Christian Mission as Complex Reality

Authentic Christian mission, God's mission, is a single reality, but it is far from simple actuality. All of creation is caught up in the redemptive drama of its Creator. Addressing our human tendency to reduce missio Dei to proprietary, monodimensional agendas and methods, contributing editor Stephen Bevans offers a helpful taxonomy of mission as a complex reality. The same point is amply illustrated by other contributors to this issue of the IBMR.

Missio Dei is evident in the remarkable story of Mazhar Mallouhi, a Syrian "Muslim who follows Jesus," whose conversion to the way of love was the result of Mahatma Gandhi's admiration for Jesus Christ—not the brutal Christ of crusading Christendom, but the loving, self-giving, reconciling Christ of the Gospels. It is apparent as well in the Parsi and Nigerian conversion narratives recounted by Farshid Namdaran and Felix Ekechi.

It can be discerned in the conversion of a supposedly calcified institutional church, as John Gorski, a new contributing editor, reports on a remarkable phenomenon that is quietly but profoundly transforming the once passive Roman Catholic Church in Latin America into an active initiator of local and international mission. And it manifests itself in human languages. Knowledge of God, missionaries Edwin Smith and William Chapman discovered, did not arrive among the Ila of Zambia with them, nor did the Ila's extensive theological vocabulary come via the Bible. The Ila had at least forty-four names for the Supreme Being and scores of words for prayer; the missionaries' task was simply to connect what was already there with the Christian Gospel.

Even the human quest for the transcendent traces its source to missio Dei. The Preacher's enigmatic words, echoed elsewhere in our Christian Scriptures and amply illustrated throughout human cultures and across human time, may provide us with a clue: "He has also set eternity in the hearts of everyone; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end" (Eccles. 3:11 NIV).

As Marcella Hoesl, M.M., discovered early in her pilgrimage, God's mission in this world is a God-sized, complex reality too vast for any human being to conceive, let alone manage. That we humans should be invited to participate as both ends and means in God's great enterprise is as humbling as it is daunting. Christian missionaries can be sustained in their endeavors and constrained in their pride by the awareness that however peculiar the language to be learned, God has spoken and is speaking through it; that however unfamiliar the culture in which the missionary must pitch his or her tent, God is already present—and has been in residence there for a long time.
Unraveling a “Complex Reality”: Six Elements of Mission

Stephen B. Bevans, S.V.D.

Mission,” writes Pope John Paul II in Redemptoris missio, “is a single but complex reality, and it develops in a variety of ways” (RM 41). There is only one mission, the mission of God as such, in which the church shares (e.g., Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:21; 1 Cor. 10:16–17; Matt. 10:40; John 20:21) and which it continues (Matt. 28:18–20; Mark 16:15–16; Luke 24:44–47; Acts 1:8) by preaching, serving, and witnessing to Jesus’ lordship and vision of the reign of God (Acts 28:31). The church does so in four “fields”: in its pastoral work, in its commitment to the “new evangelization,” in its efforts to transform society and culture, and in its movement to all peoples in the mission ad gentes (RM 34). At every level as well, there are six operative elements: (1) witness and proclamation; (2) liturgy, prayer, and contemplation; (3) justice, peace, and the integrity of creation; (4) dialogue with women and men of other faiths and ideologies; (5) inculturation; and (6) reconciliation. Both the singleness and complexity of mission can be seen in the accompanying diagram.

But why six elements? Opinions certainly vary. In 1981 the Catholic organization SEDOS (Service of Documentation and Studies, sponsored by missionary orders headquartered in Rome) spoke of four elements of mission, adding dialogue, inculturation, and liberation to the traditional element of proclamation. In 1984 a document entitled “Dialogue and Mission” was issued by what was then known as the Secretariat for Non-Christians at the Vatican, and it named five elements: presence and witness; development and liberation; liturgical life, prayer, and contemplation; interreligious dialogue; and proclamation and catechesis (DM 13). In 1991 David Bosch’s Transforming Mission spoke of thirteen “elements of an emerging ecumenical paradigm” of mission; in 1999 Andrew Kirk outlined seven elements, as did Donal Dorr in 2000.

In an effort to synthesize these various namings of elements, my colleague Eleanor Doidge and I wrote an essay in 2000 in which we named the six elements of mission surveyed here. For us, witness and proclamation were bound together; Andrew Kirk’s important insistence on ecological concerns as integral to mission should be paired with the equally important elements of justice and peace; and Robert Schreiter’s insistence on reconciliation as a new model of mission needed to be fully acknowledged. In addition, unlike the document “Dialogue and Mission,” we were convinced that inculturation is an essential part of every missionary task. And so our synthesis was of six elements. Here I offer brief reflections on each of these six.

Witness and Proclamation

The interconnectedness of Christian witness and explicit proclamation of the Gospel is perhaps expressed most clearly in the charge attributed to Francis of Assisi: “Preach always; if necessary, use words.” As Pope Paul VI wrote in Evangelii nuntiandi, “The first means of evangelization is the witness of an authentically Christian life” (EN 41); and the document “Dialogue and Proclamation” insists that proclamation “is the foundation, center, and summit of evangelization” (DP 10). Witness and proclamation go together. As David Bosch noted, “The deed without the word is dumb; the word without the deed is empty.”

The church’s missionary witness is of at least four kinds. At a first level, there is the witness of individual Christians. Some of these may be quite public and acclaimed, like the witness of an Albert Schweitzer or a Mother Teresa. But most Christian witness is given by Christians in their ordinary lives—in the patience of parents, the honesty of Christians in business, the dedication of teachers, the choices made about where to live, where to shop, how one is entertained. Second, there is the witness of the Christian community—the “hermeneutic of the gospel,” as Lesslie Newbigin famously put it. Third, we can speak of the church’s institutional witness in its schools, hospitals, orphanages, and social service agencies. Finally, there is the “common witness” of Christians of various traditions committed to common prayer, common educational ventures, common work for justice, and the like. As the Manila Manifesto so aptly puts it, “If the task of world evangelization is ever to be accomplished, we must engage in it together.”

John Paul II has spoken of proclamation—explicitly of the lordship of Jesus and of his vision of the reign of God—as “the permanent priority of mission” (RM 44). The task of evangelization would be empty, said Paul VI, without proclaiming “the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God” (EN 22). Nevertheless, proclamation needs always to be done dialogically, taking account of the situation of those to whom the Good News is...
addressed. It can never be done apart from witness, for “no matter how eloquent our verbal testimony, people will always believe their eyes first.” Moreover, proclamation is always to be given as an invitation, respecting the freedom of the hearers; it is never done in a manipulative way. “The church proposes,” insists John Paul II, “she imposes nothing” (RM 39). Finally, authentic proclamation is the answer to a question about “the reason for our hope” (see 1 Pet 3:15). The first task of evangelization, mused Francis Cardinal George on a visit to the school where I teach, is to listen. To proclaim out of context, without listening to how the Gospel answers people’s deepest yearnings and hopes, is to proclaim in a way that is unworthy of the Gospel’s power.

Liturgy, Prayer, and Contemplation

According to Lutheran liturgist Robert Hawkins, the church “lives from the center with its eyes on the borders.” Liturgy is a dead end if it is its own end. My colleague Richard Fragomeni said once that the goal of liturgy is worship—and worship is not what takes place in a church but in the world. Liturgy needs to be celebrated “inside out,” as an anticipation of the “liturgy after the Liturgy,” as the Orthodox say. Celebration of the liturgy is an evangelizing act on several levels. It is always the evangelization of the Christian faithful, who day after day, week after week make up the liturgical assembly, forming them more perfectly into Christ’s body in the world and calling each individually to more authentic Christian life. But since there are always visitors in the congregation who may be nonbelievers or unchurched, the worthy and vital celebration of the liturgy in Eucharist, baptism, marriages, or funerals can be moments when the Gospel proclaimed and celebrated may find particular resonance in those who are seeking more depth in life, or may even be able to break through indifference or resistance.

In 1927 Pope Pius XI declared Francis Xavier and Thérèse of Lisieux as patrons of the church’s missionary activity. The Jesuit Francis Xavier was no surprise; his exploits on behalf of the Gospel in India and Japan make him one of the greatest missionaries of all times. But naming Thérèse was a bit unusual. After all, she was a strictly cloistered Carmelite nun and never left her convent in France. Nevertheless, her autobiography, published a few years after her death, revealed her to be a woman on fire for the Gospel, whose heart was always beyond her convent walls, calling all humanity to faith in Christ. Her life of prayer was so intense, so universal, so missionary, that she could very justly be named patroness of the missions. The pope’s action in 1927 points to the truth that commitment to the spread of the Gospel is not simply a matter of heroic work in cross-cultural situations; it is a matter of allowing the missionary task to shape Christian spirituality. Prayer and contemplation are seeing and feeling with the missionary God, aligning one’s needs and wants with the saving activity of God’s missionary presence in the world. The British Doctor Who series provides a striking example of how prayer and contemplation can be missionary. Doctor Who would enter a certain telephone booth, the inside of which contained the whole world. The cloister, the parish church, or one’s room is like that telephone booth.

Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation

“Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel”; “if you want peace, work for
justice; "we discern two types of injustice: socio-economic-political injustice . . . and environmental injustice"; "the responsibility of the church towards the earth is a crucial part of the church’s mission."

Commitment to justice, peace, and the integrity of creation is a seamless garment. All are constitutive of the church’s missionary task.

Commitment to the poor and marginalized of the world takes shape in the first place as the church acts as a voice for the victims of injustice on the one hand and a goad to the consciences of the rich on the other. People like Oscar Romero and Desmond Tutu, and documents like the U.S. Bishops’ peace and economics pastoral and the Kairos Document in South Africa are shining examples of this justice ministry. Second, the church needs to work to help those who suffer injustice find their own voice. If the church did only the first, it would ultimately only be patronizing. The goal of justice ministry is helping the poor and marginalized find their own subjectivity and hope. Third, the commitment to justice inevitably means committing oneself to a life practice that is in solidarity with the victims of this world, through a simple lifestyle, through political stances, and through a constant siding with the poor and oppressed and their causes. Finally, as the 1971 Synod puts it, a church committed to justice must be just itself: "everyone who ventures to speak about justice must first be just in their eyes."

In 1981 John Paul II visited Hiroshima, the site of the first hostile use of the atomic bomb in 1945. "From now on," he said, "it is only through a conscious choice and through a deliberate policy that humanity can survive." The mission of the church involves making sure that governments and other groups keep making that "conscious choice" and follow that "deliberate policy" toward peace. In a similar way, the church’s commitment to justice cannot but be concerned for personal and institutional witness of simplicity of life, and for support of legislation and movements that promote the integrity of creation and the care of the earth. According to Canadian novelist Rudy Wiebe, repentence is not feeling bad but "thinking different."

The kingdom call to repent and believe takes on a whole new dimension in the light of today’s consciousness of creation’s fragility and humanity’s vocation to stewardship.

Every time and every culture needs to reflect on faith on its own terms, using its own lens to interpret Scripture.

Interreligious and Secular Dialogue

"Dialogue is . . . the norm and necessary manner of every form of Christian mission" (DM 29). This general norm for doing mission, however, has particular relevance as Christians encounter people of other faiths or people who have no faith at all. Mission is carried out "in Christ’s way," reflective of the dialogic nature of God’s Trinitarian self. Dialogue is based on the conviction that "the Spirit of God is constantly at work in ways that pass human understanding and in places that to us are least expected." Documents speak of four kinds of dialogue. There is, first, the dialogue of life, in which Christians live and rub shoulders with people of other faiths and ideologies. In this way people get to know each other, respect each other, learn from each other, and reduce the tensions that exist among people who may have radically different worldviews.

Second, we speak of the dialogue of social action, by which women and men of differing faith commitments work together for common issues of justice. Working together for fairer immigration laws, for the abolition of the death penalty, for the sacredness of human life, and against racism and sexism are ways that committed people can learn to live with one another and be inspired by the social doctrines of the various religious and secular traditions.

Third, there is the dialogue of theological exchange. While this may be the area for experts, as they probe one another’s doctrines and practices, challenging and inspiring one another, it can also take place among ordinary Christians as they read one another’s sacred documents and cherished authors.

Finally, there is the dialogue of religious experience. While there always will remain differences of content and method, this is an area where many traditions seem to converge in major ways. While perhaps people of differing faiths may not be able to pray together, they can, as John Paul II has done at Assisi in 1986 and 2002, come together to pray in their own ways.

Inculturation

Throughout the history of the church, Christians have practiced in some way what we call today inculturation. Peter and Paul, Justin Martyr, Francis of Assisi, Clare, Raymond Lull, Matteo Ricci, Martin Luther, Mother Teresa, Roland Allen, and Charles de Foucauld are just a few names that may come to mind. Nevertheless, today there is an understanding that inculturation is not just something for a few women and men who live dangerously "on the edge." Rather, inculturation is acknowledged today as an integral part of communicating the Gospel, if the Gospel indeed is truly to be communicated. "You may, and you must, have an African Christianity," proclaimed Paul VI in 1969. "Contextualization . . . is not simply nice," writes evangelical missiologist David Hesselgrave; "it is a necessity."

The central place of inculturation in today’s understanding of mission is something that has emerged only as theology and spirituality began to recognize the essential role of experience in any kind of human living. Traditionally, theology was seen as reflection in faith on Scripture and tradition. There was one theology, always and everywhere valid. As theology began to acknowledge the anthropological turn that has so marked modern Western consciousness, the role of experience in theology increased and became more influential. It was not, however, that experience was just added to the traditional sources of Scripture and tradition; the anthropological turn revealed the fact that Scripture and tradition themselves were highly influenced by the experiences of women and men at particular times, places, and cultural contexts. And so experience has taken on a normative value that it did not have in times past. The theology of the West, we now recognize, was itself a limited, contextual product of a particular set of experiences. Every time and every culture has its own lens to interpret Scripture, past doctrinal formulations, ethical practices, and liturgical customs. Today the experience of the past (Scripture and tradition) and the experience of the present (context) may interact in various ways that are conditioned by particular circumstances or theological convictions, but that Christian faith needs to engage a context authentically is simply accepted as a missiological imperative.
Reconciliation

In a world of increasing violence, tensions between religions, terrorist threats, globalization, and displacement of peoples, the church’s witness to and proclamation of the possibility of reconciliation may constitute a new way of conceiving the content of the church’s missionary task. Mission today recognizes that reconciliation needs to take place on a number of different levels. There is, first, the personal level of healing between spouses, between victims and their torturers or oppressors, as well as among victims of natural calamities such as earthquakes or tropical storms. Then there is sociocultural reconciliation between members of oppressed cultures (e.g., Australian Aboriginals, North American First Nations, and Latin American indigenous tribes) and those who have oppressed and marginalized them for centuries. A third level of reconciliation might be called political. One may think of the reconciliation called for after years of apartheid in South Africa, or by years of forced disappearances and massacres as in Argentina or Guatemala.

Reconciliation, insists Robert Schreiter, involves much more of a spirituality than a strategy. In the first place, reconciliation is the work of God, a work of grace; it is offered first and foremost by the victims of injustice and violence to their oppressors. The church’s task is not to develop strategies for reconciliation to take place but to witness in its life and proclaim in fearless hope that God’s grace does heal and that, through the reconciling work of Jesus Christ, the barriers of hostility can be broken down, and those who are divided can be made one. For Christ “is our peace” (Eph. 2:14). To facilitate the recognition of God’s gracious working in the midst of so much violence and tragedy, the church needs to develop communities of honesty, compassion, and acceptance. Ministers of reconciliation need to hone their skills of contemplative attention and listening. Ways might be found to employ new approaches to celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation or to ritualizing God’s reconciling action.

Conclusion

Mission today indeed needs to be understood as “a single but complex reality.” While the explicit proclamation of the Gospel of and about Jesus has a certain “permanent priority” (RM 44), the words of proclamation must likewise be rooted in an authentic being of the church. The church is called equally to incarnate what it says in its community life and its engagement in the world. In a world where the Spirit is constantly manifest in social and political movements, in the riches of culture, and in the holiness of many religious ways, mission can serve that Spirit only through acts of justice, trust of human experience, and dialogue with religious difference. In a world that is torn apart by so many conflicts of religion, politics, and human tragedy, the church needs to recognize that Jesus’ ministry of reconciliation and peace has been entrusted to us (2 Cor. 5:18–19). Mission ultimately is witness to the hope of a new heaven and a new earth, where every tear will be wiped away (Rev. 21:1–5), every tongue will be silenced (Eph. 6:11), and God will be all in all (1 Cor. 15:28).

Notes

Mazhar Mallouhi: Gandhi’s Living Christian Legacy in the Muslim World

Paul-Gordon Chandler

Recently, on an unbearably hot July afternoon in Delhi, I found myself standing barefoot in pilgrim reverence at the memorial of Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948). This self-proclaimed Hindu has been called one of the most Christlike men in history. When India, a Hindu-majority nation with a large Muslim population, wanted to pay its highest compliment to its most famous native son, it chose to describe him as a Christlike man. Missionaries in India were greatly influenced by his example of Christlike living. They would sit at his feet, seeking to learn what it meant to live like Christ within the Indian context in order to communicate him more effectively to a Hindu and Muslim populace.

Gandhi was captivated by the person and message of Christ. He spoke of the Sermon on the Mount as going “straight to my heart.” While Gandhi remained fundamentally a Hindu in outward things, he was more Christlike than most Christians, with his inner life more and more transformed toward Christ. In many ways Gandhi, a non-Christian, helped to Christianize unchristian Christianity, yet his influence for Christ on Hindus and Muslims was even greater. His life, outlook, and methods provoked great interest—indeed fascination—with Christ.

A Peaceable and Sacrificial Approach

Gandhi challenged Christians to make love their “working force,” adopting it as a total way of life, “for love is the center and soul of Christianity.” This advice fits with an early picture we have of Gandhi, as reported by C. F. Andrews, a respected Scottish Anglican missionary to India, once visited Gandhi at the Phoenix Ashram in South Africa, where he found Gandhi surrounded by children, whom he loved. A baby girl belonging to a family that in India was considered untouchable was in his arms, along with a little Muslim boy who was an invalid. Gandhi’s tenderness toward the smallest thing that suffered pain was part of his devout search for truth, or God.

Gandhi would constantly say to Christians and missionaries, “Don’t talk about it. The rose doesn’t have to propagate its perfume. It just gives it forth, and people are drawn to it. Live it, and people will come to see the source of your power.” Because of Gandhi, a nonorganized “Christ following” arose in India, apart from the church. The leading ideas of this movement were love, service, and self-sacrifice, which created an atmosphere for understanding the Gospel.

Gandhi called his type of power “soul force” or “the power of suffering”: taking suffering on oneself but never causing suffering. Normally, the Hindu doctrine of karma has little or no room for the cross. But with Gandhi’s teaching that Hindus could joyously take on suffering for the sake of achieving righteous purposes, there came a new sensitivity to the cross. In light of this shift, a Hindu intellectual once said, “What the missionaries have not been able to do in fifty years, Gandhi by his life, trial and incarceration has done, namely, he has turned the eyes of India toward the cross.”

Gandhi’s humility and sacrificial nature were particularly evident in his relationships with Muslims. At the age of seventy-eight, during the riots in Calcutta between Muslims and Hindus, he chose to stay in a Muslim home in the very center of the riot district. There he welcomed the Muslim former premier, called “The Butcher” by Hindus because they believed he had incited the riots, who stayed with him. In order to stop the brutalities, Gandhi went on a fast until death. As a result, after seventy-two hours both sides came to him to guarantee the lives of the opposite community with their own lives, laying all their weapons at his feet. Later at the even greater Hindu-Muslim riots in Delhi in early 1948, he drew up eight points on which all must agree, or he would fast until death. All eight points shamelessly favored the Muslims, including returning 117 mosques that had been converted into Hindu temples or residences. On the sixth day of the fast, the parties signed the “Pact of Peace.”

Gandhi’s last pilgrimage was to Mehrauli, a Muslim shrine seven miles south of New Delhi. Muslim women who had been fasting with Gandhi had complained to him that Hindu violence had kept them from going alone to Mehrauli. Gandhi therefore chose to accompany them. Once at the Muslim shrine, which had been vandalized by Hindus, Gandhi promised that it would be repaired. Three days later he was murdered by a Hindu fundamentalist who was incensed at his kindness to Muslims.

