. Together we set up a doctoral program and a one-year refresher course for missionaries. In 1969 our first student defended his doctoral dissertation. He was followed by twenty-nine others, and more than one hundred obtained the degree of doctorandus. The missionaries had their own input. They kept us in contact with reality. Thus, I had many companions on the road.

In the wake of Vatican II, the Franciscans were asked to contribute to the renewal of the spirit and the method of missionary activities throughout the world. I attended the Franciscans' extraordinary general chapter at Medellin in 1971 (Colombia) and the general chapter at San Diego in 1981 (United States). For many years I was a member of our international mission council, and right up to the present I am a member of the Islam commission and of the China commission. These activities involved stays of one or two months in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and gave me a chance to live with my confreres in missionary situations. A Dutch congregation, the teaching brothers of Maastricht, asked me to stay with their members for one month and to discuss with them their policies. In the course of this consultation, I visited Sierra Leone, Malawi, Ghana, Pakistan, and Chile. From 1964 to 1980 I acted as a consultant of the Vatican Secretariat for Interreligious Dialogue, and in 1976 I attended the meeting in Tripoli, Libya, where many Muslim and Christian scholars met.

I had good relations with my Reformed colleagues in the Netherlands, and it was a cause of great joy to see Hendrik Kraemer in the audience for my inaugural lecture in 1964. Johannes Verkuyl, professor of missiology at the Free University in Amsterdam, introduced me to his international circle of friends, and this led to my involvement in founding the International Association for Mission Studies, of which I was president for four years. The World Conference on Religion and Peace, meeting in Princeton, Nairobi, and Melbourne over a period of several years, gave me a chance to meet many people of other faiths and to continue my pilgrimage with them. In the Netherlands we were fortunate enough to start an Interuniversity Institute for Missiological and Ecumenical Research, of which I acted as a member of the board and, for more than ten years, as president.

This involvement in quite a number of international and national organizations helped me to keep contact with many specialists professing various religious affiliations. Three visits to continental China brought me into contact with young students searching for meaning in life after the end of the Cultural Revolution. It is no exaggeration to state that many good friends have helped me during so many years to live in context, that is, to profess my Christian faith in relation to the real questions and longings of today's pilgrims on the road.

On the basis of these experiences, I tried to reflect as a theologian on the question, What does it mean today to bring the Good News of the kingdom of God in the light of God's presence in Jesus Christ? I wrote three books in Dutch on this question, which were translated in English in 1983 in one volume, *Partners in Dialogue: Christianity and Other World Religions*. I elaborated upon this topic after 1983 in a number of articles. As early as 1964, in my inaugural lecture in Nijmegen, I focused on Christ and the religions of the world. The gap between the official doctrine of the Catholic Church and my personal experiences of people of other faiths gained during so many encounters and exposures demanded a thorough reflection. The need for this was very great also among my students and among my partners in the dialogue. Moreover, my studies of the history of missionary methods, which I never gave up, convinced me that this problem has arisen throughout Christian history. The admonition of Saint Francis, that we should live among and not against Muslims and other peoples, was a constant reminder.

I came to the conclusion that the classification of theologians into exclusivists, inclusivists, and pluralists was unsatisfactory, as nobody fitted entirely in any one category. I felt free to search for a new approach to this problem, which is so central in a world wherein all faiths and cultures are set on the road of meeting one another and are becoming collectively responsible for the well-being of this planet and its inhabitants. While attempting this new approach, I was very well aware of the fact that relativism could never be a solution, any more than could the problem simply be bypassed.

During the various stages of my pilgrimage I have learned that mission must be undertaken in the spirit of dialogue. For a real dialogue two attitudes are needed. On the one hand, the faith of the other partner must be taken seriously; one must try to understand the innermost religious aspirations of the other and to interpret them in a theological manner. On the other hand, one must try to interiorize and to live his or her own faith as authentically as possible. Both partners in dialogue should enter into this encounter. It is my conviction that out of this meeting in depth—which I call the maieutic method—something new, a tertium quid, will be born, a new synthesis of partial religious experiences or a synthesis of all the riches God has given humankind. In this way humankind will continue to grow spiritually until the end of time: "When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28). Dialogue is a dynamic process and has a deep theological meaning. This maieutic approach calls for two new theological treatises.

