Can There Be Christianity Without Church?

Twenty-seven years ago an essay by Paul Hiebert entitled “Conversion, Culture, and Cognitive Categories” appeared in the October (1978) issue of the short-lived Gospel in Context: A Dialogue on Contextualization. To conservative missiologists, who had long struggled to articulate an evangelical soteriology that would more adequately reflect both the mercy and the severity of God, Hiebert’s article was groundbreaking. It began with the hypothetical case of Papayya, an Indian peasant returning to his village after a grueling day of farming. Joining a small crowd of curiosity seekers, he hears a stranger tell of a new god who appeared on earth in the form of Jesus. Before going to his house for supper, Papayya publicly declares his belief in this new god, little comprehending either the content or the implications of his newfound faith. He knows that among the millions of gods in the Hindu pantheon, some repeatedly visit earth in one form or another, while this new god came to earth only once. Although Jesus is the Son of his heavenly Father, nothing is said about his celestial Mother. It is all very confusing, as matters pertaining to gods tend to be. The stranger departs from the village, never to be seen again. What difference does or should Papayya’s newfound faith make in his life? Who can teach him? Should he still go to the Hindu temple to pray to this new god? “Can Papayya become a Christian after hearing the Gospel only once?” Hiebert asks. “To this we can only say yes. To say that a person must be educated, have extensive knowledge of the Bible, or live a near perfect life would mean that the Good News is only for an elite few in the world” (p. 24).

Tim Tennent’s lead article in this issue poses this question in a slightly different form: Can there be authentic Christianity without a gathered church? Answers to this question hinge on what we mean by “church” and “Christian.” For two thousand years these deceptively simple terms have defied consensus, as global estimates of 37,000 Christian denominations and nearly 300 confessional councils worldwide attest.

Reading the articles in this issue, one is struck by our uncanny human penchant for getting things wrong and then making sure they stay that way. Christianity in its most visible and impressively organized forms has steadily resisted those...
persons and practices most integral to its spiritual renewal and, hence, survival. These same articles, however, remind us that the viability of God’s kingdom is not at the mercy of organized religion, that inevitably, if slowly and imperceptibly, the living Seed produces a surprisingly bountiful and variegated harvest.

Take the indigenous resurgence in Latin America, for example—the theme of Edward Cleary’s article. Routinely and rightly criticized for often being little more than the religious front for Christendom’s brutal “guns, germs, and steel” conquest, missionaries at the same time unwittingly sowed the seeds of cultural survival, preservation, and renewal that have only recently begun to blossom after a 500-year incubation.

Linda Benson, whose scholarly intent was to discover the process of political change in China after 1912, instead found herself drawn into the lives of three extraordinary “missionaries with attitude,” whose practices elicited the censure of ecclesiastical purists of their day. Evangeline and Francesca French, with Alice Mildred Cable, who between them served more than 100 years as missionaries in China, left scarcely any visible traces of their work—few, if any, converts, and no churches. Yet, given kingdom germination patterns, to call their endeavors fruitless would be premature. In their willingness to venture beyond the comforting confines and dictates of establishment religion, they followed in the train of John Amos Comenius and Anthony Norris Groves, whose stories also appear in the pages that follow.

Disillusioned with the establishment church’s predilection for resisting and undermining missionary efforts in India, Groves advocated a mission modus operandi that focused, in his view, for resisting and undermining missionary efforts in India, Groves advocated a mission modus operandi that focused, in his view, on the Good News rather than on the extension or preservation of proprietary religious domains. Highly critical of prevailing mission theory and practice, he had “little interest in buildings, services, finances, organization, training, or ceremony.” Convinced that the Sermon on the Mount was the defining charter of God’s reign, Groves held that the true church was composed of individual believers “seeking to please Christ and encouraging others to do the same.” Significant indigenous movements initiated by leaders such as Watchman Nee and Sadhu Sundhar Singh are traceable to the influence of Groves’s ideas.

Comenius, 200 years earlier, lived out his life in the viciously partisan world of parochial European Christendom. Despite this fog that all but swallowed up mission, he proclaimed the universality of the Gospel. God’s kingdom, he taught, would come through the faithful and sustained witness—in preaching, reasoning, educating, translating, and, if need be, suffering—of apostolic preachers (missionaries). The kernel of his life and vision, producing little more than controversy by the time he died in 1670, was integral to the Moravian mission thrust, which formed the basis of the modern Protestant missionary movement, without which contemporary world Christianity is unimaginable.

Jesus warned his disciples that they (like most of us) tended to look in all the wrong places for the kingdom of God. It is worth pondering that Christ is more likely to be found outside than inside the wealthy, smugly self-sufficient Laodicean church (Rev. 3:14–22) and its contemporary analogues. Will we one day discover that, for “churchless Christians” in India, Hindu temples were simply places of incubation, just as synagogues incubated our Lord’s earliest followers before finally ejecting them as “Christians”? And so we return to the question: can there be Christianity without church? Perhaps the question should be reframed: Is the true church—the kingdom—always visible, always recognizable, to those who operate within the Christian religious establishment? This issue of the IBMR points to an answer consistent with our Lord’s promise that “where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them” (Matt. 18:20 NIV).
The Challenge of Churchless Christianity: An Evangelical Assessment

Timothy C. Tennent

The explosive growth of the church in the non-Western world is raising many new questions regarding the doctrine of the church. In his book *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity,* Philip Jenkins has highlighted the vigorous growth of Christianity in the non-Western world. Jenkins predicts that if current trends continue, six countries in the world will have 100 million Christians by the year 2050, but only one of the six (the United States) will be located in the industrialized West. Within the next twenty-five years there will be more Christians in Africa than in either Europe or North America. Christianity is also exploding in the heartlands of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Chinese religions. In these contexts the very word “Christian” carries strong connotations of Western culture or foreignness. For many, the words “Christian” and “church” call to mind Western imperialism or colonialism or worse. In short, the phrase “Christian church” can carry very negative cultural connotations, whereas the name “Christ” may not. This reality has caused many to rethink the very nature of the church as it has been known in the Christian West. This reexamination of ecclesiology is certainly a welcome and important development, since the doctrine has often become unnecessarily tethered to Western expressions of the church, which may not be appropriate for the growing church in the non-Western world. The focus of this article is on the emerging and growing phenomenon known as churchless Christianity, which is one response to the church as it has brought the Gospel to the non-Western world.

In his book *Churchless Christianity,* Herbert Hoefer has compiled data from people living in rural Tamil Nadu, India, and in its capital, urban Chennai (formerly Madras), who are devoted followers of Christ but who have not joined a visible Christian church and, indeed, remain within the Hindu community. Hoefer does not call them Christians but *Jesu bhakta,* that is, devotees of Jesus. This is no small movement. Hoefer’s research suggests that there are more nonbaptized followers of Jesus in Chennai than there are formal, visible Christians in the traditional sense. The Hindu *bhakti* movement allows Hindus to focus their worship on Jesus Christ, accept him as Lord and Savior, and thereby maintain their cultural and social particularities as Hindus. If asked, they identify themselves as Hindus, not as Christians, and many do not attend any church. This unwillingness to identify with the church or with baptism is due, according to Hoefer, not to any shame about following Christ but to strong cultural associations surrounding the terms.

During a two-year period (2001–03), I surveyed the perceptions of Hindus in northern India regarding the church and Christianity. I found that many Hindus do indeed have distorted and unfortunate associations with the notion of the church or organized Christianity. Hindus, for example, view Christians as disrespectful because they keep their shoes on during services of worship. They often look on Christians as culturally foreign because they sit on pews rather than on the floor, or use Western musical forms rather than bhajans, the indigenous forms of music in India. They simply do not understand why Christian women will no longer wear bangles or participate in popular cultural festivals. In short, even if Hindus are drawn to Christ, they may find membership in the church or the very word “Christian” repugnant. This negative association with the visible church raises the vital question, Can someone say yes to Jesus and no to the visible church?

Distorted associations with the terms “church” and “Christianity” are not limited to India, nor is the phenomenon of nonbaptized followers of Jesus who do not identify with the visible church. This pattern has also been observed throughout the Muslim world. Robby Butler tells the story of a Kuwaiti Muslim who was asked what he knew about Christians and Christianity. He replied that a Christian is someone who promotes immorality, pornography, and television programs like *Dallas* or *Sex in the City.* Butler goes on to comment that “for a Muslim to say that he has become a Christian is to communicate that he has launched into a secret life of immorality.” Within the Muslim community this embarrassing perception regarding words like “Christian,” “church,” and “Christianity” has also spawned churchless, but Christ-loving, movements. For example, Rafique Uddin and David Cashin have observed many Muslim followers of Jesus (Issa) who remain within the mosque, not uniting with a visible church. Mission Frontiers highlighted a missionary couple, Alejandro and Bertha Ortiz, who have nurtured several of these “Jesus mosques” in Benin. They claim that another Muslim nation has over 100,000 Muslims who worship Jesus as Isa in Islamic mosques.

This phenomenon raises some very important ecclesiological questions. For example, can a Hindu or a Muslim or a postmodern American disillusioned with the institutional church come to Jesus Christ, accept him as Lord and Savior, and not unite with the visible church? Does someone have to use or accept the name “Christian” in order to belong to Christ? What is the meaning of baptism? Is it a public profession of one’s personal faith in Christ, or does it also require incorporation into a visible community of believers? What is the relationship between ecclesiology and soteriology? Such questions cry out for further missiological reflection.

Historical Reference Points

It is essential that the whole discussion be explored with an appropriate historical perspective. We cannot properly evaluate the churchless Christianity movement without reference to several important milestones in the history of the church’s understanding of ecclesiology. I do not question the descriptive truth of what Hoefer and others have documented. I am more interested, though, in whether the church has a prescriptive role in guiding and shaping this movement and in our response to it. To properly

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reflect on this history, we consider four historical reference points: the Nicene Creed, medieval Roman Catholic ecclesiology, the Reformation, and the creeds of later Protestantism.

Nicene Creed. One of the earliest ecclesiastical statements embraced by the church is found in the Nicene Creed (A.D. 325): “I believe in one, holy, catholic, apostolic church.” Two of these words are of particular significance to this discussion: “catholic” and “apostolic.” Apostolicity may be in jeopardy if, for example, some churchless Christians continue to worship other gods besides Jesus or fail to embrace Trinitarianism.11 Even if we suppose, however, that these churchless Christians are essentially orthodox in their doctrine, we still must ask about their recognition of the catholicity, or universality, of the church. Despite our many differences, catholicity reminds us that there is one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. Do nonbaptized followers of Jesus fully reflect the catholicity of the church? Are they an expression of the true mystery of catholicity, which defies all human organizational efforts, or do they represent a fracturing of the visible community of faith as it exists around the world, which, despite its many organizational and theological differences, nevertheless confesses Jesus as Lord in concert with other believers from around the world?

Medieval Roman Catholic ecclesiology. Popes in the Middle Ages—especially Innocent III at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 and Boniface VIII in 1302—identified salvation with being sacramentally connected to Christ through the church. This view traces back to the phrase extra ecclesiam nulla salus (outside the church there is no salvation), which Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258) coined in his On the Unity of the Church (251),12 arguing that the doctrine was based on Jesus’ words “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53). The implication drawn was that not to receive the sacraments (baptism, absolution, the Eucharist, etc.) is to cut oneself off from Christ. The church is, to invoke a favorite patristic metaphor, like an ark. It is the vessel God has provided to save us from judgment. Those who enter into the ark are saved; those who do not, are lost.13 From the traditional Catholic perspective, there is absolutely no room for an unbaptized follower of Christ who does not belong to Christ’s holy church.14

The Reformation. The third ecclesiastical reference point is the Reformation. One of the biggest theological challenges in the Reformation was to answer the objection that the movement seemed to be an assault on the catholicity of the church. As far back as Cyprian, the church fathers interpreted the church’s unity as not merely mystical or invisible but episcopal. Cyprian gave us a second notable phrase: “He cannot have God for his father who has not the church for his mother.”15 The apostolic authority of the church was conveyed and continued through the episcopal laying on of hands from Peter to the present. The Reformation therefore represented a fracturing of the outward, visible unity of the Roman Catholic Church. It represented a challenge to the episcopal authority and thereby was viewed as schismatic and destructive of the Nicene marks of oneness, apostolicity, and catholicity.

Luther responded by rearticulating ecclesiology so that it was not tied to the structural and sacramental connection with a particular church organization; rather, it stressed the mystical communion of the saints that transcends all particular ecclesiastical organizations. The true church is apostolic, not because of an episcopal chain of the laying on of hands, but only when it teaches what the apostles taught. Protestant ecclesiology thus found its apostolic legitimacy through the doctrine of sola Scriptura. If the apostolic message is proclaimed, then the church is apostolic, and it shares in the mystical oneness and catholicity that are the marks of the true church. In his On the Councils and the Churches, Luther defines the true church as sancta, catholica, Christiana, that is, a Christian, holy people. Luther goes on to argue explicitly that when the Nicene Creed mentions “one holy, catholic, apostolic church,” it refers to one holy, catholic, apostolic people.16 The emphasis, he argued, has always been on the people of God, not the organizational structure to which they belonged. For Luther, the true, organic church has both a visible and an invisible nature. The visible church contains both unredeemed sinners and those who are saints by God’s divine work. The invisible church, in contrast, consists of all true believers throughout time and space, the composition and number of which are known only to God.17 Nevertheless, this Reformation articulation of a spiritual rather than episcopal basis for ecclesiology still finds its expression, however varied, in some visible expression of the church.

Later Protestant creedsal formulation regarding the church. The fourth and final reference point emerges in the wake of the Reformation and is also pertinent to our evaluation of churchless Christianity. As the number of Reformation churches grew, a new crisis of ecclesiology developed because the initial protest from which we get our word “Protestant” did not fully anticipate the dizzying array of divisions, disputations, and controversies. Each new branch of Protestantism was forced to articulate its own understanding of the true marks of the church. The Augsburg Confession, for example, states that “the church is the assembly of saints in which the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly” (art. 7).18 Similar words appear in the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England (art. 19).19 The emerging Reformation churches tended to affirm the spiritual nature of the church, but they also set forth certain “marks” of the church, which could be embodied only in visible communities.

Conclusion. From a historical perspective, the existence of unbaptized believers in Christ who are not under the authority of the church is not accepted as normative ecclesiology. The traditional Catholic view that outside the church there is no salvation certainly would not accept the notion of followers of Jesus who are not in any sacramental relationship with the church. Similar statements could be found in the Eastern Orthodox tradition.20 The Reformation and the subsequent creedal formulations that speak to ecclesiology reveal that, despite a vigorous rethinking of the doctrine of the church, the Reformation churches could not possibly comprehend or accept a person untethered from the doctrine and discipline of the visible church. Indeed, virtually all Protestant churches have insisted on, as a minimum, the sacrament of baptism and the Lord’s Supper as necessary signs of the visible church.21 Most also insist on some organized authority of pastors, priests, bishops, or elders who preside over a defined, gathered community. Thus, if churchless Christianity is to be
Critique and Debate

Such a departure has been proposed by, among others, M. M. Thomas (1916–96), a well-known Indian theologian and ecumenical leader who for years was the director of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, in Bangalore. The major critique of Thomas’s ecclesiology was developed by Lesslie Newbigin (1909–98), British missionary to India, ecumenical leader, and bishop of the Church of South India. The result was a whole body of literature between these two men on the subject of ecclesiology, with many discussions on the nature of the church as a visible community. They each wrote dozens of books and articles. The debate between Thomas and Newbigin on this issue remains the most sustained and theologically reflective discussion to date.

M. M. Thomas. In 1971 Thomas published a landmark book entitled *Salvation and Humanisation*. It is an examination of issues related to the theology of mission seen from within the particularities of the Indian context. Central to Thomas’s vision is a radical rethinking of ecclesiology. Thomas is concerned with the implications of a church that becomes increasingly isolated from society. He therefore encourages the idea of a “Christ-centered secular fellowship outside the Church.” He goes on to argue that a vigorous ecclesiology should embrace a view of the church that can “take form in all religious communities” because it “transcends all religious communities.” Thomas would clearly embrace the notion of what Hoefer calls “churchless Christianity” but would rephrase it by saying that the church does not always exist as a defined, visible community but can be formed within other religious communities, such as Hinduism and Islam. He states this point explicitly when he says that the church can “take form as a Christ-centered fellowship of faith and ethics in the Hindu religious community.” The fact that these followers of Jesus reject the sacrament of baptism is not, according to Thomas, because, in India, baptism has become “a sign not primarily of incorporation into Christ but of proselytism into a socio-political community involving rejection of their [own] socio-political-religious communities.” Since baptism as a “transfer of communal affiliation” is understood in India as an act of hostility toward one’s own culture and social background, it makes a travesty of the true nature of baptism. Therefore, according to Thomas, at least in India we should not insist that the sacrament of baptism be considered a mark of the true church.

Thomas insists that there is a distinctive new humanity that belongs to Jesus Christ, but that this new humanity cannot be equated with the visible church. He says that “in spite of the famous slogan extra ecclesiam nulla salus,” the new humanity of Christ does in fact exist outside the “empirical Church.” This is a new understanding of what might be called the invisible church. When Luther introduced the distinction of the invisible and visible church, it was for the purpose of acknowledging that there were unregenerate unbelievers who did not truly belong to Christ but who had become empirically united with the visible church on earth. Thomas is arguing the reverse situation. Namely, there are those who truly belong to Christ and thus are members of the invisible church in heaven but who have not united with any empirical, visible church on earth. Luther is concerned about unbelievers inside the visible church; Thomas is concerned with believers inside the visible community of Hinduism.

Lesslie Newbigin. In contrast, Lesslie Newbigin raises important questions about Thomas’s ecclesiology. In *The Finality of Christ*, Newbigin insists that the church must involve a “visible community.” However, Newbigin wants to be clear that by “visible community” he is not merely embracing the notion that salvation in Christ is linked to mere “church extension” or the “aggrandizement of the community.” Instead, Newbigin argues that “a visible fellowship is central to God’s plan of salvation in Christ; but God’s plan of salvation is not limited to the visible fellowship.” According to Newbigin, the proper balance is achieved when we realize that “true conversion involves both a new creation from above, which is not merely an act of extension of the existing community, and also a relationship with the existing community of believers.” Thus, while acknowledging that salvation comes from God and is from above, central to God’s plan of salvation is the uniting of his redeemed people to a visible community. So Newbigin directly responds to the churchless Christianity question when he says, quite bluntly: “Can a Hindu who has been born again in Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit be content to remain without any visible solidarity with his fellow-believers? The answer to that question is No. The New Testament knows nothing of a relationship with Christ which is purely mental and spiritual, unembodied in any of the structures of human relationship.”

Newbigin thus rejects what he regards as M. M. Thomas’s overspiritualization of ecclesiology. For example, he asks, if someone belongs to a community sodality known as Hinduism, but at the same time confesses ultimate loyalty and allegiance to Jesus Christ, is it not naïve not to expect that there will be various points whereby commitment to Christ will “override his obligations as a Hindu, [and that] this allegiance must take visible—that is, social—forms?” Furthermore, presumably “the acceptance of Jesus Christ as central and decisive creates some kind of solidarity among those who have this acceptance in common. If it did not do so, it would mean nothing. The question is, what is the nature of this solidarity? It has always been understood to include the practice of meeting together to celebrate with words, songs and formal actions the common faith in Jesus. . . . A man who is religiously, culturally and socially part of the Hindu community is a Hindu.”

The value of the Thomas-Newbigin debate lies both in the clarity with which each man states his views and in the depth of their theological reflection. Indeed, good biblical exegesis united with solid historical and theological reflection must be the ultimate arbiter of this debate.

*Other voices.* The most prominent contemporary missiologist to weigh in on this debate is Ralph Winter, the founder and director of the U.S. Center for World Mission, in Pasadena, California. Winter has made numerous statements in favor of the churchless
Christianity movement. His comments suggest that, for him, churchless Christianity is not only missiologically sound but also strategically superior to traditional churches. Winter says, “Apparently, our real challenge is no longer to extend the boundaries of Christianity but to acknowledge that Biblical, Christian faith has already extensively flowed beyond Christianity as a cultural movement, just as it has historically flowed beyond Judaism and Roman Catholicism. Our task may well be to allow and encourage Muslims and Hindus and Chinese to follow Christ without identifying themselves with a foreign religion. The Third Reformation is here!”

Winter’s allusion to the Reformation is significant. If the first reformation was to move beyond the monolithic framework of Judaism and the second was to move beyond Roman Catholicism, this third reformation is churchless Christianity. Winter argues that we must now embrace the fact that the Gospel has already moved beyond explicitly identifiable Christian communities and can now exist, and even prosper, within the communities and structural framework of non-Christian religions.

We thus have a body of evangelical scholars such as Ralph Winter, Herbert Hoefer, and H. L. Richard (author of Following Jesus in the Hindu Context) who are increasingly siding with M. M. Thomas’s new ecclesiology. It is therefore increasingly important for evangelical theologians to assess whether this new ecclesiology should be embraced by evangelical missiologists and by the missionary community as a whole, whether working among Muslims (Jesus Mosques), Hindus (Jesus Bhaktas) or postmodern Westerners (cyberchurch).