The example of Gandhi’s sacrificial approach made it easier for Indians to move from the thought that if one man could take suffering on himself in order to bring peace and reconciliation between two religious communities, then if there was one divine and holy enough, this one might take on himself the sin of the whole human race in order to bring peace and reconciliation between us and God. When Gandhi died for the nation of India, his death pointed to the cross, supplying on a national scale an illustration of what we see in Christ on the cross. In the Muslim city of Hyderabad Gandhi’s death was commemorated by a procession carrying his garlanded picture with a cross above it. They saw the connection.

Though Gandhi’s life shed much light on the cross, there is much more in the cross than his own experience illustrated. Furthermore, the final goal is not just interest in Christ but faith in Christ. Gandhi’s life, however, raises the question of what the effect in the Middle East might be if those who bear Christ’s name were really more like Christ, catching and demonstrating his spirit and outlook.

Perhaps unknown to himself, Gandhi presented an Eastern face to Christ to India. By his life, Gandhi helped Indians to visualize Christ walking down Eastern roads, dwelling among Eastern villagers in lowly poverty, simplicity, and love. Many Hindus believed Gandhi was the Eastern incarnation of Christ, and others began to see the meaning of the cross because they had seen it in one of their sons. 12 Gandhi reflected the Easternness of Christ, and this Easternness had profound implications in the Indian context. One Christmas day Rabindranath Tagore, a

Paul-Gordon Chandler, President and CEO of Partners International, grew up in the Muslim country of Senegal, West Africa. An Anglican minister, he served as the rector of St. George’s Anglican Church in Tunisia, North Africa. He is the author of God’s Global Mosaic (InterVarsity, 2000) and is currently writing a book on Mazhar Mallouhi’s life and thought.
Nobel-Prize-winning Bengali poet and friend of Gandhi, wrote this amazing prayer: “Great-souled Christ, on this blessed day of your birth, we who are not Christians bow before you. We love you and worship you, we non-Christians, for with Asia you are bound with the ties of blood.” 13

A Muslim Disciple

Gandhi’s unintentional witness of Christ to Hindus and Muslims stretched over time to 1959 and geographically west from India to the Middle East, touching Mazhar Mallouhi, the celebrated Arab novelist and publisher, as a young man posted on the Golan Heights as a soldier in the Syrian army who was looking for spiritual life. The story of how Mallouhi met Christ through Gandhi is yet another example of God’s using unexpected and irregular channels to accomplish his purposes.

Born into a large Muslim family in Syria that has produced a number of well-known writers, including one uncle who translated all of Chairman Mao’s works into Arabic, Mallouhi cares deeply for his country and is proud of its heritage. His family is also very proud of their religious heritage. A family tree in a gold frame showing the Mallouhis’ descent from the Prophet Mohammed hangs on their wall. To date the family has produced Muslim clerics, Communist political activists—and one disciple of Christ.

An avid reader from his childhood, Mallouhi spent much time alone with books. At an early age he began to have religious questions but was strongly discouraged from asking them, for according to Islam it is blasphemous to question God. “When I read the Qur’an, I pictured God up in the sky smoking his water pipe. He had given me his book but had no involvement in my daily life or in the suffering of humanity below.” 14 Spiritual restlessness led Mallouhi to study many Eastern religions, as well as ancient Greek and Roman religious beliefs. His search led him to conclude that because humans had created a hell on earth, they had created “God” as an escape so as to obtain peace of mind. Furthermore, he observed that the leaders of all the religions preached something they themselves could not live; all were striving for something they never actually experienced or realized. This conclusion led him to reject his family’s plan that he pursue a religious vocation as a cleric.

Though Muslims respect Christ highly, Mallouhi refused to study the Christian faith. He saw Christianity as a tool of oppressive colonialists, a Western religion that was continuing its medieval Crusades against the Arab people. Western “Christian” nations gave blind support to the injustices of the State of Israel against the Palestinian people. He observed Christians calling Christ the Prince of Peace but then supporting and waging war. “The most beautiful part of the Gospel, the cross, became a weapon used against us in Crusaders’ hands. The cross, where God had embraced humanity, had become a sword,” he says. (The Arabic word for Crusader means “cross-bearer.”)

During the 1950s Mallouhi, like many moderate Syrian intellectuals, joined a popular secular political party. He also began to write for newspapers and publish some of his poetry. During this period he started reading Gandhi’s works and learning about Gandhi’s nonviolent movement, and soon he discovered Gandhi’s great respect for Christ. Mallouhi began to see a different Christ through Gandhi’s eyes than he had heard about previously. He was fascinated, he says, to see how “Gandhi took Christian principles without Christ against a Christian nation [England] without Christian principles and won the battle.” “Gandhi stands out to me as the one person who most dramatically demonstrated Christ’s teaching.” In this way Gandhi opened Mallouhi’s heart to consider Christ.

Influenced by Gandhi, Mallouhi decided to study the Bible while stationed as a soldier on the disputed Golan Heights. His spiritual turmoil grew so great that at one point he felt on the verge of committing suicide. Finally, after spending one year reading the Scriptures, he concluded that Christ was unlike the other religious leaders he had studied; like Gandhi, Christ matched his teaching with his life. Even though he had had no contact with a church or Christianity in any other form, Mallouhi was drawn by the words of Christ, “Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Finally, at the age of twenty-four, his heart responded, crying out, “This Christ is my Lord! Give me this new life you promise!” Not only was Mallouhi given new life, but the whole world came to life for him. Now instead of hating people, he wanted nothing more than to be with them.

New Directions

Mallouhi immediately experienced rejection from his family, including from an uncle who attempted to kill him, as evidenced today by a scar on his neck. Not long afterward, as a result of his being an active member of a certain political party, a warrant was issued for his arrest, which led to his exile from Syria.

Mallouhi persevered in his new faith and began writing Arabic novels with a spiritual theme in the mode of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky. His supreme desire became to share the treasure of Christ with others. The most natural way for him, and one of the most effective methods in the Arab world, is through literature, for stories are especially powerful in the Eastern tradition. He has now written seventeen books, which are read all over the Middle East. His first novel, The Traveler, a modern-day Arab prodigal story, has sold more than 80,000 copies and has been read by over 1.5 million Arab Muslims. 15

Years later, in 1975, Mazhar married Christine, an Australian who had dedicated her life to the Arab people. Christine was on her way to live in the United Arab Emirates when they met. They now have two sons. Working together in a writing and publishing ministry, the Mallouhis have lived and served in Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Syria, Jordan, and, most recently, Lebanon.

This transformation occurred because of one humble Indian, Mahatma Gandhi, who did his best to live his life in the shadow of Christ as taught in the Sermon on the Mount. Being introduced to life with Christ through Gandhi has greatly influenced Mazhar Mallouhi’s approach to living and sharing his faith with fellow Muslims.

Waging Peace on Muslims

The best way to describe Mallouhi’s approach is to speak of his “waging peace on Muslims.” 16 With this perspective, he has been...
a powerful force for peace and healing between Muslims and Christians. In Mallouhi’s understanding, the critical element, if Muslims are to be able to see Christ’s true nature, is that they first see the likeness of Christ in his followers. For Mallouhi, who describes himself as “a Muslim who follows Jesus,” following Christ in the spirit of Gandhi means taking the path of love, peace, sacrifice, and self-denial on a daily basis. Gentleness, kindness, open-heartedness, and joyfulness exude from him, and people are drawn to him like a magnet. Children love him. I have enjoyed walking with him through the old Arab medinas, watching him converse with strangers. They almost instantly bond to him because of the warmth and the depth of being he displays. It is fascinating to watch him sharing about the sweetness of Christ to those gathered around him in Arab cafes, as he puffs on a water pipe and fingers his prayer beads. He is known through North Africa and the Middle East as a big-hearted man.

The Mallouhis’ lives are always open. The result is a continual flow of people through their home, hundreds each week when they lived in Cairo. Everyone comes, from Muslim fundamentalist sheikhs, Catholic priests and nuns, Baptist pastors, Coptic Orthodox, Communists, Jewish rabbis, and Baha’is, to all kinds of Western expatriates. While living in Morocco, Mallouhi would bring home people he found in the street to feed them and help them. He was known to so many people in Fes, Morocco, a city of 1.3 million people, that he once received a letter addressed simply “Mazhar Mallouhi, Fes.”

Mallouhi has hundreds of friends around the world and knows their telephone numbers by heart. As soon as he walks into a city, he begins calling friends. He calls them regularly during the year, checking on them and praying for them. He has a renowned capacity for people and friendships, both Muslim and Christian. Everywhere he lives, he forms a weekly meeting of men, drawn largely from the intellectual and artistic communities.

Mallouhi lives his life for others. His tenderness and joviality disarm even those who would naturally be against him because of his beliefs. When he was in jail once in Egypt, fellow prisoners who were fundamentalist Muslims asked him why he was there.

**Mallouhi’s most significant contribution is stripping Christ of his Western trappings and introducing him as a Middle Easterner.**

After telling them it was because he was sharing his faith in Christ with other Muslims, a fundamentalist sheikh shared his blanket with him, and another shared his food. Muslims often say to him, “I can’t figure you out. Why are you going to such trouble to help us? What is your hidden agenda?” Mallouhi’s reply is simply, “If I see a chance to do good and don’t help, it is a sin. The opposite of love is indifference.”

A prison experience in Syria had a profound effect on his understanding of Christ’s sacrificial suffering. After twenty-five years of exile, he returned to his homeland. Upon his arrival he surrendered to the authorities, requesting that his case be investigated and that he be given a chance to prove his innocence. For eighteen days he was kept in solitary confinement in an underground cell, sharing it only with rats. For the cold concrete floor he had only a thin blanket. God used this prison experience to teach him anew to “embrace the bitter until its piercing brought drops of sweetness.” Mallouhi testified, “I felt as if I was released from my dismal surrounding and from my personal internal prison. I drank deeply of the Father’s love and suffering for us in Christ on the cross.”

Heightened interest in Islam has recently been evident among Christians, with many sincerely and open-mindedly seeking to understand Muslims. Nevertheless, a quickly growing discord between the two has also been evident. Some Western Christians have sought to demonize Islam, portraying it as the last great enemy to be conquered. Rather than create further alienation between Muslims and Christians, Mallouhi advocates a non-confrontational approach to Muslims and demonstrates the importance of building on commonalities between Islam and Christianity. Christ’s followers today need to be involved in an all-out effort to help Muslims, not to conquer them, embodying goodwill, appreciation, and sympathy in the spirit of Christ.

By offering respect and reciprocity, Mallouhi has found an amazing openness among Muslims toward his faith in Christ. For example, Muslim students, studying in the prestigious Islamic intellectual and missionary center of Al-Azhar Mosque in Cairo, have sat around him in the courtyard of the mosque as he taught them of Christ, opening the Scriptures to them.

**Presenting Christ as a Middle Easterner**

Perhaps Mallouhi’s most significant spiritual contribution is that of stripping Christ of his Western trappings and introducing him to Muslims as one who was born, lived, and died in the Middle East. This Christ, one that Muslims can understand, is the Christ that Mallouhi met, which explains why he calls himself simply a Syrian Arab follower of Christ, avoiding the label “Christian.”

Muslims generally perceive Christianity as part of a Western political agenda and see Christ as a Westerner with no relationship to Eastern culture. Christianity, however, is Middle Eastern in origin, not a Western faith. Christ, a Middle Easterner, was culturally more like today’s Arab than a Western Christian.

Mallouhi effectively bridges this gap because of his own personal experience. When he became a follower of Christ, he was told by Christians that he needed to leave his cultural past behind, change his name (take a “Christian” name), stop socializing in coffee shops (the primary meeting place of Arab men), not attend his family’s religious celebrations, keep his distance from mosques and Muslims, cease to fast, begin to pray in a different posture (not bowing or prostrate), and begin to eat pork (to prove he was converted!). As a result, he quickly became alienated from his family and all his former friends, whom he was advised by Christians to reject. Ironically, no matter what he did, Mallouhi still was not fully accepted by the local Christian community, because of his coming from a Muslim background.

Over time, however, Mallouhi realized that following Christ does not mean denying his loyalty to Middle Eastern culture and becoming part of an alien “Christian” culture. Although he worships Christ, he continues to embrace his Middle Eastern roots, the very roots of the one he serves. He came to understand that his family’s rejection of him was not because he was following Christ but rather because of the way Christians had told him to act and to explain his new life. It was not Good News to his family. In their eyes he was turning his back on family and community values in favor of Western individualism, rejecting a monotheistic faith for polytheism, and abandoning strong moral traditions for morally lax Western styles of behavior. They saw
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him as rebelling against all the best values they had taught him; any decent family would have been similarly and rightly concerned.

Today, Mallouhi enjoys praying and meditating in the quiet, reverent atmosphere of a mosque, where he sits on the carpeted floor and reads his Bible. While there, he often visits the sheikhs and imams, who are his friends. Mallouhi says, “Islam is my heritage and Christ is my inheritance,” and as a result he has kept his Islamic and Arab culture while being a follower of Christ for four decades. Mallouhi’s official Syrian identity papers still list him as a Muslim, as the government does not allow a change in one’s religious identity. And he encourages new followers of Christ from Muslim backgrounds not to leave their family.

By presenting the Scriptures as culturally Middle Eastern, he gained unprecedented acceptance for God’s Word.

people, or culture. He emphasizes that following Christ does not require taking a Christian name, wearing a different type of clothing, using the symbol of the cross (not used by the early church), changing the day of public worship (Sunday instead of Friday), adhering to a different style of worship within a church building, eating different foods, drinking alcohol (Muslims do not drink alcohol, whereas many Christians do), using pictures of Christ (most illustrate a Jesus of European descent), or ceasing to fast. He works to help them become disciples of Christ without having to join the “Christian” West.

Presenting Scripture to Muslims

Mallouhi now spends most of his time and energy working to present the Christian Holy Scriptures in ways that Muslims can respect. To assist in carrying out this mission, he founded Al Kalima (“the Word” in Arabic), which publishes spiritual books through one of the largest secular Arab publishing houses. Al Kalima’s most important projects focus on re-presenting the Christian Scriptures as the ancient Middle Eastern writings that they are, returning them to their authentic cultural origin. After all, the Bible is not a Western book, being actually rooted in Middle Eastern cultures more ancient than that underlying the Qur’an.

The distinctive emphasis of Al Kalima is best illustrated by its recent publication of the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Genesis. Mallouhi actively seeks cooperation and counsel from influential Muslims as he seeks to shatter stereotypes, overcome prejudices, and illuminate and resolve typical Muslim misunderstandings of Scripture. He has asked hundreds of Muslims to read the Scriptures to identify difficulties they have in understanding the text. With their feedback, he then develops commentary to address the issues raised. Titled An Oriental Reading of the Gospel of Luke and Genesis: The Origin of the World and of Humanity, these recent works include the biblical text and Muslim-focused commentary that effectively explains the Scriptures and presents Christ as the Middle Easterner that he was. Terms such as “Messiah” and “Son of God” are explained so average Muslim Arab readers can understand them within their own cultural context, helping them see how Christ was the fulfillment of God’s covenant with Abraham, whom they view as their historical father. Mallouhi is currently working on An Oriental Reading of the Gospel of John for Sufi Muslims (the mystical segment of Islam). The commentary and articles will present Jesus as the ultimate mystic and the Living Word.

Mallouhi also asks Muslims to contribute articles and introductions for these publications. Fadhel Jamali, the late prime minister of Iraq, wrote the introduction for the Oriental Reading of the Gospel of Luke, saying, “We Muslims know less about the Christian faith than Christians know about Islam. Therefore, I encourage you as a Muslim to read this book to understand what they truly believe.” These “Easternized” publications of Scripture have been endorsed by Arab Muslim leaders ranging from a former prime minister to current government cabinet ministers to Islamic university deans and professors.

Not only is their content exclusively oriented to Muslims, but equally important are their external packaging and the way they are distributed. To a Muslim, God’s Holy Word needs to be presented in a fashion that conveys great reverence and importance. Hence Al Kalima’s publications are beautifully detailed hardbound volumes, printed with ornate Arabic calligraphy on a par with the quality that Arab readers expect in editions of the Qur’an.

By presenting the Scriptures as culturally Middle Eastern, Mallouhi has gained unprecedented access and acceptance for God’s Word. At a recent Arab book fair in a North African country with very few local Christians, An Oriental Reading of the Gospel of Luke was the best-seller. After reading it, a Muslim professor commented, “This is the first time we’ve seen that Christ has Middle Eastern roots, related to our own culture! Historically, we’ve only received Christianity through the imposed view of Western colonialists. But we want everyone and every student in our Department of Islamic Studies to read this.” It has since become a required textbook in his university.

Coupled with Middle Eastern presentation and packaging of the Scriptures is Mallouhi’s strong belief that their distribution should be exclusively through legal sales channels, as opposed to smuggling or mass free distribution of any sort. Al Kalima’s publications are sold legally and openly through normal outlets from supermarket bookstands to book fairs to Arabic Muslim bookstores. They all have been approved by government censors for sale in the mainstream market and therefore do not bear the stigma of smuggled contraband that much Western-produced Christian literature does. This approach has made the Scriptures widely available and officially acceptable in most of the countries considered “closed” to the Bible. Over the years, Mallouhi has seen the very negative effects of smuggling, blocking all possibility for the Bible to be taken seriously and naturally by Muslims or for the Bible to be endorsed officially as a legal book, something his approach has proved is very possible. At the same time, the greatest financial support for these publications comes from Muslim readers themselves, as the proceeds from the sales are reinvested to underwrite reprints and further publications.

Conclusion

As Mahatma Gandhi enabled Indians to visualize Christ walking down their Indian roads, so Mazhar Mallouhi is serving to return Christ to his cultural origins, walking naturally down the roads of the Middle East. His vision to win a home for God’s Word in the heart of the Muslim world is helping thousands of Muslims to understand the Gospel and enabling many to find true and lasting reconciliation in the Middle Eastern Prince of Peace.
Notes
2. The well-known missionary evangelist to India, E. Stanley Jones said, "I bow to Mahatma Gandhi and I kneel at the feet of Christ... . A little man... has taught me more of the spirit of Christ than perhaps any other man in East or West" (*Gandhi: Portrayal of a Friend* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993], p. 8).
3. Ibid., pp. 82-83.
5. Ibid., p. 148. In this passage Gandhi urged Christians to "live more like Jesus Christ, ... put your emphasis on love... [and] study the non-Christian religions and cultures more sympathetically in order to find the good that is in them, so that you might have a more sympathetic approach to people."
9. Ibid., p. 92.
12. Ibid., pp. 77-78.
13. Ibid., p. 143.
14. All quotations of Mazhar Mallouhi in this article are taken from the manuscript of a book the author is preparing on his life and thought.
15. The Arab League estimates that every book is read by 20-50 people in the Arab world.

How the Catholic Church in Latin America Became Missionary

John F. Gorski, M.M.

During the past thirty-five years the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America has experienced a significant transformation. It has come to an ever clearer awareness that its vocation is to be missionary, in the specific sense of evangelizing those who do not yet know Christ and his Gospel, or hardly know them. I have had the privilege of accompanying this church in the growth and development of its new missionary identity and activity during these past forty years and would like to share my experience with a wider readership, particularly in the English-speaking world.

Previously, for almost 500 years, the Catholic Church in Latin America was dependent on the missionary input of personnel, means, and ideas of other churches—particularly those of Europe, and, in the past century, those of North America. In receiving missionaries from elsewhere, the church was passively a "missionary church." It is still largely dependent on this input but is becoming more and more a missionary church in an active sense, attending to missionary situations among nonevangelized human groups within the continent and sending missionaries beyond its frontiers, even to other continents, "giving from its very poverty," and doing so with an original missiology that is its own. This about-face is a real conversion, a "new creation," a work of the Spirit. Here I explain why and how the Catholic Church in Latin America emerged from passivity to become actively missionary.

Missionary Challenge in Latin America

Although at the sociological level the great majority of Latin Americans profess to be Catholic Christians, there are many "missionary situations" in the continent. One-eighth of the population (or about 65 million) belong to almost 600 linguistically differentiated indigenous groups, sometimes called Amerindians or native Americans; their ancestors were the original inhabitants of the continent. More than one-fifth of the population are African-Americans, the descendants of the slaves brought to the continent from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. These two groups, together with a much smaller Asian-American minority, constitute almost 35 percent of the continent's people. One-third of Latin Americans are thus not "Latin" in their cultural roots. Apart from these ethnically distinct groups, there are those with mixed racial and cultural roots, partly European and partly Amerindian, African, or Asian, commonly called "mestizos." These constitute roughly one-half of the population of Latin America.

