This book is about two major transitions now taking place in the history of Christianity. The first is a shift from a Western to a post-Western church, where the increasing majority of Christians live outside Europe and North America. This shift is the result of a dramatic increase in the last fifty years of the number of Christians outside the West and of a marked decline, both in church membership and in Christian observance, in the former Christian heartlands. “In 1950,” Sanneh writes, “some 80 percent of the world’s Christians lived … in Europe and North America. By 2005 the vast majority of Christians lived in … Asia, Africa, and Latin America.” The change in the figures for Africa is even more striking, from 9 million in 1900 (most of them in Egypt and Ethiopia) to 60 million in 1960, and 393 million in 2005 (p. xx). The change is not only one of population shift. Sanneh maintains that “the current awakening had occurred without the institutions and structures that define Western Christendom . . . monasteries, theological schools, and hierarchical agency”; furthermore, political power, instead of being of assistance, has been a “problem and a burden to overcome” (p. x). The second transition is less marked and may be less obvious: the recognition of the first transition by Christian theologians, historians, and church leaders. Lamin Sanneh, originally from Gambia, taught at the University of Aberdeen and at Harvard University. Since 1989 he has been the D. Willis James Professor of World Christianity at Yale Divinity School. He is not simply an observer of this second transition, for he has taken a leading role in appealing to scholars not to resist but to accept gratefully this new view of a new chapter in Christian history.

Because the book is concerned both with a major historical change in Christianity and with the implications of this change for Christians, its organization is partly chronological, partly geographic, moving from region to region, and partly thematic, dealing with many important aspects of Christianity, especially in its present post-Western phase. Sanneh notes at the beginning that the current simultaneous expansion of Christianity in one part of the world and its contraction in another repeats earlier patterns in Christian history. He observes that “the religion is now in the twilight of its Western phase and at the beginning of its formative non-Western impact” (p. xx). His introduction deals with the growing consciousness of Christianity’s world mission as attested in the New Testament and with the spread of Christianity in the Greek-speaking Hellenistic world beyond the boundaries of the Jewish synagogue. The first chapter deals with the expansion of the Christian movement during the following centuries. Within an empire under increasing attack, Christians developed a culture that was distinct from Hellenistic culture and yet borrowed much from it. Beyond and subsequent to Roman rule, the church established itself as a minority in non-Christian societies (examples from the Middle East and India) and gained cultural dominance in tribal societies to the northwest (examples from England and Iceland).

The second chapter provides a brief history of the relations between Christianity and Islam, illustrating with many examples the negative views of the other religion on both sides. After the first few centuries of Islamic military success and the decline of Christian populations under Islamic rule, the last thousand years have been, in Sanneh’s opinion, an unproductive stalemate, with each religion finding in the other “an insurmountable barrier” (p. 57). The third chapter treats the first part of the transatlantic exchange initiated by Portugal and Spain, which led to the colonization of the Americas and the slave trade. Sanneh discusses the relation of Western Christian missions to colonial power and goes on to relate the ending of the slave trade and the return of former slaves in North America to Sierra Leone and Liberia, a return with important consequences for the nineteenth-century Christian mission in West Africa. The fourth chapter focuses on the ambivalent relation between Christian missions and Western colonial rule since 1800, with particular reference to Africa.

The fifth chapter, “Charismatic Renewal,” starts with the eighteenth-century Pietist movement that began to have impact in many parts of the world before the nineteenth-century colonial empires. This movement regarded the Gospel as opposed to inculcating Western culture, including colonial rule. This Pietist heritage encouraged new converts in Africa and elsewhere to interpret the Gospel in terms of their local culture and sometimes to establish churches independent of Western missions, churches that sometimes engaged in philanthropy “without foreign aid or government subsidy” (p. 171). The revivals characteristic of Pietism now took place within these independent churches as well as within mission churches. Much support for the development of a Christianity free of mission control came from the translation of the Bible into many vernacular languages, about which Sanneh has previously written extensively.