An Evangelical Missiologist’s Response

I offer here an exploratory response to the issue of churchless Christianity. While generally supportive of many of the contributions and insights of these writers, I have some reservations about endorsing a churchless Christianity along the lines suggested by M. M. Thomas and H. L. Richard. To Richard’s credit, he has called for a more vigorous debate on this issue. To that end, I offer several points that I trust will promote a more sustained discussion of this issue.

Conversion, church, and community. First, to separate Christian conversion from visible Christian community is to separate two things that God has joined together. The word “church” (ekklesia) in reference to the Christian community was inaugurated by Jesus Christ himself. To the charge that Jesus’ use of the word “church” is only spiritual and not referring necessarily to a visible community, I reply that the very word ekklesia means “public assembly.” The choice of this word helped to launch the church as a visible, defined community into the world.

Notice, furthermore, that the defining confession of the Christian faith by Peter recorded in Matthew 16:16 is immediately linked to the necessity of community. Furthermore, this encounter took place in the pluralistic, multireligious context of Caesarea Philippi. After Peter’s declaration, Jesus stated, “On this rock I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18).

Westernized Christianity versus churchless Christianity. Second, the discussion about churchless Christianity often creates the notion that the choice is between a Westernized Christianity and a churchless Christianity within some other religious community. In this scenario, it is easy to knock down the straw man of a Westernized Christianity. H. L. Richard correctly points out that the emerging Gentile Christianity found some within the Jerusa-

All believers, in all times, in all parts of the globe must seek—whenever possible—to form themselves into visible communities of faith.

lem church hostile to them, and yet God was clearly blessing the new movement. He is certainly correct in expressing his frustration about Christian communalism, legalistic sectarianism, separatist cultural attitudes, rigidity among Christian communities, and similar errors. However, that is like pointing out a thousand examples of bad and fragmented marriages as a reason to jettison the institution of marriage.

India has tens of thousands of churches across the country whose members do sing Christian bhajans and not Westernized hymns, who do take their shoes off and sit on the floor rather than in pews, and who do not think twice about their women wearing bangles or participating in cultural festivals. But these are distinct, defined Christian communities that have existed for centuries in India. The churchless Christians should, in my view, be baptized and then, as members of a global movement (even if they continue to reject Westernized forms of worship), find creative ways to express their catholicity with the global church.

Community and apostolicity. Third, the church is the divinely ordained institution that links believers to one another for correction, training in righteousness, and preserving the apostolic message. In a passage peculiar to Matthew’s gospel, Jesus speaks about the role of the church in administering church discipline.
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Christ. This reference is not to any ontological change in Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, our understanding and insight into the full nature of God in Jesus Christ is continually expanding as more and more people groups come to the feet of Jesus. This is the meaning behind the popular phrase “It takes a whole world to understand a whole Christ.” We in the West have glaring blind spots that need to be illuminated by these Jesu bhaktas and followers of Isa within mosques. Perhaps our very understanding of the church does need to be broadened in certain areas. But practically speaking, none of this is possible if all believers in Jesus do not belong to some visible, defined community.

We worship a triune God who is, by nature, a relational God. He made his relational nature fully public in the incarnation of his Son, which is reflected in the life of the church, which in turn is called his body. Our very doctrine of Christ thus demands that all believers, in all times, in all parts of the globe must seek—whenever possible—to form themselves into visible communities of faith. The visible communities may have to meet in catacombs or suffer great persecution or undergo cultural misunderstanding, as did the primitive church, but the early church did not forsake the assembling of themselves together. They understood that biblical conversion, by definition, implies community.

Conclusion. There is no doubt that more creative thinking is needed if we are to effectively communicate the Christian Gospel into new global contexts. More vigorous discussion is needed on all of these issues. We also must not confuse the roles of description and prescription in responding to these developments. Finally, we must allow Scripture and history to guide and direct our thinking on this vital issue.

Notes


3. Herbert Hoefer, Churchless Christianity, new ed. (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2001; orig. pub., 1991), p. 96. Hoefer mentions 156,000 “nonbaptized believers in Christ” (30,000 high caste, i.e., Brahmin; 70,000 middle castes, i.e., Kshyatriya and Vaisya; and 56,000 scheduled castes, i.e., Sudra and Dalit); see appendixes 2–5, pp. 277–352.

4. The practice of ishta devata in Hinduism allows a person to worship a particular chosen deity without necessarily denying that other gods exist.

5. Some will occasionally make a pilgrimage to a large church, in the same way that Hindus make periodic pilgrimages to great temples in India.

6. This research has been published in English and in Hindi as Your Questions—Our Answers (Dehra Dun: Micropress, 2004), by Dharmanand Premraj (the author’s pen name).


10. It should be noted that this issue is not limited to the non-Western World. For example, the Pew Internet and American Life Project (an initiative of the Pew Research Center) identified 28 million people in the U.S. alone who use the Internet for religious and spiritual information. Andrew Lord in “Virtual Communities and Mission” cites a Barna Research Group survey which suggests that “by 2010 we will probably have 10% to 20% of the population relying primarily or exclusively upon the internet for its religious input” (*Evangelical Review of Theology* 26, no. 3 [2002]: 204). See also Michael L. Keene, “The Church on the Web,” *Christian Century*, April 11–18, 1999, pp. 774–75.


14. In the post–Vatican II era of Roman Catholicism, this teaching has been challenged, especially in the writings of Karl Rahner, who espoused implicit or “anonymous” Christianity, which is, quite clearly, unrelated and distant from either baptism or membership in any visible church. According to Vatican II, “Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—those too may achieve eternal salvation.” See *Lumen gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, sec. 16.


17. Luther’s concept of the invisible church was widely accepted in Protestant ecclesiology, as is reflected in a wide range of confessional documents. See, for example, the First Scottish Confession (1560), Westminster Confession (1647), Savoy Declaration (1658), and Philadelphia Baptist Confession (1688). These confessions can be found in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983).


21. Even the twelfth-century Waldenses, who were one of the earliest groups to rebel against papal authority, affirmed the essential nature of the sacraments. See Confession of the Waldenses (1655), art. 28, as quoted in Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, p. 765.


25. Ibid., p. 71.
Missionaries and the Indigenous Resurgence in Latin America

Edward L. Cleary, O.P.

A resurgent voice is being heard in Latin America. The 40 million indigenous peoples are no longer content to live on the margins of society. In a series of three articles in July 2004, the New York Times gave unusual attention to Indian political movements in Bolivia,1 which are but a few of the many Indian activist movements in Latin America. Indeed, Indian political movements are the newest and strongest new political movements in the region.

After more than 500 years of marginalization, how did the situation change? A major reason is that religious groups contributed strongly to the rise of indigenous movements. Here many secular news sources falter, in part because they consistently overlook religion as a source of political activism. Or worse, having discovered that religion and politics are mutually related, reporters may simply identify one or two religious leaders and portray them as the plotters behind the activism.

The connections between religion and politics have become extraordinarily relevant in world and national politics, and for good or ill, religion and politics can no longer be kept off the front page. Since both religion and politics are highly normative phenomena, with both being concerned about what is “good” or “bad,” it is not unusual that the two would be intertwined—or that the media would be unable to interpret well what is happening.

After five centuries of social exclusion, indigenous peoples became notably active in the 1970s. They demanded a fair share of educational and health services and recognition of their ancient rights to tribal lands so as to have sufficient land for their communities to farm. They opposed governmental policies of cultural assimilation, especially education only in Spanish. They fought for multicultural government policies, for preservation of their cultures and languages, and against ethnic discrimination in public life.

They gained political experience in municipal and provincial elections and elected deputies or senators to promote what they perceived as indigenous rights. The indigenous movements gained international prominence especially in 1992 through contesting celebration of the Fifth Centenary of Columbus’s arrival in the Americas as an event of unqualified benefit for the region. The 1990s were also marked by national marches of indigenous protest in Ecuador and Bolivia and the Zapatista revolt in Chiapas, Mexico. At base, these were efforts to force national recognition of indigenous identity and to fight injustice and discrimination against indigenous persons and communities.

The following account is based on Resurgent Voices in Latin America: Indigenous Peoples, Political Mobilization, and Religious Change, a multiyear and multiauthor research study published by Rutgers University Press in 2004. This article offers pastoral and missiological reflections on the study. Missionaries have been crucial to the indigenous resurgence. We first consider the work of Catholic missionaries to this largely Catholic region. Then we examine the increased presence of Protestant missionaries. Third, we look at contemporary issues toward which indigenous activism has been directed.

Modern Missionary Crusade to Latin America

After World War II Catholic seminaries and convents in the United States, Canada, and Europe were filled to overflowing with priests, brothers, and sisters. The Vatican issued a challenge for 10 percent of these resources to be sent to Latin America. The target was almost reached, as country after country stocked up with foreign missionaries from the West. More than half of the priests in many Latin American countries were foreign. These priests flowed into city and country parishes, generally arriving with much greater resources than those enjoyed by their national colleagues. Similarly, Protestant missionaries fanned out to cities and rural areas. Many Indians experienced this encounter with foreign missionaries of the twentieth century as a cultural shock, similar to that of the first century and a half of interaction with Spanish and Portuguese missionaries.

When missionaries from the North Atlantic countries began creating parishes and missions in Latin America, they were initially appalled at the heterodoxy apparent in the indigenous practice of Christianity (which had come about, in part, because...
the long-standing lack of clergy and religious schools). Against the practices and beliefs of traditional indigenous religion, missionaries stressed orthodox Catholicism. Bishops, priests, and catechists began taking harder stands against traditional practices that seemed to them to have little to do with essential Christianity. Dioceses began forbidding the celebration of Catholic masses as part of certain traditional celebrations. Some missionaries viewed traditional practices as contrary to a modern understanding of Scripture. A few even went so far as to portray traditional practices as furthering mestizo political and economic control and the subordination of Indian peasants.

From Vatican II to Liberation Theology

An understanding of the critical religious changes that swept Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s is necessary in order to grasp the complex relationship that subsequently evolved between Christianity and the indigenous peoples. Changes within the institutional Catholic Church and the birth of liberation theology reshaped the Latin American religious and political landscape. Under the influence of missionaries and of internal reform initiated by Latin American bishops, the Catholic Church became renewed in a number of sectors. Millions of laypersons became active in the church and its social justice mission. Thousands of prayer and neighborhood improvement groups kept parishes busy. Seminary walls could not contain the number of students studying for the priesthood, whose numbers increased by 388 percent from 1972 to 2001, including a number of priests from indigenous backgrounds.

These events were spurred and supported by major changes within the institutional Catholic Church. The general thrust of Vatican Council II (1962–65) included two key factors that would affect Latin America: adaptation of a universal church to national and local cultures, and awareness of the presence of God in other religions (such as those of Latin America’s indigenous). In 1968 the Medellin Conference of Latin American Bishops (CELAM) reinforced these trends, emphasizing the “Latinamericanization” of the church. Changes in attitude toward the indigenous became inevitable. Inculturation—the process of discerning where God is at work in a culture and articulating a theology sensitive to the local context—became the aim of church leaders and theologians. To summarize, CELAM changed its policy toward the indigenous from indigenista to indigena, from paternalistic to collegial, in the 1970s and 1980s. In its most specific form, guidelines for this indigenism included (1) defending the land, (2) learning the indigenous languages, (3) motivating self-determination, (4) equipping the community for contact with outsiders, (5) recovering cultural memory, (6) providing hope, and (7) stimulating alliances.

Liberation theology also emerged in Latin America in the 1960s as a way of proposing that the church, as a people and an institution, exert an active role in society. This way of thinking contrasted to the previous role of the Latin American Catholic Church as an otherworldly, fiesta-bound institution. Liberation

Samuel Zwemer’s Theological Judgments

Editor’s note: One hundred years ago Samuel Zwemer published the little book The Moslem Doctrine of God, his first in a series of reflections on Islam that some consider never to have been equaled. The century mark of this publication provides the occasion for Gordon Nickel’s brief reflection on Zwemer’s missiological approach. Nickel taught for ten years among Muslims in Pakistan and India, and his doctoral research focused on the earliest commentaries on the Qur’an. He is the author of Peaceable Witness Among Muslims (Herald Press, 1999).

In an essay written for a collection titled Christian-Muslim Encounters, John B. Carman asks a haunting question regarding the suspension of judgment about Islam’s claim to divine revelation. Carman writes candidly that after studying and teaching religions intensively for three decades, he does not find himself getting closer to a personal evaluation from a Christian theological perspective. “The object of understanding seems to recede as I advance,” he writes. Carmen asks whether this indefinite postponement of evaluation is “just an excuse.” Suspension of judgment is tempting, he writes, “because it is easier to remain silent in a theological environment where my ‘Christian inclusivism’ may be considered outdated in an age of ‘religious pluralism.’” Carman adds with striking candor, “Whether my caution is growing wisdom or intellectual cowardice I do not know.”

A century ago, Christian scholars were generally not so hesitant to evaluate religious claims. But their voices have been muted in recent decades because of their association with a number of perspectives now deemed unfashionable. Has the time perhaps come to rehabilitate this scholarship for the help it can give us in the difficult theological challenges that missionaries still face today?

In 1905 Samuel Zwemer wrote at the end of his classic study The Moslem Doctrine of God, “In the comparative study of religious ideas there must be a standard of judgment, and a Christian can only judge other religions by the standard of the Gospel.” Zwemer and other missionary scholars were arguably as close to “the object of understanding” as any Western scholars have been since. They lived long-term in the heartlands of Islam, often in the Arabian Peninsula, became fluent in local languages, and enjoyed meaningful contact with ordinary Muslims. In Moslem Doctrine, Zwemer took for granted a mastery of classical Arabic. He went straight for what most Muslims would agree are the sourcebooks of their faith, the Qur’an and the Hadith. He casually cited Beidhawi, Zamakhshari and the Jellalain, when many missionaries today would be hard-pressed merely to give the name of a classical commentator on the Qur’an. He was familiar with German scholarship on the theology of the Qur’an but could find no English monograph—so he set out to write it himself.

But there was more. Zwemer believed that Christians who encounter Islam deeply are responsible to demonstrate their loyalty to Jesus by evaluating what they learn. He believed that Christian scholars do not set their discipleship aside when they investigate the faith of others. Zwemer did not hesitate to judge according to the Gospel, something many scholars today shrink from doing.

The reasons why some recent readers are unable to appreciate the contributions of Zwemer and others appear rather
theology centered its concerns in a preferential option for the poor, weak, and vulnerable. Its theologians advocated social change, that is, action to promote justice, and emphasized communities with mixed lay and clerical leadership as the basis of action.

Liberation theology can claim an important contribution to present-day theologizing throughout the world, namely, its stress on method and on context. Both are salient here. Liberation theologians emphasize an inductive method: begin with a description of the world and the church within it, reflect on the situation from a biblical perspective, and act to bring the world and the church more in harmony with this biblical vision. Liberation theology also took the lead in what is today called contextual theology, a theology of utmost importance to many missiologists. Contextual theology attempts to express Christian faith in distinct languages, thought patterns, and other cultural expressions.

The developers of liberation theology were Latin American religious thinkers, many of whom had been trained in Europe and the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. The main figures were Gustavo Gutiérrez in Peru and Juan Luis Segundo in Uruguay, who were part of a core group of about a hundred theologians working together to formulate this new theology, especially in the 1970s. An Argentine Methodist, José Míguez Bonino, became the most prominent Protestant theologian in the group. Latin Americans quickly bonded with theologians from other regions of the world in the 1970s to form the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians. By and large, the missionaries working in Latin America were not the creators of liberation theology, although its main “consumers” were Catholic, and some Protestant, missionaries.

Just as liberation theology was becoming popular in Latin America, missionaries of all denominations came under severe criticism from academics and secular activists in the region. The first conference of the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, held in Barbados in 1971, served as a lightning rod, bringing the subject of religion and the indigenous peoples to the attention of the world. Delegates to the conference charged that governments, international agencies, and missionaries were all participating in programs of ethnocide in Latin America. While the charges were leveled specifically about non-Andean Indians, by implication relations generally with missionaries, churches, and indigenous peoples were faulted. The Barbados conference repeated a position that some anthropologists had long held, namely, that missions were instruments of cultural imperialism.

The Barbados conference not only served as a wake-up call for the churches but also helped to launch the international indigenous rights movement. Anthropologists and indigenous activists at that meeting established themselves as catalysts for such a transnational movement. In part as a response to Barbados, religious institutions began playing a critical role in this process. In the last third of the twentieth century some religious bodies responded extensively to the perceived need to aid tribal leaders in organizing to pressure governments for full recogni-

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tion of their rights and privileges as citizens. Throughout the 1970s the World Council of Churches flew Indian leaders to regional meetings dealing with these topics. Between 1970 and 1981 the Catholic bishops of Brazil sponsored fifteen meetings, bringing together hundreds of indigenous leaders from about two hundred groups. These international conferences, along with local assets provided through religious organizations, supplied the critical networks, resources, and ideological frameworks needed for the resurgence of Latin America’s indigenous peoples.

Alison Brysk, in the best account so far of Indian movements as a transnational enterprise, found that liberation theology “played a critical role in establishing indigenous movements” and remains a fruitful concept. According to Brysk, “Concerned clergy were the most frequent (and periodically successful) interlocutors for Indian interests in Latin America.” In other words, liberation theology went beyond a merely academic setting to facilitate the empowerment of Latin American Indians. Spurred on by many of the tenets of liberation theology, thousands of missionaries have served the indigenous poor in Latin America through selfless service, even as they maintained their loyalties to their churches.

From Liberation to Indigenous Theology

A second link between liberation theology and indigenous mobilization relates to the theologians and missionaries themselves. In the 1980s and 1990s some theologians within the liberationist tradition who worked at indigenous think tanks began to rediscover the value of culture, which many missionaries and liberation theologians had previously ignored. These theologians entered into the long process of listening to the indigenous people and elaborating intellectually what they heard.

A number of missionaries in Bolivia, Peru, and elsewhere in Latin America also began to develop a theological perspective with a greater focus on the value of local culture. In this view, culture is crucial for description and explanation. Some early forms of liberation theology were seen as ignoring culture, emphasizing instead the strictly socioeconomic aspects of Latin America. Furthermore, culturalists believed that the liberationist perspective may have doomed many indigenous development projects because the projects were based on socioeconomic analysis that excluded cultural factors. Some members of this sector saw liberation theology as looking for a socialist world that never came.

In the end, both liberationists and culturalists helped to foster the growth of indigenous theologians, who eventually brought about a fuller elaboration of teología indígena. Indigenous theology became a major derivative of the liberationist movement. Some indigenous theologians also began to appear in print, not so much as liberationists, but as part of a small wave of theologians of inculturation. The Zapotec theologian Eleazar López and others helped to make the Fourth Latin American Bishops Conference, in Santo Domingo in 1992, a new stage in the church’s awareness of the indigenous people. Since then, Domingo Llanque in Peru, Enrique Jordá in Bolivia, a small group of indigenous theologians from the Catholic University, Cochabamba, Bolivia, and others have joined in the effort to create indigenous theology based on Andean, Mayan, Zapotec, or other indigenous cosmologies.

Evangelical Missions

As religious changes were fundamentally altering the Catholic Church in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s, evangelical Protestantism began experiencing its first period of rapid growth in the region. Although Protestantism has a long history in Latin America, early missionaries met with little success in their attempts to promote Protestant growth. The loss of China as a mission field around 1950 brought more missionaries into Latin America in the 1960s, and in some cases, local religious leaders broke from their mother churches and abandoned some of the cultural practices that had previously limited their success in gaining converts.

While most observers focused on the historic Protestant congregations with a longer history in the region, the real growth among evangelicals came from the Pentecostals. Pentecostal churches stressed faith healing, charismatic acts, and a millennial message focused on the imminent coming of the “end times.” These churches grew most rapidly among Latin America’s indigenous groups, as local Pentecostal pastors worked with missionaries to translate the Bible into indigenous languages and to make their services more culturally relevant. Many other non-Catholic groups also had success evangelizing the indigenous, including Seventh-day Adventists, Mormons, and Jehovah’s Witnesses.

The distribution of evangelical groups among Latin America’s Indians varies widely between and within countries. In the Andes, some entire indigenous communities have become Adventist, while others have joined historic Protestant missions. Still others remain staunchly Catholic. In Central America and Mexico, it is commonly asserted that Pentecostalism is most prevalent among the indigenous, though hard numbers are rarely cited. In the countries considered in Resurgent Voices in Latin America, the percentage of indigenous evangelicals ranges from 10 to 25 percent of the population.

The impact of evangelical groups on indigenous societies has also been mixed. Protestant missionaries have been accused of fomenting local divisions, supporting repressive governments, and destroying indigenous culture, as were Catholic missions at various times. At the same time, Protestant mission organizations have played a critical role in promoting literacy, education, and other services that have translated into political resources among indigenous peoples. As is often the case, the interactions between religion and indigenous politics defy simple characterizations.