Besides these traditional cultures another reality challenges the church today: the number of people living in a situation of migration, whether from one part of their country to another or to other nations. As much as one-third of the population is in migration. These people no longer express themselves solely in the traditional cultural and religious forms that served their ancestors but through a mixture of these forms with models from other cultures, with a dose of modern and postmodern elements. This is particularly the challenge of urban populations and the youth. The missionary challenge of this multiethnic, pluricultural, and even plurireligious human reality relates the Latin American church to its sister churches in Africa and Asia.

A Non-Missionary Church

Because the continent's dominant culture was of European roots and expressions, particularly the "Latin" variety of Spain and Portugal, for centuries it was presumed that the primary missionary challenge was teaching people to learn the Catholic religious expressions transmitted through the models of the dominant culture and to pass it on from one generation to the next. An anthropologist would say that the first contact with
Christianity involved a process of *acculturation* (a culture change produced by direct and prolonged contact with an alien culture), and its further transmission, a process of *enculturation* (learning established cultural models). In a “best case scenario,” where it existed, catechesis was part of a “general pastoral action” that was so general that it evangelized no one in particular, at least not in their own cultural identity.

Even though it is commonplace among Catholics to speak of a first or constitutive evangelization starting five centuries ago, it would be more exact to speak of an enterprise of *Christianization*, or the incorporation of the peoples of the continent into a monocultural *Christendom*, in which they were subject to Christian authorities, both ecclesiastical and civil. Evangelization in the specific sense of announcing the Gospel to enable a personal encounter with the living Christ, leading to conversion and discipleship, became a conscious concern of the Catholic Church only within the past half century. Previously, it was presumed that people would learn to become good Christians by belonging to the church, learning the doctrine, observing the commandments, receiving the sacraments needed for salvation, and participating in Catholic devotions. This project of Christianization did have a positive result, for in Latin America today Christianity is not considered a foreign religion, and the preaching of the Gospel is not only accepted but even desired.

Over the centuries, however, Christianization produced a church that was introverted, concerned merely about taking pastoral care of those who came to church, and conserving whatever influence it had in society. It did not produce a missionary church, one committed to communicating the Gospel to the human groups that did not know Christ. It was presumed that those close at hand were already Christianized, but perhaps ignorant or indifferent about their faith. Those beyond its borders who did not know Christ, peoples in Africa and Asia, were hardly a direct object of concern. Up to the middle of the twentieth century, not only in Latin America and not only among Catholic Christians, hardly any positive importance was given to indigenous cultures in the expression of Christian life. It was presumed by Christian missionaries that their Western culture was the adequate and perhaps the only valid way of expressing the Gospel.

Factors Contributing to Missionary Renewal

Renewal in the church is often stimulated and guided by two factors: the life-giving pastoral experience of drawing near to the people in their concrete life-situation, and a return to the sources of Christian identity, particularly in the sacred Scriptures. The missionary renewal of the Catholic Church in Latin America illustrates the significance of these factors.

The first renewal factor was internal. From the 1950s some missionary groups began showing a new interest in the religious situation of the indigenous peoples, particularly in the countries of the Andes (Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador) and Mesoamerica (Mexico and Guatemala), where over 90 percent of the native American population is concentrated. Missionaries sent to these areas undertook a new evangelization of these peoples through the formation of indigenous evangelizers or catechists. The latter not only had to catechize their people in their own languages but also were responsible for Catholic worship and other dimensions of ecclesial life in their communities. The interaction between them and the missionaries, who soon recognized that they too had to study the native languages, first led to an effort to express the Christian faith in terms understandable to the members of those cultures and, eventually, to a theological valuing of the indigenous religious experience and cultural expressions.

The strongly biblical content of this new catechesis, this “return to the sources,” contributed significantly to its evangelical dynamism and capacity to motivate renewal. Latin American missiology had its roots not in theological faculties, as in Europe, but in the grassroots challenges of the indigenous apostolate.

Ever since the Second Vatican Council, the official teaching of the Catholic Church has supported this concern of the missionaries for the specific evangelization of each human group, taking account of its own cultural identity and religious experience. It was not so much the missionary orientations of the council itself as the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1975) of Pope Paul VI that directly moved the Latin American bishops and theologians in general to take seriously the relation between Gospel and culture. When the Puebla conference of the Latin American Bishops (1979) decided to adapt the orientations of this papal document to the present and future situation of Latin America and to make evangelization its basic theme, the bishops had to make their own Paul VI’s emphasis on what was then called the evangelization of cultures. John Paul II’s insistence on what is now called inculturation has reinforced this thrust. Until 1975, however, virtually only those in mission among the indigenous peoples made this orientation a priority.

A second very powerful factor was external, namely, the way the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) renewed Catholic theology, particularly by its focus on how divine revelation gives meaning to the evangelical identity of the church and its mission in the world. The council’s Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity affirmed that the entire church is missionary “by its very nature” (*Ad gentes*, 2). Missionary activity is not just a concern of a body of professionals, those who by vocation see themselves called to be missionaries, but a concern of the entire church. In 1966, a year after the end of the council, when the Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (CE-LAM, or Latin American Council of Catholic Bishops) reorganized for more effective service to the national episcopal conferences, the Departamento de Misiones del CELAM (DEMIS, or the Mission Department of CELAM) was founded.

DEMIS organized meetings in 1967 (in Ambato, Ecuador) and 1968 (in Melgar, Colombia) to identify the situations in Latin America that called for missionary activity in its specific sense, to set priorities, and to propose theological guidelines to give a solid orientation to evangelizing efforts. One of the significant contributions to mission theory was the rejection of merely canonical and geographic criteria to delimit what is “mission” in favor of a theological and pastoral criterion, the identification of “missionary situations.” Certain human groups need missionary activity rather than normal pastoral care not because they happen to live in a jurisdiction designated as mission territory by church authority but because their cultures have not yet encountered the life-giving force of the Gospel.

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people are prominent in the Latin American mission focus: the cultural identity of those evangelized, and their socioeconomic situation of endemic poverty. After almost 500 years of Christianization the indigenous peoples were judged to be not only inadequately evangelized in their cultural identity but also usually the poorest of the poor. While the incipient Latin American missiology was keenly aware of the justice dimensions of evangelization, the contemporary liberation theologies generally did not give much importance to traditional cultures. While DEMIS did consider the challenges of worldwide mission, it opted for a particular strategy: let the local churches learn to be missionary by dedicating themselves seriously to the specific evangelization of the indigenous cultures and thus gradually open up their horizons beyond the continent. The problem was that over 90 percent of the indigenous population was concentrated in only five countries; in the other seventeen episcopal conferences they constituted only a small minority, hardly a priority in their pastoral planning.

Before 1975 many church officials in these nations viewed DEMIS merely as CELAM’s “Department of Indian Affairs” or “Department of Anthropology,” and therefore of little interest to them. The president of DEMIS from 1969 to 1974 was Bishop Samuel Ruiz, of Chiapas, Mexico. His valuing of the indigenous cultures and call for the birth of diversified, indigenous local churches among the indigenous peoples were considered exaggerated or unrealistic (if not threatening) in those years, causing him to be marginalized in CELAM. Ironically, his theological and pastoral orientations on culture have now become the official policy of the Roman Catholic Church since Pope Paul VI’s emphasis on the evangelization of cultures and John Paul II’s on inculturation. In those years the ones who promoted world mission education for spiritual and material support for “the missions” (directors of the Pontifical Mission Aid Societies) generally evinced an outdated motivating message (help missionaries save those poor pagans in Africa and Asia) and seldom were informed or concerned about missionary situations in their own countries. The Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops, held in 1968 in Medellin, Colombia, was typical of the times in hardly recognizing the existence of the indigenous populations, regarding them merely as socially marginalized groups, not as peoples whose cultural identity challenged the church to specific mission activity.

A New Focus on “Missionary Situations”

The Third General Conference proved to be the decisive turning point in mission awareness and action. In this conference, held in 1979 in Puebla, Mexico, the Latin American bishops recognized the existence of challenging missionary situations within the continent, not only among the indigenous peoples but also among the African-Americans, so often ignored by the church’s apostolate and now considered a “permanent missionary situation.” Together these culturally differentiated and inadequately evangelized groups constitute over 30 percent of the total population of the continent and are the poorest of the poor.

Puebla also recognized “new missionary situations” among people who share the dominant Latin culture and who are affected by recent social changes, particularly groups in a state of internal or external migration who are tempted by modern or postmodern secularism and are attracted to new sectarian religious or quasi-religious movements. But the indigenous peoples, African Americans, and economically disadvantaged migrants normally welcome the evangelizing efforts of Catholics and evangelical Christians.

Puebla also called the attention of the church to other groups that constitute “difficult missionary situations,” for instance, politicians, the magnates of business and industry, the military, intellectuals, those who control the media, and leaders of radicalized labor unions. These groups are generally not only indifferent to evangelization but resist or impede it.

Segundo Galílea, the well-known Latin American pastoral theologian who coined the term “missionary situations” at the Melgar encounter (1968) as an alternative to the geographic criterion for mission, observed that while Puebla reiterated much of what Medellín had said about justice issues and various pastoral priorities, its original thrust was its sense of mission. It urged specific evangelization of groups whose identity and vitality are shaped by traditional and new cultures, and it conveyed a sense of the urgency of becoming a church that is missionary beyond its own frontiers, to the uttermost ends of the earth, giving from its poverty of personnel and means. Whereas the main architect of Catholic mission thinking from Vatican II until Puebla was DEMIS, since 1979 no single party has been responsible for the development that has occurred.

Mission as a Current Concern

Until Puebla nonindigenous missionaries like Bishop Ruiz promoted theological valuing of the traditional cultures, but since then the thinkers who are engaged in leadership of this enterprise are themselves from the indigenous peoples. In 1985 DEMIS spoke of a transition from a “pastoral indigenista” to a “pastoral indigena,” that is, from pastoral ministry shaped by outsiders and directed toward indigenous communities to pastoral ministry carried out by members of indigenous communities themselves. These budding missiologists, who do creative research into their own cultures as well as Christian theology, some twenty years ago founded the Latin American Ecumenical Articulation of the Indigenous Apostle (AELAPI), which since 1990 has organized four continental encounter-workshops. This movement seeks to promote dialogue between the Christian faith and the ancestral religions, leading to the birth of truly inculturated local churches among the indigenous peoples. The name of the movement points to a search for a theology of their own—a “Teología India”—capable of guiding this search and implies a radical critique that rejects rationalistic European theology, which during five centuries depreciated their cultures and resulted in a mainly superficial Christianization marked with syncretistic accommodations. The current president of CELAM, Bishop Jorge Jiménez of Colombia, has convoked the continent’s bishops and theologians to engage in sincere dialogue with the protagonists of the movement, welcoming its missionary intent, accompanying it, and helping it to reach theological maturity. Another development is among the African-Americans. Since Puebla, at least Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, and Haiti, countries where this population is concentrated, have
organized specific pastoral plans and organizations for a specific evangelization of these people based on their cultural and religious identity.

Perhaps the most dramatic change in the past quarter-century is the growing awareness of the challenge of the evangelization of peoples outside the continent, particularly in Africa and Asia, and the commitment of Latin American Catholics to world mission. Since the 1940s national mission congresses have been held in Mexico to awaken and shape this mission spirit. In 1977 the seventh congress, held in Torreón, became the first continent-wide “Latin American Mission Congress.” In the second of this new series of congresses, held in Tlaxcala (also in Mexico, 1983), the acronym “COMLA,” for Congreso Misionero Latinoamericano (Latin American Mission Congress), was adopted. Although only a relatively small number of non-Mexican bishops and national directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies participated in the first congress, subsequent meetings were attended by sizable national delegations that prepared their participation beforehand and also engaged in follow-up programs in their own countries.

The third COMLA, held in Bogotá in 1987, had as its main theme the missionary responsibility of the local diocesan churches. The fourth, celebrated in Lima in 1991, stressed the formation and actual sending of missionaries as a basic act of faith of these churches. The fifth COMLA, in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, in 1995, emphasized mission as inculturation and was a celebration of the religious identity and missionary vocation of Afro-Brazilians. The sixth COMLA, declared the First American Mission Congress by Cardinal Tomko, the prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, had as its principal theme the need for a challenging proclamation of a biblical kerygma that promotes a personal encounter with the living Christ. The seventh Latin American and second (Pan) American Mission Congress is sponsored by the local churches of all of Central America and is to be held in Guatemala in November 2003; it is to stress mission from human weakness and divine strength manifested in martyrdom.

An important aspect of these congresses is their involvement of laity and pastors alike. It is now common for several dozen bishops and hundreds of priests to participate in the entire congress (and not just in opening and closing ceremonies, which can be mostly for show). The participation of the lay majority is evangelical in content and spirit; their celebrations are almost Pentecostal in their shape and dynamism. The enthusiasm of the youth is extremely promising.

A New Missiology in Latin America

Through these initiatives the Catholic Church in Latin America is developing its own mission theology, or missiology, that addresses two principal areas of concern. The first relates to the theological orientation for the evangelization of the indigenous peoples. How does the historical and cultural situation of the diverse peoples enter into the theology of mission? What theological focus can give orientation to a true inculturation of the Gospel among the diverse peoples so that local churches may come to birth with “their own face,” that of their own culture? In this task, how is the church to be faithful to the Gospel as received and shaped in the Christian theological tradition and also faithful to the cultural identity and vitality of the diverse peoples? How does the ancestral religious experience of the peoples, expressed in their own language and cultural symbols, relate to Christian revelation, to the “once and for all” salvation realized in Christ?

This whole area touches questions of fundamental theology (i.e., the sources of Christian revelation), Christology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, and theological anthropology (i.e., the place of human beings and the meaning of human history). These issues are central and not marginal.

The second area of concern refers to the theological motivation for the urgency of world mission and of missionary activity in the specific sense of the evangelization of human groups that do not yet fully know Christ and his Gospel. We note here that an affirmation of the Second Vatican Council in Gaudium et spes, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, is central to this theology: “We must believe that the Holy Spirit offers to all people, in ways known to God, a participation in the paschal mystery of Christ” (sec. 22). This concise statement beautifully expresses the Trinitarian and paschal foundations of Christian mission, namely, that salvation does have a particular content and shape divinely revealed especially in the death and glorification of Jesus. It also effectively inserts the situation of the peoples evangelized and their own historical and cultural experience of the paschal gift of the Spirit into the very “content” of the gospel message. Mission is urgent not just to save people from eternal perdition but, more fully, to enable them to participate as humanly as possible in the paschal salvation manifested in the mystery of Christ. Fully human participation implies intelligent awareness of that mystery, freedom, responsible commitment, heartfelt joy, and generous love. It implies not a merely passive salvation (what happens to our immortal souls after death) but an active salvation operative here and now in history, in society, and in culture. It is what we call discipleship, knowing and loving Jesus and following him in the community of his disciples, which is the church. This focus was already present seminally in the reflections of DEMIS’s meeting in Melgar in 1968 and was progressively nurtured by Latin American theology’s insistence on the awakening of people’s critical awareness of how God is acting in history, the call to freedom and liberation and joint commitment in society for the transformation of the world according to God’s plan. It is a missiological focus that is profoundly evangelical and authentically Latin American.

We must admit that this new sense of missionary vision and responsibility is experienced by the faithful people and their pastors in different degrees of intensity. Only a relatively small number of Catholics are genuinely excited about mission and fully committed to it. Any living social movement has a strongly motivated core group, others who have a constant and serious commitment to its goals, and still others who participate only marginally and occasionally. Much is still to be done in the formation of missionaries and missiologists. The enthusiasm of those who are committed, however, is affecting the Latin American church as a whole. When we compare what is happening today with the indifference and passivity regarding mission that was rather typical only a generation or two ago, we can only thank God for the graces showered on the church and the people of Latin America in these recent decades.
Notes

1. Samuel Escobar contrasts the Catholic methodological priority of planting the church with that of Protestant missionaries, who highlight a biblical message intended to lead to the conversion of individuals (Changing Tides: Latin America and World Mission Today [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002], pp. 35–44).
2. It was presumed that missionaries would be sent to these areas from Europe and North America; what support there was from Latin America for such missions consisted in prayer and token monetary donations.
3. David Bosch notes that this ethnocentrism was typical of all Christian missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant (Transforming Mission [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991], pp. 447–50).
5. CELAM is a coordinating organism at the service of the continent’s twenty-two episcopal conferences (twenty-one of these conferences are national, and one is international, that of the Antilles, which includes the former British and Dutch colonies in the Caribbean area, mostly island states or territories but also Belize, Guyana, and Surinam). CELAM does not have the canonical status of an episcopal conference, nor is CELAM to be confused with the occasional General Conferences of the Latin American episcopate (to date, there have been four such conferences: in Rio de Janeiro in 1955, Medellin in 1968, Puebla in 1979, and Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, in 1992). It is thus improper to refer to these as CELAM I, II, III, and IV.
6. CELAM’s mission department has been known as DEMIS since mid-1979. From its foundation in 1966 until the Puebla conference in early 1979, the department simply used the acronym “DMC.”
7. See Segundo Galilea, El mensaje de Puebla (Santiago: Paulinas, 1979)

What the Ila Believed About God: Traditional Religion and the Gospel

Dennis G. Fowler

In 1959 my wife, Ena, and I were stationed at Kasenga, a Methodist mission station in the heart of Ila country in what is now southwest Zambia. In a corner of the mission office I found a filing cabinet stuffed with cards and papers. It proved to be a collection of about 12,000 items on Ila vocabulary and usage dating back to the arrival of Edwin Smith (1876–1957) as a Primitive Methodist missionary in 1902 and continued by his successors. When we returned to England in 1966, I brought the material with me.

For the next thirty years the Ila material remained in two battered suitcases in our attic. Once or twice I made attempts to sort through it, but the task was too much for me until I retired in 1994. I now had leisure for the job and a laptop to work with; even so, it took three months to put the entries into alphabetical order and start work on translation, and it took another six years before the Dictionary of Ila Usage was published.

The following article is based on extracts from the conversations recorded in the dictionary. Although the quotations originated in questions about vocabulary, they incidentally reflect many aspects of Ila life and thought in the period before the arrival of the Europeans. Much of the value of the quotations lies in their unstudied nature. They were not structured and directed by anthropological theses but arose spontaneously as the Ila speakers explained the meaning of words and customs and the various contexts in which they were used.

The Ila People and Pantheon

The Ila people numbered about 25,000 in 1900. The men were imposing in appearance: they were tall, dressed their hair in cones almost four feet high, and never traveled even a short distance without one or two eight-foot spears over their shoulders. They had the reputation of being a warlike and turbulent people. Until the arrival of the Methodist missionaries in 1893, no European had settled in their country, and several attempting to do so had been killed. David Livingstone, who encountered them in the 1850s, knew them as the Bashukulompo.

In 1920 the Ila were the subject of a groundbreaking anthropological study, The Ila-Speaking Peoples of Northern Rhodesia, by Edwin Smith and Andrew Dale, a district officer. Their work set the pattern for much subsequent research in Africa and led to...
Simunengu, Tutelary Spirit

Simunengu was the legendary patron and founder of Maala, the metropolis of the Baila.

Smith's becoming president of the Royal Anthropological Institute in 1933.

The Baila had no churches, no priesthood, and no meetings for corporate worship. A Western visitor might therefore assume that they had no belief in God. The fact that they prayed frequently and that they were always conscious of a spiritual dimension around them was not at first obvious, since their prayers and offerings were made on an individual or family basis, and the village shrines were insignificant little huts or groves.

In fact they did believe in a hierarchy of spiritual beings, in which the mizimu (ancestral spirits, sing. muzimu) were lowest and most numerous. Next in rank were the tutelary spirits of the local communities, such as Sikaumpa at Baambwe, Simunenga at Maala, and Malumbe. Above them was Bulongo, the archmuzimu for the whole of the Ila country. Supreme above all came Leza, the Creator.

Bulongo, Archanselalpirit

In 1910 Bulongo's cult was maintained by Nalubwe, an old blind headman at Maala.

Like other prophets, he was said to come from the northeast.

Bulongo, as for his origins, he hails from the Sala country, from Inasyamwenda; that's where he comes from.10

On the whole, Bulongo seems to have been seen as a spirit having human origin. He was not generally identified with the supreme being, the creator Leza.

Leza, Supreme Being

The Ila had many names for the Supreme Being. Thirty-two are recorded by Smith and Dale, and another dozen by Fowler.11 The commonest by far is Leza, which also means "rain." Another is Namese (p), meaning also "light showers." Many references to rain are ambiguous, so that it almost seems as though the rain is regarded as God. Some of his praise names, however, make it clear that Leza was the provider of rain, not the rain itself.

Many sayings connect the idea of God with weather.

April 2003
unconscious [of days when the heat makes the grain wilt].