The sixth chapter relates the development of indigenous Christianity in West Africa, highlighting the way in which “charismatic prophets” incorporated beliefs and practices of traditional religion and sometimes sharply challenged them. Sanneh gives special attention to the preaching of the Prophet Harris, who brought thousands to convert, while Protestant and Catholic missionaries competed to enroll the converts in their own churches and refused to acknowledge African leadership.

The seventh chapter discusses two Western missionaries, one Protestant and one Roman Catholic, who out of their own experience and reflection became highly critical of prevailing approaches in Western missions. One was the Anglican Roland Allen, who because of ill health served as a missionary in China for only eight years (1895–1903) but spent much of the next twenty years writing about missionary methods and principles. “Without realizing it,” Sanneh comments,
“Allen had set out to delineate the nature of post-Western Christianity at a time when the church and his contemporaries thought almost exclusively in Eurocentric, Christendom terms” (pp. 218–19). Sanneh’s second example of missionary self-critique is Vincent Donovan, a Spiritan Catholic missionary who served among the Maasai from 1955 to 1973. Donovan discovered in Allen’s writings a solution for problems that troubled him deeply, leading him to conclude that “Western missionaries must renounce the view that civilization was required to disinfect indigenous people and render them tidy enough to receive the gospel” (p. 236). “God enabled a people, any people, to reach salvation through their culture and tribal, racial customs and traditions” (p. 237). Moreover, Donovan learned from those he came to teach, taking to heart what he heard from a Maasai elder that “it was not the Maasai who had searched for God, but God who had searched for the Maasai” (p. 238).

This seventh chapter thus personalizes the second transition with which the book is concerned: recognizing that Western culture does not and should not define world Christianity. The eighth chapter returns to the objective, historical transition, coming to the present and to the unknown future, as exemplified by the dramatic development of Christianity in Communist China. Cut off from Western missions but still denounced and oppressed as a foreign religion, Christian churches have multiplied. Current estimates of the total number of Christians vary widely, from 25 to 89 million. “The real question for the church in China,” Sanneh holds, “is not about succeeding in winning converts, for that seems assured on present trends, but about what role the church might and should play in a reawakened China” (p. 266). Such a church and such a China could play a leading role in the next phase of post-Western Christianity.

Through this introduction to world Christianity, Lamin Sanneh is also introducing his readers to a series of more specific volumes that are not yet written. It remains to be seen how closely they will follow his approach. “Post-Western” could suggest that there may soon be as many local “Christianities” as there are distinct cultures. Sanneh believes that diverse local developments are part of the genius of Christian “awakening,” but he is equally concerned with encouraging the unity of Christians around the world: first, their solidarity in the face of so much variety and diverse involvement in their various cultures, and second, their willingness to learn from one another.

The volumes planned can deal in greater detail with the topics treated in this introduction, along with other subjects that are here but briefly discussed. One of these topics is the situation of Christians when they are in a small and vulnerable minority, which is the case not only in most countries with Islamic leadership but also in many countries with strong Buddhist or Hindu elites who provide religious and cultural leadership for a majority Buddhist or Hindu constituency. In some cases Christian influence on modern thought and social institutions seems greater than the percentage of the population who are Christians. In many countries, including India and Japan, we need to learn more about those who worship God in Jesus Christ but are not members of any Christian congregation. We need also to gain a greater understanding of those who are church members but share many of the beliefs and practices of their non-Christian neighbors, including those who are immersed in an avowedly secular culture. Whether in a majority or a minority, Christians are now often one community among others in a religiously and culturally diverse society. These modern situations may look quite different to us in the light of Lamin Sanneh’s
perspective. We should be grateful to him, both as author and general editor, for helping us recognize Christianity’s present and future state as a worldwide community.

—John B. Carman

John B. Carman served as an American Baptist missionary in South India (1957–63) and taught comparative religion at Harvard Divinity School (1963–2000), where he was also affiliated with the Center for the Study of World Religions.