To summarize the relationship of indigenous political activism and missionaries, one should note that most of the impact of the missionaries came indirectly. Missionary groups supplied education and evangelization that had been denied Latin America’s indigenous groups. In a word, missionaries emphasized the dignity of the person that derived from God’s creation and redemption. Contrary to the world in which indigenous peoples lived, all persons and communities of persons had not only rights but a mandate to pursue these rights nonviolently. One should note further that the emergence of indigenous orga-
nizing took place during the so-called third wave of democratization, not in a revolutionary era. Samuel Huntington described this “third wave” as occurring mostly in Latin America, identifying religion as one of its principal causes.14

To show this indirect but powerful ideological influence, one might look first at the Bolivian and Peruvian altiplano, especially the area around Puno, Peru, near Lake Titicaca. Adventists, mostly from the United States, constructed and operated a series of schools for an almost exclusively Indian clientele. Fernando Stahl, a charismatic Adventist leader, was bent on convincing the indigenous people of the region that to empower themselves through education for professional and advanced roles in society, they must lead the communities toward greater health and education. Adventists are a peace-loving group, but Stahl and followers came to see that peace did not mean passivity, ignorance, or tolerating illness. Similarly, Maryknoll and other missionaries in El Quiché, Guatemala, and elsewhere educated large numbers of Indians for roles in society previously open only to mestizos.

Across from Puno in Bolivia, Indians built thousands of elementary schools after the 1952 revolution. Eventually, pushed by Indians, the Bolivian government furnished education to all its citizens at rates that surpassed those in Brazil. Missionaries supplied a vision that education for Indians would lead to a career and a life made better by literacy, basic education, and, for some, advanced education. Missionaries also supplied low-wattage radio stations as part of large networks of radio schools. Hundreds of these stations have operated for decades, and the effect on Indian empowerment is now evident. They contributed to political movements by valuing Indians as persons with distinct and valuable cultures.

Contemporary Indigenous Organizing

In the main, Latin American countries that have large indigenous populations have seen them become uncommonly active in national politics. The first contemporary target strongly challenged by indigenous groups was the five hundredth anniversary (1992) of the arrival of Columbus to Spanish America. As plans for celebrations were taking shape, Latin America’s indigenous groups took the occasion to criticize national leaders for downplaying the harm done to Indian peoples by the conquest.

Much more than dealing with the past was involved. Indigenous groups made clear their demands for contemporary changes in the political and economic structures of their countries. They took aim at the state, making demands for schools and health care and for recognition of their rights, which existed before the state was created.

For the most part, the efforts of indigenous activists were ignored by various governments. This began to change in Mexico when the Zapatistas arose on January 1, 1994. These mostly indigenous activists chose the date on which the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect between Canada, the United States, and Mexico. As Subcomandante Marcos, one of the leaders, told 60 Minutes and many other international media sources, the Zapatista rebellion was aimed at helping indigenous peoples survive in a globalizing world.

Indigenous groups would no longer accept their customary subaltern status. In Guatemala too, and in Peru to a lesser extent, Indians were making demands for recognition of their rights in new ways. Mexican and Guatemalan Mayas, Ecuadoran Quechas, Bolivian Aymaras, and other Indians in the Americas called for a new vision of autonomy in a world of globalization.15

Factors for the indigenous resurgence included the growing integration of the world economy, shifts from industrial production to financial capital as the basis for accumulation of wealth, and diminishing resources devoted to subsistence production throughout the world.

In the midst of this social and economic dislocation, governmental and popular support shifted away from the modernization paradigm of assimilating indigenous into the national society. As state-funded projects aimed at indigenous incorporation gave way to policies of structural adjustment, decentralization, and privatization, indigenous groups were increasingly cut off from traditional modes of promoting their interests and from access to state funding.

Adopting elements of the so-called neoliberal discourse (i.e., one based on free-market capitalism with democracy), indigenous groups focused attention on their long-denied individual

Missionaries contributed to political movements by valuing Indians as persons with distinct and valuable cultures.
has gone in troublesome directions, threatening the stability of the state. “Indigenous political activists have a lot to learn about politics and political prudence,” Juan Bottasso, a Salesian missionary who has had a major influence on Ecuadorian indigenous, observed to the author in private conversation.

In sum, Christian networks and institutions have played a key role in fostering the resurgence of indigenous voices after centuries of silence. Christianity forms a major component of indigenous life and culture, provides resources and motivations for public action, and serves as a transnational link to state and nonstate actors who can advocate for indigenous causes. Christian ideologies provide a groundwork for the framing of issues significant to the movement. Christian institutions enhance the acceptance of positions espoused by the movement, provide social legitimacy, and help ward off repression. Christianity also furnishes narratives for movements, providing a rationale for action and a foundation for collective identities and group solidarity.

Notes


7. The conference gained additional rhetorical force by its receiving funding from the World Council of Churches. The council had been advised by anthropologist Georg Gruneberg from the University of Berne. This apparently solid front of criticism weakened during the 1970s.

8. The second Barbados conference of the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs took place in 1977 and issued a revised declaration signed by Indian representatives and anthropologists.


11. In Resurgent Voices, authors follow the Latin American usage of “evangelical” for describing Protestants.


13. Historical, or mainline, Protestant denominations include Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians. In Latin America, most proselytizing non-Catholic groups are commonly referred to as evangelicals.


Edinburgh 2010—Mission in Humility and Hope

In June 2005 an international consultation hosted by the Scottish “Towards 2010” Council met in Edinburgh to begin preparation for the centenary of the Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference. Two dozen participants from all corners of the globe represented a wide spectrum of missional thought and organization.

The context, understanding, and practice of mission have changed almost beyond recognition in the course of the 100 years since 1910. There was, therefore, agreement upon the need for a thorough historical study, including analysis of global trends, regional/national studies, acknowledgment that mission has been a source of conflict and division among Christians during this period, and an attempt to account for the role of the original Edinburgh 1910 conference in the developments of the twentieth century.

Looking ahead to the twenty-first century, the consultation identified eight research projects, or “Commissions,” as preparation for Edinburgh 2010: (1) Good News to Share!—Inspirations and Foundations for Mission;
Missionaries with Attitude: A Women's Mission in Northwestern China

Linda Benson

Recent research on women in mission service has deepened our understanding of the overall impact of Christian missions in China. At the same time, it has drawn attention to the contributions of thousands of women who, by 1900, comprised some 60 percent of the Protestant missionary presence there. Although women at first played a relatively minor role in the leadership and decision-making processes of most mission societies, their presence was nonetheless vital to the work of all Protestant missions and today is recognized as such.

Context

Despite this recognition, however, there are still relatively few studies of women who were influential or prominent in mission service in comparison with the number of studies chronicling the lives of their male counterparts. The studies that we do have show us the value of focusing on women: their lives were, and are, an intrinsic part of the Christian missionary presence in China. As such, they help us to examine important processes such as conversion, the impact of the social gospel, and historical changes in gender relations, particularly as they relate to the place of women in the Christian church and the missionary impact on China.

For historians of modern China, the examination of Protestant missions also provides perspectives on the process of political change, particularly after China became a republic in 1912. It was my effort to understand the dramatic political shifts in China’s northwestern Xinjiang region during the republican era (1912–49) that first led me to the books of three British women who served with the China Inland Mission (CIM): Mildred Cable and the sisters Evangeline and Francesca French, all of whom spent years in northeastern China. The women’s publications proved valuable because they provided details not found in other sources on village life, trade, and contemporary political figures. Despite my interest in the women, other writing projects intervened, and it was not until several years ago that I decided the time had come to write about the women themselves, in part to understand why they had chosen to travel to the northwestern provinces of China in the 1920s, but also to understand how they had managed to survive the many dangers inherent in such a venture.

Some aspects of the women’s lives were as I had expected, but I also discovered much that I did not anticipate. As missionaries, their purpose in China was to preach the Christian Gospel. But as I soon discovered, these women not only had strong belief in God but also had strong opinions on the issues of their day. As will be seen, their beliefs occasionally placed them at odds with their male colleagues and their mission society. Indeed, as my research on the women progressed, I began to refer to them as “missionaries with attitude,” a rather irreverent way of characterizing the women, who were unwilling to have their views or their abilities dismissed. Ultimately, that strength of character proved essential when, after long years in central China, the three decided to launch a new ministry as itinerant evangelists in the Gobi area of northwestern China. In so doing, they earned themselves a unique place in the history of Christianity in China.

Alice Mildred Cable (who preferred to be called Mildred), Evangeline French (called Eva), and Eva’s younger sister, Francesca, all lived and worked together in China from the late Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) through the years of the early republic. They witnessed the dramatic events of this tumultuous period, from the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 to the Chinese Revolution of 1911 and the founding in 1928 of the Nationalist government under Chiang Kai-shek (or Jiang Jieshi). Their long years of experience in China would later make them models for aspiring missionaries, but they were also complex individuals whose lives reflected their strongly held views on the place of women in Christianity and in mission service in particular. From their earliest years in China through their retirement in England after 1936, they embodied the strength and faith that characterized many women who volunteered for mission service in China.

Early Years in China

The lives of these three women share certain commonalities, yet each one also brought unique qualities and skills to what became a lifelong partnership. Their alliance provided each one with support and friendship, without requiring them to sacrifice their individual personalities. Because Eva French was the first of the women to serve in China, this discussion begins with her and the French household.

In the French sisters’ account of their early lives, there is little to suggest that their parents expected or encouraged them to become missionaries. Eva French (1869–1960) and her younger sister, Francesca (1871–1960), were the daughters of a peripatetic British couple, John and Elizabeth French, who were living in Algeria when Eva was born. The family was visiting in Bruges, Belgium, at the time of Francesca’s birth, but by the time the girls reached school age, they had settled in Geneva, Switzerland. Both sisters thus received much of their education in continental Europe before the family finally moved to England in the late 1880s. After the family resettled at Portsmouth, Eva became active in church activities and felt called to serve as a missionary. This was not what the French family had expected for their daughter, but when faced with Eva’s determination, they acquiesced. After two years of training in London and Liverpool typical of that given to single women candidates of the CIM, she sailed for China, arriving in 1893. In addition to Bible study, the training included work with boys and girls clubs, teaching French at the YWCA, home visitation in Liverpool slums, and a period of medical training. The latter was supposed to last for six months, but Eva became ill after only a month and was excused from having to complete this part of the program.

Eva was sent to Taiyuan, the capital city of Shanxi Province, in northeastern China. Like other single women missionaries with the CIM, her earliest years in China were filled with Chinese lessons, visits to outlying villages, and other duties typically

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assigned to young single women. She had been assigned to work in the small Shanxi town of Pingliao when the Boxer (Chinese Yihetuan) Rebellion erupted. Like so many others, Eva was forced to flee the province as roving bands of Boxers targeted missionaries and their converts. Once safely in Shanghai, she grieved for friends and colleagues who died in that summer of 1900. She left China for a period of home leave to rest and recover, but a year later she chose to return to work in Shanxi.

The year of her return, 1901, was also the year Alice Mildred Cable (1878–1952) first arrived in China. Mildred’s background and education were decidedly British in comparison with the bilingual French sisters, but like them she came from a family that enjoyed a comfortable life provided by her businessman father in the southern town of Guildford. Like the Frenches, her parents did not envision their daughter as a missionary, but they too ultimately accepted Mildred’s decision. She had nearly completed a university degree when she left for China, traveling via the United States. The Boxer Rebellion had just ended, and newly arrived mission volunteers found themselves assigned to stations with a minimum of language training. Mildred was sent to join Eva French, who was working alone at Huozhou, a town in central Shanxi Province. The two women quickly became devoted friends and colleagues. When Eva’s mother died in 1908, the two traveled to England together on furlough. Francesca, who had served as nurse and companion to her mother while Eva was in China, was now free to join them as a missionary, a goal she had long cherished. Thus was formed what became known as the Trio.

They were at the forefront of advocating full inclusion of women in all aspects of Christian religious practice.

In Huozhou, Shanxi Province

At Huozhou the lives of the three women followed a relatively conventional pattern. They taught in the Huozhou girls’ school and, as time permitted, visited homes in nearby villages in rotation. Mildred and Francesca also both worked in the mission dispensary, which was open to all local residents. A less conventional aspect of the mission station was the “opium refuge,” where addicts lived while undergoing a cure. The three women held unequivocally negative views on the British role in the spread of opium, and the refuge was one way in which they, as British subjects, could counter at least some of the impact of the opium trade.

During their years at Huozhou, the Christian congregation expanded, as did the size of the church building; enrollments in the school grew, and the opium refuge continued to attract new patients. By the time of World War I, the church at Huozhou had also made great progress toward the oft-stated goal of “nativization.” Two Chinese pastors served the church, Chinese Christian women taught in the school, and all contributed to outreach programs for neighboring villages.

In a sense, the women’s success contributed to their decision to leave Huozhou. After twenty years, they believed that the mission station should be placed in Chinese hands, and that belief was certainly one factor in their decision. But other forces were also at work. By 1921 they had become acutely aware of what they considered the needs of the great “untouched” areas of China, especially the Muslim northwest. They had heard reports from colleagues at mission conferences about people there who had yet to hear the Christian Gospel, and they also knew that few volunteers had come forward to take up this challenge. They came to believe that they had received a new call, to a new part of China, and as experienced senior missionaries they felt ready to meet the challenge.

Developments outside the mission sphere also contributed to the women’s sense that it was time for a change. Immediately following World War I, British women had increased their call for female equality. By the time Mildred, Eva, and Francesca arrived back in England for home leave after the war, British women not only had gained the right to vote but also had elected the first woman to serve in the British Parliament. Such developments signaled a new era for women, and mission societies soon heard calls for similar changes from their women members. Cable and the French sisters added their voices to the chorus. Not only did they strongly support a female presence on mission governing boards, but they also were at the forefront of advocating the full inclusion of women in all aspects of Christian religious practice. Their views on the proper role of women in the church were not initially shared by the majority of their fellow missionaries, but over the course of their lifetimes the women saw some of the changes they so strongly advocated gain acceptance by mainstream Protestant groups.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the Trio’s decision to begin a new venture as itinerant missionaries ranging across the modern-day Silk Road provinces of Gansu, Qinghai, Inner Mongolia, and Xinjiang drew both criticism and praise. Western China was relatively unknown at the time, and the women’s desire to leave the safety of their Shanxi mission station for the uncertainty of life in the west must have caused great concern to the CIM’s leaders, not all of whom considered such a mission suitable for women. Although archival materials are silent on whether disagreements with male colleagues over women’s place in mission service played a part in their decision to leave Huozhou, the possibility cannot be dismissed. The delay in receiving permission to begin their new ministry (a year elapsed before their request was approved) suggests that at least some members of the CIM leadership weighed the question with great care.

Ultimately, however, the women began their Gobi ministry with the blessing of the CIM. A period of adventure, danger, frustration, and exhilarating experiences began, and it lasted until the women finally left China in 1936. By then, they were well known as seasoned Silk Road travelers, knowledgeable authors and scholars, and, above all, dedicated missionaries with the CIM.

West to Suzhou (Jiuquan), Gansu Province

Initially, the women followed the great trading routes of northern China as they made their way to the northwestern city of Xian and then on to Lanzhou, the capital of Gansu Province. From Lanzhou, they continued west to the town of Ganzhou, where a small church had been established by Dr. Gao, a medical missionary. They remained at Ganzhou initially, but in 1924 they moved further west to Suzhou (now Jiuquan), where they rented premises for a church and housing for themselves. This town remained their base throughout their stay in the northwest, although their itinerations kept them away for long periods. From Suzhou they traveled to small villages and attended fairs, where
they would set up their tent and sell or give away copies of the Gospels. Whenever weather permitted, they traveled extensively in Gansu Province and gradually extended their range to include Tibetan villages in what is now Qinghai Province, Mongol encampments in Gansu and Inner Mongolia, and, eventually, small Muslim towns in eastern and central Xinjiang.

The Trio believed that the Christian message would be welcome among Muslim women because it offered spiritual strength that could liberate them from what the missionaries saw as the oppression of patriarchal Muslim society. Some of the women they met were Chinese Muslims, or Hui, who spoke Chinese and could thus speak directly with the missionaries. Despite their common language, however, few converts from among the Hui are mentioned in their writings. But the northwest was (and is) also home to other Muslim populations, the largest being the Uighurs and the Kazakhs. For work among these people, the women studied Uighur (then called Turki), hiring tutors when they were at their Suzhou base and when they visited Urumchi, the capital of the Xinjiang region. Rather than viewing the need to master yet another language as an obstacle, they willingly set to work learning what they needed to know for their new ministry.

Despite the women’s enthusiasm for the work that lay ahead, they received sharp criticism from unnamed colleagues not long after they had settled at Suzhou. Word had reached the outside world that Eva French had given Communion to the small Suzhou congregation on Christmas Eve of 1924. It was not considered appropriate for women to celebrate Communion, and a colleague had written to remind them of that fact. The women were undeterred. The following year at Easter, Mildred led the Communion service. Clearly the women had decided to act on their convictions that women were equal to men both in mission service and in Christian religious practice.

More generous colleagues, mindful of the women’s isolation and the importance of celebrating Communion at Christmas and Easter, focused instead on the women’s achievements. After all, not only had they volunteered for work few men were willing to undertake, but they also had placed themselves in a region where they were beyond the protection of their government’s consular services, should they have needed them. In fact, not even the possibility of assistance from the Chinese central government existed in Gansu, where local warlords wielded absolute power. Their safety in what became an increasingly unsettled region ultimately depended on the goodwill of the local population. Without it, the women could never have traveled as many miles and for such a long period as they did. As their books and articles make clear, their welcome was sometimes assured by their medical skills, sometimes through their friendships with local women. Although local Muslim leaders occasionally opposed their message and caused them to move on to the next town, their difficulties had more to do with the harsh conditions of the Gobi than with animosity from the local Muslim population.

Their ability to travel in western China is even more remarkable when compared with that of other Europeans who ventured into the region at approximately the same time. The 1920s saw a number of major Gobi expeditions backed by the governments of England, the United States, Sweden, and Germany. As recounted in Peter Hopkirk’s book *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road,* each sought to make archaeological discoveries that would bring fame and renown to its scholars and museum collections. Men like Aurel Stein, Sven Hedin, and Albert von Le Coq traveled the area, often with armed guards and caravan loads of provisions. Eva, Francesca, and Mildred provide an interesting contrast, as they bumped along the tracks of the old Silk Road in their carts, with copies of religious literature and their cart driver. On some of their travels, a few Chinese Christian colleagues joined them, but they remained a small, vulnerable party. Like pioneering figures in other settings, the women accepted the risks and embraced the opportunities that Gobi travel offered them.

The travels of these women provided a strong argument for sending women, as well as men, to work in the northwest of China. As they would make clear in their books and articles, no male missionary, however sincere or well regarded by the local people, could interact with Muslim women as they did. Invitations to women’s quarters allowed the three British women to meet local women in their homes and to visit the same women regularly throughout their time in the northwest. In short, women were vital to the success of any Christian effort in the Muslim regions.

### Literary, Scholarly, and Social Success

Over their years in western China, the Trio came to know the peoples and trade routes well. To share their knowledge of the region and to publicize the need for more volunteers to minister to such a vast area, the women began to write the books that today remain an important part of the Cable and French legacy. On periodic home leaves they in effect began a second ministry through their writing and publishing. These books are also what first brought the three women to the attention of the general public. The Cable and French books were written with grace, wit, and authority, but it was the stories of travel in exotic lands and of the sacrifices this life entailed that brought them growing numbers of admirers and supporters. Like other missionaries on home leave in England, the women often spoke publicly, but because of their books and the strong public interest in China at the time, the women were in almost constant demand as speakers during periods of home leave. They drew enormous audiences whenever they spoke. In fact, their popularity was such that newspaper reporters eagerly interviewed them when they arrived in town, and local papers as well as mission publications published their schedule of speaking engagements well in advance.

The travels of these three women also brought them another form of fame that most missionaries neither aspired to nor had the energy or ability to pursue. They won recognition for their scholarly writing and archaeological discoveries from England’s learned circles; they also received awards from two prestigious royal societies for their knowledge of the Gobi and its peoples. Mildred Cable addressed the membership of several such societies during her furloughs, and articles under her name alone appeared in scholarly journals, establishing her as an authoritative contributor to central Asian studies. By example, they showed countless women—from London to Beijing—that hard work, difficult travel, and scholarly endeavors were not the sole province of men.

Another aspect of the women’s lives not readily apparent...
from their books or other sources is the richness of their extensive social networks. They counted among their friends and correspondents members of leading Mongolian families and high-ranking Chinese officials. At academic gatherings in England, they shared the podium with Sir Denison Ross, an eminent scholar of central Asia, and Sir Francis Younghusband, the British colonel whose 1904 occupation of Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, drew worldwide attention and controversy. During World War II the three received an invitation for tea at Buckingham Palace with the queen, who was among their admirers and a supporter of several societies with which the women were associated. In addition to moving in these exalted circles, the women knew countless people of more humble backgrounds who also belonged to their informal network of friends, acquaintances, colleagues, and admirers. As these connections show, the women did not hide from life or from controversy but embraced every opportunity to learn and to extend themselves intellectually and socially.