First of all, we need a theology of the ways God has given to humankind. During my many encounters with other believers, I have come to understand that all of them in their finest moments saw themselves as being pilgrims on the road or the way. In the first sura of the Qur'an the prophet Mohammed prayed for guidance in order to walk on the straight path. The patriarchs taught the way of the Lord, and John the Baptist had to prepare the way of the Lord and to make his paths straight (Matt. 3:3). Paul called the early Christians "followers of the Way" (Acts 22:4 and 24:14). Jesus is called the Way (John 14:6). People of the Hindu faith know of three ways: karma, bhakti, and jnana. The Buddha taught the eightfold path. In China there are many followers of the Tao, the Way. The way of the ancestors is kept in great reverence by people in Africa and by Native Americans. All human beings are set on a way or on a path leading from here to elsewhere. It is time that they join their efforts and consider themselves to be copilgrims. They will discover many things they have in common, and they will be enriched by the particularities of the others. Both partners on the way can grow spiritually as full humanity is lying ahead of us. I think we need a
creative theological reflection on human beings as copilgrims on the Way.

But we also need a new theology of the Logos. God has never left humankind alone in its pilgrimage. All human beings are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), and they experience this self-manifestation of God. They try to live in that image of God within their own cultural surroundings, and they express this in various "ways," the religions of the world. God’s Spirit and Word, the Logos, is active among us from the very beginning of creation until the end of time. The Logos is present in all of us (John 1:4), is eminently present in Jesus, and will be with us until the Second Coming. Followers of the Way of Jesus are not living in a ghetto, separated from other human beings. They are copilgrims with a special task and mission: to be faithful in the search for fullness, helping themselves and others to grow in God’s way. Christians should be a light, leaven, a mustard seed.

This is where my pilgrimage is leading me. Intense exposures and constant theological reflection have taught me how to live among people of other faiths and how to render account as a Christian.

### Book Reviews

**Unfinished Agenda: An Updated Autobiography.**


This updated autobiography of Bishop Lesslie Newbigin brings his life’s story up to 1992. It is a rich and varied story, not just of a remarkable man but of the ecumenical movement, one of whose architects he was and the beginning of whose sad decline he has also witnessed.

The main themes of this book may be summarized as follows: Newbigin’s Indian experience, culminating in his election as the first bishop of the Church of South India (CSI), an ecumenical association of Protestant churches; second, his work as general secretary of the International Missionary Council, which he led into the World Council of Churches as the Department of World Mission and Evangelism (DWME). He also became editor of the *International Review of Missions*.

While the CSI has survived and flourished in spite of disappointments with the failure to create its counterpart in North India, the DWME has largely been eviscerated by what Newbigin calls the Rapid Social Change thinking in the Western churches, to be reinforced by cultural relativism. These two attitudes had in common the idea of God as an auxiliary of the Western development machinery. The main thrust of Christian engagement with the world would be carried forward by interchurch aid agencies, and in that work the results would be assured by the toolmaking prowess of the West and by its wealth. That would remove any need to look to proclamation, preaching, and prayer to bring in the kingdom of God. That approach has weakened the evangelical impulse of mainline Protestantism and, with it, its ecumenical strength. Newbigin speaks candidly and charitably about this, predicting that it would leave the church’s raison d’être in crisis.

Newbigin returned to India again in 1964 as bishop of Madras, but clearly he had seen enough of the state of affairs in Europe to know that the task back home belonged firmly with his “unfinished agenda.” So in 1974, following his retirement from India, the Newbigin family resettled in Birmingham, England, where Bishop Newbigin taught at the Selly Oak Colleges. However, his work continued to appeal to a much wider audience. He participated in the 1975 WCC Nairobi Assembly and found himself responsible in part for interpreting the work of the WCC to a skeptical public audience in England, where recent proposals for an ecumenical Anglican-Methodist merger had been rejected by the Englishmen.

Also on the racial front, England was in an uncompromising mood. In 1989, on the occasion of Birmingham’s centenary anniversary, a committee of local churches decided to invite Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa to be the leader of an event convened under the rubric “Faith in the City of Birmingham.” The prospect of Archbishop Tutu’s visit created bitter acrimony, with attacks in the press and media, accusing Tutu of being a Communist, an unbeliever, and other equally bitter aspersions. What was planned as a happy centenary celebration ended up running a huge deficit of just under £200,000, all because of Tutu.

The modern defense of culture in racial and national terms sits poorly with what Newbigin sees as the Gospel of love. On a visit to an English slave castle at Cape Coast, Ghana, Newbigin said he was surprised how easily such crimes like black enslavement can be forgotten by the West, saying he wished a representative Englishman—an archbishop or a prime minister—might one day make such a visit to the slave castle, “kneel on the floor, and offer a prayer of contrition” (p. 229).

As a guide to ecumenical affairs and their great, leading personalities, Newbigin’s autobiography is a record of inestimable value. It will also stand as the testament of a broad, generous spirit whose tireless and characteristically self-effacing efforts for the cause remain a reason for profound thanksgiving.

—Lamin Sanneh

*Lamin Sanneh, a contributing editor, is the D. Willis James Professor of Missions and World Christianity at Yale Divinity School, New Haven, Connecticut.*

**Mission and Ministry in Fiji.**


John Mahoney was one of the Columban Fathers, an order that began work in Fiji after World War II, coming to assist the well-established Marist Fathers. Columbans have brought new strength and vitality to the Roman Catholic Church in Fiji. Mahoney came in 1958 and worked chiefly as a parish priest until his death at the age of sixty in 1989. His colleague Frank Hoars, S.S.C., has collected and published this book of essays, which were
written by Mahoney at various times during his career.

Since the essays deal with a wide range of subjects, it is difficult to characterize them as a whole or to adduce from them a central theme. They show how a priest worked to bring laypeople together to think about the church and the ways it should go, how he tried to deal with their fears of supernatural powers, and how he worked on ceremonial ways to help heal the sick who saw themselves under the power of death because of broken relationships. One essay tells of his efforts to indigenize church art and shows some lovely, if poorly reproduced, examples of paintings. Throughout the book there is an ecumenical attitude toward other churches, particularly the Methodist Church, which is predominant in the country.

Several of the chapters deal with Mahoney’s work among the Indian population of Fiji. The most useful parts are those where he describes his attendance at non-Christian worship and his decisions about how far he should participate, “avoiding a fearful distance on the one hand and an inappropriate and compromising identification on the other.” There is some help in this short book for the missionary in cross-cultural work and for the person interested in Fijian life.

—Charles W. Forman

Charles W. Forman, Professor Emeritus of Missions at Yale Divinity School, has worked in and studied the churches of the South Pacific Islands.

Fifteen Outstanding Books of 1995 for Mission Studies

The editors of the INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN OF MISSIONARY RESEARCH have selected the following books published in 1995 for special recognition of their contribution to mission studies. We have limited our selection to books in English, since it would be impossible to consider fairly the books in many other languages that are not readily available to us. We commend the authors, editors, and publishers represented here for their contribution to the advancement of scholarship in studies of Christian mission and world Christianity.

Allen, Hubert J.

Bediako, Kwame.
Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion.

Bosch, David J.
Believing in the Future: Toward a Missiology of Western Culture.

Cracknell, Kenneth.
Justice, Courtesy and Love: Theologians and Missionaries Encountering World Religions, 1846-1914.

Hastings, Adrian.
The Church in Africa 1450-1950.

Heim, Mark S.
Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion.

Isichiei, Elizabeth.
A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present.

Kaplan, Steven, ed.
Indigenous Responses to Western Christianity.

Jongeneel, Jan A. B.
Frankfurt and New York: Peter Lang. DM 89/$52.95.

Knitter, Paul F.
One Earth Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility.

Neely, Alan.

Ranger, Terence.
Are We Not Also Men? The Samkange Family and African Politics in Zimbabwe 1920-1964.
Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann, and London: James Currey. $60; paperback $24.95.

Shenk, Wilbert R.
Write the Vision: The Church Renewed.

Thomas, Norman, ed.
Classic Texts in Mission and World Christianity.

Missiology: An Ecumenical Introduction. Texts and Contexts of Global Christianity.

The Short-Term Missions Boom: A Guide to International and Domestic Involvement.


Michael Anthony, who teaches Christian education at Talbot School of Theology in LaMirada, California, and in his spare time leads short-term mission trips, drives seventeen contributors like a mule train across the High Andes. They bear packs of stories about how to turn high school kids, college students, professionals, and retirees into decent, useful workers—sometimes for a week or two, sometimes for a year or two.

Recruiters at home call them short-term missionaries, while their hosts on the field sometimes call them less complimentary things. To put it another way, Anthony’s “boom” is another person’s “bust.”

No one doubts the astonishing growth in the number of people going
overseas to do a Heinz 57 Varieties of things, from painting to preaching, from whitewashing to witnessing. Equally astonishing is the number of churches, schools, agencies, and people eager to send them.

This outpouring of missions enthusiasm, like other booms, defies harnessing, but Anthony’s compilation is easily the best effort on the market. It is impossible to evaluate a boom that stretches from immature, two-week, teenage adventurers to mature, two-year-term physicians, teachers, businessmen, and others.

But Anthony’s purpose is not critical diagnosis. Essentially, his is a how-to effort, eminently practical for those who want to put together work teams, or, as one agency leader calls them, “taste and see” teams.

The opening part stirs up the vision, hardly a pressing need in view of the numbers. Writers go from there to money, legal matters, and training. Training, of course, is the most serious shortfall in the whole enterprise and warrants much more space. The section on doing projects closer to home mercifully bursts the hype for treks to more romantic locales overseas.

No profound missiology here; rather, a much-needed dose of common sense.

—Jim Reapsome

THE PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS

Research Advancement Grants for Projects on Christian Mission and World Christianity

The Religion Program of The Pew Charitable Trusts invites proposals for large-scale projects that will enhance team research and publication in studies of Christian Mission and non-Western Christianity. Grants will be made on a competitive basis for two- to three-year collaborative projects that will contribute significantly to the advancement of scholarship on cross-cultural mission and/or the development of Christianity in the southern and eastern continents. Grants will range from $50,000 to $100,000 (U.S.) per year.

Projects should be directed by one or more established scholars, have access to appropriate research facilities, involve scholars from two or more regions of the world, and contribute to the intellectual and cross-cultural vitality of the global Christian movement. Projects that are interdenominational and interdisciplinary and that elicit significant contributions from the non-Western world are particularly welcome. Two or three grants will be awarded at the end of 1996, subject to the quality of proposals received and the availability of funds.

The deadline for receiving initial proposals (maximum four pages) for 1996 Research Advancement Grants is May 15, 1996. For further information and instructions please contact:

Geoffrey A. Little, Coordinator
Research Advancement Grants
Overseas Ministries Study Center
490 Prospect Street
New Haven, Connecticut 06511-2196
U.S.A
Tel: (203) 865-1827
Fax: (203) 865-2857

Classic Texts in Mission and World Christianity: A Reader's Companion to David Bosch's Transforming Mission.


This volume makes a very important contribution to the ongoing legacy of David Bosch and the contemporary study of world mission. As a collection of primary sources on themes related to mission and world Christianity, it is an extremely valuable resource. Professors, students, and general readers alike will appreciate the scope and depth of the selected texts as well as the informative introductory comments that accompany each excerpt. The provision of cross-references from Classic Texts to designated sections of Bosch's Transforming Mission (1991) is both helpful and instructive.

As a reader's companion to Transforming Mission, Norman Thomas's selection of texts is determined to some extent by both the possibilities and limits of Bosch's particular frames of reference. Noteworthy excerpts from pivotal works of renowned Protestant theologians and church leaders is unquestionably the book's greatest strength. As for contemporaneous and contextual perspectives on mission and world Christianity, Thomas has enhanced Bosch's work significantly by recognizing and addressing the need to make available to a broader audience the theological writings of women and men from various regions of the world. Some readers may find the absence of Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox sources from the beginning of the modern period up until the mid-twentieth century a limitation of sorts. In fairness to Thomas, however, this lacuna reflects a prevailing tendency in comparative ecumenical mission studies to view Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox approaches to Christian mission from the perspective of historical continuity rather than contextual differentiation.

In summary, Classic Texts is more than a reader's companion to Transform-


Attitudes toward interreligious dialogue strike at the heart of ecumenical identity. Instead of simply tracing a history of attitudes toward religious pluralism in the World Council of Churches (WCC), J. H. Pranger asks how the WCC has understood itself vis-à-vis other religious traditions as a part of its own self-understanding. In a time of new paradigms and a "wider ecumenism" (including other religious traditions), the book is particularly insightful.

The book is a revised thesis of the author's doctoral work at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands (he also studied at Princeton Theological Seminary). It begins by drawing heavily upon Konrad Raiser's Ecumenism in Transition and used that book's challenge to the paradigm of "Christocentric universalism" as a starting point. Then the author highlights a conference on dialogue in Kandy, Sri Lanka (1967), discussions at the WCC Uppsala Assembly (1968), several meetings leading to the 1971 establishment of the program Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies under Stanley Samartha, the WCC debates at Nairobi (1975), and the release by the Central Committee of its Guidelines on Dialogue in 1979. Apart from the focus upon the larger questions of self-understanding, the systematic articulation of the development of the call for dialogue in the face of a pervasive exclusivism is particularly helpful. The sixteen pages on the debate at the Nairobi Assembly would be useful to a reader just in themselves. The book also includes a lengthy treatment of particular theologians, especially Stanley Samartha and M. M. Thomas.

The author recognizes the absence of reference to the actual conversations that took place between Christians and people of other religions in dialogue. No voices emerge from the text. The particular issues surrounding Judaism are not mentioned. However, at a time when the WCC is engaged in a major study "Common Understanding and Vision," many should read this book and allow it to raise the uncomfortable questions of pluralism so crucial for Christian, ecclesial, and ecumenical identities.

—Bruce W. Robbins

Bruce W. Robbins is General Secretary of the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns of the United Methodist Church.
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Learn to speak a foreign language


When the Catholic Bishops Conference of India invited Hindu journalist Arun Shourie to speak at their missions conference in Pune, Maharashtra, in January 1994, they may not have realized that the occasion would yield the caustic assessment of Christian missionary work contained in this book. Shourie, a former editor of the Indian Express who has written widely on issues of religion and politics in India, sharply criticizes the preoccupation of the church (primarily the Catholic Church) with numerical growth through conversions.

Foreign missionaries, according to Shourie, acted as an extension of British colonial rule and directed numerous campaigns against Hindu belief and practice in order to elicit funding from Britain. Foreign-funded institutions and proselytism enticed India's poor out of the Hindu fold, producing what Shourie sees as a largely nominal population of Christians lacking genuine transformation by "spiritual truth" (pp. 21–24). The book includes lengthy excerpts of speeches by British officials as evidence of their subjugation and proselytizing of India's peoples.

The emergence after independence (1947) of new mission theologies, contextualization, Indian leadership, and ecumenism marked the church's transition from calumny to expressions of empathy toward Indian culture and religion. The most significant example of this was the Second Vatican Council's acknowledgment that salvation is possible in other religions. But if these strained concessions carried any sincerity at all, says Shourie, they would lead the church to "forfeit its mission" altogether (p. 228).

The assumptions of this book reflect the rising nationalism in India, which equates "Indian" with "Hindu" and considers conversion to other religions as subversive of Indian nationhood. Shourie focuses so much on the foreign hand in Christian expansion that he never faces or accepts the reality of an Indian church. His conflation of "missions" and "colonialism" ignores the complex relationship between British rule and religious establishments in India. Shourie downplays the many instances when missionary and colonial agendas clashed and makes no mention of the British patronage of Hindu temples—a fact that belies his sweeping portrayal of British rule as Christendom.

While his history is patchy and overgeneralized, Shourie voices perceptions and attitudes toward missionary work that need to be taken seriously in the study of South Asian religious encounter. If readers can overlook his meandering writing style and excessive use of block quotations, the amount of "curry" in this contemporary Hindu-Christian showdown will give them much to ponder.

—Chandra Mallampalli

Chandra Mallampalli is a Ph.D. student of modern Indian history at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.
The Realm of the Word: Language, Gender, and Christianity in a Southern African Kingdom.


Unlike the West, the African mind has never distinguished between the secular and the sacred. When missionaries brought Christianity to Africa in the colonial era, the new religion took on distinctive indigenized forms, in a holistic synthesis of African Traditional Religions with Christianity.

In The Realm of the Word, Paul Landau takes a similarly holistic approach to the study of missionary Christianity in colonial southern Africa. The author, who studied African history and southern African languages at the University of Wisconsin, and who presently teaches at Yale, presents the results of six years of field and archival research in this incisive study of the historical course taken by Christianity among the Ngwato people of Botswana. Throughout, Landau demonstrates an understanding not only of the particular indigenized form that Christianity takes in the region but also of the cultural, sociopolitical, and historical context in which the indigenization of Christianity occurs.

Landau examines in detail how a complex social alliance forged between the Ngwato royalty, clergy, and Tswana women enabled an indigenized Tswana Christianity to become the power base of the Tswana Kingdom; how an acceptable body politic was established; and how Christianity throughout not only transformed Ngwato society but was transformed by it as well. The book traces the emergence of a people's Christianity, which both structured and was structured by the texture of Ngwato society. The epilogue outlines the factors leading to the demise of the Ngwato Kingdom.

The book is a significant contribution to understanding the construction of identity and power in southern Africa. Its holistic approach is a model to future researchers concerned, not only with theory, but also with the entire existential situation of Africans and with the way in which Christianity adapts (and needs to adapt) to become relevant to the African experience.

—G. C. Oosthuizen

G. C. Oosthuizen is Honorary Director of the Research Institute for New Religions and Independent/Indigenous Churches in Durban, South Africa.
Directory of Schools and Professors of Mission in the USA and Canada.


Once again mission scholars are indebted to John A. Siewert and MARC, the research division of World Vision International, for providing a handy reference tool to facilitate their work. This directory, including both Protestants and Catholics, contains two major sections. First is a listing of over 200 schools that offer mission studies, with address, telephone, fax number, degrees and certificates, courses offered, and names of faculty members who are teaching mission courses. Second is an alphabetical listing of more than 1,000 professors and members of the three professional mission organizations in North America—Association of Professors of Mission (APM), American Society of Missiology (ASM), and Evangelical Missiology Society (EMS)—giving their academic degrees, telephone, fax number and E-mail address, title and school or organization, address, missiological society membership(s), areas of professional speciality, and courses taught. In the front matter of the directory is general information about the history, purpose, activities, and membership procedures for the APM, ASM, and EMS.

The material in the directory is well organized and clearly presented in an attractive, inexpensive format. On the basis of the information in this directory, it can be affirmed that there are more mission scholars, professional associations, and programs of mission studies in the United States and Canada today than ever before.

—Gerald H. Anderson

Gerald H. Anderson is Editor of the INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN OF MISSIONARY RESEARCH and Director of the Overseas Ministries Study Center in New Haven, Connecticut.