This Side of Heaven: Race, Ethnicity, and Christian Faith.


Twenty social scientists and theologians from all over the United States have contributed to this valuable symposium on racism in American society from a Christian perspective. They share the conviction that “while Christians claim ‘citizenship in heaven’ (Phil. 3:20 NIV), we live ‘on this side of heaven,’ where we find ourselves ensnared in realities that are anything but heavenly” (p. 323). The editors state clearly their intention to diagnose and analyze “the nature of racial and ethnic problems in our churches, our society and our world” (p. 323), and they have succeeded in this effort.

In Part 1, “Thinking Critically About Culture, Race, and Colour,” the authors describe the problem of racism in U.S. society, clarifying concepts and using adequate analytic tools (pp. 19–94). The researchers in Part 2, “Encountering the Other in Ethnic and Racialized Worlds,” report surprising and embarrassing data about the racist practices of various Christians, especially of evangelical groups (pp. 97–161). Part 3, “Using and Abusing the Bible in Ethnic and Racial Contexts,” offers a rich and seminal reading of biblical material relevant to race issues, with new hermeneutical keys (pp. 165–240). Finally, in Part 4, “Engaging Racial and Ethnic Realities in Congregational Settings,” the authors explore promising case studies that show how we might move forward from the dilemmas and contradictions presented (pp. 243–333). Appendix 1, a timeline about race and ethnicity in the United States, starts in 1619, though it actually should have begun with the arrival of Hernando de Soto in Tampa in 1539.

Editor Robert Priest is director of the Ph.D. program in intercultural studies and professor of mission and anthropology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Deerfield, Ill.), from which five other scholars have contributed chapters. Editor Alvaro Nieves is department chair and professor of sociology at Wheaton College (Wheaton, Ill.), a school that is also represented in the book by five other scholars. The other contributors come from a wide variety of Christian and secular universities. The editors have managed to produce a volume that has unity and clarity, combining the realistic double edge of social analysis with a courageous rereading of biblical texts and a hopeful attitude in spite of discomforting facts. In short, this book represents missiology at its best.

—Samuel Escobar

Samuel Escobar, a contributing editor, is Professor of Missiology Emeritus at Palmer Theological Seminary, Wynnewood, Pennsylvania. He presently teaches at the Theological Seminary of the Spanish Baptist Evangelical Union in Madrid.


This volume is the final part of a two-volume series on the letters and documents penned by Théophile Verbist and his companions from 1861 to 1869. Verbist, who died from typhoid fever in February 1868, was the cofounder and first superior of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (C.I.C.M., also known as Scheut).


The entire series owes much to CICM editors Daniël Verhelst and Hyacint Daniëls. They fell ill, however, and their colleague Nestor Pycke took over to complete volume 2B. This last book introduces 341 documents in addition to the 438 presented in volumes 1 and 2A. It is the first publication of all of Verbist’s writings.

Since parts A and B of volume 2 both deal with the first years of the CICM missionary presence in China, the editors opted to number consecutively both the pages and the documents in these two halves. All documents are reproduced in full in their original French, Flemish, or Latin, but those in Flemish and Latin are also followed by a French translation.

Volume 2B is a treasure trove of information on the life and work of missionaries in Inner Mongolia during the second half of the nineteenth century, including the material and spiritual organization of the mission, seminary formation, orphanages, expenses and revenues, language learning, and many observations on local crops, climate, famine, and so forth. It also details the complexity of the relations the CICM missionaries maintained, not only among themselves, but also with Propaganda Fide, French Vincentians, native priests, Chinese authorities, and French representatives in charge of the protection of Catholic missions. The 100-page introduction provides a detailed and most useful background analysis of the main themes and types of information found in the documents.