Ubwasunu mbuyaba; Leza wabusa ymalele (p) / It’s a foul day; God is playing tricks.

Ubwasunu Leza wabusa ymuifu; tabalule (p) / Today God raised up dull weather; it’s not hot.

Koko Leza waasimpika; ultrasoundcitei byabu, ulasiya-mbi (p) / Over there God has put the pot on to boil; it’s very threatening and black.

Leza waasimpika makumbi, ukalawa (s) / God has put the clouds on the fire; it’s going to rain.

Ubwasunu Leza watsinentalxa Wacita isiti, takubona; ambweni wakalawa (p) / Today God is burning his things. He’s made everything so dark, you can’t see a thing; perhaps it will rain.

Leza watsikumuna masalo akwe (s) / God is shaking out his blankets.

Wavumna; wakwa maungu Leza (p) / It thunders; God is cooking his pumpkins.

These sayings no more represent literal beliefs than do ours about the man in the moon. As Auden wrote:

When Norsemen heard thunder,
Did they seriously believe
Thor was hammering?12

Rather, they reflect the vivid imagery of a people who lived in close dependence on the cycle of nature and on Simucinka (s) (the Thunderer).

In a similar class are the sayings about God’s dwelling place.

Kumbo kucilyango cakaLeza (p) / The west is God’s door.13

Ubwasunu Leza ulalila kwamululala (p) / Today God is sleeping in the south [after the rains had finished].

Ukwalaleza kwakamwina nkulele cinicini; kwina uwaene koko (p) / God’s home at Kaangwe is very far away; nobody has ever seen there.

At the same time it was realized that Leza ulitala bele, wina nkwoateko (p) (God is everywhere, he is nowhere absent). The Baila were no more consistent in their beliefs than we are.

God was creator of all things.

Cilenga (s) / the maker
Lubumba (s) / the potter
Syakapanga (s) / the one who joins things together
Munamazuba (p) / the giver of light
Leza owala cinicini, wainzuka (g) / God numbers [us] with absolute accuracy and is silent.

Tuli balenge baLeza, usinjuyo syonse silenge kwakalaleza (p) / We are created by God, and all things are God’s creation.

Leza ngwasilenge (s) / God it is who originated everything.

God alone could work miracles.

Nikubabobo mabibo ake Leza; kwina unji pele icenana Leza, kwina ulinsana syaLeza muntu ansi ano, pele Mutulabala (s) / However, miracles are of God; there is nobody other than God alone, therefore there is no person on earth who has the power of God, but only the Omnipresent.

Mabibo ake Leza ngu “Nantamaulika” (g/p) / Miracles are of God, who is the “one at whom you grumble, whatever he does. He can never please you.”

Anything in nature that seemed inexplicable was therefore dubbed malaila aLeza (s) (a sign from God).14

God was always the same.

Bulongo-namese (s) / the one who hardens like baked clay, immovable.

Leza wina kampenda; siindi syaaktue sililuleme (g) / God has no moods; his seasons are regular.

Leza teeli (s) / God never grows weary.

Therefore his power was shown not only in the original act of creation and in special miracles but in the constant renewal of life through food.

Leza ngususesela mwini; ati limu nici tibwiza, limu cabwiza; wakibwiza mukamwina (s) / It is God himself who replenishes; at one moment it’s not ripe, the next it is ripe; he himself has ripened it.

Sintu syonse watsimeneka Leza (s) / God makes all things grow.

Caaba, wakababa octalitwa (s) / He is the distributor; he gave more than could be eaten.

But if God gave increase, he could also withhold it; he was Ippookuboyza (s) (the one who gives and destroys).

Bo busiku wakwima, bo busiku wakupa, ngu caaba Leza (g) / One day he takes, one day he gives; he is God the distributor.

Sometimes his gifts to people were linked with their own generosity to others.

Utakusinya beenzinoko kula. Leza tazanda bobo; humwi busiku ulookasa yaze. Maila maleya-mdimi, aina muntu uma “Ndaya sikwense” (p) / Don’t deny food to your neighbors. God doesn’t want that; one day he will refuse it to you also. Grain is sometimes a failure; nobody can say, “I shall always have a good crop.”

God’s power is seen in decay and destruction as well as in growth. He is

Babulaala-tiwa (s) / the one who throws down the imbula-fruit
Cikungwe (p) / the one who strikes without warning
Luboleka-masuko (s) / the one who rots the masuku-fruit
Lumbombola-ngulul (s) and Munakaculu (s) / the one who softens anthills.

God wreaks the same destruction on people as on nature.

Ulizi buti ati ncyona? Namakungwe ucelelela; tuli myungu yakwe, nsisele uga sikwense (p) / How do you know that you will still be alive? Namakungwe plucks us up; we’re his pumpkins, it’s us that he eats all the time.

He was known as the Destroyer (Sikakunamo).

Bolya mbuuli Sikakunamo; Leza wakankila kwa ushe ubaina wawayya. Mucembele weso uciel muluma, kuruwaka kwa ushe ubaina, wawayya. Wayya ubaina bakaintu ubana babanina, bafwa boone (s) / This is what happened with Sikunamo; when Leza first sprang from his father and mother, he killed. When that old one was still an infant, from his very beginning from his father and mother, he killed. He killed his sisters and their children; they all died.

So God was seen as the author of life and death, of sickness and all manner of afflictions.

Leza wamukonoma ampringu, wamuyaya (p) / God broke him with his finger bone and killed him.

Ukwakono muaka inakulima, ndooma amafuwa, kaambo kamapenzi manimpani. Pele kulina nadakulimine, wankasa bulyo Leza. Lina ulyakusoma, ndooma amafuwa (p) / This year I’ve not dug over my field, I’ve just slept in front of the hearth, because of all my troubles. But as for digging, I’d intended to dig, had not God prevented me. I’ve not eaten new corn, just stayed by the fire.

Wenzu muntu wapenga cinicini. Leza wampenza, wamucita ipenzya-bulanga; inzwo nemuuyaya bulyo (p) / This fellow is in deep trouble. God laid on him afflictions, everything short of death; now let God finish him off.

This view of God could lead to pessimism or worse.

Akufuluka kale Leza, takuleka, pe; ulaukkukupa mapenzi lyoosuye, kustakakuleke (p) / God has already inflicted losses on you without cease; he will always continue to send troubles on you without any relief.

Leza wamulabila (s) / God was angry with him.

Wamulabila Leza (s) / He was angry with God.
For others, resignation was more fitting.

God was Upyatawakwe (s) / he who can do as he pleases with his own because all things are his
God was Namawana (p) / the one who neglects
Leza nguNamawana; ulawu bantu bawu (p) / God is the one who neglects; he neglects some people.

As the proverb says,
Leza mibwaalebele tatembelwana mafunze (p) / God is such that he cannot be blamed for error.

The only proper attitude to such a being is awe.
Leza ulalema (p) / God is to be dreaded.

In contrast, God is Simuzesu (p) (our chief) and Simatwangesu (p) (our master), and therefore in a special relation to his people.
Leza ndisiko, uswe tuli mitabi yakaleza atovu aakwe (p) / God is the base of the tree, and we are God’s branches and his leaves.

He is Silweno (p) (the protector).
Leza ngusilweno, uleena bantu (p) / God is our protector who watches over people.

Therefore many of his praise names reflect care and even love for people. He is
Lezelula (s) / the one who relieves poverty
Laozunaumba (s) / the one who saves the outcasts
Laezetelula (s) and Siluse / the merciful one
Mabula-ulaliwila (s) / the one whose blessings fall like imbula fruit
Upausteduwa (s) / the one who gives to the poor

He is Sintemwe (g) (nurse, with all that term implies).
Sintemwe muntu ukoata kabotu muluwa. Tasowa muntu; naabisha, naasata, ulikwete intenda (p) / A “sintemwe” is someone who nurses the sick very tenderly. She never abandons a patient; even if the sickness gets worse, she still has compassion.
Leza ngusintemwe (g) / God is our nurse.

Prayer to God

The step between seeing God as nurse and God as giver of health was a short one.

Ngucampa-Leza cipona (g) / Good health is the gift of God.

If God willed it, a sick person would recover, even from being at the point of death.

Wewu muntu ngumuhawana Leza; kafwile cincini (p) / This person has been vomited back by God; she was really dying.

Some people evidently took that step, praying directly to Leza for healing.

Ndaalala kwaLeza wonponya (g) / I prostrate myself for God to heal me.
Leza ntumba, apone musenzuma! (p) / Please God help me; let my friend get better!
Inzyo amukapaile Uzuma, akoziise avume (p) / Now make an offering to the Deliverer, so that he may hold him fast and deliver him.

Indeed, we missionaries did not have to teach the Ila to pray, since they were accustomed to doing so every day,; they had more words for prayer than ever we knew in English (alala, enzela, enzelela, komba, koma, kupaula, pumpu, and tabaila all mean to make intercession; balauka, banda, kantana, kubila, tembula, and tembula mean to glorify by reciting praise names; paila, paillia, and paizya mean to make an offering). When the first group of twenty schoolgirls was about to be baptized in the new church we opened at Kasenga in 1963, they spent the whole night in a vigil of prayer as preparation. Such natural piety was not taught by missionaries—indeed, it amazed me—but was surely the fruit of their belief in Leza.

In the 1950s and 1960s we found the village people eager to hear of Jesus, the muselusye Leza (the one sent down by God). At Baambwe, the last of the old great stockaded villages, Chief Mukobola would send round his messengers, and the whole population would assemble in a great circle to listen. In tiny villages, occupied by one extended family, we were welcomed, and our broken Ila was received politely. Messages came from Lubanda, north of the Kafue, beguising us to send evangelists to them also, but we could not comply with such requests. Each year at harvest, the people gave the tithe of the harvest in great heaps of maize, which we collected in 200-pound sacks and sold to the local store for cash. Their friendship to the mission was in marked contrast to the indifference to Christianity back in England. The most touching memory of our years at Kasenga is of Easter mornings when, before dawn, in the darkness and mist, a group of schoolgirls would go round the houses singing the hauntingly beautiful Easter carol Jesu Kristu wabuka, wabuka (Jesus Christ has risen, has risen). It is noteworthy, however, that the Ila people seem never to have prayed for forgiveness, because they apparently lacked any idea of sin as breaking God’s laws. The sources reveal only two examples of belief in God being linked with conduct. The first (cited also above) relates to sharing food.

Utakusinsya beenzinoko kulya. Leza tazanda bobi; bumwi busiku ulookasya aze. Maila maleya-ndimi,aina muntu wamha “Ndinya sikwense” (p) / Don’t deny food to your neighbors. God doesn’t want that; one day he will refuse it to you also. Grain is sometimes a failure; nobody can say, “I shall always have a good crop.”

The second example involves juvenile manners.

Mukando tasyolwa kumwana musyoonto; tukasika kumbele, pembe Leza, tazenda bobi (p) / An elder should never have a raspberry blown at him by a youngster. You will never get on in life, no. God will trip you up, he does not like that.

On his first arrival at Kasenga, Edwin Smith questioned an elder called Mungalo on his ideas of God and then preached on the Ten Commandments, having realized that the people’s pressing need was for an ethical dimension to their faith.” Our task as missionaries was thus not so much to teach prayer as to direct it toward God and to link it with conduct.

Fulfillment Theology

The Ila were fortunate in their pioneer missionaries. Edwin Smith, who founded Kasenga in 1909 as a branch of the Primitive Methodist mission at Nanzila, made it his business to understand their religious beliefs and to build on them, rather than to condemn them as heathen. His first recorded sermon to the Ila was on Paul’s address to the Athenians, “Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you” (Acts 17:23), and...
over the next decade, with the help of his pagan friend Mungalo, he built up a detailed and objective picture of their religion. His writings and lectures in Europe and America became influential in establishing the idea of an African theology.

This idea that the Christian Gospel should build on Ila beliefs was reflected most clearly in the Ila hymns, which William Chapman had started to write in his first years at Nkala. Smith joined in the work, and the first hymnal was published in 1909. When the final edition of Inyimbo sya bunakristo appeared in 1960, it contained 200 hymns. Some were translated from the Primitive Methodist hymnbook, some from the Shona, and several were newly written to African rhythms and tunes. Ila praise names were adopted and used in the hymns. Ten of the traditional names were applied to the Christian God, and thirty-one new ones were devised. This was indeed "fulfillment theology" in practice; to hear an Ila choir praising God was to recognize the depth of their traditional faith as well as the soundness of the Christian grafting.

**Christian Practice: No Concessions**

It was a different matter, however, when it came to teaching. In 1906 Smith produced a catechism in Ila that was a clear summary of orthodox Protestant belief and practice, set out as questions with answers. Revised by Matthew Luceya in 1955, it remained the basic tool of the village evangelist for two generations. This catechism made no concessions at all to liberal ideas or to the traditional culture of the Ila.

Unfortunately, Smith failed to suggest a single custom good enough to hold fast. He did, though, give a long list of evil customs to abjure: female initiation rites and feasts, beer brewing, smoking marijuana, marrying girls as soon as they reached puberty, funeral feasts, witchcraft, divination, praying to ancestral spirits, knocking out the middle front teeth, and slavery.

In 1943 the catechism was supplemented by the publication of a series of sixteen Bible studies for discussion groups, translated from a book produced for Nyasaland. This work started in great style, with a glowing description of the traditional African family, whose well-being depended on solidarity of belief in ancestor worship. It went on to develop the picture of the family of God, based on Christian beliefs. Naturally, the material was based almost entirely upon Bible passages. Sometimes biblical metaphors were developed using examples from African culture (e.g., chap. 13, "Vessels of Clay in the House").

No attempt was made, however, to use African ideas about God; indeed, there was no mention of them at all. The attitude to traditional culture was summed up as,

> Inkamu yabanakristo bemu-Africa iyelele kwibiza ati teekonzya kulizumuyazumuya ukuya kumbele mubumi buyapa cita kuti siyanza syakalekale yasileka / The body of Christians in Africa has to realize that it is not possible for it to grow strong and to make progress in the New Life unless the old ways are abandoned.

This rigorous approach was followed in the Ila mission, which perhaps explains why the mission was always something of a disappointment to the home church. While the medical and educational work prospered, all efforts at evangelism failed to produce more than a few dozen church members. It was not for want of preaching. In 1976, for example, there were no less than forty-four preachers on the Kasenga preaching plan, and sixteen places where regular weekly services were held. (One such place was the jail at Namwala, where manslayers were held. I always found the congregation of two dozen there to be becomingly pious in demeanor.)

That numbers never rose far is due rather to the society in which we were preaching. I have a photo of a small village near Maala, which shows me expounding Smith’s catechism to an interested group of the headman and his wives and children. If they had requested me to baptize them, the headman would have had to put away all his wives except the first. They would have returned to their families, and the cattle of their bride price would have been sent back, leading to long periods of haggling or litigation. I had no reason to doubt that the wives were deeply attached to their husband, and that the social and emotional upheaval involved would have had wide repercussions. (I still remember vividly having to turn away from the Communion table a Christian of many years’ seniority, named Joshua Matale. When his wife grew too old to look after him, he married a young girl, that being the only way to get a housekeeper. He was then immediately expelled by the local church meeting.)

In later years, long after he had left Kasenga, Smith’s attitude was different. In 1906 he had written,

> Pe, pe, cilatonda; mulombwana natwale mukaintu omwinana, aze mukaintu atawale kumulombwana omwinana / No, no, that is forbidden; a man must marry one wife only, and a woman must be married by one man only.

In 1926, however, he argued for a more flexible approach: “To demand that before a man can enter the church he must discard all wives but one, is to debar from the privilege of Church membership many men who are desirous of being Christians, but who cannot bring themselves to send away the women whom they have honourably married and who are the mothers of their children.” Yet this approach was never taken by the Church in Northern Rhodesia, which persisted in shelving the problem. In 1943 polygamy was discussed—and dismissed—in only one line out of forty-eight pages of the prescribed textbook.

The idea that the Gospel should build on Ila beliefs is seen in their hymns.
Candle in the Dark
This drama faithfully recounts the incredible saga that earned William Carey the title “Father of Modern Missions.” Carey’s Serampore mission began two hundred years ago. The Serampore Community’s task seemed impossible, yet they overcame many obstacles to make a lasting impact for God and brought the transforming power of the Gospel to multitudes of hungry hearts in India. Their experience provides valuable insight for any today concerned to see the message of Christ reach the world. 97 minutes
VHS, #4306 (In Spanish, #0346) .... $19.99
Curriculum kit also available, #4289 .... $59.99

First Fruits
Made two decades ago to celebrate 250 years of Protestant missions, this is the true story of the extraordinary devotion of young people and their role at a critical point in the history of world missions. In the 1730s a community of Moravian refugees finds a home on the estate of Count Zinzendorf in Germany. See how the first two young men who went as missionaries to the slaves on St. Thomas were willing to become slaves themselves, if they had to, in order to proclaim the Gospel. 70 minutes
VHS, #4009 (In Spanish, #0887) .... $19.99

Mama Luka
Doctor Helen Rosevere, affectionately called “Mama Luka,” pioneered vital medical work in the rain forests of the Belgian Congo—now the Democratic Republic of the Congo. After independence in 1964, the country was ravaged by the Simba Rebellion. Helen, caught up in the horror of the revolution, was beaten, raped and imprisoned by the rebels. Mama Luka Comes Home vividly tells her story of forgiveness and faithfulness to those she came to serve. This is a story of love overcoming hatred, brutality, and racial prejudice. 60 minutes
VHS, #4066 .... $19.99

Through Gates of Splendor
Five missionaries went into the land of the savage Aucas. Their offer of friendship was rejected, and the Aucas killed the missionaries. Elizabeth Elliot, wife of one of the martyrs, her daughter and Rachel Saint would not give up and lived for a time among the Aucas and brought the Gospel to them. This older film is an effective demonstration of God’s grace at work during an unforgettable moment in modern missions history. 36 minutes
VHS, #8010 (In Spanish, #9995) .... $19.99

The Law of Love
Twenty-two year old Jackie Pullinger could not get missionary society sponsorship, so, sensing God’s calling, she went on her own in the early 1960s to Hong Kong. There she began to witness amidst the drug-crazed vice and violence of the old “Walled City.” She started a youth outreach for heroin addicts and brought healing to desperate lives through prayer without any use of conventional methods for treating withdrawal. This is a story that touches your heart, as you see the power of the Holy Spirit at work. 51 minutes
VHS, #4150 .... $19.99

The Good Seed
A remarkable case study of how a remote tribe was transformed in one generation by the Gospel. Marianna Slocum and Florence Gerdel went to Mexico to bring the Tzeltal Indians the Scriptures in their own language. At first they experienced heartbreak and much opposition. Then, a mighty movement of the Spirit of God occurred, affecting the whole society. The Indians then sent these two women to Colombia to reach others there. This film visits the locations a decade ago to show the life-changing results of their mission. 30 minutes
VHS, #4028 (In Spanish, #4059) .... $19.99

Peace Child
The notable and inspiring story of Don and Carol Richardson and their missionary work in the remote jungles of the Southwest Pacific. They are shocked when the story of Judas’ betrayal of Jesus makes him a hero to a primitive people who revere treachery. When inter-tribal warfare breaks out, a chief offers his son as the means of bringing peace, making the Gospel understandable as these new missionaries discover the “Peace Child.” A heartwarming story that provides valuable insight into modern missions. 30 minutes
VHS, #4925 (In Spanish, #2760) .... $19.99
DVD, #99351D .... $24.99

Beyond the Next Mountain
A powerful drama originally made for theatrical release. At the close of the 19th century the British branded the Hmar people of northeast India as “the worst headhunters,” a label well deserved at the time. But in 1910, a single copy of the Gospel of John reached their village and introduced them to a revolutionary new life in Christ.” This is the story of the personal pilgrimage and vision of one tribesman’s son, Rochunga Pudate. 97 minutes
VHS, #4316 .... $19.99

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was, I believe, the biggest single obstacle to the growth of the church in village communities during the twentieth century. Only in the last decades of the century, as polygamy became less frequent among the younger generation, did the situation alter, with more teenagers being baptized through the schools.  

Conclusion

The contents of the filing cabinet found in the old mission station revealed a rich picture of Ila life and beliefs, marvelously preserved by Edwin Smith and the other missionaries. The benefits of their sympathetic attitude to the existing culture, so unusual in that era, were soon seen in the Ila hymnbook, which expressed both the enthusiasm of the timeless Christian faith, and the Ila people’s own approach to God.

However, the unbridgeable gulf between Christian monogamy and Ila polygamy led to tensions which could not be resolved until a new generation of educated women emerged from the mission schools and the polygamous society passed away.

