The trend in writing books on the Christian theology of religions is to move them as far away as possible from sectarian divisions within Christianity, let alone the dogmatic positions taken by sectarian theologies. The editors and authors of this book, however, move as far as possible in the opposite direction. Theirs is a book written from the point of view of Roman Catholicism and the church’s magisterial teaching on the basic doctrines of the church. Any theology of religions, they aver, not only must take into account that tradition but also must grow out of it and must remain within the boundaries it describes.

One will look in vain in this book for substantive references to religions—to the psychologies, anthropologies, sociologies, and philosophies of religion. A theology of religions must look to Scripture, the teachings of the church fathers, and Roman Catholic theologians down through the ages, with the official pronouncements of the church councils and the popes forming the boundaries of where this developing sector of dogmatics may go. This is old-school theology dealing with the newest, and perhaps most crucial, of global religious crises.

The question posed by the book might be stated this way: How has Roman Catholicism as represented by magisterial teaching engaged the world’s religions theologically and practically, and what is the status/future of that engagement for us today? The book is divided into four parts: history, dogmatics, theology of religions, and engagement. Twenty-five authors write scholarly, mostly brilliant summaries of the historical period, doctrine, theological loci, or practical engagement assigned to them.

The historical section is perhaps the most interesting portion. Its six differently authored chapters fit together quite well, and its opening chapter on the development of the concept of religion within the church, by Peter Henrici, provides one of the most useful interpretive principles for understanding that history. As the term “religion” moved from a reference word for the official Christian church only to a term that acknowledged other religions did exist (but were still not worthy of theological consideration), to religion as a generic category that might just warrant theological commentary, to the de facto religious pluralism of today, one can see correspondingly sophisticated theological positions taken by church theological voices. A consistent theological terminology develops around issues that become more complex as the notion of religion grows. Præparatio evangelica, ecclesiæ ab Abel, pedagogia divina, and semina Verbi are Latin books on which one can still hang most of the church’s official pronouncements, past and present, regarding the other religions.

A second interpretive principle emerges from one of the most intriguing insights this historical sweep produces—it concerns the halting attempts even today for the church actually to produce a constructive theology regarding the non-Christian religions. One would think that a theological system that wholeheartedly endorses the idea of theology as a cumulative, developing endeavor would have no trouble with this. But the story seems to show that the theologia constructiva was constantly confused with and/or inhibited by a theologa defensia, a battle against indifferentists such as deists and other cultured despisers of religion. For example, would the church’s eventual censure of (and then centuries later endorsement of) Matteo Ricci’s “constructive theological attempts at inculturation in China” have been as strongly negative if it had not been fighting indifferentists (atheists,agnostics, materialists) back in Europe? And are today’s constructivist Catholic theologians painted with the same broad brush as the indifferentists of today—the relativists and secularists and atheists? And if they are, is this confusion inhibiting the development of a desperately needed Roman Catholic theology of religions?

Part 2 is a theological framework the editors/authors provide to show the boundaries within which a Roman Catholic theologian of today must work: “We write as Catholics guided by our Church’s authoritative teaching” (p. 151). These eight chapters would be a useful stand-alone summary of the church’s theology on the eight topics chosen: God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, revelation, humanity, church, mission, and faith. The framework provides more than a theological boundary, however. It also stresses the point that knowledge of one’s own faith identity is essential as a foundation for dialogue with other religions. The first step in any interreligious dialogue is for each participant to know and state clearly “the place from which one listens and speaks” (p. 179).

With sixty-two pages, Part 3, the theology of religions section and also the theme of the book, is less than half as long as any of the other three sections. And of the four chapters in this section, three are mostly critical analyses of pluralist approaches to the theology of religions. Is this also evidence of an overreliance on defensive theology?

But let us focus on Karl Becker’s chapter in Part 3, “Theology of the Christian Economy of Salvation.” Becker here observes that there are unanswered questions surrounding the relationship of Roman Catholicism with other religions that need to be addressed. Primarily they swirl around the issue of timing: Why did God send his Son so late in historical time? Why has Christianity grown so slowly? Why are the other religions thriving today? These indeed are some of the questions the magisterium needs to address with a constructive theology in mind.