Readers will appreciate the photographs of CICM missionaries, the foldout map of the Inner Mongolia mission, the extensive bibliography, and the several indexes. One glaring mistake is the replacement of page 1,014 with a duplicate of page 1,824. Overall, however, the entire series represents a valuable contribution to the history of nineteenth-century Roman Catholic missions in China.

—Jean-Paul Wiest

Jean-Paul Wiest, Research Director of the Beijing Center for Chinese Studies and Distinguished Fellow of the EDS-Steward Chair at the Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History at the University of San Francisco, writes extensively on the history of the Roman Catholic Church in China.
Empire in Africa: Angola and Its Neighbors.


David Birmingham is a British scholar of African history. His well-researched Empire in Africa is filled with vignettes and insights about colonial and postcolonial Angola, a part of Africa too often neglected in English-language studies. From the grim ironies of promoting Portuguese fortified wines as a way to combat alcoholism (and to replace locally produced rum and gin) to the centuries-long tradition of Carnival in Luanda, a curious reader will not be disappointed, and naive assumptions will be overturned. Racism became much more acute in the mid-twentieth century than it had been earlier. In postindependence conflicts, church membership may have been as significant as tribalism.

Birmingham gives the social and political influence of missionaries and churches due weight. Special (and deserved) prominence is given to the enterprising Swiss pioneer Héli Chatelain, who founded the Kalukembe Mission as a refuge from slavery and called it Lincoln.

However, no overarching narrative provides coherence for this book. Its eleven chapters originated as articles written over a period of twenty years. In addition, the "empire" of the title is a vague concept and, ultimately, ineffective as an organizing principle. A reader new to Angolan history will be baffled by unexplained allusions.

Unfortunately, the overall impression given is one of Angolans as victims, most recently of the oil wealth that funds a governing elite without accountability. The voices of courageous Angolans coping with oppression and finding their courage in the Gospel are not found here.

The book concludes with an excellent guide for further reading, which helps make up for its deficiencies.

—Stuart J. Foster

Stuart J. Foster has served in Mozambique with SIM (Serving in Mission) since 1986. He is part of the Lomwe whole-Bible translation project.

The Westminster Dictionary of Theologians.


This dictionary is a translation of the original Spanish version, Diccionario de teólogos y teólogas (Barcelona, 2004), written by over sixty Latino scholars around the world. The 1,500 theologians covered are chosen from the whole of Christian history from the first century to the contemporary period, from various Christian traditions (Roman Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Coptic, and Ethiopian), and from all regions of the world. There is a conscious attempt to be inclusive in choosing the entries, but understandably, greater representation of Latin America and of Catholic tradition is noticeable. The contents of the dictionary are very concise and give good explanations of key aspects of the background, theological thinking, and major works of the theologians. This dictionary will be very helpful for undergraduate students and for people in theological training.

Though the entries on the more well-known theologians are extensive and well written, most of the articles are too short for any substantial discussion of the various persons’ theologies. The theologians selected from the non-Western world are well known to the West because of their audience in the West rather than

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Think on These Things: Harmony and Diversity
by Wisnu Sasonkho

“I paint what I can see, what I can touch, what I can feel—a utopia of love expressed in the reality of life. All of that inspires me in my artistic way,” says Wisnu Sasonkho, a graduate of the Faculty of Fine Art, Institut Seni Indonesia, Yogyakarta. This book includes “All Dreams Connected,” a 28-minute DVD about Sasonkho and his art. 96 pages and a DVD, $29.95

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How could the Chinese be converted to Christianity? In Journey to the East, Liam Brockey examines the proselytization strategies of the Jesuits in China during the years 1579–1724. Aiming to provide a corrective to previous histories that present the Jesuits’ strategy as “top-down” and elite-centered, Brockey reconstructs the history of the China mission “from the ground up.” Readers will get little of the Chinese perspective from this book, but that clearly is not Brockey’s intention. He chooses rather to reexamine archival materials in Lisbon and Rome in order to present an institutional history of the Jesuit enterprise in China “from the inside,” one that seeks to understand the Jesuits’ strategies and outcomes in the training that prepared these Europeans for service in East Asia and examines the “cultural baggage” that influenced their actions.