As the above comments suggest, the women’s own writings and their public personas have made them very accessible figures. Nonetheless, unanswered questions remain. For example, despite the books detailing their years in China’s northwest, it is still unclear how many Muslims, male or female, became converts as a result of their efforts. The three women apparently did not send in reports to the CIM headquarters in Shanghai, nor did they provide numbers in their books or other writings. Instead, they asserted that their goal was to follow the original vision of James Hudson Taylor, the founder of the CIM. He had called upon his membership to rely on God and to spread the Gospel as widely as possible. The women fully embraced this view and believed that their role was to “scatter the seed” of the Christian message and to leave the final matter of conversion to the Lord. After all, they had limited resources and only a small congregation at Ganzhou to support their efforts. While we know that they made some converts among the Han Chinese, there are few specific references to Muslim converts, so the final tally of such converts remains unknown.

Another example of missing information stems from the women’s decision not to name specific individuals in their books. For instance, neither close colleagues and supporters nor critics of their personal views on women’s roles in mission service are identified. Thus, the origin of the letter taking them to task for celebrating Communion in the Gobi Desert is unknown, as are the identities of women who clearly supported them over the years. By the 1930s, their critics were vastly outnumbered by the legions of supporters attracted by the women’s popular books and engaging public presentations.

By the time the Trio left the northwest of China—and China itself—for the last time in 1936, a brief window of opportunity was closing. The Japanese invasion of China in the summer of 1937 sharply curtailed mission activity. Although the Japanese did not advance into Xinjiang, the provincial warlord Sheng Shicai ordered all missionaries expelled in 1938. It was decades before missionaries were again allowed into Gansu and Xinjiang.

Retirement

Eva, Francesca, and Mildred began yet another phase of their lives when they returned to England and settled in Dorset. They remained actively engaged in Christian organizations and maintained a regular speaking schedule until travel became perilous during World War II. They also spent time with their adopted daughter, Eileen Guy, who had been a child beggar in the streets of Suzhou. Her deafness and the neglect she suffered at the hands of her stepmother had contributed to her learning disabilities, and the women arranged to adopt her while still living in Suzhou. In England they engaged a tutor for her, and as a result, she learned to read and write. Eva took primary responsibility for her care when Francesca and Mildred were working or traveling.

When World War II finally ended, the women accepted invitations to travel abroad. They visited Australia, New Zealand, India, and later Latin America. Admiring crowds welcomed them wherever they appeared. It was after their last international sojourn, to Latin America, that Mildred Cable’s health declined. She died in 1952, breaking what the women saw as the “threefold cord” that had bound their lives together. The French sisters each passed away in 1960 within months of each other.

Of all the labels by which the Trio might be known—authors, scholars, Silk Road travelers—they themselves no doubt would wish to be remembered first and foremost as pioneering missionaries who brought the Christian message not just to the people of China but especially to China’s Muslims. Throughout their time in China, they remained loyal, if not always submissive, members of one of the oldest mission societies in China, and there is no question that they deeply admired the vision of James Hudson Taylor. At the same time, they also embraced and supported the work of other Christian organizations as evidenced by their activities after leaving China. Mildred became a vice president of the British and Foreign Bible Society, a position which carried no salary but which was, in effect, a full time job; Eva was named a vice president of the Zenana and Bible Medical Mission (serving women in India); and Francesca served as president of the Girl Crusaders Union and was also named an honorary life governor of the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1945. The women’s renown also reached beyond mission circles. Their books on the Gobi Desert and western China became best sellers in their day and remain an important contribution to the history of the region.

The accomplishments of the Trio set them apart from other women in mission service who did not have the same opportunities for education and travel that these three enjoyed as a result of their affluent backgrounds. Their intellectual curiosity, their remarkable writing ability, and their careers as authors and public speakers also served to distinguish them from others in their generation of missionaries. These gifts, as Mildred called them, also allowed the three to speak out for changes in mission service for women. Through the example of their own lives and careers, they came to symbolize the full development of women’s potential in the work of spreading Christianity in China.

Notes

1. The following brief introduction to the women is drawn from a book manuscript currently in preparation and tentatively entitled “Across China’s Gobi” (White Plains, N.Y.: EastBridge, forthcoming).
5. See especially Mildred Cable and Francesca French, Ambassadors for Christ (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1935), and also references in Cable and French, Through Jade Gate and Central Asia (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1927).
6. Of their twenty-plus books, Mildred Cable’s Gobi Desert, which first
Peoples On the Move
Introducing the Nomads of the World
David J. Phillips
Nomads - they inhabit every continent yet have “no abiding city.” Always on the move, they are often “invisible,” unreached, despised and easily forgotten by settled citizens. This is the most comprehensive source of information on all the nomadic peoples of the world and includes maps, black and white photographs, people profiles and bibliographic data.

Church Multiplication Guide
The Miracle of Church Reproduction
George Patterson & Richard Scoggins
This book is very practical in addressing the areas of church multiplication and reproduction from ten points of view in response to Jesus’ command. “As our teams apply the Biblical principles explained in these pages we see fruit: disciples are made, churches are born and multiply.”

Churchless Christianity
(Revised Edition)
Herbert Hoefer
The purpose of this book is to describe a fact and reflect upon it theologically. The fact is that there are thousands of people who believe solely in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior but who have no plans to take baptism or join the Church. Churchless Christianity is based on research from the early 1980s among non-baptized believers in Christ in Tamilnadu, India. This revised edition includes all the original text plus five additional chapters and a new foreword.

Searching for the Indigenous Church
A Missionary Pilgrimage
Gene Daniels
From the Foreword: “The central goal in missions is the establishment of strong, growing indigenous churches. Gene Daniels addresses that crucial subject in the pages of this remarkable book. “Many books have been written about the problems associated with crossing into another culture. Most of them are helpful, indeed valuable, but they do not quite prepare the reader for his or her actual arrival in a cross-cultural setting. No matter how much we have read about the need to remove our culturally tinted glasses and see things from the perspective of another culture, most of us have difficulty doing so. The main reason for this is that we don’t even recognize we are wearing such glasses. Gene Daniels makes us aware of our cultural glasses more effectively than any author I know. For this reason alone I believe his book is must reading for anyone contemplating missionary service.”

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Works by Mildred Cable

Works by Mildred Cable and Francesca French

Work by Mildred Cable, Evangeline French, and Francesca French

Works About Mildred Cable

Work About Mildred Cable, Evangeline French, and Francesca French

Researching World Christianity: Doctoral Dissertations on Mission Since 1900

Eric Friede and Paul F. Stuehrenberg

In July 1983 the International Bulletin of Missionary Research published a compilation prepared by E. Theodore Bachmann of 934 American doctoral dissertations on missions for degrees granted between 1945 and 1981. In July 1993 William A. Smalley prepared a ten-year update that listed an additional 512 North American dissertations. Stanley H. Skreslet compiled the next decennial supplement in July 2003, listing an additional 925 dissertations. The geographical coverage of this third survey was expanded to include English-language dissertations from all over the world.1

During the past fifteen months, Yale Divinity School Library staff, under the direction of the authors and in conjunction with the Overseas Ministries Study Center, have compiled an electronic database that incorporates all 2,371 titles identified in the previous compilations, as well as 2,822 others—a total of 5,193 doctoral dissertations. The scope of the present listing has been further expanded in several ways. First, like the most recent compilation, it includes English-language doctoral dissertations from all over the world. Second, rather than focusing narrowly on missions, it also includes dissertations dealing with Christianity outside the West. Excluded are dissertations about Christianity in Europe, Australasia, and North America, with the exception of those treating aboriginal missions in those areas. Third, it expands the chronological scope to include dissertations presented since 1900 (see table 2), which makes clear the amazing increase in interest in missions on the part of the academic community over the past century.

Fourth, unlike the earlier compilations, which were limited to “research” doctorates, understood to include the Th.D. and the Ph.D., the present compilation includes all doctoral-level dissertations and theses that we could identify, including the D.Miss.

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<th>Table 1. Degrees Granted, by Country</th>
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<th>Table 2. Degrees Granted, by Date</th>
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<td>1895–1900</td>
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1. Dissertations prior to 1900, if found, are included in the database.

Eric Friede is Monographs Librarian at Yale Divinity School Library. Paul F. Stuehrenberg is Divinity Librarian at Yale Divinity School Library.
and D.Min. degrees (see table 3). Finally, we consulted many more sources to identify theses and dissertations than did the predecessor compilations, including Web sites and published bibliographies. These various expansions of coverage led to our total of 5,193 dissertations on mission.

<table>
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<th>Table 3. Type of Degree Granted</th>
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<td>Ph.D.</td>
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<td>D.Min.</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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1. Twenty different degrees, each with 1-8 dissertations.

This compilation will be available to current and new IBMR subscribers without charge as an online searchable database starting October 15 and on a CD-ROM upon request for subscribers who do not have access to the Internet. Subscribers will be able to access the database by visiting www.OMSC.org/ibmr.html and using their subscriber account number. The database will include a bibliography of sources consulted. This method of distribution makes appropriate use of the technology available and makes the database user-friendly and flexible.

The database includes dissertations from 467 different institutions. The top twenty-five institutions are listed in table 4. It is significant to note that the vast majority of dissertations from Fuller Theological Seminary and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School were completed after 1970. It is also interesting to note the number of English-language dissertations produced at institutions located in countries whose primary language is not English. Some of these are the result, as in the case of the Scandinavian countries, of the fact that scholarship is often done in English, French, or German rather than the language of the country itself. In addition, students from Asia and Africa often prefer to use English as their language of scholarship, which accounts for many of the English-language dissertations from the pontifical universities, for example.

The present release of this database must be considered to be preliminary. For one thing, all the available bibliographies have not yet been searched. Furthermore, conversion of the subject headings to a standard form has not yet been completed. Key words in the subject field, added when the data were entered, were often derived from the abstract of the dissertation. The work of converting those key words into Library of Congress subject headings should be completed over the coming months. But even then the database will still be a work in progress, requiring updating on a regular basis as older dissertations are identified and new dissertations are completed.

It should be emphasized that this compilation is derived from the work of others. The compilers of this database have not physically seen all the dissertations listed. Undoubtedly, dissertations only marginally related to missions and non-Western Christianity have been included, simply because of their title. Conversely, dissertations that should have appeared have no doubt been missed for similar reasons. And there will inevitably be errors in this compilation, some because of incorrect information in the sources we consulted, others from errors in transcribing the data. There were also occasional inconsistencies of information between different sources. We invite readers and users to submit information regarding corrections and additions to the database. It will be greatly appreciated and will ensure a greater level of accuracy and comprehensiveness in future updates.

<table>
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<th>Table 4. Institutions Granting the Most Degrees: The Top Twenty-five</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fuller Theological Seminary</td>
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<td>Pontifical Urban University</td>
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<td>Hartford Seminary Foundation</td>
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<td>Temple University</td>
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<td>Graduate Theological Union</td>
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<td>Pontifical Gregorian University</td>
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1. Includes Hartford Seminary.

Finally, a note on availability. Some dissertations, especially those from abroad, can be difficult to obtain. Over the years, Yale Divinity School Library has routinely attempted to acquire missions-related dissertations, a commitment that will continue, regardless of the language of the dissertation. Scholars are welcome to come to New Haven to use dissertations along with the other resources of the Day Missions Collection. Or scholars can ask to borrow dissertations through their institution’s interlibrary loan department, whether held at Yale or another lending institution. Alternatively, the Center for Research Libraries routinely collects foreign dissertations. They hold more than 750,000 dissertations, of which only about 20,000 are cataloged. For titles not held in libraries that will lend them, the last resort is to contact the library of the institution granting the degree and request that a copy be made.

Notes

1. The work of the three student assistants who did most of the hard work to make this database a reality is acknowledged with gratitude: Dionis Gauvin, San Yi (Shirley) Lin, and Nungshitura Jamir, all students at Yale Divinity School. Their work was made possible by a grant from the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia to the Overseas Ministries Study Center. The support of Jonathan Bonk and OMSC, first for proposing the idea of the database and then for providing the funding for student assistants, must also be recognized. Finally, without the technical support of George Ouellette of Yale University Integrated Library Technology Services, this project would not have been possible.

2. Submit corrections by e-mail to dissertations@OMSC.org.

3. A useful Web site for locating dissertations is www-sul.stanford.edu/depts/ssrg/africa/theses.html, which has a particular focus on Africa. For holdings of the Center for Research Libraries, see www.crl.edu/content.asp?l1=5&l2=22&l3=39&top=11.

Tormod Engelsviken

Editor’s note: Tormod Engelsviken was elected to the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) as an evangelical representative after the Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1998. Most of his work and interest in the area of mission and ecumenism has been within the evangelical and charismatic movements in Norway and internationally. He was a member of the Lausanne Theology Working Group from 1985 to 2000 and has been an associate of the Mission Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance since 2001 and a member of the task force of the Great Commission Roundtable since 2000. He has written extensively about the ecumenical mission movements, both evangelical and conciliar, from an evangelical perspective, trying to outline differences and convergences within both a historical and a missiological framework. He admits that he participated in the CWME with high expectations—and some apprehension. Having kindly agreed to serve as the editors’ eyes and ears for this important event, he presents the following report.

For the first time in modern history a major ecumenical mission conference was convened in a predominantly Eastern Orthodox country. In some Orthodox circles mission has been associated with proselytism, and ecumenism with heresy. The fact that the Athens local committee was composed of Orthodox, Catholic, and evangelical representatives may well indicate a breakthrough in ecumenical relations, given that inter-church relations in Greece have historically been less than amicable, to say the least.

While the theme of the conference was a pneumatological prayer (“Come Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile”), the accompanying subtitle set the prayer in a Christological context (“Called in Christ to Be Healing and Reconciling Communities”). The main theme was spoken and sung on numerous occasions before and during the conference, and I believe that this appeal to the Holy Spirit, this epiclesis, was answered by God.

A Wider Constituency

To properly understand the working of the CWME and the conference, we must realize that the CWME has a wider constituency than the WCC itself. As heir to the International Missionary Council, which was integrated into the WCC at the New Delhi Assembly in 1961, the CWME is made up of representatives of WCC member churches and of so-called affiliated bodies. The commission thus includes representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, the evangelicals, and the Pentecostals, all of whom are full members of the commission, having the same rights and responsibilities as the others.

Although there have been disagreements and even tensions within the CWME, with commissioners coming from widely different ecclesial and theological backgrounds, evangelicals—and I believe also other representatives of the “wider constituency”—have felt themselves neither marginalized nor patronized as a “token” presence. Discussions and decisions both in the commission and in the conference itself were characterized by respect for different views and a sensitive striving for consensus in which no one felt personally alienated, condemned, or ignored.

Credit for this atmosphere of respect and cooperation must, humanly speaking, primarily go to the very able moderator, British Baptist pastor Ruth Bottoms, and to the two leading staff persons in the WCC office in Geneva, Jacques Matthey, from Switzerland, and Carlos Ham, from Cuba. They refrained from promoting personal agendas and from pressuring the commission and the conference, choosing rather to facilitate the work of the commission and carry out its decisions. They set the tone for the commission.

A Spiritual Experience

One of the explicit aims of the conference was that it should be a spiritual experience for the participants, in which reconciliation and healing went beyond theological or intellectual concepts to become an experiential reality. Accordingly, special healing services, counselors, and opportunities for reconciliation were arranged. While relatively few participants took advantage of these opportunities, most of the participants were spiritually moved by the conference. The emphasis on “home groups,” in which six to ten participants met regularly each evening for reflection on the day’s program and in the morning for Bible reading, sharing, and prayer, greatly facilitated interpersonal discussion, counseling, caring, and praying. For many participants these groups were the most vital element of the conference.

Worship sessions ranged across ecclesial traditions, from Orthodox to Pentecostal. Although the Pentecostal session may not have been as fully representative of Pentecostalism as some would have liked, the fact that an Orthodox priest pronounced the blessing at the end of it was indicative of a new hope for a rapprochement between Pentecostal and Orthodox believers (see more below).

The Plenaries

The fact that this conference deliberately avoided the adoption of statements or resolutions took pressure off conference delegates, allowing plenary sessions to deal with issues relevant to the theme of the conference. Delegates could listen to lectures, reports, testimonies, and panel discussions from a variety of perspectives without having to take a formal stand on a given issue.

The plenaries represented a broad perspective and varied widely in both form and content. They took seriously the “wider constituency,” giving voice to people and groups who have not so far been heard clearly enough in the WCC, such as evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Catholics. For this writer three speeches stood out.

First, Kirsteen Kim from Great Britain spoke on the
pneumatological topic “How Do We Know When the Holy Spirit Comes? The Question of Discernment.” She proposed four biblical criteria of discernment: ecclesiastically, the confession of Jesus as Lord; ethically, the evidence of the fruit of the Spirit; charismatically, the practice of the gifts of the Spirit; and liberally, taking the side of the poor. Other delegates added an ecological criterion, stressing the integrity of creation in light of the Spirit’s creative and life-giving work in the whole of the cosmos. Second, Wonsuk Ma, a Pentecostal theologian from South Korea presently working in the Philippines, spoke on the topic “The Role of Pneumatology in Pentecostal-Charismatic Mission,” highlighting the importance in today’s mission of Pentecostal-charismatic and non-Western churches. He concluded with a passionate plea for mutuality in the relationship between historic churches, with their “rich histories and traditions,” and the new movement, reminding God’s people of “his missionary mandate to the world.”

Third, Robert Schreiter, professor of Vatican II Theology at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, compellingly presented reconciliation as the missionary task of the church. His emphasis on the ministry of reconciliation between people (“horizontal reconciliation”) clearly presupposed reconciliation with God (“vertical reconciliation”), accomplished through the church’s sacraments. Schreiter is clearly emerging as a dominant voice in contemporary missiology.

There was, however, a certain disappointment, especially in evangelical circles, that no significant attention was devoted to “vertical reconciliation.” The ministry of reconciliation with God was simply assumed. A group of British missiologists representing the Churches’ Commission on Mission raised this concern in a letter to the moderator in which they stated: “How will it [the WCC through the CWME] strengthen the Churches’ Commission on Mission raised this concern in

The plenaries took seriously the “wider constituency,” giving voice to people and groups who have so far been heard clearly enough in the WCC.

The Synaxeis

The synaxeis were forums offering participants an opportunity to present important issues related to the conference theme. Since the number of synaxeis made it impossible for anybody to attend all of them, the delegates experienced rather different conferences, depending on their individual choice of synaxeis.

The two sessions presenting and discussing the prepared document, “Religious Plurality and Christian Self-understanding,” stirred the most debate. The somewhat controversial document, which had not been seen by the CWME before the conference, proposed hospitality as the essential element in a theology of religions that would address the challenge of religious plurality. Although the paper did not neatly fit into any preconceived category of theology of religion, evangelicals viewed it with some suspicion as possibly another expression of a pluralistic theology. The question of salvific divine revelation through Christ or the Spirit in non-Christian religions continues to be one of the most controversial issues within the ecumenical mission movement. Although the San Antonio 1989 declaration “We cannot point to any other way of salvation than Jesus Christ; at the same time we cannot set limits to the saving power of God” still seems to be the theological standard to which most adhere, for many this statement does not go far enough.

From an evangelical, and indeed a world Christian, point of view, there is a strange reluctance within leading ecumenical mission circles to courageously and humbly witness to Jesus Christ as the only Savior, and to accept confrontation with other religions when this confession is denied. Some wonder why the ecumenical movement’s unapologetic application of ethical and political standards in its confrontation with economic and political evil and injustice is not reflected in equal measure in its application of biblical theological standards to evil or untruth in the religious realm.

For this writer, the synaxis on Orthodox-Pentecostal relations was the most deeply moving part of the whole conference. Orthodox churches were represented by Professor Petros Vassiliades, from Greece, and the vice-moderator of the CWME, George Mathew, from India. Vassiliades maintained that these two theological traditions, which “at first glance seem to occupy the extreme ends of the Christian spectrum,” actually share much in common, including terminology. Both are deeply engaged by pneumatology and by the liturgical expression of witness (although the liturgies may be quite different), and both have a holistic understanding of mission and healing. Vassiliades’ invitation to dialogue was taken up by three relatively young Pentecostal/charismatic mission scholars: Joshua Young Gi Hong (South Korea), Chris Gnanakan (South India), and Opoku Onyinah (Ghana). At the end of the discussion the moderator was able to pinpoint at least eleven areas of common concern—including Trinitarian theology, Christian initiation, and spirituality and mission—that could serve as a basis for ongoing dialogue. A number of those who participated in this synaxis felt that this was an unprecedented opportunity for embarking on a
dialogue that could be of profound significance both to the traditions themselves and to world Christianity as a whole.

The Preparatory Documents

Strangely, the two official CWME papers published immediately before the conference (together with three other important ecumenical mission documents) received little attention at the conference itself. Perhaps when the Athens conference is later analyzed missiologically, these articles will receive the attention they deserve. “Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation” is an example of a consensus document in which the several groups in the “wider constituency” were given space for their concerns. Orthodox, Roman Catholic, mainline Protestant, evangelical, and Pentecostal concerns are represented. It is notable that the document clearly expresses the classical Christian view of reconciliation with God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as well as the need for proclamation of this reconciliation: “Based on the reconciliation effected in Christ’s death and resurrection and on God’s behalf, the church challenges and invites all people to be reconciled with God (2 Cor. 5:18–21). This offer of reconciliation is received and becomes a personal reality through faith (Eph. 2:8).”

Conclusion and a Look Ahead

Athens 2005 was in many ways an experiment. The consensus principle resulted in a conference message that was unanimously adopted by the CWME subsequent to the conference, reflecting what took place at the conference without challenging any particular position or tradition. The unique contribution to missiology was the pneumatological emphasis, combined with a comprehensive understanding of healing and reconciliation. Participation of the “wider constituency” and active cooperation of Roman Catholics, evangelicals, and Pentecostals augurs a more open ecumenical mission movement in which one can come, pray, sing, walk, and talk together (without necessarily agreeing), thus manifesting the unity of the body of Christ.

The next major crossroad will be the centenary of the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference. Perhaps then a primary common focus, across missiological and ecclesial divides, will be the proclamation of the Gospel of salvation in word and deed to a world in need.

Notes


A Letter from Athens to the Christian Churches, Networks, and Communities

Come Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile—
Called in Christ to Be Reconciling and Healing Communities

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Greetings from Athens, Greece. We write to you during the holy time between Easter and Pentecost, when the risen Christ prepared his followers for the gift of the Holy Spirit and called them to carry the Good News to “the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8), promising to be with them until “the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). Here, on the shores of the Aegean Sea, 600 of us have gathered, from 105 countries, hosted by the Church of Greece and other churches in Greece, and called together by the World Council of Churches for the 13th International Conference on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME), meeting May 9–16, 2005. And as the sun rose on the conference, a small boat sailed out of the dawn, carrying a huge olive-wood cross: a gift from the churches in Jerusalem, a sign of both suffering and hope, made from the fragments of the trees uprooted during the building of the wall separating Palestinians from Palestinians and from Israelis. We pray that this cross become a sign of reconciliation.

For the first time, this CWME conference has taken place in a predominantly Orthodox context. Young people, though far fewer than planned, have played an important part. For the first time the meeting included a significant number of fully participating delegates from non-WCC member churches, that is, the Roman Catholic Church and some Pentecostal and evangelical churches and networks. “We,” therefore, are a diverse group, from every corner of the world and many ethnic and cultural backgrounds, speaking many languages, and representing the major Christian traditions. Our theme is a prayer: “Come Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile.”

This letter is an attempt to share with you some of the week’s insights and challenges, as well as the experiences of joy and pain it has brought us. In these days, we have journeyed together, although we have not always agreed. We are in mission, all of us, because we participate in the mission of God, who has sent us into a fragmented and broken world. We are united in the belief that we are “called together in Christ to be reconciling and healing communities.” We have prayed together. We have been
particularly helped by readings of Scripture as we struggled, together, to discern where the reconciling, healing Spirit is leading us, in our own contexts, two thousand years after St. Paul arrived on these shores carrying the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We want to share that journey with you, and to invite you to make it your own.

We stand now at a particular moment in the history of mission. While the centers of power are still predominantly in the global North, it is in the South and the East that the churches are growing most rapidly, as a result of faithful Christian mission and witness. The missional character of the church is experienced in greater diversity than ever, as the Christian communities continue the search for distinctive responses to the Gospel. This diversity is challenging, and it can sometimes make us uneasy. Nevertheless, within it we have discovered opportunities for a deepening understanding of the Holy Spirit’s creative, life-sustaining, healing, and reconciling work. For the power of the Holy Spirit touches us in many ways: in gentleness and truth, comfort and creativity, worship and action, wisdom and innocence, communion and sanctification, liberation and holy contemplation. But there are evil spirits too, active in the world and sadly even in many of our histories and communities. These are spirits of violence, oppression, exclusion, division, corruption, self-seeking, ignorance, failure to live up to our beliefs, and fearful silence in the face of injustice. In discerning the work of the Holy Spirit, we have experienced the need to return constantly to the roots of our faith, confessing the triune God, revealed to us in Jesus Christ, the Word-made-flesh.

In Athens we were deeply aware of the new challenges that come from the need for reconciliation between East and West, North and South, and between Christians and people of other faiths. We have become painfully aware of the mistakes of the past and pray that we may learn from them. We have become conscious of our own tendency to reinforce barriers by excluding and marginalizing on grounds such as race, caste, gender, or disability or by tolerating the continuation of oppressive practices within our own societies and our own churches. Halfway through the Decade to Overcome Violence, we realize anew that the call to nonviolence and reconciliation stands at the heart of the gospel message. As a global gathering, we are challenged by the violence inflicted by the forces of economic globalization and militarism and by the plight of the marginalized people, especially the indigenous communities and peoples uprooted by migration.

St. Paul speaks of the new creation heralded by Christ and enabled by the Holy Spirit. “In Christ,” he says, “God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:19–20). It is this “new creation” that we hold to be the goal of our missionary endeavor. With Paul, we believe that reconciliation and healing are pivotal to the process by which that goal is to be reached. Reconciliation, as the restoration of right relations with God, is the source of reconciliation with oneself, with other people, and with the whole of creation.

But the road to reconciliation and healing is not an easy one. It involves listening, truth-telling, repentance, forgiveness, and a sincere commitment to Christ and his justice. For this reason, we have explored a range of ways by which the healing power of God is made available to us. These include the healing that takes place through prayer, ascetical practices, and the charisms of healing; through sacraments and healing services; through a combination of medical and spiritual, social and systemic approaches; and through sensing the sustaining presence of the Holy Spirit, even when we accept and continue to struggle with illness and traumas. We celebrated healing services and were moved by the stories of Christian health and counseling professionals and their struggle for more holistic approaches. We were inspired by the stories of people living with HIV and AIDS and were challenged to counter stigma and discrimination and to promote wholeness for those living with HIV and AIDS. We heard testimonies of people healed by the power of the Holy Spirit, as well as those who have not been healed or have encountered corrupt or exploitative healing practices. We also heard stories of healing in the midst of struggles for social, economic, and ecological justice. All true healing comes from God. It includes physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual healing, and it shares the tension of the coming of God’s reign as “already here” and “yet to come.” We therefore celebrate true healing as a living sign of God’s new creation.

Living in the Holy Spirit, anticipating the reign of God, called to be children of God’s new creation, we have also to acknowledge the troubled and confusing present. It is a source of pain to us to recognize that God’s mission is distorted by the divisions and lack of understanding that persists in and among the churches. In our longing for a fuller and more authentic participation in God’s mission, we continue to carry the pain of our inability to overcome the barriers that prevent us from celebrating together the most healing and reconciling of sacraments, the Eucharist—the Lord’s Supper. The conference theme, therefore, has been a call to a humble acceptance of our own need for healing and reconciliation.

But God calls us to be a community of hope. “Called in Christ to be reconciling and healing communities,” we have continued here in Athens the task of defining the kind of community God desires us to become, a community that bears witness to the Gospel in word and deed, that is alive in worship and learning, that proclaims the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all, that offers young people leadership roles, that opens its doors to strangers and welcomes the marginalized within its own body, that engages with those who suffer and with those who struggle for justice and peace, that provides services to all who are in need, that recognizes its own vulnerability and need for healing, and that is faithful in its commitment to the wider creation. We pray that the Holy Spirit will breathe healing power into our lives and that together we may move forward into the blessed peace of the new creation.

In conclusion, we wish to express our deep gratitude to all those who made this conference possible. From the country in which St. Paul proclaimed the Gospel of God’s reconciling love in Jesus Christ, we pray that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all.

—Conference on World Mission and Evangelism

Athens, May 18, 2005
My Pilgrimage in Mission

Charles C. West

What does it mean to be a pilgrim? For a Christian it is a special journey, not to some shrine where God fulfills our longings, but toward the realm whose foundation is Christ, who judges and redeems this world. But a lot depends on where one starts, which in my case was childhood in the secular suburbs of New York. Born in 1921, I bear the name of my grandfather, a pious church deacon and stockbroker; my parents, though, rejected his religion. Books by John Dewey, Bertrand Russell, Sinclair Lewis, and other critics of Christianity lined the shelves in our living room. The local church was just three doors from our house, but we never went there. The atmosphere we breathed was confidence in human goodness. We were humanists. Our world, inspired by great teachers of the past, including Jesus to be sure, was growing by human creativity and democratic practice into higher, more progressive ways of life. So I learned at home. So I was taught in school.

Poverty and Hope

Then came the Great Depression. Everything collapsed. My namesake grandfather fell from millionaire to penniless dweller in a big old house he could not sell. My father, an engineer-salesman, lost his salary. It was so everywhere in the world around us. The haunting melodies of the times reflected it: “Once I had a good job; now it’s gone. Brother can you spare a dime?”

But something else happened too. We all collapsed together. The fabric of our balloon lay there on the ground still intact. There was no rental market, so our landlord let us stay in our house just for upkeep. We discovered how dependent we were on one another, and on those other people—workers and their labor unions, African-Americans in their ghettos, sharecropping farmers, and the poor everywhere—whose plight we so nearly shared.

We were ready for Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal. It burst upon us like an epiphany. Suddenly we were all working together to rebuild the country. Our town, like many others, held a parade under the blue eagle of the National Recovery Act, the NRA. Struggling farmers were helped by the Agricultural Adjustment Act, the AAA. Workers gained the right to bargain collectively by the National Labor Relations Act, the NLRA. Millions of unemployed were given work by the Works Progress Administration, the WPA. Even the rich tycoons of Wall Street welcomed, and we learned from people who knew something of the way Christ accepts, judging, and transforming us all.

Conversion in the City

How, then, does one move from humanism to Christ? Through the witness of prophets, evangelists, and the community of believers, of course. But let me be more specific. In 1938 I entered the undergraduate College of Columbia University in New York City, a brash but fragile idealist, with a firm intention to reform the world through some form of public service. Then, as freshmen, a year’s course led us through the great writings of Western history. Week by week we read Plato, Aristotle, Lucretius the Epicurean, Marcus Aurelius the Stoic, Augustine, Dante, Descartes, Spinoza, Rousseau, and Goethe, to name only those I remember. They, with all their varied messages, were my first prophets, projected against the awful background of world events, which included Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, the failure of the League of Nations, and the growing threat of war. Gone was the shallow hope that by human effort, justice and peace would prevail. I was left with a basic question: what is the ultimate reality underlying all this philosophy and these events? What power, what guiding truth in a world of dictatorship and war, could be worthy of complete trust and loyalty? If this reality is named God, who is God? How can I search and find out, and how can I test this knowledge? This quest became my priority. It led me to the place on campus where God was central, the Student Christian Movement (SCM).

There the community of believers, with the evangelists and prophets among them, did their work. Quite simply, they placed me in the context of the grace of God in the face of Jesus Christ. They made me realize that the world—the vast world of learning, including all those scientists and humanist scholars at Columbia and elsewhere, the world of capitalism with its wealthy exploiters, of Communism with its high ideals and brutal reality, of Nazism, and of war—is in the hands of this God, its Judge and its Redeemer. It was both a social and an intensely personal discovery. My self-confidence broke down. I was left through most of a year feeling exhausted, worthless, judged by my own ideals and by the challenge of the Gospel. But the SCM was a community that drew in people like me who were arguing, challenging, testing, and throwing their raw personalities against colleagues, against the church, and against God. We were accepted and welcomed, and we learned from people who knew something of the way Christ accepts, judges, and transforms us all.

So we lived by the mediated grace of God as we learned from, argued, and also worshiped with, the Bible. It was not easy. To read the Gospels for the first time, as I did in this context, was a strange experience. Who is this Jesus who claims so much authority? Is the Sermon on the Mount realistic? Those parables of the kingdom, what can one make of them in this world? Easter, the Victory of a Lost Cause was the title of an issue of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) journal Student World. What on earth could that mean?

But we were not alone with our questions. Not only our local counselors helped but also Christian leaders from the world around us. To name a few: Jim Robinson, who came from Harlem and led us into Christian faith through the experience of blacks; Reinhold Niebuhr, who came from Union Seminary across the street and rooted our struggle for social justice in the judgment and grace of God, beyond our self-righteous liberal ideals; Robert...
Mackie, the matter-of-fact saint who was then general secretary of the WSCF, who came from Geneva and shared with us of the faith, the suffering, and the witness of Christian students in places like Germany, England, Russia, Norway, Latvia, and China, whose struggle, in those war years, was so much deeper and more intense than ours.

So I became, through the Student Christian Movement, an ecumenical Christian, a minister, and a missionary. It was all one conversion. If the Christian Gospel was true, if the hope of the world was really in the reign of Christ, then it demanded a life commitment. It meant not only to be a member but to serve the church full-time. It meant not just to cultivate the religion of the faithful but to bring the message to a nonbelieving world. Thus began the pilgrimage. It has had many stages. Each one has given it new direction.

**Learning to Believe**

First, there was the theological journey at Union Theological Seminary in New York, where I went after college, in dialogue with other philosophies and worldviews along the way. The prophets and evangelists were David Roberts, who showed how truth can be revealed and how a philosopher can believe; Reinhold Niebuhr, who taught us the humility of forgiven sinners as we struggled, judged and inspired by Christ, for a relative justice in the world; John Bennett, the gentle ethicist who guided us all in Christian discernment; Henry Sloane Coffin, our rough and kindly pastor president, and many others. Union Seminary in those years was a center of Christian reflection and action in mission (though we didn’t use that word) to the world of naturalist philosophy and secular worldviews at Columbia, to the world of politics and economic power in the nation, and to the world overseas, whose churches were forming the ecumenical movement in the shadow of Fascism, Communism, and the struggle of World War II. There, and later in doctoral studies at Yale under the guidance of H. Richard Niebuhr, I learned to study history, philosophy, politics, and all else that came into view—including Communism, that great alternative faith and its Marxist-Leninist doctrine—with what I would now call a missiological mind. How is the God whom we know in the biblical story and in the coming of Christ at work in the whole of this world, past and present, in the world of ideas and in the world of events? How can I be a servant and a witness?

I should have known that this can be an intimate personal question as well as a social one. But I soon learned. Ruth Carson, who became my wife, was the daughter of missionaries. We met in the same Student Christian Association where I had earlier learned faith. We married and became parents while we still were students. She has been, all our lives, my deepest lasting faith. We left China in 1950, humbled, with a searching question: what is the Gospel, what is the form of Christian mission, as in the years since, praise God, they have. We left China in 1950, humbled, with a searching question: what is the Gospel, what is the form of Christian mission, to a world in which both the overwhelming power and the moral challenge is the ideology of Marx, Lenin, and Mao? With this question we moved to the next stage in our pilgrimage as ecumenical fraternal workers with the church in Germany.

**East Germany: The Challenge of Communism**

In the years after the Nazi nightmare, Germany was a land, and also a church, in upheaval and change. Berlin, to which we went in 1951 after a year in a mission to industrial workers in Mainz, was a city between East and West. The Russian-occupied east zone that surrounded it was being changed by Soviet power and Marxist-Leninist ideology into a new and alien society. Christians, already chastened and renewed by the Confessing Church’s resistance to Nazism, were discovering their mission in that encounter. So we participated vicariously for two years in the life and witness of the Evangelical (Lutheran, Reformed, and Moravian) Church in Communist East Germany, especially the part of it that lived and breathed the theology of the Word of God, nourished by the Bible, Martin Luther, and Karl Barth.

So I became an ecumenical Christian, a minister, and a missionary. It was all one conversion.
From these fellow Christians we learned what it really means that Christ, not Communism and not the Western “free world,” is central to all reality, personal and social. We learned the power of a sinful but often church’s witness to Christ’s judging and transforming presence in every situation: in school under atheist teachers, in workplaces and neighborhoods infiltrated with police informers, in the coercion of public meetings, and in prison facing Communist interrogators. We learned what freedom means in Christ: freedom from both fear and hate toward enemies, freedom to speak the truth to power, freedom to take responsibility in an unfree society, freedom to minister in God’s name to victims and to their oppressors. In short, we learned how Christian faith is lived in what one of our friends and mentors there called “God’s beloved East Zone.”

Back in the United States, I walked into the dean’s office at Yale to discuss a dissertation topic. “West,” he said to me, “choose a subject a thousand miles from your experience. That way you will get the job done.” I did not follow his advice. I wrote on recent theological encounters with Communism. For two years I plunged into six different worlds of thought and action, often in conflict with one another. Anti-Communism was one, the crusade against an atheist worldview and a totalitarian system. Acceptance of Communism was a second, as the judgment of God on the injustices and idolatries of Western civilization. Nicholas Berdyaev, a Russian Orthodox philosopher who lived through the revolution in his country, was third. There followed the German religious socialism of Paul Tillich, the American Christian realism of Reinhold Niebuhr, and finally the powerful theological influence of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth. Much of this work (without Berdyaev) was published as Communism and the Theologians in 1958. It was a student’s participation in an evangelical, ecumenical, missiological adventure.

It was also a prelude. All the time we were in Berlin, we were aware that we were not just foreign visitors; we were living representatives of what the Christians of East Germany called the Ökumene. They meant by that term the church of Jesus Christ in all the world, which through the ecumenical movement supported them with prayers, books, theology and Bible study, visits, and fraternal workers such as ourselves, in a community of the Spirit that nourished them, as they nourished us.

**Bossey: Ecumenical Mission**

The next stage in our pilgrimage led in 1956 to the staff of the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, the conference and study center of the World Council of Churches in the orderly, peaceful countryside of Switzerland. Our children (by then we had three) loved it and remain to this day nostalgically Swiss.

The contrast between a Swiss village and an ecumenical institute, however, was strong. The World Council of Churches, and therefore Bossey, was on the frontier of ecumenical mission. The central question it faced, its very life and reason for being, was that coined by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his Nazi prison cell: who is Christ for us today? What, therefore, is the Gospel for each human condition, each culture and religion, each social power, in a changing world? What does it mean to be Christ’s church in such a world? In every course and conference people from different churches in every continent came together in the Swiss countryside to learn from one another as they searched for the form of their own mission. For example:

- Evangelists in city and industry, from post-Christian and non-Christian worlds, struggled with their ministries to mass societies estranged from the church or from their traditional cultures.
- Pastors, missionaries, lay leaders, and a few bishops from all over the world wrestled with the ecumenical discovery that every church is in mission to its society—whether the ethos of that society be secularist, Communist, nationalist, traditionally religious, or nominally Christian—and that the whole church ecumenical participates in this mission.
- We all faced together the question of the relation between religion in all its forms and Christian faith. Westerners from traditionally Christian cultures had learned from their own theologians and experience to distinguish sharply between the Word of God and human, especially Christian, religion. What is the implication of this distinction for Christian witness in cultures dominated by other religions and the faiths that undergird them?
- Physicists and theologians gathered at Bossey to explore the problem of faith, truth, and ethics in a world of nuclear power. What is the relation between truth as scientists discover it and truth as Christians believe and respond to it in the revelation of the triune God? What is the critical responsibility of both physicists and believers in a world of nuclear weaponry?
- This theme soon expanded. What does it mean that Christ is Lord in a world where the methods and assumptions of all the natural and social sciences, and all the economic and technological power based on them, are secular? What is a Christian understanding of secularity?
- In social ethics, what is a “responsible society”? The term was coined in 1948 by the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches to express Christian witness in a world torn by competing capitalist and Communist ideologies. What does it mean for developing Third World countries, for lands under Communist rule, and for Europe and North America?

One could go on to name other issues. Enough to say that the Ecumenical Institute was a crucible in which—through worship, Bible study, passionate debate, and worldwide Christian community—the mission of the church universal was discerned and spelled out. We were part of it. I wrote many a report on it. It gave form to my lifelong teaching of ecumenical mission and ethics.

**Princeton: The Home Base**

But even an ecumenical worker must one day go home. In my case this meant accepting an appointment in 1961 to Princeton Theological Seminary as professor of Christian ethics. This calls for some explanation. When I became a Christian believer I asked about a church to join: “the least self-conscious denomination possible,” I said. I was sent to the Presbyterians. I have never regretted it. Over the years I have become a more Reformed theologian, in the tradition that stretches from Luther and Calvin to Karl Barth, without ever becoming less ecumenical. Princeton is a school in this tradition. So is the Presbyterian Church. On returning to the United States, I was asked to join the Church’s commission to write a new statement of faith. It was suggested by some that our task was “to define a Presbyterian theologically.” No, we said. Our mission was to confess the Gospel of Jesus Christ in terms that speak to our time and place. So we produced the thoroughly ecumenical and missionary Confession of 1967.

My inaugural address at Princeton bore the title “The Missionary Context of Christian Ethics.” It tangled with philosophers like Ludwig Wittgenstein and Karl Marx, with physicists such as Heisenberg and von Weizsäcker, with Chinese culture,
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Robert Bernard Dann

In the spring of 1834, as he neared the end of his first tour of Protestant missions in India, Anthony Norris Groves (1795–1853) declared, “My earnest desire is to re-model the whole plan of missionary operations so as to bring them to the simple standard of God’s word.”1 How might we interpret such a declaration? Was it presumptuous, subversive, or simply naive? Or was it the first deliberate expression of a primitivist and bibliclist strategy that would prove to be of enormous significance to the future history of Protestant overseas mission? Opinions are likely to differ as widely in our day as they did in his.

Brief Biography

Born in 1795 in southern England at Newton Valence, Hampshire, Groves completed his secondary education in Fulham, near London. After training as a dentist, he set up practice in Plymouth and later in Exeter. In 1816, at the age of twenty-one, he first professed himself “a disciple of Christ,” a typical middle-class convert to evangelical High Church Anglicanism. In the same year, Groves married his cousin Mary Bethia Thompson, and soon found his growing desire to serve overseas with the Church Missionary Society (CMS) thwarted by Mary’s determined resistance. Eight years later, after contact with Anglicans and Nonconformists of a more Calvinistic persuasion, Norris Groves gained a fuller assurance of his personal salvation. About the same time, Mary also responded to Calvinistic influences and began to support not only his philanthropic activities but also his missionary interests.2

While engaged in dental practice, Groves became convinced from his reading of the New Testament that Jesus intended his disciples in every age to take literally the instructions given in the Sermon on the Mount. The result was a small booklet published in 1825 with the title Christian Devotedness, in which he encouraged his fellow believers to give away their savings and possessions, and assist in proclaiming the Gospel throughout the world. The message in this booklet typified Groves’s lifelong desire “to read the word of God with a single view to know his will”3 and to follow, in the most literal fashion, the teaching and the example of Jesus and the apostles as recorded in the New Testament.

Embarking on a course of theological study in 1826 with a view to ordination in the Church of England and service with the CMS in the Middle East, Groves traveled to Ireland every three months to take examinations at Trinity College, Dublin. In the course of these visits, he was invited to drawing room meetings for prayer and Bible study that were attended by Christians of both Establishment and Dissent.4 He was impressed by his first experience of Christian fellowship transcending denominational barriers, and in the spring of 1827 he proposed going one step further. Denying the necessity for an ordained minister to administer the sacraments, he suggested that, according to Scripture, “believers, meeting together as disciples of Christ, were free to break bread together as their Lord had admonished them; and that, in as far as the practice of the apostles could be a guide, every Lord’s Day should be set apart for thus remembering the Lord’s death, and obeying His parting command.”5 A small circle of friends began to meet regularly for this purpose.

A few months later, finding on pacifist grounds that he could no longer accept the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England and Ireland,6 Groves withdrew from Trinity College and

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Robert Bernard Dann has twenty-five years’ experience with indigenous churches in the developing world. He is currently engaged in doctoral research on church and mission strategy, with particular reference to the life and work of Anthony Norris Groves.
abandoned his plans for ordination. In the spring of the following year (1828), he severed his connection with the CMS, and shortly afterward he requested adult baptism.

Unconnected with any church denomination or missionary society, Norris and Mary Groves, with their sons, Henry and Frank, set off for Baghdad in June 1829. Traveling through St. Petersburg, Russia, they arrived six months later in Baghdad. There they learned what could be considered the first Protestant mission to Muslims in the Arab world. They were assisted for a year by Karl Gottlieb Pfander of the Basel Mission, whose book *Mizan al-Haqq* (The Balance of Truth) subsequently became a classic in the field of Christian-Muslim apologetics. Also with them, serving as a tutor to the boys, was John Kitto, who later wrote a series of scholarly works elucidating aspects of Eastern culture for English readers of the Bible. In April 1830 Groves and Pfander started a small elementary school, in which the idea of vernacular literacy was introduced using colloquial Bible translations as reading texts for both boys and girls.

A year after their arrival in Baghdad, civil war broke out, and the city entered upon two years of devastation through siege, famine, warfare, floods, cholera, plague, and typhoid, during which two-thirds of its inhabitants were killed by disease, and two-thirds of its houses were swept away by floods. Among the dead was Groves’s wife Mary. After many delays and anxieties he was joined in Baghdad by a small party from Dublin including John Vesey Parnell, Edward Cronin, and Francis W. Newman (younger brother of the cardinal John Henry). The team opened a medical clinic and resumed their evangelistic efforts, but without seeing any great encouragement.

In 1833 Groves left Baghdad to investigate the possibilities for ministry in India, and the following year the Baghdad venture was abandoned.

In India Groves intended to visit missions associated with a wide range of Protestant agencies and denominations throughout the subcontinent. Traveling in short stages from Bombay to Calcutta via Ceylon, he generally met with a warm welcome and found opportunities to share his distinctive ecclesiological and eschatological (premillennialist) ideas with missionaries and other expatriates. In the far south, at Tinnevelly, he attempted to intervene in a dispute between the CMS and some of its own German agents, led by the Lutheran K. T. Rhenius, who protested the curtailing of their right to ordain Indian catechists in deference to the Anglican bishop in Calcutta.

After remarriage, to Harriet Baynes, and a brief recruiting campaign in Britain and Switzerland, Groves returned to Madras in 1835 with a fresh team of missionaries. Somewhat to his surprise, he encountered opposition to his unconventional views and to his support of Rhenius against the CMS, and his opportunities for pastoral ministry and Bible teaching in English became severely reduced. A Christian farm settlement that he then established at Chittoor suffered serious financial reverses, which largely clouded his later years. In 1853 he died at the age of fifty-eight in Bristol, England, at the home of his sister Mary and her husband George Müller.

Although he considered his own missionary career a failure, Groves lived long enough to witness the success of his most promising Indian disciple, John Christian Arulappan, who created an expanding network of indigenous Christian fellowships in the Madurai district of Tamil Nadu. Following Groves’s distinctive missiological principles, this indigenous work might be considered the true fulfillment of his vision in his own lifetime.

### A Radical Ecclesiologist

In seceding from the Anglican Communion, Groves was following a path marked out by others of his generation. He differed from them, however, in his choice neither to attach himself to another denomination nor to launch a denomination of his own, but rather to adopt a deliberately nondenominational stance. He attributed the tensions and divisions between contemporary Christians to church customs and requirements not found in the New Testament. As he himself expressed it, “My full persuasion is that, inasmuch as any one glorious either in being of the Church of England, Scotland, Baptist, Independent, Wesleyan, etc., his glory is his shame. . . . For as the apostle said, were any of them crucified for you? The only legitimate ground for glorying is that we are among the ransomed of the Lord by his grace.”

Groves’s ecclesiology was essentially pietistic, based upon the simple principle of the individual believer seeking to please Christ and encouraging others to do the same. With little interest in buildings, services, finances, organization, training, or ceremony, he desired to rediscover, from the New Testament itself, the original “apostolic” principles of Christian ministry, unity, and influence. As a principle of ministry, he urged the liberty of any Christian man to teach the Bible and of all members of the spiritual body to exercise the spiritual gifts entrusted to them, recognizing no distinction between clergy and laity. Regarding unity, he considered the essential oneness of Christians to be spiritual rather than organizational, insisting that a true church should be neither an arm of the state nor a voluntary society with limited membership. Concerning influence, he believed that personal benefit would extend to others from God’s spiritual blessing on a Christlike life, rather than through the acquisition of social prominence or political power.

In several controversial articles and booklets, as well as in his personal journals, Groves applied these principles to the circumstances of his day. In particular, he urged Protestant Christians to cooperate, without reference to church or denomination, in any spiritual activity that did not require them to act against their own conscience. He encouraged personal holiness through a willing response to progressively increasing “light.” He hoped, at least initially, for a restoration of miraculous gifts, especially for a gift of tongues to facilitate gospel preaching to other peoples. He proposed a simple form of dispensationalism, liberating the church from the necessity to observe the law of Moses while requiring it to follow the instructions of Christ. He urged sacrificial Christian stewardship, a literal offering of oneself and all of one’s material resources for the benefit of others. In fact, he considered his frugal practice of “living by faith,” in constant dependence on the written promises and active providence of God, to be the happiest and wisest course for every Christian. He affirmed, “So intensely am I convinced of this truth that I can with my whole heart pray for myself and all who are nearest and dearest to me that we be so circumstanced in life as to be compelled to live by faith on the divine promises day by day.”

### Somewhat to his surprise, Groves encountered opposition to his unconventional views.


Ecclesiological Influence

It can hardly be disputed that Groves’s ideas were radical. The bitter opposition they aroused, especially from Anglicans of the expatriate community in India, demonstrates the extent to which they were unconventional and largely unwelcome to the majority of Christians around him.

They came, nevertheless, at a time when the “romantic” and the “primitive” were newly fashionable. The publication of Christian Devotedness in 1825, followed in 1827 by Groves’s suggestion that unordained Christians of diverse denominations might partake together of the Lord’s Supper, and then his own resolve in 1829 to launch a mission to Baghdad “by faith,” without the support of a recognized church or missionary society, certainly challenged and enthused his circle of personal friends. Some of these friends soon became leading figures in the Brethren movement, which itself would prove to be a phenomenon of great significance to British evangelicalism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

It could be argued that, once Groves himself had left Britain, the Brethren movement developed without significant personal input from him and in directions of which he strongly disapproved. Correspondence between India and Britain, however, enabled him to remain in fairly close touch with major leaders of the movement in Devonshire and London, particularly with his friends and former colleagues John Parnell (Lord Congleton), Henry Craik, Robert Chapman, and John and Robert Howard. His closest tie was with his brother-in-law George Müller, whose influence in open Brethren circles was second to none. The views expressed by these men substantially coincide with those offered by Groves in his published writings, copies of which he sent to them, and they had opportunities to discuss matters with him personally during his three brief visits to England (1835–36, 1848–49, and 1852–53). Müller’s own initial decision to live “by faith” without financial appeals or debts, and then to provide for his orphans “simply through prayer and faith,” may be traced back to 1829, when he read Groves’s Christian Devotedness and experienced what he described as a “second conversion.” As Müller himself recalled, “The Lord most mercifully enabled me to take this promise of his word and rest upon them. . . . In addition to this, the example of brother Groves, the dentist . . . who gave up his profession and went out as a missionary, who gave up his profession and went out as a missionary, was a great encouragement to me. For the news which by this time had arrived of how the Lord had aided him on his way to Petersburg, and at Petersburg, strengthened my faith.”

Additional aspects of Groves’s radical ecclesiology found a place in the Brethren movement, and through Brethren influence spread far beyond it. His emphasis on liberty of ministry, active participation in the body, unsalaried plural leadership, and spiritual unity and cooperation, as well as his concepts of sacrificial stewardship, holiness, “light,” faith, and obedience, all became characteristic of the open wing of the movement and eventually found their way, especially through the university Christian Unions, into wider evangelical circles. With this in mind, we may consider Groves a significant contributor to primitivist trends in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Protestantism in the United Kingdom.

A Radical Missiologist

He observed affluent missionaries amid poverty, foreign denominations competing for Indian converts, and missionary societies preoccupied with issues of authority, property, and finance. He suggested, “It must be obvious to all, if the native churches be not strengthened by learning to lean on the Lord instead of man, the political changes of an hour may sweep away the present form of things, so far as it depends on Europeans, and leave not a trace behind.” He wished to simplify the missionary task of the church, believing that conversion to Christ should be quite possible without any provision for authority, property, or finance. With no organization to oversee, no buildings to maintain, and no salaries to pay, his emphasis lay in the freedom of local converts to meet together without foreign supervision and to preach the Gospel to their own people without being trained, authorized, or paid to do so.

Groves elaborated these thoughts in his journals and especially in his “Letter on Missions to the Heathen,” published in 1840, where he suggested that “the work societies endeavour to accomplish can be done better, because more scripturally, by the Church herself.” He proposed the sending of evangelists by local congregations to plant other local congregations, the liberty of indigenous Christians to take responsibility without reference to foreign organizations, the freedom of missionaries and Indian Christians to seek guidance and provision directly from God, the development of local leadership in the course of active Christian service, and the partnership of industrialist and evangelist in frugal living “by faith” for the extension of the Gospel.

Fourteen years later, Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson would propose their “three-self” scheme for congregations to become self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating, along with their concept of the foreign mission as a scaffolding that must remain until the national church has been firmly built. But Groves had already foreseen the difficulties that would face mission executives wishing to transfer weighty administrative and financial responsibilities to nationals, and he did so eighty years before Roland Allen drew our attention to the problem.

Whereas Venn envisaged the creation by one institution (a foreign mission) of another institution (a national church), Groves made no distinction between mission and church. And rather than projecting an eventual shift from foreign government, support, and propagation to self-government, support, and propagation, Groves would start with no organized government, support, or propagation at all, expecting these to develop naturally as local believers helped one another develop their own abilities and ministries after the fashion described in the New Testament.

Missiological Influence

In 1985 Groves was described as “a neglected missiologist,” and twenty years later the neglect persists. During his own lifetime he suffered considerable prejudice and misrepresentation from Protestant Christians, which no doubt restricted the extent of his influence both in his own day and later. Nevertheless, his primitivist and Pietist principles eventually found their way into circles that made great use of them. In the process, they were developed and adapted, sometimes almost beyond recognition, yet credit should be given to Groves himself for introducing ideas that stimulated the breaking of traditional denominational molds and the birth of a new generation of missions following what have been called “faith principles.”

Groves’s eldest son, Henry, having survived his early expe-
periences in Baghdad and India, in 1872 became one of the founding editors of the magazine *Echoes of Service*, which facilitated prayer and financial support for Brethren missionaries from the British Isles. Brethren have since planted assemblies with a quasi-primitivist ethos in more than a hundred different nations, and there are now approximately 2.5 million Christians worldwide identifying themselves as Brethren.

Groves’s influence was equally significant to the founders of the great interdenominational “faith missions.” All of these were inspired by Hudson Taylor, whose “faith principles” can be traced back to George Müller and, through him, to Groves. These three men moved in the same circles. Indeed, in the early years of Hudson Taylor’s China Inland Mission, its financial support came almost entirely from personal friends of Groves.

In fact, Groves’s idea of using the New Testament as a practical manual of missionary methods was taken up with greatest effect not by Western missionaries but by indigenous Christian leaders. We might think in particular of Bakht Singh in India (whose closest colleagues were great-grandsons of Groves’s disciple Arulappan), Watchman Nee in China (who mentions Groves and the Brethren as an early influence), and John Arulappan himself.

Groves encouraged young Indian Christians to ignore Western church tradition and to follow, as closely as possible, the teaching and practice of Christ and his apostles, which he saw as a divinely inspired model applicable to every generation and every culture. In 1840 he confided, “The fact that our position here puts pastoral work and fellowship on a simple Christian footing among the natives is by no means the least important feature of our work. Until we came, no one but an ordained native was allowed to celebrate the Lord’s Supper or to baptize; and when our Christian brethren Arulappan and Andrew partook of the Lord’s Supper with the native Christians it caused more stir and enquiry than you can imagine. The constant reference to God’s word has brought and is bringing the questions connected with ministry and church government into a perfectly new position in the minds of many.”

Shortly afterward, Arulappan moved to Madurai, where, with Groves’s blessing, he initiated a rapidly growing network of entirely indigenous fellowships. He encouraged self-supporting Indian evangelists to travel widely, preaching the Gospel, initiating informal meetings, and stimulating the emergence of local leadership. By 1853 congregations had been established in sixteen places, comprising nearly 200 believers. By 1856 there were twenty-five villages with 300 believers in total; and in 1859, thirty-three villages and 800 believers. In August 1860 the Anglican *Church Missionary Intelligencer* declared, “It is indeed a new era in Indian missions—that of lay converts going forth, without purse or scrip, to preach the gospel of Christ to their fellow-countrymen, and that with a zeal and life we had hardly thought them capable of.” Here, the writer believed, was “the first entirely indigenous effort of the native church at self-extension.”

**Groves in the History of Missiological Thought**

Leslie Newbigin has identified three basic elements, as three corners of a triangle, that in varying proportions combine to determine the basic strategy adopted by any missionary or missiologist. They are foreign church custom, local culture, and New Testament principle and practice. The third of these “corners” is obviously the one that interested Groves. Indeed, we might identify him as the first major primitivist or biblicist among mission strategists.

Newbigin suggests that, in general, this third “corner” will be valued more highly by indigenous Christians than by the agents of Western missionary societies. He comments, “The Bible has operated as an independent source of criticism directed both against the Christianity of the missionaries and against the traditional culture of the tribe.” It was this use of the Bible by the Indians themselves that Groves encouraged, and which equipped them to act on their own initiative without waiting for foreign tuition, authorization, or finance.

Like Groves himself, primitivists such as Arulappan, Nee, and Singh have taken to its logical conclusion the evangelical belief that the New Testament is inspired, authoritative, and rightfully endowed with a status above foreign church custom and local culture. For these indigenous leaders, the New Testament represents genuine Christianity, untainted by either Western or Eastern accretions. Bakht Singh’s approach, as described by his biographer, is typical: “He did not compromise the Word of God with Indian culture, customs or the traditions of men. He vehemently taught against any culture or custom that was contrary to, or in conflict with, the Word of God. ‘What we needed in the Body of Christ was not Western or Eastern culture but Biblical culture,’ he emphasized.”

Though generally neglected by missiologists, these primitivist movements arguably achieved more, in a shorter space of time, than contemporaneous Protestant missions following different principles. With evidence that their indigenous leaders were both directly and indirectly influenced by Anthony Norris Groves, we may consider his legacy a substantial one.

**Notes**

2. The concept of an individual divine call to salvation, irrespective of personal merit, was introduced to Groves by Bessie Paget, a nonconformist lady in Exeter, and by John Marriott, the Anglican curate of Broad Clyst. Marriott was particularly influential in Mary’s conversion.
3. Ibid., p. 11.
4. For Groves and his contemporaries, the “Establishment” signified the Church of England and Ireland, whose bishops in the House of Lords participated in the parliamentary government of Great Britain. Christians who objected to this were known as “Dissenters” or “Nonconformists.” They maintained their own churches and were identified, for example, as Congregationalists, Baptists, or Methodists.
5. Ibid., p. 39.
6. Art. 37: “It is lawful for Christian men . . . to wear weapons and serve in the wars.”
7. Groves’s second wife, Harriet Baynes, was sister of William Craig Baynes, an influential early settler in Quebec.
8. Ibid., p. 49.
11. The Brethren of Groves’s acquaintance are commonly called Plymouth Brethren to distinguish them from the many other groups identified as Brethren outside the British Isles. One of their earliest fellowships met in Plymouth, on the southwest coast of England.
12. In 1848 a rupture occurred in the Brethren between those willing to follow the doctrinal and disciplinary leadership of J. N. Darby and
those who would not. Darby’s followers became known as Exclusive Brethren in contrast to the Open Brethren, with whom Groves was associated.


15. [Harriet Groves], Memoir, p. 393.


17. Groves advocated a sacrificial lifestyle for evangelists and missionaries and equally for those who supported them through generous stewardship of a secular income. Spiritual and material blessings would thus be shared as they labored together for the progress of the Gospel in the world.

18. Roland Allen (1868–1947) was a High Church Anglican who served with the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) in northern China from 1895 to 1903. Among recognized missiologists, he is undoubtedly the closest to Groves in spirit. He wrote two particularly influential books, Missionary Methods: St Paul’s or Ours? (1912) and The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church (1927), in which he argued that mission is a task for local churches and indigenous initiatives rather than foreign societies with salaried employees.


25. [Harriet Groves], Memoir, p. 393.


27. [Harriet Groves], Memoir, p. 622.


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Except where noted, the following items by Groves are found in the Christian Brethren Archive, John Rylands Univ. Library of Manchester, Eng.


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The Legacy of John Amos Comenius

Mike W. Stroope

John Amos Comenius (Jan Ámos Komenský), born in 1592 at Uhersky Brod in eastern Moravia in the Kingdom of Bohemia, was the youngest of five children born to Anna and Martin Komenský, people of modest means and members of the Unity of the Brethren.1 Bohemia was Comenius’s homeland; the Unity of the Brethren was his mother. From Bohemia, Comenius received a deep sense of national consciousness and pride. From the Unity of the Brethren, Comenius inherited an unshakable faith in Jesus Christ, a belief in the radical separation between faith and society, and a tradition of strict discipline.

From within this milieu of homeland and faith, John Comenius envisioned a daring kind of Christianity that sought to be faithful to his received tradition, yet free from the overpowering notion of Christendom that had silenced the missionary witness of the Reformers. The experiences of Comenius’s life and his ecumenical spirit produced a prophetic word to the church in its missionary encounter with the world.

Pilgrimage

“This is only a pilgrimage.”

The Bequest of the Unity of the Brethren, pp. 18–19

The first of many tragedies that shaped the direction of Comenius’s life and thought was the death of both his parents when he was twelve years of age. He made his way through a number of schools, beginning with secondary education at the Latin school at Přerov (Ger. Prerau, in today’s Czech Republic), and ending with the University of Heidelberg, which he entered in 1613. After his studies, he traveled to Holland and England and then returned to Bohemia to become rector of the Unity school in Přerov. Between 1616 and 1618 he was ordained as a priest, married Magdeline Vizovská, and served as pastor in Olomouc (Ger. Olmütz) and Fulnek, both in Moravia.

In 1618 decades of conflict erupted into what became known as the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648). Three years later, Spanish troops in support of the re-Catholicization of Bohemia devastated Fulnek, burning Comenius’s home and books. He fled for his life to the estate of Count de Zerotin in eastern Bohemia. He never saw his wife and small son again, as they died from the plague brought to Fulnek by the soldiers. On July 31, 1627, the people of Bohemia were ordered to accept the Catholic faith or leave. Comenius set out for Poland in the spring of 1628 and took up residence in Leszno (Ger. Lissa). Thus began his lifelong exile from his beloved Bohemia.

In The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart (1623), Comenius recounts his personal loss and establishes his identity as a pilgrim. Written as an allegory, the story is “no fable, even though it may have the appearance of one.” The main character, Pilgrim, like Comenius, journeyed through the world seeking to make sense of the confusion, difficulty, and deception that he encountered in language, religion, politics, and relationships. After much searching, Pilgrim discovered peace and contentment not in the circumstances of life but in fidelity to the Divine. At the end of his journey, Pilgrim heard the welcome words, “As long as I leave you in the world, remain there as a pilgrim, a stranger, an alien, and a guest; but with me you are a member of my household, for I grant you the right of citizenship.”2

The pilgrim identity became a mode by which Comenius and the Brethren existed in a hostile world and remained faithful in their witness to Christ. Because they found themselves without political sponsorship, they were suppressed by both Catholics and Protestants. As victims of the religious-political crossfire, they defined faith simply as a disciplined life, a love for the brethren, and steadfastness in suffering. Their pilgrim existence was best fitted for journeys, the prison cell, or exile. They had no city or country to call their own, and they were out of step with the society around them. Their faith was not particular to a locale or tied to an earthly ruler, and thus it could be both universal and missionary.

Universality

“Nations come running to the Light radiating from Zion.”

The Way of Light, 21.3

In 1632 Comenius was elected a bishop of the Brethren and in 1648 became its twentieth and last presiding bishop. While exacting in his leadership of, and devotion to, the Unity, Comenius espoused a universality that led him to speak of Christ’s reign beyond the Unity, Bohemia, and Europe that would embrace all peoples, even the Turks. Comenius’s universality was a means to a greater end: nothing less than “the conversion of all peoples to the Church, so that Jehovah shall be King over all the earth.”3

Universality, for Comenius, was expressed as pansophism, the integration of all knowledge “into one, all-embracing, harmonious world-view.”4 The missionary intent of his universality evidenced itself not in its attempt at comprehensive knowledge but in viewing knowledge as a reconciling principle. Comenius’s brand of universality maintained that in knowledge there existed a reconciling force that united nature with faith, one person with another, and an individual person with God. Knowledge universally applied changed everything. Comenius wanted “to have every man so enlightened that whosoever hath eyes may see, whosoever hath ears may hear, and whosoever hath the heart for understanding may understand.”5

Comenius never indicated the source of his pansophic aspiration. It can be assumed that his teacher at the Academy at Herborn, Nassau (today in Hesse in Germany), Johann Heinrich Alsted (1588–1638), author of one of the best-known encyclopedias of the seventeenth century, Encyclopaedia scientiarum omnium (1630), tutored Comenius in the science of gathering information. In addition, Comenius’s study of Ramon Llull of Majorca (1232–1316), the medieval philosopher, mystic, and missionary best known for his Ars generalis ultima (The Ultimate General Art, 1305–8) and Ars brevis (The Short Art, 1308), provided Comenius with a model for his pansophic project and missionary motivation for its application. In Ars generalis ultima, Llull combined symbols, numbers, and diagrams to create a complex system of “art,” which formed a basis for understanding reality and a means to defend the Christian faith.6 Llull envisioned the conversion of Muslims in North Africa through his system, which was “a new method and new reasons by which those in error might

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be shown the path to glory without end and the means of avoiding infinite suffering.71 While less complex than Llull’s, Comenius’s pansophic plan served the same goal.

**Education**

“internal light . . . shining in the mind of the rational creature”

Panagia, 2.9

The backbone of Comenius’s scheme of universality was universal education. To address the problems of humankind, Comenius developed a plan based on a fourfold formula: “common textbooks, common schools, a common research college of learned men, and a common language.”9 He spent his life teaching, writing, and crusading to effect this solution. The aim of Comenius’s plan was “to provide opportunities, not only for all nations and tongues and orders of men, but for every single individual to rise out of the darkness of ignorance and barbarism.” His revolutionary proposal was for every person in the world to be educated—male and female, all nations, and every stratum of society.

True to the Enlightenment spirit, Comenius believed in the centrality of human intellect and the regenerative capacity of knowledge.10 If any change in human behavior was to take place, the intellect must be purified. Human nature was “so designed that all its actions, good or bad, are rooted in the intellect. The limbs move in obedience to the Will, which rules like a queen.”11 Thus, rational knowledge led to re-creation or renewal of the image of God already present within humankind. Comenius believed that, in the end, every man and woman in the world would “return to the image of God within him . . . and similarly every family group, every state and church, and finally the entire world.”12 The eventual renewal, return, or regeneration of the image of God in the individual and humanity as a whole meant that humankind would be able to “move towards the perfect fulfillment of human nature.”13 As a result, the possibility of the human intellect producing a change in the nature of men and women gave universal education more than an educational or moral role—it served as a missionary means.

**Language**

“universal interpreter of All things to All Men”

Panorthosia, 14.9

In Comenius’s scheme of universality, language served as the forum for understanding and reconciliation. Because the multitude of languages was a source of confusion and division, Comenius proposed that particular languages should cease to exist or be blended into a new universal language.14 In this way “the whole world should become a house accessible to all, and all the inhabitants of the earth one family of God, linked by the common bond of a universal language.” Language became the tangible means to ensure that “all should be enlightened and restored to harmony.”15

Comenius intended that the spread of this universal language would “increase the universal Kingdom of God.” Just as a ruler would impose a new language on a conquered people, “surely Christ, the new monarch of the universe, will impose some new language on his World.” Comenius connected the missionary intent of the new language with the reign of Christ. He concluded that Christ’s wish that the Gospel be preached to the nations “will surely require a new gracious language, and that naturally since nations are at last to be fully gathered together into one kingdom of Christ they must be bound together in the bond of one spirit and one language.” Thus the agents of Christ’s kingdom would be those who preach to the nations in the universal language, which Comenius called the “final seal of apostleship.”16

One of the creative works that emerged from Comenius’s attention to Ramon Llull was developed in his *Janua linguarum reserata* (The Gate of Languages Unlocked, 1631). Comenius’s goal in *Janua* was both to introduce a better way to teach Latin and also to extend Christ’s kingdom through language. Just as Llull had sought to extend Christianity through literary means, so Comenius hoped that *Janua* would facilitate the spread of Christianity among Muslims in the Middle East and Native Americans in North America. The literary success of *Janua* was amazing, being translated during his lifetime into sixteen languages, including Persian, Mongolian, Arabic, Turkish, Polish, German, and other European languages.17

**Christ**

“one supreme monarch”

Panorthosia, 10.10

Paramount in the doctrinal heritage passed on to Comenius from the Brethren was the kingship of Christ over the church and the entire world. Christ alone was seen as “the king of Zion who shall speak peace unto the heathen, and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea.” The reign of Christ truly reconciled “all sects and partisan desires,” as “all philosophies become one supremely good philosophy under one supreme teacher, Christ, and all religion will become one supremely good religion under one supreme priest, Christ.”18 Comenius’s ultimate hope was not in a political system or a religion that triumphed over others but in Christ.

The main focus of Comenius’s life was the proclamation of Christ to all the nations, because for him Christ was the only reconciler of the world. It thus followed that Christ’s words were to be received and then communicated with universality, simplicity, and agreement to the whole world. That is, Christ was to be preached to all (universality), without pomp or ritual (simplicity), and without coercion (agreement).19 The reign of God, of which Christ is the exemplar, is like no earthly kingdom in its arrival and its rule. His supremacy does not require auxiliary or circumstantial powers, which other rulers depend upon.

**Mission**

“The final apostles should go forth to the nations.”

Panorthosia, 14.15

In Comenius, universal hope united with unshakable faith in the supremacy of Christ to produce a strong missionary conviction. The various influences upon his life, together with the development of his system of pansophism, brought him to the conclusion that missionary work must be an essential practice for the true church.

While the missionary obligation is implicit in much of Comenius’s writings, it becomes particularly clear in *De regula fidei judicium duplex* (On the Rule of Faith, a Double Investigation, 1658).20 In response to the teachings of Valerian Magni, a Capuchin monk, Comenius stated here that evangelization was an unavoidable responsibility of the church. The true church would exist as the instrument of world missions.21 In addition to making this direct appeal for missionary work, Comenius reproved those who were “only idle spectators playing no part in the promotion of God’s work,” for this was “surely to tempt God and to commit a grievous sin, making a mockery of the Lord’s
Comenius maintained that apostolic preachers should be skilled in theology, use appropriate means to communicate their message, and respect unconverted people, conveying the sense that they were friends rather than enemies. Preachers were not to attack the religious error of Jews or Muslims but persuade them of the truth through noncoercive means. To illustrate this missionary methodology, Comenius referred to Paul’s approach at Mars Hill in Athens, where the apostle directed his hearers to an unknown god whom they already worshiped (Acts 17:19–33). Thus Comenius not only appealed for missionary work but also urged that it be done in a culturally appropriate and persuasive way.

Closely linked to Comenius’s idea of mission was persecution. The Peace of Westphalia (1648) crushed any hope for religious liberty and thus sealed the fate of the dwindling Unity of the Brethren. In An Exhortation to the Churches of Bohemia (1661), Comenius compared the persecution of the Unity with that of the early church in Jerusalem. He recounted the Unity’s forty years of suffering at the hands of Jesuits and cautioned that even if there were “not verily so much as one Church remaining,” they were not to despair. He reminded them that “the dispersion of the Apostolical church at Jerusalem was very sad, and yet it was nothing but the dissemination of the Gospel amongst other Nations.” In like manner, their “stumbling may be the enriching of the World, and [their] diminishing, the riches of the Gentiles.” The example of the early church’s persecution encouraged the Brethren to hope in the advance of the Gospel through their own imprisonment, suffering, and death. They could take heart that “no violence, no torments, no executions, [can] hinder the propagation of Christianity [and] shall not be able to stop the course of the Gospel.”

Comenius not only promoted the missionary idea, but also lived a missionary life. An example of this life was his initiative to translate the Bible into Turkish. Although Turks were at the time largely considered to be hostile or indifferent to the Gospel, Comenius sought a common ground of understanding with them for the purpose of reconciliation and conversion. In 1658 Comenius contracted with Levin Warner to do a Turkish translation of the Bible, and Laurence De Geer, Comenius’s benefactor, agreed to finance its publication. The completion date was set for 1660 but then was delayed until 1663. In anticipation of its publication, Comenius composed a preface addressed to the sultan of the Ottoman Empire, Mehmed IV, in which he affirmed that “all the peoples of the earth [are] the children of the same God.” Comenius reasoned that since God is one, as taught by Moses, Jesus and his disciples, and Muhammad, and because the...
Qur’an is based on the Old and New Testaments, it is only right that Muslims and Christians should understand each other and live in harmony. He then invited the sultan to take the Bible and read it for himself. In the end, however, the translation was deemed to be a poor one, and Comenius abandoned the project.

As evidenced in his Generall Table of Europe (1670), Comenius knew the religious conditions of people around the world. He listed nations not only according to political and geographic information but also by their religious affiliation, with comments on the progress of the Gospel in each land.30 He was acquainted with mission work in China, India, and the Americas and considered what he might do to assist these endeavors. In Via lucis (Way of Light, 1642), he wrote specifically about Native Americans and enthusiastically projected how the Brethren might do mission work among them.

Fruit

“In the hidden seed”

The Bequest of the Unity of the Brethren, p. 20

In the Bequest of the Unity of the Brethren (1650), Comenius lamented the demise of his beloved church and yet at the same time expressed faith in its vitality, but only as a seed that might yet come to full fruition. He reminded the Brethren that this seed, cleansed of chaff and preserved through persecution, would eventually be sown among the nations. With the death of Comenius in 1670, this seed died and fell into the ground. It lay dormant only a short time before it sprouted and bore fruit in Herrnhut, Saxony, where the Moravians emerged approximately fifty years later under the leadership of David Nitschmann (1696–1772) and Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700–1760).31

The ensuing worldwide mission effort of the Moravians is part of Comenius’s legacy. The Brethren who arrived on Zinzendorf’s estate had a certain missionary consciousness, having the reformation spirit of Jan Hus, a spirit of the suffering and discipline learned as Brethren, and the convictions and example of John Comenius. What Comenius wrote and practiced was in full view of the intimate family of the Brethren, and his writings provided hope and encouragement to the exiled church. The Brethren arrived at Herrnhut as a pilgrim people. They were schooled in suffering, which defined their allegiance, and in universality, which opened before them the possibility of worldwide missions.

The Moravians’ unusual expression of mission is often credited to the genius of Zinzendorf—to his mission awareness, Pietistic beliefs, and Christocentric mysticism.32 These factors undoubtedly had their effect on the group and fomented the ensuing mission fervor, but they cannot fully account for the remarkable missionary initiative of the Moravians. Zinzendorf’s Pietism and heartfelt missionary concern converged with the belief of the Brethren in the universality of faith and the reign of Jesus Christ over the entire world to produce a zeal for mission unmatched in modern times.33

The fruit of Comenius remains for the postmodern era.
Although the twenty-first century is certainly different from the seventeenth, Comenius’s message of the universal reign of Christ, of a vital faith that embraces both the sacred and the secular realms of life, and of the identity of God’s people as pilgrims could provide fresh alternatives to the sectarian and mechanistic modes that often characterize today’s mission endeavors. Quite possibly, the full fruit of Comenius’s thought is yet to be completely realized.

Notes

1. The Unity of the Brethren, or, in its Latin form, Unitatum Fratrum, emerged from the martyrdom of Jan Hus (1415) and the ensuing Bohemian rebellion against Catholic domination. They grew in strength and influence during the period prior to Martin Luther but because of their pacificist convictions were severely persecuted and eventually driven from their homeland during the Thirty Years’ War (1618–48).


4. For a comprehensive definition of pansophism, see Matthew Spinka, “Comenian Pansophic Principles,” Church History 22 (June 1953): 155.


14. See John Comenius, Unum necessarium, unpublished translation (1598) by Vernon Nelson (in Reeves Library, Moravian College and Theological Seminary, Bethlehem, Pa.), 1.6; see also Panorthosia, 14:2.

15. Comenius, Panorthosia, 5.21, 10.10.

16. Ibid., 14.7, 9, 15; see Panorthosia, 15.8.


18. Comenius, Panorthosia, 10.9, 10.

19. Ibid., 10.46.

20. Regula fidei judicium duplex was originally written as two tracts against Valerian Magni: The Echo of Absurdities and The Foundation of the Rules of Faith. These were printed in 1644–45 and then reprinted as a single volume in 1658.


25. Ibid., 18.16.

26. John Comenius, An Exhortation of the churches of Bohemia . . . order and discipline used in the churches of the Brethren of Bohemia (London: Thomas Parkhurst, 1661), preface and p. 74. In Historia persecutionum ecclesiae Bohemicae (1647), Comenius gives a much longer presentation of the history of the Brethren’s faithfulness and witness and the story of its martyrs. Comenius recounts the course of Christianity in Bohemia from its beginning in 894 to his day. The vehicle for this story is their suffering.


29. Cited in Murphy, Comenius, p. 42.

30. A General Table of Europe was a prototype of William Carey’s maps and tables.

31. Opinions vary concerning the extent and character of the continuity between the Unitas Fratrum and the Moravians. This link, though, can be seen visibly in the group’s adoption of the Brethren’s Ratio Disciplinæ and the continuation of the Brethren bishoppic in David Nitschmann (1735) and Zinzendorf (1737) via Daniel E. Jablonski, the son of Comenius’s son-in-law, Peter Jablonski.


33. Francke had read Comenius’s Panegersia, which he describes as having refreshed him. Francke cited Comenius’s works, especially Unum necessarium and Lux et tenerebris, in a positive manner. See Rudolf Rikan, The History of the Unity of Brethren: A Protestant Hussite Church in Bohemia and Moravia, trans. C. Daniel Crews (Bethlehem, Pa.: Moravian Church in America, 1992), p. 383.

Selected Bibliography

Works by John Amos Comenius

Comenius was a prolific writer, producing some 144 larger works and 49 smaller or incomplete works on subjects ranging from education to history to church catechisms. Archival material can be found at the J. A. Komensky Pedagogical Museum and Library in Prague and the Archiv der Brüdergemeinde in Herrnhut, Germany.

1623 Labrint světa a ráj světce (The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart).

1631 Janua linguarum reserata (The Gate of Languages Unlocked).

1642 Via lucis (The Way of Light).

1644 Panorthosia (Universal Reform).

1647 Historia persecutionum ecclesiae Bohemicae (History of the Persecution of the Bohemian Church).

1650 Kšáta umírající matky jednoho bratráška (The Bequest of the Unity of the Brethren).

1656 Panegersia (Universal Awakening) and Panaugia (Universal Enlightenment), first printed as parts of De rerum humanarum emendatione consultatio catholica (The General Deliberation on the Remedy of Human Matters).

1657 Lux et tenerebris (Light in the Darkness).

1658 De regula fidei judicium duplex (On the Rule of Faith, a Double Investigation).

1660 De bono unitatis et ordinis, disciplinaeque ac obedientiae continuazionee (An exhortation of the churches of Bohemia to the Church of England).

1668 Unum necessarium (The One Thing Needful).

1670 A Generall Table of Europe.

Works About John Amos Comenius


Book Reviews

Furthering Humanity: A Theology of Culture.


Here is a thoroughly engaging, wide-ranging, critically argued, and sometimes sublime book that places theology and culture under scrutiny with a view to identifying whether and to what extent they can be dialogue partners. Of course “culture” cannot actually dialogue with “theology”—only human agents can converse. But surely it is legitimate to ask how people—specifically how we ourselves—might reflect theologically about culture, and culturally about theology, and why this effort might be critically important in the contemporary world.

The author develops various theses as he works systematically through three fields of discourse: culture, power, and mission. Although these fields appear at first sight to be clearly demarcated, Gorringe shows that in fact they are adjacent to one another and not even formally separated from each other. By considering each field separately, he can show the rationale by which they are interrelated. To use his metaphor: “Power is the thread [that] stitches the seams of the cultural garment” (p. 105), and “scripture [read ‘theology’] functions uniquely as an ideological irritant, critiquing ruling systems of power” (pp. 105–6). Such aphorisms abound in this provocative book.

Part 1, which is on culture, offers a comprehensive survey of this rather intractable term and social reality, demonstrating how power is embedded in culture and to what extent religion is a cultural reality-construct. Gorringe advances four propositions: that “theology is concerned with the whole of human endeavor”; that eschatology—the telos, or ultimate purpose of life and creation—is “the central category for any theology of culture”; that “a theology of culture is at the same time a theology of the Spirit”; and that, as such, this theology “will be a theology of diversity in unity” (p. 102).

Part 2 is about power. For me, this is the most interesting and imaginative section. Here, bearing out Lord Acton’s dictum, the author shows that “power tends to corrupt.” The “Christendom project” itself would exemplify this tendency. But Gorringe reminds us of the gospel call to “redefine power from the base upwards” (p. 173). This is an exciting and evocative section.

The third part asks whether and how the church should “export” itself: “Why bother with mission?” (p. 173). Gorringe offers a blistering critique of Samuel Huntington’s “strong” thesis of an inevitable and destructive clash of civilizations, and he challenges us with a Gospel of loving encounter and encountering love. Jesus is the center: not the pious plaster-Jesus of hagiography and Hollywood, but the radical, revolutionary, countercultural, godly, committed Jesus of fidelity and faith.

Only an extended review could possibly do justice to this book. For anyone struggling to understand mission, culture, the institutional church, and the incarnation, this book is one to read, discuss, and ponder. I recommend it highly for anyone interested in the interface of theology and social science; its content is substantial, and its messages are urgent.


On the Bloody Road to Jesus: Christianity and the Chiricahua Apaches.


While claiming that Spanish, Mexican, and then U.S. colonization sought the conquest and “decultrualization” of the Chiricahua Apaches for economic, political, and religious reasons, Henrietta Stockel focuses in this study on the religious. Her deep appreciation for the people and culture of the Chiricahua Apaches of the American Southwest is apparent throughout the work, which includes a wealth of photos and interviews.

Stockel believes that the Chiricahua Apaches “were aware of how to please the outsiders’ churchmen, military personnel, and political officials, all the while hiding in their hearts their beloved traditions.” They “never completely surrendered their traditional religion to Christianity” (p. xiv). According to Stockel, an ethnologist, not a missiologist, the Christian “indoctrination” forced upon the Apaches by the church was “culturally strange and alienating” and posed “a menace they had never before experienced” to their religious identity (p. 2). Converts therefore tended to be insincere (p. 133), capricious (p. 176), or duped (p. 190). Geronimo’s conversion to Christianity is especially problematic, and Stockel concludes that he was simply a “master manipulator” who became whatever circumstances required in order to achieve his own ends (p. 193).

Rather than seeing an inculturated Christianity emerging, reflecting a “new creation” of Apache culture and Christianity, Stockel claims the Apache practiced a “religious dimorphism” in which “both traditional and Christian ways exist side by side” (p. 267). It is the only way that Stockel can explain the numbers of the Chiricahua Apaches who continue adherence to the Christian faith when there is no external reason to do so. Had the book ended with Chiricahua Apache Franciscan Sister Juanita Little’s words, “You can be Indian and you can be Catholic” (p. 264), one might have drawn other conclusions.

—Bonnie Sue Lewis

Bonnie Sue Lewis is Associate Professor of Mission and Native American Christianity at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa. She taught at the Inter-American School in Quezaltenango, Guatemala, from 1976 to 1979.


Borrowed Gods and Foreign Bodies provides an insightful and sophisticated analysis of missionary perceptions of Chinese society and religion from the beginning of the Protestant missionary enterprise in 1807 until the early twentieth century. Drawing skillfully upon a wide variety of archival sources, Eric Reinders, associate professor of religion at Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, offers a multidisciplinary overview of how Western conceptions of the Chinese “other” were shaped by the

Victorian sensibilities and religious predispositions of the Protestant missionary community. The primary focus of Reinders’s investigation is the manner in which these conceptions—or, more often, misconceptions—were reflected in and disseminated through contemporary missionary publications and correspondence.

The early Protestant missionaries to China found many aspects of native culture profoundly abhorrent or simply inscrutable. The inherent difficulty of surmounting the formidable cultural barriers between China and the West, such as the “Great Wall of Language” (p. 71), meant that missionaries interpreted Chinese customs, beliefs, and mannerisms within the context of their own limited knowledge and experience. The ritualism and idolatry of Chinese religion, for example, were indiscriminately associated with that of Roman Catholicism. Other perceptions of life in China were filtered through Victorian-inspired metaphors crudely applied to portray the mindlessness, lethargy, and deceitfulness of the stereotypical Chinese. While Western perceptions of Chinese culture constitute the focus of Reinders’s study, he also looks at the reciprocal Chinese perceptions of the hairy, odd smelling, and strangely clothed “Spectacle of Missionary Bodies” (p. 173).

Historical investigations of the early Protestant missionary movement in China have rarely focused sufficiently on the sensitive and complex issue of cross-cultural perceptions. Reinders’s incisive theoretical analysis therefore provides a welcome contribution to our understanding of this formative episode in the history of Sino-Western cultural relations.

—Michael C. Lazich

Michael C. Lazich is Assistant Professor of History at the State University of New York, Buffalo State College.

Methodism: Empire of the Spirit.


This book is a stimulating extension of Hempton’s previous works: Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750–1850 (1984); Religion and Political Culture in Britain and Ireland (1996); and The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion, c. 1750–1900 (1996). Here his analysis spans the whole history of the movement, draws on examples from across the globe, and includes carefully drawn comparisons between the United States, Britain, and
Ireland. Rather than producing a narrative confined to biographical and institutional history, Hempton puts analysis and explanation at the heart of each chapter by always asking why or how. In doing so, he revisits many of the debates that have intrigued historians of Methodism, providing his own meticulously researched interpretations and engaging with the legacy of E. P. Thompson’s notorious descriptions. As might be expected, he also takes pains to uncover the religious experience of the rank-and-file Methodists, using his sources to illuminate issues of race, gender, and class.

The chapter on world missions is mainly focused on the experience of North American Methodists, contrasting the “spectacular success” of their appeal to immigrants from Europe on the expanding western frontier, with their “relatively slow” progress on foreign fields and with Native Americans (p. 164). Nevertheless, Hempton distinguishes a distinctively Methodist approach, one that was “ruggedly individualistic” and suspicious of bureaucratic paternalism, with an optimistic confidence in ultimate success. The discussion of mission is firmly rooted in the context of the sending churches and does not attempt to take up the story of their spiritual daughters.

The final chapter situates the experience of membership decline in North America and Britain within a wider context of theories about secularization. The result is a thought-provoking assessment of Western Methodism, of what it has meant to people over the generations, and, indeed, of what it is today.

—Kirsteen Murray

Kirsteen Murray is the Project Officer of the Methodist Missionary Society History Project, Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World, University of Edinburgh.

** Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context.**


In integral mission, conversion is not separable from ethics but involves a radical reorientation in one’s social, economic, and political allegiances and practices. Missionaries, however, do not have the right to prescribe the ethical content of conversion and they should not attempt to do so. Each culture must freshly and responsibly discern and determine for itself the ethical demand of the Gospel.

Glen Stassen of Fuller Seminary (Pasadena, Calif.) and David Gushee of Union University (Jackson, Tenn.) have coauthored an introduction to Christian ethics that provides a most useful paradigm for an ethic grounded in Scripture and situated in a cultural context. They intend “to reclaim Jesus Christ for Christian ethics and for the moral life of the churches” (p. xi). Allowing the teachings and practices of Jesus, and especially the Sermon on the Mount, to set the agenda and structure, the authors present a radically unique and compelling way of doing ethics. Critically engaging various moral traditions, Kingdom Ethics examines two foundational issues of ethical methodology—sources of authority and levels of moral norms. It then carefully establishes its own “holistic character ethics,” which embraces practices, virtues, and narratives in integral relation to rules and principles. Following the pattern of the transforming initiatives identified in the Sermon on the Mount as the norma-
tive guide, the book’s second part addresses crucial contemporary moral issues, reflecting both on experience and on social scientific data. The authors address issues relating to life and death, marriage, sexuality, race, economics, care of creation, and politics. Kingdom Ethics is shaped, but also limited, by the authors’ own North American cultural location, experience, and perspective; few Third World theologians and ethicists are seriously engaged. Yet, since the book is a profound call to Christian discipleship based on incisive and illuminating reflection on the Sermon on the Mount, it deserves to be used across cultural boundaries as a model to construct a faithful and relevant Christian ethic. —Joon-Sik Park

Joon-Sik Park is the E. Stanley Jones Associate Professor of World Evangelism at the Methodist Theological School in Ohio, Delaware, Ohio. Earlier he served as pastor of multicultural United Methodist congregations in Ohio and Kentucky.

Creative Writing: Translation, Bookkeeping, and the Work of Imagination in Colonial Kenya.


Derek Peterson of the College of New Jersey (Ewing, N.J.) has written an innovative and original work based upon extensive archival research in Kenyan materials, including those of the Presbyterian, Anglican, and African Inland Mission churches. His geographic focus is central Kenya, north of Nairobi, and he deals with the Gikuyu people of this region.

Peterson’s thesis about Gikuyu creativity is lucidly developed throughout the book. He de-emphasizes the stereotypical colonial encounter occurring between rational, “civilized” Westerners and passive, receptive Gikuyu. Instead, he presents the Kenyans as possessing generations of intellectual innovators, including Christian converts, church leaders, female revivalists, radical Marxists, and politicians. These people used their writings, such as Bible translations, Christian literature, lists, record books, and novels, to advance a new era, future social innovation, and the creation of their own imagined communities.

The book critiques the view that the Gikuyu were static in their cultural and political traditions. Instead, Gikuyu people engaged literary texts in multiple ways from multiple perspectives, doing so in politically and socially creative ways that inspired people to act in imaginative ways, to adjust to changing colonial society, and to create new constituencies. By such means, Gikuyu Christians innovated religious practices that suited their own purposes and reality. This creativity is a significant aspect of colonial intellectual history.

—Charles W. Weber

Pierre Claverie: Un Algérien par alliance.


Pierre Claverie, Catholic bishop of Oran, Algeria, was assassinated by Islamic militants on August 1, 1996. Although the Algerian nationality he desired had not
been granted, the mingling of his blood with that of his young Muslim driver in the booby-trap explosion in which they both perished symbolized Claverie’s place in the hearts of Algerians—the theme of this biography by his fellow Dominican Jean-Jacques Pérennès.

Claverie was born to French settler parents in Algiers in 1938. His was a happy childhood in a loving family that had no contact with the Arabs among whom they lived. He enrolled at the University of Grenoble in France to study science in 1957, as the debate on the future of the colony began. After being a right-wing student activist, he began to see the other side and joined the Order of Preachers (Dominicans) novitiate near Lille. Claverie’s military service in Algiers ended as the French withdrew, and after his profession as a Dominican he returned to an independent Algeria, where he learned Arabic and explored links with Algerian Muslims.


After the Algerian government canceled elections in 1992 that the Islamic fundamentalists were expected to win, the latter attempted to take power by force. Assassination of intellectuals and artists was followed by the murder of priests and sisters. Claverie denounced the cowardice of the killers but believed that the church was in the right place—at the foot of the cross, on the fracture lines of Algerian society.

This book depicts the evolution of a Christian martyr against the background of politico-religious developments in Algeria.

—Aylward Shorter, M.Afr.
area of the world. Readers will perhaps be surprised to discover that the strands of Pentecostalism exploding around the world resist close connection to North American antecedents.

The Achilles’ heel of overview volumes such as this one is that at times they cover so much so quickly that real insight can get lost in a bewildering array of information. For example, W.R. Ward’s chapter, “Evangelical Identity in the Eighteenth Century,” will be a difficult read for anyone not intimately familiar with the literature on the period. David Martin’s concluding summary of explanatory causes for evangelical expansion, while exceptional, can be overwhelming. “I'll trade you two ananomies for one expression of transnational modernity...”

Interested readers, however, should not be intimidated by the few pages sure to overwhelm. There is much here that is useful, and some that is masterful. There are few topics in Christian history where one could do better than to start with an essay by Mark Noll, and that is certainly true of his sweeping synthesis of the history of Christian identity and expansion in the nineteenth century. Brian Stanley elegantly challenges received dogmas about connections between the spread of Christianity and colonialism. Chapters by Jehu Hanciles and Marthinus Daneel on Africa offer fascinating insights into Pentecostal growth in the region. Finally, Paul Preston’s chapter on Latin American Pentecostalism is a model for such scholarship, providing a well-written overview of the subject filled with satisfying insights. Preston’s chapter alone is worth the price of the volume.

—William Svelmoe

William Svelmoe, Assistant Professor of History at Saint Mary’s College, South Bend, Indiana, lived for seventeen years in the Philippines, where his parents were members of Wycliffe Bible Translators.

All According to God’s Plan: Southern Baptist Missions and Race, 1945–1970.


This book argues that, in the quarter-century following World War II, “Southern Baptist progressives presented a forceful argument against racism and contributed to real change in the South” (p. 12). These progressives controlled not only the denomination’s Social Service and Christian Life Commissions but also the major Southern Baptist mission organizations—the Home Mission Board, the Foreign Mission Board, and the Woman’s Missionary Union. They also enjoyed the support of Southern Baptist missionaries generally.

To document this argument, the author turns to “the popular literature of the Convention’s three main mission organizations” (p. 5), a half-dozen periodicals, some of which were aimed primarily at women or youth. The book consists largely of summaries and quotations from material in these periodicals, much of which is highly repetitious. Believing that this “consistency is one of the most remarkable aspects of this study” (p. 196), Willis emphasizes it by organizing his work thematically rather than chronologically. Southern Baptist African missions, for example, are dealt with primarily in chapter 3, though the author returns later to the role of African students in the desegregation of Southern Baptist educational institutions in the United States.

Throughout, Willis stresses the centrality of three themes in progressive racial thought: “the biblical mandates of racial equality and unity, the international dimensions of the race question, and the personal responsibility of each Christian to work for better race relations” (p. 4). Even in the last chapter, which charts the progressives’ changing course from attempting to promote racial harmony within a segregated system to an increasingly vigorous attack on segregation and racial discrimination generally, the book emphasizes continuity. Willis also argues that despite the post-1970 conservative takeover of the denomination, “there are clear indications that the progressive view still holds sway” on matters of race (p. 198). Perhaps that is because Southern Baptist racial progressivism, as defined in this book, had been for the most part, all along, rather cautious.

—David W. Wills

David W. Wills is the Winthrop H. Smith ’16 Professor of American History and American Studies at Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts, teaching in the Departments of Religion and Black Studies.
A History of Christianity in Asia.
Vol. 4 of A History of Christianity from a Global, Asian Perspective.


Thomas G. Oey, a self-described evangelical Baptist, works out of Singapore as an Asian Christian history consultant. The present volume is the fourth of a series that includes Ancient and Medieval Worlds (2002) and volumes 2 and 3 (projected) “Modern European Christianity” and “Africa and the Americas.” In the introduction Oey devotes eight pages to describing his evangelical beliefs and approach to Christian history. The format of the book, however, is equally important for understanding the theory and the purpose.

The volume is divided into two unequal parts: part 1 covers Asian Christianity up to 1800 (48 pages, with 17 pages for pre-Christian history), and part 2 (166 pages) covers from 1800 to the present. Each chapter starts with a timeline that has a highlight of important (mostly) Christian events, followed by a brief history of the region, statistical information, and a small bibliography. Some sections have study questions at the end that focus on reading comprehension (“Identify two main events . . .,” p. 211) rather than synthesis of the material. The style is factual, dominated by dates, names, and places, with virtually no discussion of themes, movements, periodization, or intercultural interactions. Each area or region stands alone, generally as a “national” church, with no discussion of the movements (especially political and social) and cross-fertilization that make Asian Christianity so complex.

The value of the volume is that the reader can quickly look up major events and dates by region. Unfortunately, the limitations of the volume greatly reduce its value for the serious Asian or missional historian. Bibliographies are very erratic and incomplete, regions are not represented at all proportionally (the Philippines is given nine pages, and tiny Singapore, twelve), the Pacific world is (inconsistently) attached at the end, there is no index, and history is portrayed as a listing of isolated “factoids.” If we are looking for a briefer history of Christianity in Asia than Samuel Moffett’s volumes, this will not be it.

—Scott W. Sunquist

Scott W. Sunquist is the W. Don McClure Associate Professor of World Mission and Evangelism at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. He previously taught Asian church history at Trinity Theological College, Singapore.
volumes on the Second Vatican Council. The authors of each of the eight sections of the present volume bring the reader into the council hall, curial offices, and many semiofficial venues where issues of moment were discussed, if not decided. The narrative describes the council proceedings—including open disagreement and political machinations—without pulling any punches.

Two of the six major works to come out of Vatican II were produced during the third session and form the core of the discussion in this volume: Lumen gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) and Unitatis redintegratio (Decree on Ecumenism). A preconciliar commission presented a first draft on the church (1962), and after considerable debate the decision was made to draft an entirely new document that would be more biblical, more historical, and less institutional and juridical.

The document on ecumenism broke new ground in the Catholic Church’s relationship with other churches and ecclesial communities. The church intended to signal its readiness to join the ecumenical movement, and Pope John XXIII made it clear that in the process of renewing the church, Christian unity needed to be taken more seriously.

An example of the reporting of the “human” side of the council is the detailed narrative of “Black Week,” the final week of this session. Four striking events marked the final days of the third session: the postponement of the vote on religious liberty, the presentation of the methodology related to the third chapter of Lumen gentium (the church as hierarchy), the introduction by Paul VI of nineteen amendments to the document on ecumenism, and the papal declaration of the Marian title “Mother of the Church.” This lengthy chapter reveals the partisan feelings of the council fathers and the apparent disregard for the rules of protocol in attempting to hurry things through at the last moment.

The volume concludes with plans for the fourth session, which began in September 1965.

—John W. Nyquist

John W. Nyquist, Professor of Mission and Evangelism, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois, served as a missionary with Campus Crusade for Christ International in Germany from 1972 to 1977.

The Eyes of Another Race: Roger Casement’s Congo Report and 1903 Diary.


Roger Casement, who has been variously regarded as an Irish nationalist hero and a British traitor, was executed by the British in 1916 after attempting to import German weapons to help in Dublin’s Easter Rising. Long before, however, he had served as a distinguished British diplomat, and in 1903–4 he had prepared a report that helped to unmask the details of King Leopold’s atrocities against the Congolese people.

This book is made up of two parts: Casement’s Congo report and his diary for 1903. The report shows in great detail how King Leopold and his various subordinates (both companies and individuals whom he had appointed) extracted rubber from the peoples of the Congo for export and profit. The process was always unjust, frequently brutal, and sometimes murderous. Those who failed to collect enough rubber were often punished by having their hands or feet cut off as a warning to others. Such atrocities had been documented by missionaries to the Congo, and during the several months that Casement spent in the Upper Congo researching his own report, he depended on such missionaries for information, contacts with local people, travel arrangements, and accommodation. (John Harris, Joseph Clark, and John Whitehead were some of the missionaries who helped him.) Thanks to these local contacts, Casement was able to include sworn statements by local Congolese in his report, which was unusual in his time.

When published in Britain in 1904, Casement’s report greatly influenced public opinion against King Leopold. Casement also persuaded E. D. Morel to found the Congo Reform Association, which missionaries John and Alice Harris later worked for. Some of Alice Harris’s photographs of atrocities are included in this volume.

Although Casement’s career as a whole remains controversial, his work in the Congo and his cooperation with local missionaries helped greatly in bringing
colonial atrocities there to a much wider audience. This book is therefore welcome as an easily accessible resource for all those interested in these events.

—T. Jack Thompson

T. Jack Thompson, Director, Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World, University of Edinburgh, is presently researching the impact of missionary photography in Africa.

Editor’s note: For additional information, see “Light on the Dark Continent: The Photography of Alice Seely Harris and the Congo Atrocities of the Early Twentieth Century,” IBMR 26 (2002): 146–49.


This is a book of serious intellectual inquiry into the ways in which nineteenth-century American Protestant women, at home and abroad, came to perceive the “degenerate” “Orient.” Using women’s memoirs and other publications, through which American Protestant women championed the cause of converting their “oppressed” Asian sisters, Lisa Joy Pruitt clearly demonstrates the cultural and social agendas of these Protestant women as they attempted to justify an expanded role for women in both evangelical and public spheres, domestically and internationally. The view of women missionaries about the “Orient,” embodying the dichotomy of the West versus the Other, consequently reinforced the already existing sense of superiority and privilege among Americans.

Credit should be given to Pruitt for the nuances she adds to the topic of cultural imperialism, a well-trodden area of study given momentum by Edward Said’s Orientalism (1978) in the 1980s and early 1990s. Her book, however, suffers from the same flaws that are inherent in Said’s approach. Pruitt compresses the rich discourses of American Protestant women missionaries on heterogeneous Asian traditions into one single version. Without taking into account the historical contexts of various Asian countries, she makes untenable generalizations about the missionary presentations of the “Orient” that gloss over the differences and evolution in American attitudes toward these countries over the years.

Such an approach is even more troublesome with Pruitt’s selection of “Oriental” countries: Ceylon, India, Persia, Syria, and Turkey. China is treated only in passing, though some attention is given to Peter Parker, a male medical missionary in Canton. The rest of Asia, including Korea and Japan, is not considered. Another example of a striking omission occurs in chapter 5, on women’s involvement in educating women. Protestant higher education, which exerted enormous influence in Asia, is completely left out of the picture. Such omissions, together with Pruitt’s rather idiosyncratic choice of “Oriental” countries, weaken her generalizations about views of the “Orient” held by women missionaries.

—Dong Wang

Dong Wang, author of China’s Unequal Treaties: Narrating National History (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005) and Sino-American Cultural Encounters: A Case Study of Canton Christian College, 1888–1951 (forthcoming), is Assistant Professor of History and Director of the East-West Institute, Gordon College, Wenham, Massachusetts.
Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia.


The growth of missions and their concomitant religious conversions constituted a major element of Russia’s imperial encounter with its non-Christian and non-Orthodox subjects. Yet until recently, research on the topic has tended either to restyle ecclesiastical conversion stories or to provide political analyses in which Orthodox missions are simply one dimension of Russia’s colonial schemes.

A more multifaceted analysis of missions—“from several different angles at once” (p. 3)—is the explicit goal of editors Robert P. Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky, both specialists in imperial and colonial Russian history. Placing the Orthodox missions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries within their larger context, the book explores the political, cultural, economic, social, and gender implications of religious conversion.

The book sheds significant new light on how the building of Russia’s colonial state impacted the Orthodox missionary enterprise. The authors challenge, for example, conventional notions regarding the symbiotic relationship between the Russian state and the church, demonstrating that the imperial government did not support the church’s proselytizing efforts through systematic and consistent mechanisms.

Instead, the chapters show that the state limited its involvement in missionary enterprise, based on motivations of political expediency. For instance, there were more resources for missionary efforts among Slavic-speaking heretics and Catholic Uniates (of doubtful political loyalty) than in Russia’s more volatile southern border regions, where the government developed a congenial modus vivendi with loyal provincial elites.

While not a missiological analysis of Orthodox mission engagement per se, this book elucidates the sociopolitical context in which these activities took place. It provides an engaging and informative read on Russian Orthodox missionary work outside of Russia.

—Andrey V. Ivanov

Andrey V. Ivanov, a graduate of Yale Divinity School, is currently pursuing doctoral studies in Russian religious history in the History Department of Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

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