The last section of the book—“Particular Religions in Their Own Right and in Relation to Catholic Faith”—consists of chapters on interreligious dialogue in general and then specific chapters.
on Judaism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. These chapters expertly summarize the teachings of the religion and then compare the religion’s teachings with those of Christianity. The chapters are fair, even generous, to the non-Christian religions, and because of its history-of-religions approach, this section would make this book a good candidate for being the main text in a world religions course taught in a Catholic theological school.

I like this book a lot. I like the implicit lesson it teaches that all theologies of religions must be rooted in a religious tradition of some sort. None of us can float above the fray and claim some sort of ethereal theological objectivity. I like the idea that theology, especially constructive theology, is a slow business. When measured against eternity, what is a decade or two taken to discuss an issue seriously? And, Protestant as I am, I like the idea of the cumulative nature of theology—the idea that our histories, and all of our histories together, are there to be mined for insights and to be built on with respect. We must not lose the wisdom of our fathers and mothers.

But having said that, I find myself a bit impatient, and I wonder if Roman Catholic theologians, the ones who wrote these essays, could not speed up the constructive theological enterprise just a little. The clash of religions is at a crisis point, and we need all the theological wisdom we can get!

Perhaps the best way to summarize this excellent book is to say that if what you are looking for is the best Roman Catholic thinking on what it means to be Roman Catholic in today’s religiously plural world, then this is the book for you. But if you are looking for theologically faithful ideas on how Roman Catholic Christians can better think about, relate with, and witness to people of other religions, you will be disappointed. The book describes the theological framework within which Roman Catholics live, but it prescribes very little beyond offering endless cautions about the importance of staying within that framework. I am afraid that we need more than good description in this age of religious crisis.

—Terry C. Muck


As archbishop of Albania since 1992, Anastasios Yannoulatos is widely credited with facilitating the revival and reconstruction of the Orthodox Church there in the midst of extremely difficult circumstances. This came following his years of missionary service in Africa and his scholarly activity as the premier Orthodox missiologist in the ecumenical movement, where he is one of the presidents of the World Council of Churches and honorary president of the World Conference of Religions for Peace. During his distinguished career he has published more than 230 essays and articles (in several languages) and is a contributing editor of the International Bulletin of Missionary Research.

The essays in this volume are selected from those that first appeared between 1964 and 2003. They cover the...
Asian American Christianity: Reader.


Asian American Christianity is a timely and much-needed book that makes a significant contribution to the growing study of Asian-American Christianity, providing broader and more diverse perspectives than are available in most other sources on the topic. For example, it includes a number of articles about South and Southeast Asian-American Christianity, making a conscious effort to represent more than just those whose ancestors are of East Asian origin. Just as historical and contemporary American Christian life cannot be understood without studying religious experiences of the various ethnic Americans—African-Americans, Latin Americans, Native Americans, and others—so the growing presence and influence of Asian-American Christians and churches require more careful study of their history, experience, and theology. As Timothy Tseng rightly points out, “There is no sustained university-based program that focuses on the study of Asian American Religion,” and this book helps to “fill a vacuum in the study of religion in the United States” (p. 15).

At the same time, this volume reveals that it is not an easy task to present a coherent portrayal of Asian-American Christianity, for at least two reasons. First, the history of Asian-Americans is shorter than that of other ethnic minority groups in America. Although there is certainly the history of early Filipino, Chinese, and Japanese immigrants that goes back mainly to the nineteenth century, it still cannot be compared to the longer African and Latin American history, which traces back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Besides, as a number of contributors in this volume repeatedly emphasize, “Asian American Christianity today is predominantly comprised of post-1965 immigrants and their children,” particularly Koreans, who are largely a Christianized group (p. 16).

The second difficulty is the great ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and historical

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OMSC Scholarships
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Each academic year the Overseas Ministries Study Center grants scholarships to several international Christian workers (citizens of nations other than the United States). Applicants—especially those engaged in cross-cultural ministries—are encouraged to apply for scholarships for residency and study toward OMSC’s Certificate in Mission Studies. If accepted they receive furnished accommodations and modest living stipends. Scholarships are granted on a competitive basis. Scholarships are awarded to:

• Church leaders from countries where faith is often restricted
• Church leaders from impoverished countries
• Artists from Asia who proclaim the Gospel through their art
• Senior administrators of Majority-World denominations and universities

In recent years, OMSC has welcomed scholarship recipients from numerous countries, including China, DR Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nigeria, Russia, Sri Lanka, and Tanzania. Each year we receive seven applications for every scholarship available, and many deserving applicants must be denied due to a lack of resources.

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diversity that exists among Asians in the United States, as reflected in the variety of essay topics presented in this volume. Many Asian-American communities are still struggling with a deep tension between the first-generation immigrants and American-born generations, which is the topic of many essays in parts 2 and 3 of the book.


To present an organized picture of Asian-American Christianity and to give the topic coherence is a challenging undertaking. This Reader, with its indispensable collection of sources and perspectives, makes a significant contribution by tracing the group’s identity and theology. Although its effort to represent diverse Asian-American Christian groups in one volume sometimes makes for difficult reading, it is an important sourcebook.

—Katherine H. Lee Ahn

Katherine H. Lee Ahn is Adjunct Assistant Professor of Church History at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, and the founder of the Center for Women in Ministry and Mission.

Light a Candle: Encounters and Friendship with China. Festschrift in Honour of Angelo S. Lazzarotto, P.I.M.E.


This Festschrift compiled by missionary Angelo Lazzarotto’s friends and colleagues presents a fitting tribute to a longtime friend of China and founder of the Holy Spirit Study Centre in Hong Kong. Unusually, perhaps, for a Festschrift, it is also an excellent collection of essays, here divided into five parts: traditional China, archival materials on the history of Chinese Christianity, Sino-Vatican relations and the history of the modern Catholic Church, and two smaller sections on Maryknoll/P.I.M.E. cooperation and contemporary China. The book developed out of a conference on the interdependence of church history and the historiography of Christianity in China; it brings the links between religious orders and the shape of the Chinese church into focus through personal reflections and analysis.

Since this is a Festschrift, the first section comprises essays honoring Fr. Lazzarotto. There are tender, personal tributes, but in the best tradition of biography, several are also enlightening as to the universal human condition and the value of the life of a mission. The rather masculine language of some essays points to their authors’ vintage—as do anecdotes such as one noting that missionaries were allowed a visit home every twelve years after World War II, and this a concession. The inclusion of biography alongside academic essays reminds that the academic is merely analysis of the human, the composite of individuals: Lazzarotto was a participant in the history of the twentieth-century church. Gerolamo Fazzini’s profile of Lazzarotto captures the title of the volume in its highlighting of the small things, the details of friendships, which constituted Lazzarotto’s missionary strategy and no doubt endeared him to Chinese literati. Mission is never unproblematic, however, and two of the best essays in the volume, some “idiosyncratic reflections” by Paul Rule on being Chinese and Christian, and a rich article by R. G. Tiedemann on the controversy over the formation of an indigenous Roman Catholic clergy in China, show why. In the midst of celebration, a note of profound sadness sounds at the “history of failed experiments in what today we call inculturation” (p. 331), as Rule puts it. Tiedemann’s article documents in painful clarity the woeful failure of the church over centuries to nurture Chinese priests, and especially a Chinese episcopate. The compromise of the missionary—being and relinquishing—is held taut for the reader across the volume.

—Chloë Starr

Chloë Starr is Assistant Professor of Asian Christianity and Theology at Yale Divinity School, New Haven, Connecticut.
This volume by Dyron Daughrity, assistant professor of religion at Pepperdine University, Malibu, California, joins the mushrooming rank of textbooks on what church historians and theologians now speak of as “world Christianity.” In the introductory chapter Daughrity emphasizes the recent changes in Christianity, within itself and in relation to the other three “world religions.” Within itself, Christianity, now claiming one-third of the total world population of just under seven billion, is undergoing dramatic changes. The bulk of its membership is no longer found in the Global West or North but in the Global South—Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania. The other religions that can claim to have a global presence are Islam (20.87 percent), Hinduism (13.41 percent), and Buddhism (5.78 percent), but their reach is far from worldwide. Both Hinduism and Buddhism are confined mostly to Asia, and even Islam is dominant only in the so-called Islamic Crescent. Of these three religions, only Islam is a real competitor of Christianity, which enjoys a decided advantage thanks to its intentional adaptability; this fosters genuine growth and a lasting impact in the places in which it is established. As Daughrity puts it, Christianity “is always changing, geographically, theologically, liturgically, and socially” (p. 17). As a result, we are witnessing “a universal, transcultural, multi-lingual religion” (p. 19).

How can a borderless religion such as world Christianity best be studied? Daughrity has wisely adopted a geographic approach, dividing his exposition of world Christianity into eight areas corresponding broadly to continents (the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania). Each chapter is preceded by extremely useful maps and statistics, and each one is divided into three sections: geography, history of Christian development, and the current situation of Christianity in the region. Daughrity gives equal treatment to various strands of Christianity, including Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Orthodoxy, and Pentecostalism. Though he memorializes the achievements as well as the failures of foreign missions, he also highlights the work of native Christians in making the imported Christianities their own.

All in all, The Changing World of Christianity is an encyclopedic treasure trove of information, a real tour de force that can rarely be carried out by a single author. In fewer than 300 pages Daughrity has succeeded brilliantly in his task of providing a “global history of a borderless religion.” Readers will be quickly disabused of any notion that Christianity is a Western religion and at the same time will have a vivid sense that the future of Christianity is bright. Written in a lucid and accessible style, this book will serve as an excellent text for undergraduate and continuing education courses on Christianity as a world religion.

—Peter C. Phan

Peter C. Phan is the inaugural holder of the Ignacio Ellacuria Chair of Catholic Social Thought at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.
Christians and Pagans: The Conversion of Britain from Alban to Bede.


In Christians and Pagans Malcolm Lambert provides a detailed account of Christianity in Britain from its origins in Roman Britain to its dominant presence in the “Christian Britain” of the eighth century. Lambert is a meticulous scholar. His reading of the early texts is careful and observant, and his mastery of the extensive scholarly literature is evident in the footnotes. Many of the recent advances in understanding early British Christianity come from archaeology, which obviously fascinates Lambert. His leisurely and precise descriptions of finds are fascinating: fifth-century Eucharistic vessels from Water Newton in Huntingdonshire reveal the liturgical sophistication of an early church; two centuries later, in a grave ten miles from Canterbury, a warrior’s belt buckle depicting Woden enables one to appreciate what the Christian evangelists were up against.

Lambert’s account has numerous strengths. One is his treatment of the “lost church” of the first five centuries. Drawing on archaeology, Lambert shows us a church that from the outset grew bottom-up through the initiative of ordinary Christians and that, even after Constantine’s adhesion to Christianity, remained a minority vis-à-vis the pagans. Another strength is Lambert’s affectionate and insightful treatment of major figures. Columba, Cuthbert, Hild, and Bede come alive, also particularly Patrick, “most remarkable of all British Christians” (p. 49). A third strength is Lambert’s appreciation, stated repeatedly throughout the book, that it was hard for Christianity to penetrate elite societies that celebrated gore and were deeply imbued with “the paganism of the battlefield” (p. 178). Lambert tells stories of monks (often the main missionaries) who were committed to nonviolence. But kings, who also played dominant roles in Christianization, could murderously dispose of relatives as well as enemies. Abbot Adomnán of Iona, Lambert notes, attempted to lessen the violence by restricting the slaughter to fighters with his Law of the Innocents.