In Part 1 the author provides a


The African Studies Companion has for years served as an invaluable resource for those who research, write, or teach on African issues. In an age of rapid technological development and media expansion, including cyber research, one of the guide's major strengths is currency and accessibility. It is a credit to the publishers that the material is available both in print and in electronic format. Now in its fourth edition, The African Studies Companion is published “to provide a compact, timesaving, and annotated guide to print and electronic information sources, and to facilitate easy access to a wide range of information” in the field of African studies (p. xiv). This is not a wild claim. The fourth edition has been thoroughly revised, updated, and expanded to keep pace with studies in the different fields of African studies. It is also international in orientation, with information on works on Africa, including publishers that deal with manuscripts on Africa (pp. 463–556), and even how to use Google to seek information on African studies research (pp. 717–86). In addition to its very helpful and innovative evaluative entries—almost 3,000 in all—The African Studies Companion comes with an extensive index spanning forty-six pages, making it the most user-friendly source to date in the field of African studies. This edition of the book will undoubtedly be a great asset to the growing numbers of scholars showing interest in Africa.

African scholars themselves, however, still lag behind their Western counterparts in the ability to secure printed material in particular. The lofty aims of The African Studies Companion would thus be greatly enhanced if African academic institutions could focus more particularly on the regularly updated electronic version of the book. Most African institutions, with their meager budgets, may be ill-equipped to obtain the print version of this useful volume.

—J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu

J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu is Vice President of Trinity Theological Seminary, Accra, Ghana, where he teaches African Christianity, Pentecostal/charismatic theology, and new religious movements.

The church’s response to those most in need is a sign of God’s presence in the world. Yet the mission of the church does not move in one direction—from West to East, first to third world, or affluence to poverty. Nor is it controlled from a central location or organization. Located in every province of every country, the church is situated to react to the needs of the poor in an especially powerful way—from the bottom up.

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Instead of rivals at cross purposes, these three forces—local church, appropriate technology, and social entrepreneurship—hold enormous promise when they converge, for they have the potential to create genuine social change and express Christian faith and witness.

We invite papers, panel discussions, and poster presentations from all disciplines that reflect on the variety of ways that global poverty might be addressed through the nexus of appropriate technology, social entrepreneurship, and Christian mission. Possible session titles include the following, though contributions on other specific topics, questions, or books are welcome and encouraged:

**Appropriate Technology for Developing Countries**
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- Micro-enterprises and Micro-financing
- Economic Development and Renewable Resources
- Holistic Missions

**Low-Cost Housing and Infrastructure**
- Economic Markets in Poor Countries
- Business as Mission or the Mission of Business

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The Order of the Wounded Hands: Schooled in the East.


Retired Anglican bishop Kenneth Cragg is well known for his numerous writings engaging Islam with a Christian mind and heart. In the book under review, Cragg elaborates the theology of ordained ministry that has nurtured this engagement. Cragg's ministry is hereby made more accessible to his readers as a result of the publication of this volume. The passion that has long characterized Cragg's teaching and writing, and his interest in the worlds of others that Cragg takes to be essential to Christian ministry. The final part of the book explores practical issues in ministry and the obedience and discipline required to persevere. Here we find reflections on such diverse matters as interfaith dialogue and homosexual practice. Many of the rich theological insights in this volume will be familiar to readers of Cragg's earlier writings, but what makes this book unique is its autobiographical quality. Cragg situates his remarks against the backdrop of his own journey from chaplain and teacher in Beirut in the 1940s, to Anglican bishop in Jerusalem, and, finally, to his distress at the July 2006 war in Lebanon. The passion that has long characterized Cragg's ministry is hereby made more transparent in the travails of his own experience in a troubled region.