Seek the Peace of the City

Reflections on Urban Ministry

ELDIN VILLAFANE

FOREWORD BY HARVEY COX

“A creative and thoughtful discussion of the issues that are critical in the ministry of God’s people in the urban world of today. Villafane combines solid scholarship with insight and sensitivity to the specific tasks of laity and clergy. The result is a splendid contribution to the mission of congregations and a challenge to all those who seek to be faithful in seeking the shalom of the place where God has called them to ministry. His insight and wisdom will be useful across a wide range of Christian traditions.” —GEORGE W. WEBBER

New York Theological Seminary

“Speaking out of his great wealth of experience in Latino barrios and their churches, Villafane offers a new vision and a renewed hope for urban ministries. This is obligatory reading for those who fear that the church no longer has a role to play in the shaping of our cities.” —JUSTO L. GONZALEZ

Columbia Theological Seminary

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Allen Temple Baptist Church, Oakland, California

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The Missionary Movement of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries and Its Encounter with India: A Historico-Theological Investigation with Three Case Studies.


A doctoral dissertation presented in 1993 by an Indian Catholic theologian in Frankfurt (Sankt Georgen), this book examines the work of three preconciliar Catholic missiologists having Indian connections: Alfons Vath (1874-1937), Josef Schmidlin (1876-1944), and Thomas Ohm (1892-1962). Of the three, only the Jesuit Vath ever worked in India, serving there for a few years before World War I. Schmidlin and Ohm were both European-based but were interested in Indian questions in a wider missiological context.

From the Indian point of view, Vath is therefore the most interesting of the three, although much of his writing about India was done after his expulsion at the outbreak of war in 1914. Schmidlin, here called “the founder of Catholic missiology,” was chiefly a historian. He was also a passionate pre-Nazi German
nationalist, inviting comparison with his Protestant counterpart, the formidable Julius Richter. It is therefore hard to get him fully in focus. Padinjarekkuttu does not really do so, though he is hardly to be blamed for that. Ohm, a Benedictine who was Schmidlin’s successor at Münster, receives more sympathetic treatment, both as a theologian (Schmidlin was “only” a historian!) and as one involved in preparations for the council.

Dissertations do not necessarily make successful books. In this present case a firmer editorial hand would certainly have improved the book’s readability. As it is, there are rather too many typos and stylistic blemishes for comfort. Nevertheless, this is an interesting and informative piece of work, valuable not least for its quotations in the original German (in footnotes) from the texts discussed. Concerning the book’s price, the less said the better! —Eric J. Sharpe

Eric J. Sharpe has been Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Sydney, Australia, since 1977.

Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India.


Powell’s interest in Muslim-Christian relations began while working as a volunteer at a women’s college in Pakistan. Later, studying at Aligarh Muslim University in India, she began to collect material relevant to the focus of this study—interaction between Christian missionaries and Muslim scholars in early nineteenth-century India. About half of the book discusses encounter between the German-born missionary Carl Pfander (1803–68), who worked for the Church Missionary Society, and his Muslim challengers, especially Rahmat Allah (1818–91). The debates (munzará) and literary exchanges (in Urdu and Persian as well as English) are meticulously examined and analyzed to show that there was little, if any, genuine dialogue between the two parties. Both asserted that they possessed the truth, to the exclusion of the other. Books by these men remain in print, and, says Powell, “disputants on both sides who continue to weigh the ‘balance of truth’ entirely in their own favour will no doubt continue to find combustible fuel” in them (p. 298).

The first half of the book demonstrates the existence of a long tradition of public debate between Christians and Muslims. This includes a sympathetic appraisal of Henry Martyn’s legacy (pp. 89–101). The same issues, such as the authenticity of each others’ scriptures and the respective status of Christ and Muhammad, occur throughout. Such issues especially enlivened the Pfander-Rahmat Allah munzará; the latter employed the “higher criticism” of D. F. Strauss and others, which left Pfander floundering. Where Powell’s book excels is its setting of the religious dispute within the broader political and historical context: a Muslim India losing autonomy, and an expanding imperialistic culture, the British, which fueled Muslim resentment and aspirations. Pfander believed in “the efficacy of a technologically superior and socially progressive Europe in ensuring the eventual success of the Gospel” (p. 155), while Rahmat Allah supported the rebels during the mutiny and fled India with a price on his head. (p. 275)

Much else in this book will interest missiologists, historians, and scholars of...
Muslim-Christian encounter. It is, however, to be regretted that such a readable adaptation of doctoral research will probably only appeal to a specialist readership because of its high price.