Lambert’s title led me to expect that he would keep his focus on the impact of paganism and Christianity upon each other. Lambert rightly emphasizes the magnitude of the task of Christianizing the British Isles, which were deeply rooted in polytheism. And he points to Gregory the Great’s famous letter to Abbot Mellitus, which changed papal policy on the means of Christianizing; instead of destroying pagan structures, Mellitus should cleanse them and adapt them to Christian use. But cleansing, Lambert realizes, takes time and involves character and practices, as well as buildings. I wondered whether, as the centuries went by and the Christian literary sources increased in quantity, Lambert was losing his earlier focus on archaeology, thereby understating the syncretism that was widespread in the lives of the people. And I wondered whether he could have done more to detect the syncretism that is present in literary texts. For example, in sermon 8 from Vercelli MS 5, a ninth-century Anglo-Saxon preacher told the story of Christ’s birth with Caesar and his retinue coming to Bethlehem. This adaptation of the story to a society in which kings had long been dominant was a bold bit of inculturation—a term that Lambert does not use. But it makes one wonder to what extent, as Christianity became dominant, paganism lived on.

—Alan Kreider

Alan Kreider is Professor of Church History and Mission (retired), Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana.

Eschatology and Ecology: Experiences of the Korean Church.


In Eschatology and Ecology, Paul Hang-Sik Cho of St. Andrew’s Theological Seminary in Manila, Philippines, grapples with Korean Protestant Christianity’s predominant indifference to ecological concerns. An insightful study, it is the publication of the author’s doctoral thesis, completed in 2004 at the University of Kent at Canterbury.

Cho painstakingly explores the link between Korean churches’ lack of
Scottish Orientalists and India: The Muir Brothers, Religion, Education, and Empire.


By the time John and William Muir arrived in India for careers in the Bengal Civil Service (in 1826–27 and in 1835–37), the sway of the East India Company’s Indian empire already reached across the entire Indian Ocean basin—from Africa and Arabia to China. “Rule of law” within this empire required blending hundreds of local cultures into overarching structures of charters, codes, laws, regulations, and treaties. Since such vast imperial domains could not be administered, much less protected, without enormous inputs of Indian manpower, money, and methodology, the essential stability and strength of this huge empire required loyal service from many hundreds of thousands of soldiers and civil servants from elite communities of India. It was therefore crucial for policies and procedures of governance to reflect a deep respect, sensitivity, and understanding of the manifold moral and religious customs, norms, and traditions held by India’s many peoples. Acquisition and accumulation of such understandings required heavy investments of energy on the part of hundreds of individual scholars, Indians and Europeans alike. Those who strove for such understanding came to be known as “Orientalists”—or, for those studying Sanskrit India, as “Indologists.”

Both Muir brothers, in turn, became magistrates in the North-West Provinces (NWP) of Hindustan, and both became renowned scholars and educators. John, the elder, was a Sanskritist. Except for a stint as principal of Sankskrit College (Benares), his career of a district of Fatehpur, he devoted his last thirty years in Edinburgh to Oriental scholarship and educational causes. William, with his mastery of Urdu, Persian, and Arabic, ranged more widely among circles of high-born (ashraf) Muslim scholars. He ascended to ever higher positions—NWP Board of Revenue, Intelligence, India’s foreign secretary, NWP lieutenant-governor, and Secretary of State’s Council of India (London). He became principal and then vice-chancellor of Edinburgh University, retiring two years before his death in 1905. Rich troves of his correspondence, especially with his brother, reflect ever wider horizons of scholarly interest and intellectual power.

Avril Powell’s meticulous and magisterial study shows, in detail, how elements of the Scottish Enlightenment and ecological concerns and their prevalent other-worldly eschatology, which is deeply rooted in dispensational premillennialism, originally introduced by American missionaries. In part 1 he depicts in detail the ecological state of Korea, identifying and analyzing its destructive causes in relation to the country’s rapid economic development. Providing a brief historical background to traditional Korean religions, part 2 focuses on examining the religious, sociopolitical, and economic soil of premodern Korea, which was conducive to the acceptance of the dispensational premillennialist eschatology. Part 3 investigates the historical and theological backdrop of dispensational premillennialism, critically probing the impact of its pessimistic and escapist eschatology upon ecological issues. Cho convincingly argues that this particular brand of millennialism has espoused an eschatology that severely undermines Christians’ sense of environmental responsibility, for it embraces a dualistic worldview and simply awaits a divinely ordained cataclysm.

Eschatology and Ecology is an important work that rightly calls attention to the challenge of the eschatological dimension in shaping ecological attitudes in Korean Christianity. However, it does not fully reflect on the complexity of Korean churches’ social involvement, which, at some critical junctures in the history of the nation, defied the typical other-worldly, escapist social ethics of dispensational premillennialism. These churches were a vanguard in the independence movement against Japanese colonization, a prophetic advocate for democracy under the suppressive government, and the soil for the emergence of minjung theology during industrial modernization. Although dispensational premillennialism undeniably shaped its dominant eschatology, Korean Protestantism has manifested a complex and dynamic pattern of social engagement.

—Joon-Sik Park

Joon-Sik Park is the E. Stanley Jones Professor of World Evangelism at the Methodist Theological School in Ohio, Delaware, Ohio.
Scottish Evangelicalism were blended together within seminal productions of Sanskritic and Islamic history and society. As importantly, she brings out of obscurity scholarly contributions made by hosts of native Indian munshi and pandits (diplomatic agents, interpreters, scholars, tutors, and translators), not to mention many ulama and other varieties of “religious experts” with whom European scholars engaged in constant two-way exchanges of empirical and linguistic data. As with Powell’s earlier Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India (1993), this study places special emphasis upon Indo-Muslim and “Islamicate” contexts. One Muslim scholarly official stands out, often more clearly than anyone else. Sir Saiyid Ahmad Khan (1817–98), renowned leader of Islamic reform and “modernity,” remained a respected friend (dost and vaiz) of William, with whom he was no less a strenuous antagonist in debates over issues of religious, historical, and educational significance. The Company’s evangelical officers had to tread much more discreetly on matters of religious concern than did their missionary colleagues, “whose convictions were worn on their sleeves” (p. 15). Official regulations requiring strict “neutrality,” with violation leading to dismissal, left some Europeans feeling that the Raj was, if anything, anti-Christian, if not actually Hindu.

—Robert Eric Frykenberg

Robert Eric Frykenberg is Professor Emeritus of History and South Asian Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy.


This inaugural volume in the Pentecostal Manifestos series is groundbreaking. Thinking in Tongues can be summarized not only as skillfully transforming Pentecostal anti-intellectualism into Pentecostal philosophy but also as laying its foundations. Smith begins with a sketch of a Pentecostal worldview by unapologetically articulating the implicit “philosophical intuitions” within Pentecostal spirituality (chap. 2). He then covers new ground by offering a third-order metatheoretical reading of Pentecostal spirituality, with a view to teasing out its latent “prephilosophical commitments” in terms of epistemology (chap. 3) and ontology (chap. 4). Next, he explores the contributions of Pentecostal philosophy within the contemporary philosophical milieu by challenging the regnant paradigms of both philosophy of religion (chap. 5) and philosophy of language (chap. 6).

A critique of Thinking in Tongues reveals the ingenious methodological strategy used to explicate a Pentecostal philosophy. While contemporary philosophical apparatus (mostly Continental) is used to interpret Pentecostal spirituality, Pentecostal spirituality itself is transformed into a philosophical critique that interrogates both secular and Christian philosophies. Finally, Smith uses Pentecostal philosophy itself to evaluate Pentecostal beliefs that do not reflect the spirituality they are meant to represent. This intermingling of philosophy and Pentecostalism has produced a philosophically rich text firmly rooted in spirituality.

Smith’s epilogue invites a further view to not only add to or fill in his “cartoon” of Pentecostal philosophy but “even revise the image” (p. 151). In response, it is clear that, among other things, Smith’s insightful notion of the politics of tongues-

The function and appeal of the philosophy of religion could be revised to view religion as a critique of the “philosophy of religion,” which would then locate Pentecostal philosophy not merely as a species of Christian philosophy but as a legitimate self-reflective tradition within the wider academy, which presently is left to choose between either the tyranny of Enlightenment universalism or the despair of postmodern nihilism.

This excellent monograph is a must-read not merely for Pentecostals and Christians but for all those who are seeking to defy Stephen Jay Gould’s NOMA and bring about a “healing of the aporias” between religion and secularism within our contemporary world.

—Brainerd Prince

Brainerd Prince, a Ph.D. candidate at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, is working under Gavin Flood on the integral philosophy of Sri Aurobindo.