—Jon Hoover


This significant book brings together two groups of scholars who rarely talk to each other: missiologists and liturgiologists. Two scholars of large vision—missiologist Charles Farhadian, who has lived in Papua and now teaches in California, and liturgical theologian John Witvliet, who directs the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship in Grand Rapids—convened seminars in 2002 and 2003 in which there was sympathetic observation of the worship practices in non-Western churches, as well as penetrating cultural and theological reflection. The aim, according to Witvliet, was “to change and deepen both the way we [Western Christians] think and worship as well as the underlying dispositions and attitudes.
that shape our work” (p. 274). The result is a book that does just that.

Reports such as that of M. L. Daneel and Dana Robert about the worship of the African Initiated Churches (AIC) in Zimbabwe are contributions to missiology, but they also fascinate and challenge liturgical scholars and all worshiping Christians. The AIC’s practices, Daneel and Robert contend, “should be a model for other churches around the world” (p. 70). Church musician Michael Hawn, who has wide experience in the use of world church practices in Western churches, helps readers ponder the promises and pitfalls of musical appropriation. One would have welcomed similar discussions of the challenges of appropriating healing and testimony. Inevitably, issues of culture figure largely. Chapters by Bryan Spinks, Farhadian, and Witvliet range widely, reflecting not only on the seven communities whose worship this volume studies but also on the inculturation of worship practices from Christianity’s beginnings. Contributions by Andrew Walls and Lamin Sanneh develop broad themes, of which Sanneh’s treatment of the parallels between Islamic and Christian prayer is especially penetrating. The editor provides the chapters with helpful introductions, which will lead to productive discussions.

—Alan Kreider

Alan Kreider is Associate Professor of Church History and Mission at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana. For twenty-six years he was a missionary in England with the Mennonite Board of Missions.


Scholars owe a debt of thanks to the editor of this impressive work. Michael Angold, professor emeritus of Byzantine history at the University of Edinburgh, has done a magnificent job of touching on the highlights of Eastern Christianity in its many forms, including the Oriental churches not in full communion with the Eastern Orthodox churches. Chapters on the Copts, Melkites, Nestorians, and Jacobites make this volume a comprehensive history. There is also an excellent review of dissent movements in Russia, especially the section on the Old Believers.

What is lacking is a better treatment of the missionary activity of the Orthodox and the Oriental churches. This lack is due in part to the date with which this volume commences, A.D. 1000. By then, missionary activity was over for Constantinople and the Nestorians. It would have been more useful for the study of Eastern Christianity if the volume had started with an earlier date, perhaps A.D. 500 or 600. A search of other volumes in the series, however, fails to give one the impression that this lacuna will be filled. Even in the 1,000 years surveyed, missions and evangelization do not feature prominently. St. Stephen of Perm gets adequate coverage, as does the linguist Nicholas Ilminski, but Macarius Gloukharev and Nicholas Kassatkin are not even mentioned. St. Herman of the Alaska mission is noted, but the mission itself and the work of John Veniaminov are notably absent. This is all the more surprising because in later life Veniaminov, under the monastic name Innocent, became metropolitan of Moscow in 1868. Those interested in Orthodox missions will need to look elsewhere.
This volume is, however, a valuable addition to our knowledge of the Eastern churches. The historical scope of the twenty-four chapters (divided into four parts) is impressive, as are the credentials of the scholars contributing to this volume. Having multiple authors means that there is some overlap of subject matter, but this actually adds depth for the reader who wants to study only a particular period. The work is primarily historical; theological discussions are at a minimum in most of the chapters, which is understandable in a work of this scope. To have included the earlier period of Byzantine history, as well as the theological controversies during that time, would have made a much longer volume. Perhaps to have divided the work into two volumes and included more material would have been justified, especially when one looks at the treatment the Western churches receive in the other books in this series.