Notes

1. The 12,000 items of Ila source materials were largely written in pen and pencil on postcards, diary leaves, envelopes, cut-up Italian Bible Society forms, and British South Africa Company notepaper. They consisted of Ila words and sentences, some with translations appended in the same or later hands. Not in any particular order, all were anonymous and had to be ascribed by internal evidence.

2. The handwritten notes fell into three groups. First were those in a large uniformed hand with no English at all. These were identified as the work of Smith’s assistants, named in Edwin W. Smith and Andrew Murray Dale, *The Ila-Speaking Peoples of Northern Rhodesia*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1920), p. 30, and as Kayobe Symatanga and the son of Chief Syezongo II. Second were numerous entries in neat but idiosyncratic script. These were ascribed to Smith based on comparison with copies of his correspondence. Third, there were notes in a clear flowing hand, many of which revealed an informed interest in medicine. These were ascribed to Dr. Herbert Gerrard, who worked at Kasenga from 1915 to 1933 and who described himself in the latter year as one of the two “Ila experts.”

3. Most of the remaining notes were typed and covered the whole range of orthographic evolution. One entry identified them as the work of John Price, who was at Kasenga from 1906 to 1934. He translated part of the New Testament into Ila in 1910 and revised the whole work in 1933.

4. One former missionary wrote: “I had no preparation for Zambian culture etc. It was, perhaps, late in my second tour (in the 1960s) that I discovered the meaning of a little thatched (miniature) house beside the door of an inanda. It was ‘a spirit house.’ I wonder how many offences I gave because of my ignorance” (J. T. McCormack to author, April 23, 2001).


7. Citations of Ila source materials are identified in the text by initials: (s) for Edwin W. Smith, (p) for John W. Price, (g) for Herbert S. Gerrard, and (f) for Dennis G. Fowler.


9. The praise name “Sikakunamo” is used as a title of Leza by a character in an old Ila tale, where it is translated “He who is about us on all sides—and not for good” (Edwin W. Smith, *African Beliefs and Christian Faith* [London: United Society for Christian Literature, 1936], p. 61). See also below in the section “Leza.”


11. Ibid., p. 192.

12. Smith concluded that Bulongo was a long-dead prophet (ibid., p. 196).


15. The phrase *kwamini nkundaakuyenzeelela* means “the one to whom I habitually prayed.” I have described their prayers in a book, *The Ila Speaking*, to be published shortly by the International African Institute.

16. This lack of an ethical dimension posed a problem for Smith in translating the Lord’s Prayer. He chose *mulandu* (fault, debt, lawsuit) for “trespass,” out of many possible alternatives. All of these terms, however, involve either offenses against people and property, punishable by fines, or infringements of natural laws that automatically triggered evil consequences. None of them is connected with God. See Fowler, *Dictionary of Ila Usage*, under *bubyaabi, butongo, bulitazi, cami, cibi, cisapwi, intewentewe, katombo, lutuzi, lweza, ila, mafunze, malibita, mazundeile, munanga, (s)muye, muzayzi, nkanta, nze, sanzya, syola, tonda, twantevetewe* and *zila*. Butongo is of particular interest, as listing Kayobe Symatanga’s examples of shameful deeds. They include cowardice, allowing oneself to be plundered without resistance, running away when one’s village is raided, letting one’s wife be stolen by another, tolerating abuse, being stung when collecting honey, dying in the act of robbery, and being the only one of a crowd to lose control of one’s temper.

17. “Africans . . . have laid hold of some essential truths. The existence of God as Creator, the need for an intermediary between man and God, the existence of a future life—these are no mean achievements of savage thought. [Missionaries should] seek diligently for these points of attachment and use them in the teaching of our religion” (Edwin W. Smith, “The Religion of the Bantu,” *Primitiv Methodist Quarterly Review* [January 1907]: 31).


20. This hymnal was revised as *Ibuku insyoonto hyaluyenzyo syacila* (Kafue, Northern Rhodesia: Methodist Book Room, 1962).


24. Ibid., p. 41.

Keeping Faith with Culture: Protestant Mission Among Zoroastrians of Bombay in the Nineteenth Century

Farshid Namdaran

The history of Protestant missionary activity among Zoroastrians has proved to be a relatively rich field, despite the small size of the worldwide Zoroastrian community, which in 1900 numbered 93,000 in India, the focus of this article, and 108,500 worldwide. Protestant missions to this community began mainly in India in the nineteenth century, and in Iran only in the twentieth century. Converts were few, but some made definite contributions to church life in India. Caught as they were between different cultures and religions, these Indian Zoroastrians converted to Christianity was the Scotsman John Wilson, who was probably the first missionary to encounter Zoroastrians in any number. He worked and preached in the streets and bazaars of Bombay until 1820. His journals are filled with accounts of his encounters with Parsis and the many inquirers he had among them, although he did not record any conversions.

Protestant Missions to Zoroastrians

The earliest recorded attempt, originating in northern Germany, at an organized mission to the Zoroastrians was by a small community of Moravians. In 1747 they commissioned two doctors to go to Zand Persia, where they had heard the Gebri lived. The mission was an utter failure, for the two doctors never reached their destination.

A little-known Armenian itinerant missionary named Carapet Aratoon, who was trained in Serampore and sent across the subcontinent to Bombay in 1810, was probably the first missionary to encounter Zoroastrians in any number. He worked and preached in the streets and bazaars of Bombay until 1820. His journals are filled with accounts of his encounters with Parsis and the many inquirers he had among them, although he did not record any conversions.

The first missionary who had any success in converting Zoroastrians to Christianity was the Scotsman John Wilson. Sent by the Scottish Missionary Society to Bombay in 1830, Wilson adopted the deliberately confrontational strategy that was popular at that time. Wilson's work and writings on Parsis and their religion helped establish his reputation as a leading orientalist of his day. He continued his work with the Zoroastrians of India until his death in 1875. No other missionary surpassed him in terms of winning converts from Zoroastrianism to Christianity.

Not until the last decade of the nineteenth century did a major missionary society such as the Church Missionary Society (CMS) send missionaries specifically to the Zoroastrians. In 1895 Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Arthur Freeman volunteered his services to the society and was sent to Bombay "to conduct a mission amongst the educated natives especially the Parsis." He conducted a vigorous though brief mission among the Parsis with the aid of Rostamji Mistry, a Parsi convert. Freeman died in 1900, and Mistry resigned in the same year.

Another attempt by five female volunteers under the auspices of the CMS is also recorded. In 1896 they were commissioned "to form a missionary settlement of lady volunteers in order to work amongst the Parsee ladies." The Parsi community reacted sharply to this attempt, with hostile articles appearing in Parsi-controlled newspapers warning the community of such a move. I have discovered no official reports or papers that indicate what happened to this effort.

Farshid Namdaran, a retired medical doctor of Persian descent residing in the United Kingdom, is a convert from Zoroastrianism. His M.Th., by research, obtained from the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World, School of Divinity (New College), University of Edinburgh, was on Christian mission to Zoroastrians.

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Apparantly the final attempt to reach the Parsis was the commissioning of James Hope Moulton by the council of the YMCA of India to work and lecture among the Parsi community in Bombay for one year in 1915. It seems that this was the last organized effort by a missionary organization to evangelize the Zoroastrians until the end of the First World War.

Five Converts

For the period 1839–1900 I have found evidence of fifteen Parsis from Bombay or nearby cities who converted to Christianity and were baptized. A first group of conversions occurred in 1839–59 under Wilson and the Scottish Presbyterians and a second group under the Anglicans in the 1890s. Some relevant details of these baptisms appear in the accompanying table.

Though the total number of converts is small, the proportion that eventually was ordained (six out of fifteen) is high. It seems remarkable that a comparatively small community of Parsis should produce such a number of high-caliber converts. Their contribution to the activities of the mission in western India, including developing an indigenous church during the latter part of the nineteenth century, seems to have been significant. Sufficient material exists to give a brief account of the lives of five of the converts who were ordained.

Dhanjibhai Nauroji. Coming from a wealthy, influential Parsi family of Bombay, Nauroji entered a missionary school as a teenager. He was converted and then baptized in 1839, the first Parsi convert to be baptized. This event caused a great stir and unrest within the Parsi community. Missionary Wilson had to appear in court and publicly defend his actions, and the missionary school suffered from the temporary withdrawal of all the Parsi and other pupils. Nauroji was disinherited and rejected by his family and became dependent on the missionary society for financial support.

At his baptism, Nauroji read a personal declaration in which he rejected Zoroastrianism. In a letter to Wilson a few months later, he referred to it as Satan's religion. At least in this early stage of his Christian experience, Nauroji rejected the idea that Zoroastrianism contained any true representation of God or could serve as any preparation for Christianity.

Nauroji became a close companion of Wilson and, with the help of fellow convert Hormazdji Pestonji, revised the Gujarati Bible and perhaps also helped in the publishing of Wilson's famous book on Parsi religion. Nauroji went to Scotland in 1843 to study at New College, Edinburgh, and was ordained by the Free Presbytery of Edinburgh. At this early stage he demonstrated his strong personality by insisting that unless he was ordained on terms of full equality with the missionaries, with full "evangelistic power and liberty," he would not enter the service of the Free Church of Scotland.

On his return to Bombay in 1847, Nauroji chose Surat as his missionary field. He worked there with the Irish Presbyterian mission until 1857, when he was offered the post of minister of Ambrolí Church in Bombay. He worked for nearly forty years among the Parsis and other communities in that city. Two of his published sermons show how deeply committed he was to the cause of spreading the Gospel to all of India. In the late 1880s he was also employed as lecturer in Bible studies in the Free Church College, and in the 1890s he became the founding president of the Parsi Christian Association. His standing in the Parsi community of Bombay increased with age, so much so that in 1896, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of his ordination, many prominent community members attended the celebration. He became known as the Grand Father of Indian Christians and died at the age of eighty-six in 1908.

Nauroji married a Christian Indian woman, but little is known about her except that she helped him in his work. They had at least two daughters, who continued to be employed by the Free Church of Scotland in Bombay after their father's death. Nauroji's wife preceded him in death, probably in the early 1890s.

A letter Nauroji wrote shortly before his death, which shows clearly his changed attitude toward his former religion, exemplifies the sentiments of Christian Parsis of his time and no doubt those of more recent generations. He wrote,

I was born a Parsi and am still a Parsi of the Parsis. With the exception of that which is of the highest importance to man, I mean, religious faith, I am one with my brethren according to flesh. Whatever touches them touches me. Their joy and sorrow are mine. I love them, and if need be, I am ready to lay down my life for them. ... I am proud to belong to a race which stands foremost by reason of many high qualities among the races of the East. The love which I bear to my Parsi brethren leads me earnestly to desire that, in regard to higher matters also, they and I stand on the same platform, that we saw eye to eye and felt heart to heart in regard to the great things God has revealed to us for our spiritual and eternal welfare. I am confident that the time is coming when this desire shall be fulfilled, and though I may not live to see it, yet I rejoice in the anticipation of it.

He clearly affirms here his membership in the Parsi community and his recognition of the positive qualities of Parsi culture. He manifests inclusiveness in talking about the great things that God has revealed and looks forward to a time when Parsis will turn to Christ.

Sorabji Khersedji. Like Nauroji, Sorabji came from a wealthy family and attended the mission school. After his conversion and baptism in 1841, Sorabji's family rejected him, and he also became dependent on the missionaries financially. Sorabji was sent out of Bombay to Ahmadabad, where he worked as an assistant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (* = ordained)</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Person Baptizing</th>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>Place</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dhanjibhai Nauroji* (DN)</td>
<td>1839</td>
<td>J. Wilson</td>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>Bombay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hormazdji Pestonji*</td>
<td>1839</td>
<td>J. Wilson</td>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>Bombay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Framji Bahmanji</td>
<td>1839</td>
<td>J. Wilson</td>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>Bombay</td>
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<tr>
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<td>G. Valentine</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>Bombay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nassawanj</td>
<td>1848</td>
<td>DN</td>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>Surat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Edulji</td>
<td>1855</td>
<td>J. Wilson</td>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>Bombay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruttonji Nowroji*</td>
<td>1856</td>
<td>W. S. Price/SK</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>Nasik</td>
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<td>1856</td>
<td>J. Wilson</td>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>Bombay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Merwanji</td>
<td>1859</td>
<td>J. Wilson/Glasgow</td>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>Surat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shapurji D. Bhabha*</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rostamji Mistry* (RM)</td>
<td>1891</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>Bombay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dorabji Patell</td>
<td>1895</td>
<td>T. A. Freeman/RM</td>
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<td>Bombay</td>
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<td>[unnamed]</td>
<td>1895</td>
<td>R. S. Heywood</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>Poona</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dorabji H. P. Khandwalla</td>
<td>1896</td>
<td>T. A. Freeman/RM</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>Bombay</td>
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Nesbit and John Murray Mitchell. In 1853 he was employed by the CMS to work with William Salter Price in Nasik, principally helping Price to run the orphanage and later building the Christian settlement of Shanapur, near Nasik. In Nasik he met and married Franscina, the adopted daughter of Sir Francis Ford, commander of an English regiment. He raised his family in Nasik but in 1867 moved from there to take up a civil service position with the British government. Nine years later he moved with his family to Poona, where his wife opened the Victoria High School. Bishop Johnson of Calcutta admitted him to deacon's orders at Agra in 1878, and for a while he worked in Junir as honorary missionary and later in Poona, where he also taught church history at the divinity school. He died in 1894.

No record remains of Sorabji's baptismal testimony or of early letters, and therefore it is difficult to say with certainty how he regarded Zoroastrianism at the time of his conversion, but his views were probably similar to those of Nauroji, for they came from a very similar environment and background. It is therefore very likely that Sorabji understood Zoroastrianism to be totally false and publicly rejected it, and in turn was rejected by the Parsi community.

In time, however, Sorabji, as did Nauroji, came to accept the Parsi community and to be accepted by them. Sorabji appears to have engaged in continuous dialogue with the Parsis, informally with family and friends, and formally with Parsi priests and the Panchayat. The best documentation of this interaction is in a book by Sorabji's daughter Cornelia, in which she describes her father's attempt to engage in dialogue with Parsi priests. He published two books on Zoroaster and Christianity in this attempt. Cornelia's account documents the change in attitudes on both sides that must have taken place during his lifetime. She also refers frequently to the pride her father felt in being a Parsi and how he made sure that the children were brought up to regard themselves as Parsis (though not as Zoroastrians).

Sorabji's family composition was rather unusual, especially considering the strict class distinctions in Victorian Britain, as well as the rigid caste system in India. His marriage, which was unified by his and his wife's common faith, blended several cultures—on his side, Parsi, on Franscina's, Hindu; her adoptive parents were typically aristocratic English, and through the missionaries he adopted a Victorian middle-class culture. Judged by the children, the marriage was a success. One daughter, Cornelia, the first woman to study law at Oxford, became a distinguished barrister and writer; another, Jean, was invited to speak at the 1893 World Parliament of Religions in the United States. A third daughter continued as a missionary educator until the 1920s, and a son became a lawyer and professor.

Both Sorabji and his wife held strong views on their own rich cultural heritage. Though they acknowledged and adopted many Western ways of living, manners, and speech, they opposed the wholesale abandonment of their culture. The method they chose to blend their cultures with their faith was one of education. They brought together Western and Eastern educational methods and materials initially to educate their own children. When they found this approach to be successful, they applied the same methods in schools they started in Poona. In 1876 they founded the Victoria High School, which began with seven children and grew during thirty years to nearly 400 children. In its coeducation of races and of boys and girls it brought Western and Eastern educational methods and materials together.

Sorabji and his wife founded and ran three successful missionary schools in Poona, where they allowed the liberating message of the Gospel to transcend culture and to transform and renew old customs and traditions without necessarily destroying them. Franscina was the main force behind these schools and campaigned relentlessly in Britain and India to raise funds. Most of her daughters worked at one time or other in these schools, and indeed one took over from her after her death and continued the work until the 1920s.

Hormazdi Pestonji. Born in 1820, Pestonji was part of the first group of Parsis to present themselves for baptism, in 1839. These baptisms provoked a great uproar within the Parsi community and led to a great deal of persecution, perhaps more for Pestonji than the others, for he was married with a baby daughter at the time. His wife and daughter were taken away from him by the family, and his wife was given in marriage to another man. After many years of legal struggle, he was reunited with his daughter, who later went on to marry a prominent Indian pastor. His unconventional and rather controversial lifestyle did not endear him to the contemporary missionary writers, which perhaps explains the dearth of material about him, compared with the information available on Nauroji or Sorabji. According to Elizabeth Hewat, Pestonji was the first Indian ordained in Bombay. His talents lay in linguistics, and he worked on the translation of the New Testament into Gujarati at Wilson College, Bombay. He then served for a few years with the Irish Presbyterian Mission in Kathiawar.

When Pestonji was posted to Jambusar, however, he refused to go. He left India to write a pamphlet highly critical of the conduct of missionaries toward native ministry. The controversy that this response caused culminated in a settlement that enabled the mission to destroy all copies of the pamphlet. Meanwhile, Pestonji married a German woman, they moved to London, and he served twelve years at King's College as professor of Gujarati. He joined the Baptists there and eventually was sent by the Baptist Missionary Society to Poona, where he conducted a relatively successful mission until his death at age seventy-one.

Ruttonji Nowroji. Nowroji came to Christianity through the influence of Pundit Nehemiah Goreh and Sorabji. He was baptized in 1856 by Sorabji and William Price of Nasik amid great commotion and personal persecution, one result of which was his forced permanent separation from his wife and child. He was given work and protection by the Anglican missionaries in Nasik and Bombay and was eventually ordained by Bishop Douglas Harding of Bombay in 1870. Thereafter Nowroji spent thirty years as a missionary in Aurangabad building up the church among the very poor and low caste of that region, with over 2,000 baptisms during this period; however, none were Parsis. He was invited to England in 1893 and gave a series of successful lectures on his work in India to audiences in London. He was one of the founding members of the Parsi Christian Association and did some translation work helping to revise the Gujarati Bible. He died in 1910 at age seventy-two, leaving seven daughters.

After his baptism, Sorabji became dependent on the missionaries financially.
Rostamji Mistry. Mistry’s name first appears in 1893 in reports from Poona Divinity School, where he was studying. He was involved in a controversy with the European students, who objected to his receiving privileges equal to theirs. Shortly thereafter he left to work as an evangelist among the Parsis in Bombay and later was joined by Freeman. They worked together until 1900, when Freeman died. Through their activities a number of Parsis were baptized and the Parsi Christian Association was formed. When Freeman died, however, the CMS did not replace him. Mistry soon resigned, and the mission to Parsis ended.

Changing Approaches to Zoroastrian Culture

This historical sketch of missions to the Zoroastrians has mentioned two missionaries each of whom was remarkable in his own way—John Wilson, who came to Bombay in 1830, and James Moulton, who arrived for a brief mission in 1915. In between these two dates we have traced the life histories of some of the Parsi converts to Christianity who were also remarkable people in terms of their contribution to church life in India. We have also traced the story of their struggles with the challenges they faced following conversion.

The challenge to Christians who seek to bring Zoroastrians to Christ and, even more so, to the Zoroastrians who have accepted Christianity is how to reconcile Zoroastrian culture with Christian faith. Wilson’s answer was to totally reject Parsi religion and culture. Since the first wave of conversions took place mainly under his influence, the converts’ early attitude naturally reflected that of Wilson. Wilson’s approach, coupled with his lack of knowledge of the Gathas, led him to dismiss Zoroaster and his religion as unworthy of any attention and to accuse the Parsis of practicing polytheism. He even went so far as to label Zoroaster an impostor.24

A different approach to this challenge appeared nearly a century later in the work of Moulton. Building on the contributions of J. N. Farquhar and others, and basing his understanding of Zoroastrianism on the Gathas, Moulton accepted Zoroaster as a prophet from God and his teachings as containing truths that lack only fulfillment by Christ. 35 Moulton’s conclusion was thus that Parsis need not reject their culture but must seek its fulfillment and transformation, which only Christ can do. The writings of these two authors demonstrate clearly how missionary attitudes and approaches had changed during the course of nearly a century.

To discover the answer of the converts to this challenge, we examined brief accounts of several of them. We saw that, under the influence of Wilson, the converts initially rejected the Parsi culture. As time passed, however, it became clear that the con-

Noteworthy

Announcing
The Central and Eastern European Association for Mission Studies was inaugurated November 28, 2002, at a meeting in Budapest of the Missiological Research Fellowship. Anne Marie Kool, Budapest; Peter F. Penner, Prague; Scott Klingsmith, Vienna; Jan Gorski, Krakow; Sergei Shirokov, Moscow; and Vladimir Federov, St. Petersburg, compose the founding executive committee. A journal and a mission conference during 2003 are being considered. Contact: ceams@missionstudies.org.

The premiere issue of Quest, a biannual interdisciplinary journal for Asian Christian scholars, was published in November 2002. David Kwang-Sun Suh of the Asian Christian Higher Education Institute, Hong Kong, is editor. The publishers are the Association for Christian Universities and Colleges in Asia, Hong Kong, and the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia, New York. Contact: Wendy Chan, managing editor, at Hong Kong Baptist University, wendy@hkbu.edu.hk.

The Baptist World Alliance, which serves 206 Baptist conventions and unions worldwide, will hold a Summit on Baptist Mission in the 21st Century, May 5–9, 2003, in Swansea, England. Themes to be highlighted include Lessons from the History of Missions, Mission and the Marginalized, and Paradigm Shifts in Missiology. Contact: Ruby Burke, Ruby@bwemanet.org, or visit www.bwemanet.org.

“New Trends in Ecumenism” is the theme of an international conference to be held May 9–12, 2003, at Lund University, Lund, Sweden. The Nordic Institute for Missionary and Ecumenical Research and the Nordic Ecumenical Council are cosponsors. Contact: ann.alden@teol.lu.se.

“The Bible and the Nations: Translating, Reading, Interpreting, and Living the Scriptures in the Multi-cultural Context of the Contemporary Church” is the theme for a conference and a series of related missions courses to be held June 6–12, 2003, at Regent College, Vancouver. Contact: conferences@regent-college.edu or call (800) 663-8664.

The Project for Archives Documentation and Oral History of the International Association for Mission Studies will hold a conference on the theme “Rescuing the Memory of Mission in New Zealand and the Pacific” at the Bible College of New Zealand, Auckland. The June 24, 2003, gathering is a follow-up to a conference held last year in Rome. Contact: John Roxborogh, john@roxborogh.com. The Aotearoa/New Zealand Association for Mission Studies will meet June 25–26 at the same location. Contact: Cathy Ross, cathyr@bcnz.ac.nz.


The Christianity in Asia Project of the University of Cambridge’s Centre for Advanced Religious and Theological Studies will coordinate seminars and consultations during the next several years that will “present Asian Christianity in all its theological variety and facilitate its interaction with theologies from other contexts in order to enrich the understanding of world Christianity,” reports project director Sebastian Chang-Hwan Kim in December 2002. The center also plans to publish seminar papers, conference summaries, the Bulletin of Christianity in Asia, and a journal Christianity in Asia. For details, visit www.divinity.cam.ac.uk or e-mail Kim at schk2@cam.ac.uk.
erts were unable and unwilling to distance themselves from their cultural background. The outworking of their newly acquired faith within their Zoroastrian/Parsi culture is demonstrated clearly by the family life of the Sorabjis, most clearly in their innovative blend of Western and Eastern educational methods at home and later in their missionary schools. Nauroji’s life also demonstrates how, during his long life, he was able to accept much of the Parsi culture and be accepted by the Parsi community but yet retain his faith and contribute actively to church life. The picture that emerges from this review is that Zoroastrian Christians, few though they were, showed themselves stalwart believers who stuck to their faith and gave all for their Lord. Ultimately, however, they saw no reason to give up their rich heritage and embrace another culture. Early missionaries, in contrast, unconsciously assumed that once people from other religions converted to Christianity, they would adopt a Western form of Christianity. The missionaries often looked with suspicion on Christian expressions that contained elements from other cultures. It seems, therefore, that the real struggle the Parsis had after accepting Christ was less with their personal faith and convictions and more with the cultural baggage that both the missionaries and the Parsis carried. The struggle, in other words, was primarily cultural, not religious. The case histories of converts show that they were tackling these issues in their day-to-day lives and finding solutions, and doing so long before either Farquhar or Moulton were able to articulate them in theological terms.

Western culture was not the sole source of conflict in this cultural struggle, for Parsi culture in its own way was also a hindrance. Parsis exhibited undue reverence for fire, ancestors, nature, and angels, and they laid undue importance on ceremonies, purity rites, and repetitive prayers or mantras. Evidence uncovered during the course of this research but not mentioned in this article shows that the Parsi religion underwent quite a considerable reformation during this same period. It is difficult to say how much was due to the influence of the missionaries and the converts and how much was due to secular pressures, but the missionaries and the converts undoubtedly had some part in the process.

Reflections

In this article we have considered the lives of some converts who were from a different culture, place, and time than ours. Issues of culture, however, are especially prominent even to this day. Right at the beginning, when Jesus commissioned his disciples to take the Gospel to all nations, it was inevitable that they would encounter such cultural issues. Thus when Peter and Paul took

The Geneva Ecumenical Centre and the Bossey Ecumenical Institute libraries, both part of the World Council of Churches, received a $2.7 million donation from Banque Pictet, Geneva, to develop an ecumenical research center. Together they house the largest collection on twentieth-century ecumenism. The grant will enable the libraries and archives to become more accessible for research via the Internet.

The United College of the Ascension, Birmingham, an international ecumenical mission community in which people from more than twenty countries live, worship, and learn together, launched a residential program for missionaries. The program offers preparation for and reflection on mission. For details, e-mail Kirsteen Kim, k.kim@bham.ac.uk, or visit www.ascension.ac.uk.

Personalia

The World Council of Churches announced in November a series of program and staff cuts totaling more than $4.5 million. In response to a predicted budget shortfall, General Secretary Konrad Raiser said the WCC will reorganize itself around five historic themes: faith and order; mission and ecumenical formation; justice, peace, and creation; international affairs, peace, and human security; and diakonia and solidarity. U.S. Office Director Jean Stromberg and Communications Officer Philip Jenks are among those leaving the WCC.

An 81-year-old Comboni missionary sister, Callista Cozzi, was honored by Sudanese president Omar Hassan al-Beshir for her work in obstetrics. Before returning to Italy in December, Cozzi, who founded a 200-bed hospital in Sudan, received an honorary doctorate. Last year she received Sudan’s Order of Merit of the first degree.

Global Mapping International, Colorado Springs, Colorado, received the first Henry Parsons Crowell Award for Excellence and Innovation in the Extension of Evangelical Christianity. It included a gift of $50,000 in recognition of GMI’s “significant and innovative” programs that “enhance the effectiveness” of missions, leadership training, and evangelism.


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the Gospel to the Gentiles, they encountered fierce opposition from some Jewish Christians who wanted the converts to follow Jewish culture and traditions. Yet, led by the Spirit, the apostles from some Jewish Christians who wanted the converts to follow the Gospel to the Gentiles, they encountered fierce opposition for a long time to bear fruit.

This study illustrates the process of transformation in a tightly knit community of Parsis in nineteenth-century Bombay. The community needed a Wilson to shake it out of its long slumber. It also needed righteous indignation within its members for them to take a fresh look at their own religion. The converts were essential in that they kept faith with their culture but allowed the Gospel to do its transforming work. Then the community needed an academic such as Moulton to reflect on the outworking of the Gospel within the lives of the converts and the effect of the missionary attacks on the Parsi community, and then to express these insights in theological terms in his writing.

The Parsis had allowed themselves to become captives of their tradition and culture at the expense of the essential message in their Zoroastrian faith. In a similar vein Martin Luther in his time spoke of “the Babylonian captivity of the church”; in our day Lesslie Newbigin described the present Western church as being the captive of its own culture.35 Perhaps a Wilson or Luther from the non-Western world is needed to shake the Western church out of its slumber and allow it to be transformed by the power of the Gospel.

**Notes**

3. The source materials in this study were obtained from published and archival materials from various missionary societies. Most of the names and life histories of the converts were obtained from letters and reports they sent to their home missionary societies. Particularly good sources, where these exist, are the baptismal and ordination testimonies that each person wrote.
4. Mary Boyce, *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1984), gives the most up-to-date materials on Zoroastrianism.
18. Smith, *Life of John Wilson*. Wilson contemplated publication of a translation into Gujarati of his book on Parsi religion, which he proposed that Nauroji should prepare for lithographic printing in Edinburgh. There is no evidence that this task was ever actually carried out.
19. Neill, *History of Christianity in India*, pp. 401–2. Nauroji, who had the full support of Wilson in this matter, became one of the first Indian ministers employed by the Free Church of Scotland and sent to India as a missionary on a par with the European missionaries. This step set a precedent, which was to be of greatest significance for the church at a later date.
20. Wilson had founded this indigenous church in the 1830s.
21. J. Murray Mitchell, on behalf of the Church of Scotland Missionary Committee, to Dhanjibhai Nauroji regarding the congregation at Poona, Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Special Collections 23 Nov. 1876. At some period during the 1870s Nauroji seems to have overseen the native congregation in Poona as well.
23. William Walker, *Glimpse of Mission Work and Some Mission Schools in Western India* (London: S. Harris, 1887). The Parsi Christian Association, which was limited to Bombay, faded away upon Nauroji’s death.
25. Parsis of this period were referred to primarily either by family name (as with Nauroji) or by given name (Sorabji). No attempt is made here to achieve a modern consistency in citations.
My Pilgrimage in Mission

Marcella Hoesl, M.M.

Entering the Maryknoll Sisters in 1957 continued a journey that I began in high school, when I seriously considered "going on mission." Even in grade school we filled "mite" boxes with our coinage to support African babies. My German-American parents were deeply religious, and that influence cannot be underestimated in my formative years. In Cincinnati, Ohio, where I was born in 1935, there was a strong Catholic Students Mission Society (CSMS), strongly supported by Archbishop John McNicholas, who was instrumental in founding the Maryknoll Fathers. Every Catholic high school had a CSMS committee, and I was elected to be secretary for the Cincinnati chapter. Its goals were to foster an understanding and appreciation of mission activities worldwide. National meetings were in order. I well remember attending one held at Notre Dame University, where many religious congregations displayed their wares, books about their particular works, and of course their religious habits! My vocation gradually but surely took hold.

The period before Vatican II was a high-water mark for vocations in the Roman Catholic Church. I was part of a large group of young women who entered the Maryknoll Sisters. After novitiate and vows we could not wait to be sent to foreign lands overseas, where we would convert the "pagans"—such was our romantic understanding of mission at the time. In 1961 three other sisters and I were sent to Yucatán, Mexico, to join in staffing the girls' high school run by Maryknoll there. We learned a little Spanish by osmosis but worked mainly in English, reflecting the view that English was the way forward for the students. Our imperial instinct was showing itself, although at the time we did not fully fathom that aspect.

On weekends several of us went to the poorer sections to teach catechism, which brought me closer to what I thought mission was all about. A few years later I was sent to Puebla, Mexico, to work in a large Jesuit school that spanned the years from early childhood to the first years of college. My particular charge was the entire English-language program and religious instruction. In relation to the latter I attended a workshop on catechesis in Mexico City, where I met Jacques Audinet, from the Institut Supérieur de Pastoral Catéchétique de Paris, who was leading the sessions. We had lively discussions and began addressing the impact of culture on religious instruction. Through his influence I was offered a scholarship to study at the Institut in Paris. A major change was about to take place in my life.

Impact of Vatican II

Our local and regional superiors, who held a far-reaching vision of both mission and education, were supportive of the idea of further study. I was approved to accept the invitation after taking final vows. As part of our preparation for the vows, we studied Ad gentes, Vatican II's Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity. An early English edition of the document called it simply "Missions."

In 1966 I flew to Paris, managed to learn some French, and began studies. Being right after Vatican II, it was a heady time for theological studies. We sat at the feet of some brilliant theologians, including Jean Daniélou, Yves Congar, and Claude Geffre.

Studies, the challenging events of the famous sit-ins in 1968, rapid changes in the church, and new ways of doing theology affected all of us. As a result of Vatican II, congregations such as ours were asked to reflect deeply on their particular charism or reason for founding. Not only did we move beyond wearing habits, we entered more fully into interpreting our original charism in light of the "signs of the times" and our post-Vatican II understanding of being church-in-the-world. I enjoyed my theological studies immensely and went on from the catechetical center to complete a licentiate in theology, and then a doctorate in systematic theology at the Institut Catholique in Paris, graduating in 1973.

Moving in New Directions

I envisioned returning to Latin America after completing these studies, but it did not happen immediately. Instead, my next assignment entailed beginning a mission renewal program with
one of the Maryknoll Fathers that would provide a renewal experience for religious men and women. Along with planning and codirecting the program, my own teaching role was to provide updating in theology. Mission stories rolled in from all over the world, recounting the challenges, the pain, the changes, and the spirituality of committed men and women. More than once I found my own journey deeply affected by the experiences they reported to me.

This period also included a time of working in Huehuetenango, Guatemala. The simple faith of the men in the leadership programs there taught me where the focus in theology needed to be and how it was best encouraged. In a real sense, we were the learners. In particular, I remember well our pain when men in the program would ask whether they could become priests. Since they had little education, this path was not possible for them, given the strictures then existing in the Catholic Church. And yet, they were the leaders in their communities. We asked ourselves the question, Would ordination of these men for their communities, where a missionary priest would visit perhaps only once every six months, one day be possible? I later wrote a case study about this experience, which I continue to use today.

Among Maryknollers at the time it did not appear that anyone had been formally trained in missiology or mission studies. I became increasingly interested in this academic field and did some homework in the area. It was not difficult to move into this critical arena, for the foundations for it had been building in our hearts and spirits. I began teaching in the area, reading broadly ecumenically. Early on, I was struck by the history and impact of the world missionary conference at Edinburgh in 1910, as well as the reasons that brought it into being. Roland Allen impressed me with his insightful book Missionary Methods: St. Paul’s or Ours? The encyclicals of the twentieth-century popes were clear in their comments about culture, language learning, and training local leaders, ideas of which we were not fully aware or had not begun to implement until after Vatican II. My attention and interest were whetted by liberation theologies from around the world, interreligious dialogue, both quite in evidence in the departments and centers. We had a Multi-Faith Center, Jewish/Christian Center, Islam/Christian Center, and Black and White Center, all making vital contributions. Doors were opened to understand better all the changes going on in all our faith traditions. Just what is God’s plan in this incredible world?

I began stressing the idea of missio Dei and our privilege of being involved in God’s mission.

I ended up working for the six major British mission-sending agencies—not one of them Roman Catholic! They were the Baptist Missionary Society, United Reformed Church, Council for World Mission, United Society for the Propagation of the Faith, Methodist Mission Society, and Church Mission Society. A wealth of experience was evident in these societies and in the service they gave to the people. Other mission organizations were also represented, such as the Danish Missionary Society, and occasionally persons from the United States came from similar organizations for cross-cultural training.

Selby Oak Colleges and Mission

I had already read the works of Lesslie Newbigin, who was a professor at Selby Oak. He was a great inspiration to all, both from his time in India and because of his great simplicity and humanness and love of the church. Since I was so new to the scene, I asked if he would continue teaching until I could get my sea legs. He was a fine model for the students and combined the ecumenical and evangelical traditions, so much needed at a place like Selby Oak Colleges. Birmingham itself is very multicultural and multifaith. Being there opened the vista of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, both quite in evidence in the departments and centers. We had a Multi-Faith Center, Jewish/Christian Center, Islam/Christian Center, and Black and White Center, all making vital contributions. Doors were opened to understand better all the changes going on in all our faith traditions. Just what is God’s plan in this incredible world?

I began stressing the missio Dei, God’s mission, and our privilege of being involved in it. Missions were the concrete realization of the missio Dei, from which was flowing the rich tapestry of evangelization/evangelism, Gospel and culture (inculturation), liberation theologies from around the world, interreligious dialogue, and the interrelation of each to all the others. If we were to be working in God’s mission, we needed to be sensitive to both ecumenical and evangelical issues. I began defining “mission” descriptively as our entering into God’s mission to overcome the barriers and obstacles that separate us from God, from our brothers and sisters near and far, and from the world. Mission, which is first and foremost a theological term, takes place everywhere but cannot be limited to certain geographic places. It does not mean that cross-cultural mission is not important or necessary, but rather that God’s mission is boundless and all-encompassing. Work with the International Association for Mission Studies enhanced my growing vision of the ecumenical and evangelical issues, as did participation in the Commission for World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches.

Theological Institute in Edinburgh

After eight years at Selby Oak Colleges, which included initiation of a diploma of mission studies with the University of Birmingham (which has since grown into a doctorate), I moved in 1990 to the Theological Institute of the Scottish Episcopal Church in Edinburgh. This move, another step in broadening my ecumenical journey, took me to the beautiful city where the famous mission conference was held in 1910.

Issues of women’s ordination, among other lively topics, surfaced many times. Strong leadership in the Scottish Episcopal Church and good relationships with the Church of Scotland and other denominations were prominent. Several of us from different denominations actually wrote an evangelization project to-

My time in Edinburgh was all too short, as my community wished me to return to the United States after twelve years in the United Kingdom, and it was appropriate that I do so. So in 1994 I returned to the United States and to Cincinnati for a brief period in order to be near family and friends. As a pastoral associate for two years in a large urban parish, I served on the consultative committee of the Archdiocesan Mission Office and helped in writing their mission statement. At that time I was encouraged to apply for the position of academic dean at Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas, where my studies and experience could be used. Somewhat reluctantly I did so, for it would again mean a huge move on my part. But mission—which is never complacent, ever on the move—calls for exactly such changes!

Widening Horizons

And so, here I am! At Oblate School of Theology the Hispanic and multicultural makeup among staff, faculty, and students is not only enriching for all of us but mirrors the universal church, as various nations and nationalities are represented. We are a multiroofed school, with houses of formation spread around San Antonio. Vital collaboration is a hallmark of the school. Assumption Seminary, which joined forces with Oblate School of Theology in 1970, is the place of study for eighteen dioceses in ten states. Our master’s programs in theology and in pastoral ministry are well received. Our strong lay ministry program, which has more than 2,000 graduates and which offers courses in both English and Spanish, reaches all sectors of the wider community.

Oblate welcomes persons of all denominations, and the ecumenical presence deepens our understanding of church and our commitment to unity. Methodists, Episcopalians, Baptists, and others ask whether Oblate is theologically open to welcoming them. We are. They know we are a professional graduate theological school for ministry, where men and women study together. More than half of the persons studying in our doctor of ministry program are from other Christian denominations. The evaluations from these programs consistently laud the ecumenical factor as important in the students’ theological growth. As a school Oblate hosts a World Faith Evening every semester, at present involving the monotheistic faiths Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. We expect to broaden our scope in the years to come.

Yes, here I am. I did not realize that my knowledge of Spanish and my fairly broad theological background would be so essential. My international experience has helped in finding ways to make the school better known in the area of theological education and in understanding what it means both to study in another language and to cross cultures. My pilgrimage continues to be blessed, and it is not over yet. I can truly say, my cup runneth over!

The Legacy of M. D. Opara

Felix K. Ekechi

Moses Dialo Opara (1915–65), known popularly as M.D., was born in the village of Obazu Mbieri, near Owerri, in southeastern Nigeria. He was tall and handsome, athletic, and, in the words of his associates, “a really jolly good fellow.” He was the first child of his parents, who had four children—three boys and one girl. Both parents were farmers, and non-Christians, but they nonetheless sent M. D. and his siblings to missionary schools, where he was converted to Christianity. Upon graduation from the Church Missionary Society School at Egbu, Owerri, where he obtained the Nigerian First Leaving School Certificate, he attended the Hope Waddell Institute at Calabar, a Scottish Presbyterian institution, which offered secondary school education.

Opara subsequently obtained the British Senior Cambridge Certificate (1944), the Nigerian teachers’ Higher Elementary Certificate (1946), and the London Matriculation Certificate (1948), all of them as an external candidate. By the 1950s he had also earned the B.A. degree in theology and an honorary doctorate of divinity from the United States. These accomplishments won him the reputation of being a self-made man.

Until recently, little was known about Opara in the wider world. The first critical study of aspects of his life and work appeared in 1987. This article relies primarily on oral and archival evidence collected in Nigeria over several years. The archival data are drawn from three main sources: (1) Zion Mission records, which contain Opara’s private papers and correspondence; (2) the Parliamentary Debates of the Eastern House of Assembly, deposited at the Nigerian National Archives at Enugu; and (3) Opara’s correspondence with the Evangelical Methodist Church in the United States, with headquarters formerly in Altoona, Pennsylvania.

Secondary materials play a limited role in the study, for not much has yet been written about Opara. He himself never published any books or articles. Except for two unpublished doctrinal manuscripts that he wrote, there is no body of primary or secondary literature from which to garner information relating to his mode of thought and action. Nevertheless, available oral and archival sources, coupled with a few secondary materials, are sufficient for a historical reconstruction of his life and work.
Early Career

Opara started his career as a teacher and catechist under the Church Missionary Society (CMS), a branch of the Anglican Church. After eleven years of teaching (1930–41), he resigned and later founded his own small church/mission, the A.M.E. Zion Church, originally affiliated with the Zion Mission at Calabar, said to be the first Zion mission in eastern Nigeria.

Why Opara resigned from the CMS remains a matter of conjecture, largely because mission records are virtually silent on the matter. Oral sources, however, provide plausible explanations. He is said to have left the Anglican mission out of frustration arising from his being repeatedly passed over for admission to the prestigious CMS Awka Teacher Training College. According to our sources, he was brilliant and passed the annual entrance examinations, but for unknown reasons he was never selected for admission. According to another speculation, Opara was fired, or at least induced to resign, because his fiancée, Catherine, was pregnant prior to their wedding. Whatever the exact reason, Opara did resign as a teacher in December 1941 and, on March 4, 1942, established the A.M.E. Zion Church, which was later renamed the Christ Methodist Zion Church/Mission.

Right from its inception, the Zion Church/Mission was (and still remains) an indigenous church, virtually free from foreign superintendence and control. Moral and material support, nonetheless, came from some groups in Nigeria and the United States, particularly from the Evangelical Methodist Church, then under the direction of Rev. Dr. William Wallace Breckbill of Altoona, Pennsylvania. In recent years, some members of the Zion Church have joined the Methodist Church of Nigeria.

The Zion Mission and Its Ordeal

Opara burst into public notice in 1942 when he established Zion Church in his hometown of Obazu Mbieri, in the present Imo State of Nigeria. He emerged as a dynamic, indigenous missionary to his people, imbued with a high sense of mission to serve God and country. He took as his motto “We fight for God and country.” Opara became a factor to be reckoned with as he embarked upon the task of spreading Christianity and Western education. In the main, he succeeded in challenging the hegemonic influence of the foreign missions, which overtly and covertly opposed him. In the long run, he weathered the storm, and thus gained high recognition in both church and state. The Zion Church/Mission prided itself as being “Evangelical in practice, Fundamental in Doctrine, and Methodist in persuasion.” In short, “it stands for the Book of life, the saving Grace of Christ, and the teachings of John Wesley.” In addition, notable beliefs included belief in miracles and in spirits.

The path to success was difficult, for Opara initially lacked resources. He once lamented, “We have an arduous work to do in this country, [but] we lack almost everything,” adding, “we are paddling the Lord’s Canoe under hardships . . . We lack workers. We lack finance . . . We are having a very hard time in everything.” In a letter to a friend he commented, “The work that I am now shouldering is beyond my endurance and skill.” Perhaps even more troubling was the opposition from both the local community and the existing Catholic and Protestant missions. Right from its inception, the Zion Mission received a hostile reception. As Opara himself ruefully acknowledged, the most “intractable problem” came from denominational opposition. “Our staunch enemies, the Roman Catholics and the modernists [Protestants], are deadly against our divine . . . evangelistic work and progress.” More specifically, he complained of persecution and victimization by Roman Catholic and Protestant adherents “in power in the Nigerian educational, judicial and administrative departments.” They “victimize our institutions everywhere. They make the Government refuse to subsidize our [schools] and we [therefore] suffer some financial stringencies.”

Initially the Zion Mission received no official recognition as a “voluntary agency,” which would have rendered its schools eligible for government grants-in-aid. Opara’s pleas for financial help “to enable us to maintain our schools more efficiently” fell on deaf ears until 1954, when school subsidies finally became available. By then Opara was a member of the Eastern House of Assembly and thus could influence legislation favorable to private schools owned by Africans. Sectarian prejudice still remained, however, as evidenced by adverse school inspection reports submitted by unsympathetic school inspectors, which rendered many Zion schools still ineligible for school grants. At one point Opara protested to the Education Department, pleading that a particular Protestant school inspector should not be sent to Zion schools because “he hates us.”

Resistance from local Protestants added to his worries. Detractors regarded him as an unwelcome intruder, and he was labeled as a false prophet. The Zion church-school building, which was constructed with palm fronds called opu, was treated with bemusement, if not scorn, being derisively dubbed “church nwa opu,” or “the grass church.” Stories abound about the concerted efforts of opponents to nip the new mission in the bud, including physical violence against the mission and “malicious propaganda” against Opara aimed at dissuading landlords from granting lands to him for the erection of permanent church and school buildings. Witnesses noted that “every effort was made by his opponents to frustrate him.”

Interestingly, local attitudes changed over time, and eventually lands were granted for mission development. Opara gratefully acknowledged the change: “Some of the good people at Mbieri gave us lands to help us develop our country.” In the final analysis, attempts by “our enemies to frustrate our business of winning souls for Christ” ultimately failed. The Zion Mission survived, thanks in part to Opara’s doggedness, vision, and tenacity of purpose. Yet moral and material support from family and friends, both at home and abroad, also played a critical role in the mission’s survival. Of particular significance was support from the Evangelical Methodist Church (EMC) in America, with whom Opara had a close relationship. In moments of crisis, Opara often appealed to the EMC authorities for material aid, and they proved exceedingly obliging and reassuring. “Stand assured that we are behind you and the work there and will do all in our power to keep the wheels moving in your favor.”

Mission Strategy

Church recruitment in the early years was difficult. Initially, it was the children, eager to go to school, who flocked to the church.
The local people by and large treated the new church with marked indifference, with only a few curious adults attending church services. Faced with recruitment problems, Opara turned to polygamists and to Roman Catholic and Protestant “backsliders.” In sharp contrast with the established churches, which rejected polygamous believers out of hand, Zion Church admitted them as bona fide church members. Thus, in its early days, Zion Church became the haven of the disfranchised (polygamists) and the discontented. Today, we should note, most Zionists are monogamists.

Interestingly, Opara himself became a polygamist later in life. He rationalized plural wives by appealing to David. “David was the man after the choice of God. God did not abhor him because he had many wives.” More important, “Since there is no marriage in Heaven . . . Christians must stick to the words of Scripture for holiness, honesty, truthfulness, pure and simple life. . . . When we get to Heaven, God is the only person to answer the question better, but we believe that marriage of one or more wives, who also are believers, is not a drawback to Heaven. . . . [M]onogamists who commit adultery and fornication and also do other evils are worse than polygamists, even before God.”

In practical terms, the acceptance of polygamists in the early days represented a pragmatic strategy to boost the church congregation. Some found it an aberration. Opara, however, was following in the tradition of the Ethiopian, or Independent African, Churches, which sought to indigenize Christianity by introducing African cultural elements into the church. In that sense, the acceptance of polygamists symbolized the integration of African culture into Zion’s theology of mission. After all, “the theology of evangelism acquires greater integrity when we present it in the context of our [cultural] experience.” From the perspective of African nationalism, we see that indigenization, or inculturation, as an expression of anticolonialism, implies the emancipation of “Christian thought and praxis from the domination of European concepts and values.”

At any event, Opara’s most effective and enduring mission strategy was the use of education as a vital tool of evangelization. Zion church-schools mushroomed almost everywhere, even in the remotest towns and villages. Strictly speaking, the Zion Mission became popular because of the education it offered. Essentially, it provided an alternative avenue both for Christian conversion and for Western education. It is indeed remarkable that, within a decade or so of its founding, the mission succeeded in effectively challenging the hegemonic influence of the foreign missions, especially in the sphere of education. To its students, Zion Mission seemed to be a welcome counterstroke against European “ecclesiastical imperialism.”

The Initiative in Higher Education

Without question, the advancement of education remains Opara’s most enduring legacy. Crowning achievements were the establishment of the Zion Commercial Secondary School and St. Catherine’s College, the latter being a teacher training college named in honor of his first wife. Opened in 1948, the commercial secondary school was the first of its kind in the region owned by any mission society. It thus not only became the center of attention, but also stirred the other missions to action, as illustrated in the bewildering interdenominational competition and rivalry in higher education that occurred during the 1940s and 1950s. The competition assumed both religious and political overtones, as each mission desperately sought to gain “points of vantage in Church and State.” Given the comparatively fewer numbers of Catholics “among politicians . . . and administrators” vis-à-vis the Protestants, the Roman Catholic Mission thereupon embarked upon an ambitious education scheme aimed at producing the new political leaders as well as counteracting Protestant influence in the country. The Protestants were naturally alarmed: “It cannot be gainsaid that the Roman Catholics have a plan to wipe out Protestantism . . . Even our boys and girls rush to their institutions. . . . We view this point with great concern.”

The Zion colleges stimulated tremendous interest in postprimary education, both at Mbieri and elsewhere. At Mbieri, for instance, Opara’s higher education initiative reportedly spurred the opening of the Obazu Mbieri Grammar School (1959). The Obazu Mbieri Welfare Union, a secular village union that spearheaded the education enterprise, apparently viewed Opara’s initiative as a challenge, as the general secretary’s circu

Opara believed in the education of everybody as a worthy investment. He never liked Africans to be rated second-class citizens.

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vis-à-vis the wider world. Second, education serves as a powerful instrument of colonial emancipation: Through education, he averred, “we shall free our nation from colonial bondage.” By promoting the advancement of education, he clearly opened the door of progress to many of his compatriots. A contemporary once noted, “There were many, many people who could not have gone to school, but he provided them the opportunity. Many of these people [today] occupy important positions in government, in commerce, and in education.”

Although he seemed to be preoccupied with politics, Opara continued as president of Zion Mission.

Political Career

Opara entered politics in 1948, purportedly “to be in the vanguard of the early freedom fighters against [European] colonialism.” But records also reveal another motivation: the desire to save his mission from its enemies, as well as to ensure the material well-being of his schools, which were then in financial crisis. As he himself acknowledged, “The Government assists most of the schools run by apostate churches but has not after many years’ application given us [even] a mite.” His entry into active politics (1948–65), as it turned out, enabled him to advance the material progress of the Zion Mission, as well as to silence his local opponents, largely through the use of political power and influence.

Elected into the Nigerian Eastern House of Assembly in 1953, Opara rose quickly to national prominence because of his political activism. He distinguished himself as an articulate critic of European imperialism, a passionate advocate of education reform, and a crusader for rural development. To begin with, he utilized his legislative powers to influence government policy on grants-in-aid. The next year the Zion Mission received Voluntary Agency status, making it eligible for government subsidy.

A fervent advocate of decolonization, Opara also highlighted the evils of European racism and showed no tolerance whatsoever of racist colonial officials. In particular, he declared every colonial medical officer (MO) who treated Africans harshly to be persona non grata. “We cannot tolerate any doctor who comes to [this country] to be harsh to the people. . . . I see no reason why the [country’s] money should be spent on a hospital for the people and where a doctor’s harshness will scare the people away.”

Opara was basically the people’s spokesperson, as illustrated by his relentless campaign for rural development, particularly the provision of potable water supply and electricity, as well as the establishment of industries. Indeed, he seemed preoccupied with the provision of amenities that enhanced the quality of life of the masses. First and foremost, he drew special attention to the issue of water supply, deemed to be the pressing need of the people in the rural areas. In addition, he drew attention to the urgent need for electricity in Owerri Township. When the government visited Owerri in 1958, Opara spearheaded the people’s petition to the government, which demanded a pipe-borne water supply and electricity. Nothing came of the demands until after independence in 1960. Also of concern was the lack of adequate medical facilities. To this end Opara devoted his energies to the crusade for improvement in health services. In characteristic style, he expressed dismay at the dilapidation of government hospitals at Enugu and Owerri and demanded their physical rehabilitation, as well as “immediate improvements in the way of efficiency, staffing, and equipment.” To the end of his life Opara continued to press for improvements in the health-care delivery system, as well as to champion the cause for social reforms.

Although Opara seemed preoccupied with politics, he nonetheless remained as president and proprietor of the Zion Mission, baptizing new converts and occasionally preaching at church services. Thus, he continued to exert spiritual and moral influence on the church. Much of the church and school administration, however, devolved on his lieutenants, who overall do not seem to have measured up to the task.

By all accounts, M. D. Opara “was a great leader” and “a Soldier of Jesus Christ”; he spent “all his life fighting for the freedom [and betterment] of his people.” When, therefore, he died, on August 8, 1965, he was widely mourned. “Ten thousand mourners at his death flooded his grave with mourning tears. . . . All in vain the passion proved. . . . A legacy for ages his memory lives. . . . Death has dealt us a wanton blow!”

Notes

2. The headquarters of the Evangelical Methodist Church/Evangelical Methodist Conference have since moved to Kingsport, Tennessee. This denomination is not to be confused with the denomination also named Evangelical Methodist Church that has its headquarters in Indianapolis, Indiana.
3. Pastors, catechists, and schoolteachers not “living consistent Christian lives” were no longer considered “in good standing as church members.” See Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Synod Minutes, December 1928. Information is also based on interviews at Mbieri, 1983 and 1989.
6. Opara to Hamilton, March 20, 1954; Opara to Conn, September 1, 1951; Opara to Onyido, September 14, 1948; Zion Mission Archives (hereafter ZMA). The archival records are now stored in Rev. Opara’s house at Obazu Mbieri, Owerri, where ants and cockroaches have destroyed some of the papers.
7. Opara to Hamilton, July 3, 1951; Opara to Conn, May 23, 1951, ZMA.
8. Opara to Archibong, n.d., ZMA.
10. Opara to Ukwouma, January 22, 1959; Opara to Conn, May 22, 1951, ZMA.
11. The Evangelical Methodist Church came into being in 1945 as a breakaway church from the American Methodist organization.
Opara's connection with the EMC began in 1950, when he first visited America to attend the EMC's Fifth Annual Conference at Shelbyville, Indiana. He was reportedly invited to the conference by Rev. W. W. Breckbill, founder of the EMC.


17. "Observations and Suggestions," June 26, 1959, ZMA.

18. Circular dated May 21, 1959; Emerenini to Opara, July 14, 1961, ZMA.

19. Anonymous, June 22, 1959, ZMA.


23. Opara to Conn, July 2, 1951; Opara to Breckbill, June 6, 1953, ZMA.


25. Acting Inspector-General of Education to Proprietor (Opara), September 29, 1954, ZMA.


29. "An Address of Welcome to His Excellency Sir Robert Stapleton... on His Visit to Owerri," November 21, 1958, ZMA.


When I first met Samuel Escobar in 1974, I never realized how our relationship would develop. It was he who saw to it in the late 1990s that I joined a Circle of Prayer for Christian Unity in Cochabamba, a relationship that has affected me deeply. Changing Tides: Latin America (Bogota, 1999). The book performs a valuable service by informing a wider world about the mission awareness and responsibility that has developed in recent decades in Latin America among Christians of both the Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions. Escobar, a Baptist, has much to teach Catholics about Catholic theological vision has helped shape missionary activity and church life. He also acknowledges how the Catholic Church in its recent evangelizing renewal has learned to acquire certain typically “Protestant” values, such as the primacy of the testimony of the Scriptures, the need to offer people above all a personal encounter with Jesus, the vocation of laypeople, and the importance of the local church community.

Escobar stresses some aspects of Latin American Christianity that are obvious to the well informed but perhaps not well known to the general public. In the first place is the importance of the missionary dynamism of Pentecostal and conservative evangelical Christians. Second is the new missionary initiative emerging from the poorer and younger continents of the South (from Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific), where well over half of the world’s Christians live and the major source of future missionaries. Here also is where new missiological reflection is taking place, combining activism and theological seriousness, and dealing with fundamental issues such as the relation between the Gospel, social justice, and cultures.

Escobar deserves the gratitude of his fellow missiologists and of all those committed to the cause of Christian unity. Indeed, his work demonstrates that among the most effective paths to unity among the disciples of Jesus is a shared commitment to mission and to mission studies.

—John F. Gorski, M.M.

John F. Gorski, M.M., a contributing editor, is Professor of Missiology and Ecumenism at the Catholic University of Bolivia in Cochabamba. A missionary in Bolivia since his ordination in 1963, he is president of the International Association of Catholic Missiologists.


The Anglicans of Tonga are a small and yet surprisingly influential group. They are now celebrating the centennial of their founding, and it is good to have this centennial history, edited by Allan Davidson, lecturer in church history at St. John’s College, Auckland. The book is well written and thoroughly researched, with much use of archival resources. It is not the first history of this church, but it is certainly the most comprehensive. Davidson has himself written the bulk of the book, providing the main historical narrative, but he has included chapters by several other authors covering special aspects of the church’s life.

The book is completely honest about the problematic beginnings of the church, which were fraught with local political machinations and international High-Church pretensions. It shows how a church that started out in considerable friction with the Methodists, the predominant denomination of the country, gradually became a leader in ecumenical cooperation not only with the Methodists but also with the Roman Catholics. Another remarkable development is that of the indigenous ministry. The Anglicans were laggardly in this respect, waiting till 1962 to install the first indigenous vicar of their main congregation. Since then, however, this small church has produced disproportionately large numbers of priests serving not only the Anglicans of Tonga but also those of Fiji, Samoa, and New Zealand.

The outreach to New Zealand is in some respects an unhappy one because it reflects the loss of population in Tonga. Many Tongans have immigrated to New Zealand since the 1970s, which, along with other factors, has resulted in a steady decline of Anglicans in Tonga. The church, according to the 1996 census, had only 811 people.

It should be added that this small body has made a significant contribution to education in Tonga. In this and other ways the church has been more important than its numbers would indicate, and its history deserves to be read.

—Charles W. Forman

Charles W. Forman is Professor Emeritus of Missions, Yale University Divinity School.
Christianity and Buddhism: A Multi-Cultural History of Their Dialogue.


Whalen Lai and Michael von Bruck offer us a selective history of Buddhist-Christian dialogue in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in six countries: India, Sri Lanka, China, Japan, Germany, and the United States. Lai is professor of religious studies and East Asian languages at the University of California, Davis, and von Bruck is a historian of religion and dean of the faculty for evangelical theology at the University of Munich. The important word in the title of their book is “dialogue,” which the authors define as “the middle course between refusing to acknowledge the relativity and plurality of religious reality, and a pluralism of preference that would level out all values to a common denominator” (p. 1). Dialogue central, the authors assert, because religions give meaning to the world’s peoples, and the process of globalization has made religions and their cultural carriers so mutually dependent that a common language for discussion (i.e., a hermeneutic) must be developed to facilitate communication. Dialogue produces that hermeneutic.

So how is the Buddhist-Christian contribution to the task of dialogue doing? If Buddhist-Christian dialogue were a person, the authors would probably say it is somewhere between the late teenage and early adult stages, the exact age varying with locale. One of the strengths of this book is its frank acknowledgment of the ways dialogue is made difficult, often the least of which is religious difference. In India, for example, dialogue has been inextricably linked to social emancipation, in Sri Lanka to the (mostly) bitter fruits of colonialism. In the United States dialogue among Buddhists and Christians has become the showpiece of the worldwide dialogue movement.

After discussion of the character and lessons from these regional dialogues, the authors end with a chapter on what the future might hold for interreligious dialogue. This is a very useful book for showing how far the Buddhist-Christian dialogue has come—and how far it yet has to go.

__Terry C. Muck__

_Terry C. Muck is Professor of Mission and World Religions at the E. Stanley Jones School of World Mission and Evangelism, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky. He is editor of Buddhist-Christian Studies and Missionology: An International Review._

The Future of Christianity.


Published in the Blackwell Manifesto series, this succinct, accessible assessment by Alister E. McGrath, professor of historical theology, University of Oxford, and principal of Wycliffe Hall, examines “trends that can be discerned within global Christianity” (p. 99). Drawing on sources reaching from Peter Abelard to evolving script changes in _Star Trek_ and the explosive expansion of non-Western churches, the author forthrightly states his perspectives, while recognizing the limits of projecting the future.

McGrath starts with setbacks: Christianity suffered in the twentieth century. Here he places the intellectual,
moral, and spiritual changes of the 1960s alongside earlier losses such as the Armenian genocide, the failure of the churches to confront Nazism, and the Communist persecutions. Writing as an Anglican, McGrath maintains that the radical attempts to “modernize” Christianity in the 1960s set the stage for growing irrelevance of the mainline denominations, which he sadly sees as unlikely to last another century.

In contrast, the book traces the resurgence of traditional and evangelical forms of the faith. Christianity’s future resides in Roman Catholicism, Pentecostalism, evangelicalism, and Eastern Orthodoxy, especially the former two as they advance dramatically in the Third World. Numerically, “Pentecostalism is already the most significant alternative to Roman Catholicism” (p. 109). Evangelical prospects depend on a willingness to learn from and adapt within non-Western contexts; to expand, Eastern Orthodoxy must develop mission beyond its ethnic centeredness.

McGrath explores such significant issues as the megachurches, fundamentalism, the statistic-fixated “McDonaldization” of Christianity, the impact of English as the common religious language of global Christianity, world theological trends, and the disjunction between academic theology and the Christian faith of the parishes. More theological than demographic in focus, the book concludes by calling for a new “organic” theology, loyal to the classical Christian traditions, yet connected to believers in the pews and relevant to contemporary cultural concerns.

—Thomas A. Askew

Thomas A. Askew is Stephen Phillips Professor of History Emeritus at Gordon College, Wenham, Massachusetts, and continues as Director of Gordon’s East-West Institute of International Studies.

Identity and Marginality: Rethinking Christianity in North East Asia.


This book, a collection of papers from international seminars held in Birmingham in 1997 and 1998, reflects mainly the voices of theologians in Northeast Asia. Although the themes of both seminars are mission related, most of the papers collected in this volume do not seem to address directly issues related to mission in Asia.

The first three papers touch on the issue of Christology. R. S. Sugirtharajah traces three Indian Hindu descriptions of Jesus in the nineteenth century. Xinzhong Yao examines how traditional Chinese Confucians perceived Jesus. Lee Hong Jung proposes a new Christology to be based on the minjung experience.

Edmond Tang and Bob Whyte write on the changes and challenges of contemporary Chinese Christianity. Four authors—Kim Yong Bock, Hwang Hong Eyoul, Jong-sik Chang, and Brian Castle—examine various aspects of Korean minjung theology. On the Japanese scene, Tanimoto Kazuhiro and Robert G. Stieber address discrimination problems faced by the Buraku people and the Christian mission for their liberation. Barnabas Satoshi Kobayashi, Asunda Lande, and Alan M. Suggate deal with various other issues related to Japanese Christianity.

Werner Ustenf’s paper introduces a new periodization of Christian history and raises the issue of the “re-definition of the nature of Christianity” (p. 96).

Though the title seems carefully chosen to offer a framework that embraces the various theological concerns, the book lacks focus. Articulation of Asian Christian identity and the task of redefining the nature of Christianity are important topics that receive only passing mention.

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Dinka Christianity: The Origins and Development of Christianity Among the Dinka of Sudan, with Special Reference to the Songs of Dinka Christians.


This remarkable book is an edited version of a Ph.D. dissertation. The book was finally published in 2001 as part of the Faith in Sudan series a year after Nikkel's untimely death from cancer.

In 1981 Nikkel, an Episcopal priest, went to southern Sudan to teach at Bishop Gwynne College in Mundri, the theological training center for the Episcopal Church of Sudan. During this time he regularly visited Dinka cattle camps and started to learn the Dinka language. As civil war began to engulf the area, Nikkel was abducted and held captive for two months by troops of the Sudanese People's Liberation Army, an experience that drew him yet more deeply into a passionate engagement with the Dinka people. In more recent years he worked closely with Nathoniel Garang, bishop of Bor, developing training courses for Dinka Christians across the south.

Through these experiences Nikkel gained unique insight into the spirituality of the rapidly growing Dinka churches. He has now opened the richness of this spirituality to the outside world by sharing his reflections and by offering translations of some of the 2,000 songs that Dinka Christians have composed in recent years. He gives us a fascinating account of a church that was isolated from outside influences at a time of unprecedented growth, a circumstance that has allowed Dinka Christians to develop a faith deeply rooted in Dinka culture.

The book documents the development of Christianity among the Dinka from the first missionary activity, Catholic and Protestant, and explores the reasons for earlier resistance to the Gospel as well as the motivation for conversion at this time of suffering and loss.

—Diana Witts

Diana Witts is a former general secretary of the Church Mission Society.

Chapters in Philippine Church History.


For this notable volume on Philippine church history across four centuries, editor Anne Kwasnes, author of two books on the subject and professor of church history at Asian Theological Seminary, Manila, has assembled an impressive, multiethnic list of contributors from a broad spectrum of Catholic and Protestant Christianity.

The lineup includes an Episcopal priest from a northern Philippine tribe, a Columbian friar, a naturalized Filipino Jesuit priest, a Japanese researcher in Philippine studies, several Filipino Catholic and Protestant Chinese professors, and Australian and American missionary educators. This mix itself is an excellent example of the diversity of cultures and religions in Philippine church history.

The wide range of subjects should also give this book a prominent place in church history courses. There are chapters on religious communities for women before 1750, Adventists, an indigenous Methodist church, American Baptists, the Salvation Army, the United Church of Christ, an Episcopal seminary, the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches, Chinese Protestant churches, the Iglesia ni Cristo, and the Bible Society. Biographical sketches on the first Filipino doctorate in theology (1772) and the first Filipina ordained as a Baptist minister (1980) add a personal flavor. Other topics covered include the Christian involvement in music, land reform, leprosy, colonization after the Spanish-American War, and the Japanese Imperial Army (1941–45). More specialized articles are a theological anthropology of Juan de Oliver’s sixteenth-century Doctrina Christiana, pastoral writings of eighteenth-century religious orders, apostolic delegates from Rome at the turn of the twentieth century, and the transition from Hispanic to American culture and language in the Catholic clergy following American takeover of the islands.


—F. Douglas Pennoyer

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The Hospital by the River—a Story of Hope.


"When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die," Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote in The Cost of Discipleship. Doctors Catherine and Reg Hamlin, a husband-and-wife team of gynecologists, died for Christ before leaving Australia in 1959 to serve in a government hospital in Addis Ababa. Their hearts were deeply moved by the plight of the "very least of these my sisters,” women who, because of childbirth...
injuries from unattended births, suffer from total incontinence of urine and often stay. They began operating on these women and eventually built a separate hospital for them. Their "short term" of three years turned into a lifetime of dedicated service in Ethiopia. The great majority of the more than 20,000 women they treated were cured, thus finding a new life, and many came into eternal life through faith in Christ.

This gripping story, told by Catherine strikingly illustrates seven basic principles of life and of Christian mission: (1) hope is essential for life, and Christ gives hope; (2) Jesus cared for the poor and outcast, and so should we; (3) compassionate healthcare is an effective method of evangelism by showing God's love for people; (4) a long-term commitment to medical missions can establish new services and bear much fruit; (5) partnership with host-country colleagues is essential for sustaining effective programs; (6) commitment to Christ and to the vision he gives can enable his disciples to cope with seemingly impossible frustrations and obstacles; and (7) when God begins a work, he carries it on—if he finds those through whom he can work.

God has indeed worked through the Hamlins, and this story is an epic in the building of Christ's kingdom in the world.

—Dan Fountain

Dan Fountain, Assistant Professor of Global Health at the Perke School of Christian Mission, King College, Bristol, Tennessee, served for thirty-five years as a medical missionary in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where he operated on many women with fistulas like those described in this book.

Islam, Christianity, and the West: A Troubled History.


One of a number of "9/11" volumes that appeared last year, Rollin Armour's book has been nearly a decade in the making. He takes the World Trade Center bombing in 1993 and its final destruction in 2001 as historical "bookends" for the material covered. His stated goal is to contribute to better mutual understanding between the West and the Islamic world.

Armour, professor emeritus in the Department of Christianity at Mercer University, Macon, Georgia, encourages Christians to learn more about the history and theology of Islam and about the mutual engagements, both intellectual and intercultural, that have characterized the long history of these traditions. The information he provides about Christian responses to Islam over the centuries is considerably richer than that of Islamic material about Christians, to which he makes only passing reference. Nonetheless, he engages very important issues in this work, making good his promise to suggest ways in which the intellectual-theological and the military-political themes of our mutual histories are intertwined.

One might wish for a few changes in orientation. Armour credits Muhammad (not Allah) with the ideas and injunctions of the Qur'an more than a Muslim would comfortably accept, he relies somewhat uncritically on the works of several prominent authors (Bernard Lewis, Karen Armstrong, Norman Daniel, and others), and, in this reader's opinion, he spends too long on the history of the Crusades and on the establishment of the state of Israel. Armour has done an admirable job, however, covering a great deal of ground in a modest-sized work, and he presents such issues as religious conflict in the

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Holy Land with sensitivity. The book could well be used as a Christian seminary text in history, theology, and even missiology. On the last note, I did miss any reflection on contemporary evangelical efforts in the Muslim world, although earlier movements were treated carefully and thoroughly.

—Jane I. Smith

Jane I. Smith is Professor of Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations, Hartford Seminary, Hartford, Connecticut.

Change Across Cultures: A Narrative Approach to Social Transformation.


Bruce Bradshaw, currently assistant professor of economics and business at Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas, draws on his many years as director of transformational development research and training for World Vision International to give us a helpful book on the whole gospel and holistic ministry and the implementation and consequences of change across cultures.

Working with the phrase “managing change across cultures,” Bradshaw argues convincingly that the goal of mission is to introduce into every culture the story of God’s redemptive relationship with creation. He believes that when people understand and experience this redemptive story, then their own community narrative will be transformed. He argues for the narrative approach to introducing change because cultures change when values change, and since “values are transmitted through stories, the values won’t change unless the stories change” (p. 9).

Bradshaw begins by demonstrating the value of a narrative approach for understanding the ethical dimensions of culture change. He then practices what he preaches by beginning each chapter with an illuminating story illustrating various aspects of culture change and holistic mission. Recognizing that culture change and development must be holistic to be lasting, he devotes a chapter each to the following areas that must be the focus of community transformation: Scripture, culture, environment, religious practices, the powers, gender equality, economics, science and religion, reconciliation, and community. He shows how each of these areas can be changed when seen from the perspective of God’s redemptive relationship with creation.

This book will be useful to anyone in cross-cultural ministry, but especially to those in community development work. The bibliography is a gold mine of resources, but the index could have been more thoroughly developed. Some readers may frown at some of Bradshaw’s nontraditional interpretations of familiar Bible passages, but this book moves us further along in our practice of holistic mission, and for that reason I heartily recommend it.

—Darrell Whiteman

Euthanasia of a Mission: African Church Autonomy in a Colonial Context


This book is a revision of Jehu Hanciles’ Ph.D. dissertation at the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World, Edinburgh, under Professor Andrew Walls. It is a fascinating account of the history of the Sierra Leone Pastorate of the CMS mission from its inception in 1861 until the establishment of the CMS mission in 1896. It remained an experiment in the sense of trying out Henry Venn’s theory of missions, which was impracticable because of the factors of colonialism and the racism of European missionaries, who refused to release control over African evangelists and pastors, even after the latter were self-supporting and had embraced self-propagation. There was thus no euthanasia of missions simply because a native bishop had not been established at the head of a national church.

Hanciles’ book touches on this point but does not face it squarely. He fails to see that the story of the Niger Mission cannot be separated from that of the pasteorate experiment and that the consecration of Bishop Samuel Adjai Crowther was an essential part of the story. Crowther was excluded from the pasteorate experiment and was not allowed to be bishop, even of the Yoruba church. He remained a missionary of the CMS working outside his own people in Yorubaland, where he was born, and in Sierra Leone, where he grew up. Thus the story of the pasteorate was as much a critique of the theory of missions as an attempt to practice or
implement the theory. The experiment was restricted to the villages, leaving alone the wealthier and more influential parishes in Freetown that should have been the core. Furthermore, the CMS insisted on retaining control over the properties of the various churches even after the pastorate had assumed responsibility for their construction and maintenance. Euthanasia could not come until the end of colonial rule in the 1950s.

—J. F. Ade Ajayi

J. F. Ade Ajayi is Professor Emeritus of History, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

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Women in African Colonial Histories.


Eight of the thirteen essays in this valuable collection have British colonial settings. The remainder are set in Belgian, French, or Portuguese colonies. Differences among colonizers notwithstanding, it is African

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William Sheppard: Congo’s African American Livingstone.


Many remarkable figures have pioneered in the missionary effort in modern Africa, persevering despite numerous obstacles and challenges in propagating the Good News of Jesus Christ around the continent. This book is a gripping and compelling account of one such missionary figure—William Henry Sheppard, Jr., whose story Phipps has helped to rescue from the dustbin of missionary history.

Sheppard was born in Waynesboro, Virginia, in March 1865, a month before the end of the U.S. Civil War. He grew up in the rural South, with all its invidious Jim Crow proclamations and “separate and unequal” institutions, which he was nevertheless able to overcome. He was brought up in the Presbyterian Church, in which his father was active. At Hampton, Sheppard was influenced by the thoughts and ideas of Edward Blyden, being particularly impressed by his ideas on racial equality and the importance of education. Sheppard strongly believed that literacy was the most effective antidote against the myth of racial superiority.

The book’s seven chapters provide copious information about Sheppard’s childhood and missionary journey. It was a journey filled with many obstacles, challenges, and triumphs. His missionary activities in the Congo were highly impressive. Sheppard and his indomitable companion, Samuel Lapsley, emphasized a three-pronged expression of Jesus’ ministry that involved teaching, preaching, and healing. They also encouraged indigenous Christian initiatives. Sheppard was in tune with African art and music. He enthusiastically described the “breakdown” dancing in the open square when Xilanc musicians played in a village.

Finally, Sheppard aggressively fought against King Leopold’s inhumane treatment of Congolese people.

Phipps has written about the legacy of William Sheppard with scrupulous fairness. One must commend him for telling this story with passion, precision, and panache.

—Akinunde E. Akinade

Akinunde E. Akinade, a Nigerian, is Assistant Professor of Religion at High Point University, High Point, North Carolina.

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Peter C. Phan, editor

The Asian Synod: Text and Commentaries

The comprehensive report on the richness, diversity, and challenges of the Catholic Church in Asia.
women themselves who are foregrounded. The overriding concern of the collection is to present African women as “active agents” rather than “helpless victims.” Rejecting simple and overworked dichotomies such as collaboration versus resistance, the contributors depict women’s early experiences of colonialism as forms of “strategic engagement” (p. 20), whereby they sought to make the best of their new circumstances through such varied means as interracial marriage and the selective appropriation of skills introduced by missionaries. Western missionaries and African Christian leaders join African women as subjects in several of the essays (notably those of Gengenbach, Urban-Mead, and Musisi). Missionaries are important, if usually offstage, actors in several other pieces (especially those by Mianda and Hanson).

African women, the collection maintains, had more exposure to the agents, practices, and violence of colonialism than earlier scholars have acknowledged. Barnes’s essay on travel and migration in twentieth-century southern Africa, for instance, inserts women into the existing paradigm of labor-migration studies to show that they too were drawn to and affected by urban commercial and industrial spaces. It is unquestionably important to acknowledge women’s presence in colonial sites where historians have until now failed to see them, or seen them only as marginal figures. But there is a risk of overcorrecting here and losing sight of the more usual pattern of African women’s encounters with colonialism as later, less direct, and typically rural. Likewise, the depiction of African women as “active agents” exists in some tension with another key theme in this work, namely, that both traditional and modernizing African male elites collaborated with colonial political officials and missionaries to create “a reconfigured patriarchy rooted in both indigenous and colonial ideologies” (p. 3).

In challenging and opening up the existing historiography on their subject, the editors and some of the contributors to this collection occasionally overstate their respective cases. That said, this is a rewardingly informative, user-friendly collection, enriched by helpful maps and endnotes and generous excerpts from written and oral primary sources. It should have a long shelf life.

—Ruth Compton Brouwer

Ruth Compton Brouwer is Associate Professor and Chair, History Department, King’s College, University of Western Ontario, London, Canada. She is author of Modern Women Modernizing Men: The Changing Missions of Three Professional Women in Asia and Africa, 1902–69 (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002).

The Prophet and the Messiah: An Arab Christian’s Perspective on Islam and Christianity.


In its motives, method, and content, this book offers a welcome alternative to the many generic “introductions to Islam” and a growing number of rather polemical Christian books on the subject. Chawkat Moucarry writes from the viewpoint of an Arab Christian who grew up in Syria, lived in France, and now resides in Britain. His love for the Arab Muslim people is combined with a solid knowledge of Islamics, and he offers reader a refreshingly balanced, side-by-side presentation of Muslim and Christian doctrines of revelation and salvation. He is impelled by a deep passion to communicate the truth of the Gospel to Muslims and by an equally burning desire to help Western Christians live out their faith with their Muslim neighbors in a way that promotes understanding and dignity for all peoples in this shrinking world.

Furthermore, as an evangelical Christian, Moucarry espouses a dialogic method that, based on Jesu’s Golden Rule, “means not comparing the ideals of Christianity with the reality of Islam, radical Muslims with moderate Muslims, or mainstream Christianity with Islamic sects” (p. 17). The “genuine dialogue” not only entails helping Christians and Muslims understand one another better and thus concentrate on their common heritage, but it also squarely faces differences and contradictions. His headings include the Scriptures, key doctrines, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, and contemporary issues (e.g., the Palestinian question and the treatment of Muslims in the West).

While Moucarry’s delivery is accessible to a wide readership, specialists will appreciate the wealth of primary sources from the Hadith, Ghazali, Ibn Taymiyya, and especially Razi’s Qur’anic commentary. Finally, Moucarry manages to demonstrate how Muslim queries into Christianity can force Christians to dig deeper into their own doctrine of the Trinity, and how an understanding of general revelation can offer Muslims, Jews, and Christians a common basis for working together on issues of peace and human rights.

—David L. Johnston

David L. Johnston, currently pursuing postdoctoral studies in Islamics at Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, has lived in Algeria, Egypt, and Israel since 1978.
This book, number 8 in the series Systematisch-theologische Monographien, is an expansion of the author's 1999 dissertation at the University of South Africa, Pretoria. The first chapter deals with continuity and renewal in a mission-historical perspective. The next three chapters analyze the views of the Roman Catholic Church, the Conference of European Churches, and the European Lausanne Committee in the period 1979-92. The fifth chapter investigates the three theology-of-mission models under consideration: that of Rome is primarily ecclesiocentric and inculturational, the ecumenical model cosmo-centric and synthetic, and the evangelical framework biblical and Christocentric. The final chapter sketches the fundamental issues of a biblical and contextual theology of mission for Europe, emphasizing Christocentric churches as the vital base of mission and evangelism.

Friedemann Walldorf (b. 1964), a teacher of missiology at the Free Theological Academy at Giessen, Germany, starts his study in 1979 when Pope John Paul II, during his visit to Poland, talked about the need of a new evangelization in Europe, facing a new millennium. His study ends in 1992 with the European Leadership Consultation on Evangelization of the Lausanne movement, held in Bad Boll, Germany, under the motto: “The whole church and the whole Gospel for the new Europe.”

The author is a convinced evangelical. This viewpoint is evident in chapters 2–4, where he pays more attention to the evangelical movement than to the Roman Catholic Church or the ecumenical movement, and also in the final chapter. The crucial fifth chapter, however, is a fair evaluation of the three theological, ecclesiastical, and missionary streams involved.

My main criticism of this generally well-done study is the total omission of the Eastern Orthodox. Furthermore, it is unfortunate that the author did not update his study to 2002 by at least adding an appendix. Nevertheless, this book is a must for anyone interested in the main concepts of the new evangelical movement in Europe.

—Jan A. B. Jongeneel

Jan A. B. Jongeneel, a contributing editor, is Professor of Missiology at Utrecht University in the Netherlands.
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“Korean Contextual Theology as Related to Ch’i: An Assessment on the Theology of Jung Young Lee.”

Boehle, Josef.
“Inter-religious Co-operation in a Global Age.”

Chen, Grant.

Chin, Peter Jaehyeok.
“Toward Appropriate Leadership Patterns for the Korean Church in the Twenty-first Century.”

Czub, A.
“Contemporary Inculturation Problems in Black Africa.”
Ph.D. Warsaw: Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski Univ. in Warsaw, 2002.

Elliott, Susan E.
“Missionary Nurse Dorothy Davis Cook, 1940–1972: ‘Mother of Swazi Nurses.’”
Ph.D. San Diego, Calif.: Univ. of San Diego, 2000.

Flores, Barbara.
“Context of Colonization: Garifuna Spirituality as a Means of Resistance.”

Jeong, Gyoung-Ho.
“Korean Christian Ethics for Peaceful Tongil Between South and North Korea.”

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“Perceptions on Leadership Foundation and Style: An Examination of Three Generations of Presbyterian Laymen in the Seoul Area.”

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“Religious Life: A Sign of Communion at the Service of the Church’s Mission in India. A Study in the Light of the Apostolic Exhortation Vita Consecrata.”

Tsai, Matthew M.

Thomas, Gary.
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