—Clinton Bennett

Clinton Bennett, a former British Baptist missionary in Bangladesh (1979–83) and executive secretary for interfaith relations at the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland (1987–92), now teaches world religions at Westminster College, Oxford.

The Forgotten Christians of Hangzhou.


This book tells the story of Christians in Hangzhou, China, from the beginning of the Jesuit mission there in 1611 until the 1730s, when the last missionary left and the Church of the Savior was converted into a temple to the Goddess of Sailors.

The introduction summarizes scholarly discussion on the importance of Christianity in China and outlines the historical situation of China at the end of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). Chapters 1 and 2 tell the story of the Catholic community in Hangzhou from its beginnings to Martino Martini, S. J. (1614–61), who oversaw the building of the Church of the Savior, through Prospero Intorcetta, S. J. (1625–96). The remainder of the book, chapters 3–7, focuses on Zhang Xingyao (1633–ca. 1715), a little-known Chinese scholar who attempted in his writings to persuade his fellow literati of the compatibility of Christianity and Confucianism. A professor of history at Baylor University, Mungello writes with sympathy and insight about the faith of Zhang Xingyao, who, in the face of an increasingly hostile attitude toward Christianity among China’s educated elite, maintained his belief that in accepting Christianity, he had simply embraced a fuller expression of the faith of his ancestors.

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Imaginative reconstructions of thoughts of people in the book, or poems by Zhang Xingyao, begin and end each chapter. Together with felicitously chosen illustrations they give a rare sense of the place and time of the events in the book and the personalities of the people involved.

The book has been very nicely produced by the University of Hawaii Press. It is a fine, important study of the beginnings of the inculturation of Christianity in China. We may hope for more such books in the future.

—Gail King

Gail King is Curator of the Asian Collection in the Harold B. Lee Library of Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

Christian Souls and Chinese Spirits: A Hakka Community in Hong Kong.


The author of this fine book, assistant professor of anthropology at the University of Pittsburgh, examines a Hakka community, Shung Him Tong, in the New Territories of Hong Kong in order to determine how the people understand their Hakka identity. Hakka Protestants established this village in 1903 as an “ideal Chinese and Christian village” (chap. 3) where they might escape the discrimination and hardships they were experiencing among the non-Christian Cantonese population in Guangdong Province. The major part of Constable’s on-site fieldwork in the village was done during a twelve-month period in 1986 and 1987.

Accepting the definition that “ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves” (p. 14), Constable states, “My objective is to identify what Hakka means to a number of people in Shung Him Tong” (p. 19).

To do this, she traces how Hakka identity has been developed historically, describing the migrations that brought them from north-central to southern China and then showing their role within the Taiping Rebellion (1850–64). She shows how Hakka identity persisted and was strengthened in the new village because of the way “it has been historically constituted and paired with Christianity” (p. 160). She analyzes the relationship between the Hakka people and the Basel missionaries who concentrated their work on the Hakka and idealized them as a distinct subgroup among the Han.

The title of the book comes from chapter 5, where the author compares Chinese traditional beliefs, such as ancestral rites, festive occasions, geomancy, spirits, and funerals, with Christian beliefs. She concludes that these Christians are not syncretic, nor do they hold a dual system of values. Rather, they have secularized many Chinese customs to be compatible with Christianity.

This study is invaluable both for its methodology and for the relationships it establishes between religion and ethnic identity.

—Ralph R. Covell

Ralph R. Covell was a missionary in China and Taiwan from 1946 to 1966. Currently he is Senior Professor of World Christianity at Denver Seminary, Denver, Colorado.
Dissertation Notices

Addo, Ebenezer Obiri.

Aghamkar, Atulkumar Y.

Bhebhe, Stanley Makhosi.

Brewer, Kenneth Wade.

Enochs, Ross Alexander.

Harris, Marjorie Jane.

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