These comments need to be balanced by an honest appreciation of the tremendous usefulness this volume will have for students and researchers. The bibliography, handily divided according to the chapters, runs to seventy-nine pages. This reviewer found the works listed a valuable resource. Those teaching in this area will undoubtedly assign reading from Eastern Christianity to orient students to the key historical issues.

—James J. Stamoolis

James J. Stamoolis, mission educator and consultant, has written Eastern Orthodox Mission Theology Today (Orbis Books, 1986).

Why Have You Come Here? The Jesuits and the First Evangelization of Native America.


Nicholas Cushner, professor of history emeritus at the State University of New York, tells the story of the Jesuits in colonial America. He explains how Christianity became the dominant religion in the New World.

Cushner’s book is a gold mine of information, but as with a mine, the nuggets of information are often unpolished and difficult to extract. Cushner’s description of the Jesuit chronicles is apt: “The information was amassed rather than selected, arranged, and edited” (pp. 168–69). Cushner has little sense of narrative, and his chapters often settle into flat accounts of contrasting Jesuit and native beliefs. Chapters seem to be unaware of one another, with stories and interpretations repeated multiple times. While the author clearly has great learning, he often drops references into the middle of paragraphs for which he provides no explanation.

In addition to the poor editing, there is nothing strikingly new in the author’s analysis. On the Jesuits (“No cultural relativists they!” [p. 63]), he seems to want to argue that Indian conversions were at least partially sincere, but all his evidence
indicates otherwise. He is left to conclude: “It is difficult if not impossible to enter the minds of sixteenth-century Native Americans to try to discern motivation or sincerity in converting to Christianity. However, the quantity, quality, and continuity of institutional Christianity that persisted in Mexico indicate a lasting continuity of institutional Christianity” (p. 69). By the author’s own evidence, one could argue that it simply indicates a lasting cultural dominance.

It is hard to decide for whom this book was written. Students will likely find the writing and editing unwelcoming and will soon put the book down. Those with knowledge of the field will find little new here, although the book does collect good material into one place. It is a nice archive to have on a scholar’s shelf.

—William Svelmoe

William Svelmoe is Associate Professor of History at Saint Mary’s College, Notre Dame, Indiana.

Forgive Us Our Sins: Confession in Late Ming and Early Qing China.


Nicolas Standaert and Ad Dudink (Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium) have edited a pioneering study of Christian ritual in late imperial China, with contributions by three leading scholars. The editors are sinologists specializing in Catholicism in China, as is Eugenio Menegon (Boston University). Erik Zürcher (Leiden University) is a scholar whose work over the last half century has encompassed Buddhism, Chinese popular religion, and Christianity in China. Liam Brockey (Princeton University), a historian of early modern Europe, has recently published Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579–1724 (Harvard University Press, 2007).

In “Deliver Us from Evil: Confession and Salvation in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Chinese Catholicism,” Menegon examines the prescriptive and normative meaning of the sacrament and the way it was actually practiced, including an examination of the particular practices of women. He shows how the ritual of confession could have different meanings for priests and their followers: lay Chinese Christians increasingly perceived the sacrament as a “pastoral of fear” rather than a “pastoral of perfection.” For them, confession became an efficacious ritual, not one of spiritual direction.

Zürcher, in “Buddhist Chan Hui and Christian Confession in Seventeenth-Century China,” compares Christian confession with the communal Buddhist chan hui confessional liturgy. He suggests that the individual Catholic practice of confession, unlike chan hui, shared the Confucian notion of self-improvement through the individual’s examination of conscience. Zürcher suggests that Confucian Christian converts could find Christianity appealing in this regard.

In “Illuminating the Shades of Sin: Confession in Seventeenth-Century China,” Brockey examines how Jesuit missionaries hoped to “reform the customs” of their followers through suasion after auricular confession. Appended to his essay is a translation of the manual by the Jesuit missionary José Monteiro (1646–1720), with the original Portuguese and Chinese texts.

—Robert Entenmann

Robert Entenmann is Professor of History and Asian Studies at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota.