A Century of Catholic Mission: Roman Catholic Missiology, 1910 to Present.


At the beginning of the twentieth century the Catholic Church modified its global mission efforts by focusing on indigenous church leadership. Coming decades before the demise of colonialism, this shift brought about a new awareness of the importance of culture in the life of faith. The Second Vatican Council ratified and deepened this approach, which understood every human culture as open to faith in Christ.

A Century of Catholic Mission is a skillfully assembled volume of essays that offers contextual analysis of the mission activity of the Catholic Church during the twentieth century, illuminating this period in which a Western church with foreign missions redefined itself as a global communion. Editor Stephen Bevans gathered an extensive list of international scholars to weigh in, and their essays display a diversity of conceptions of the missionary and missiological tasks. For Francis Anekwe Oborji, missiology today must focus on the consequences of the church’s meeting with the cultures of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania (133–34). Maria Clara Luchetti Bingemer takes a more expansive view; for her, plantatio ecclesiae missiology, which calls for the establishment of the church in new contexts, gave way in the twentieth century to service to God’s reign (187–95). Robert Schreiter, in turn, returns the focus to the church and sees in the work of reconciliation a necessary and a more modest goal for mission activity (234–38).

Paulo Suess expands the vision again with a focus on social justice (196–205). What Bevans has captured in this seesaw is an accurate picture of Catholic missiology during the period.

Most of the essays take into account the teachings of Vatican II, and readers can easily select specific topics of interest to pursue from the council. For those interested in a comprehensive view of Catholic missions and missiology, the book as a whole will reward careful reading, even if, understandably, some repetition of viewpoints on Vatican II will be encountered. Those interested in the development of Catholic teaching on mission should go directly to the three excellent survey chapters—by James Kroeger, Stephen Bevans, and Roger Schroeder—covering respectively the period 1910–59, Vatican II, and from the conclusion of the council to the present.

The first six chapters provide a geographic survey of the history of Roman Catholic mission outreach during the period 1910–2010, with the stronger of these chapters exploring the relationship of developments in church life (especially the impact of Vatican II) to the church’s mission activity. For example, while tracking the history of mission engagement in Africa through the demise of colonialism, Oborji uses mission statistics to assess the maturity and quality of church life on the continent. This presentation includes a list of religious orders founded in Africa, a significant but hard-to-find piece of data (17). The strongest geographic chapters (Martin Üffing on Europe, Paulo Suess on Latin America, and Angelyn Dries on North America) offer an annotated summary of the church’s growth and mission activities on each continent during the period.

The volume explores many aspects of Catholic mission, including migration and mission, by Gioacchino Campese, and an appreciation of the ecumenical interdependency among twentieth-century mission theorists, offered by Jeffrey Gros. Two innovative chapters focus on the importance of cross-cultural mission for pedagogy and preparation for ministry: Jim and Therese D’Orsa on Catholic schools, and Claude Marie Barbour and Eleanor Dodge on mission as accompaniment. Both chapters draw on the experience of programs that have had a degree of success. Other chapters cover missionary movements, women, the Bible, theology, witness and proclamation, service and contemplation, ecology, interreligious dialogue, inculturation, and spirituality. The work contains a splendid twenty-four-page bibliography.

Robert A. Hurteau
Director, Center for Religion and Spirituality, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, California, is author of A Worldwide Heart: The Life of Maryknoll Father John J. Considine (Orbis, 2013).
constrained. International bodies and Western countries are not guiltless here, Abu-Lughod avers.

Finally, human rights advocates themselves come from particular contexts. Abu-Lughod traces the shifting scene of women’s rights advocates in Egypt from state socialism in the 1950s and 1960s to neoliberalism, to international bodies, to corporate donors, to Islamic organizations. The business of humanitarianism may be lucrative, she notes.

But real women remain complicated. “Rather than clicking on a website to donate $10, or flying to distant lands to bring school supplies to girls, and certainly before calling in military troops, we should take time to listen” (202).

—Miriam Adeney

Miriam Adeney teaches applied anthropology in the School of Theology at Seattle Pacific University and is the author of Daughters of Islam: Building Bridges with Muslim Women (IVP Books, 2002).
biblical and practical theology. The author skillfully responds to and critiques the false antitheses that hinder one from embracing a missionally orthodox understanding of the Bible, God, human beings, salvation, the church, and final things. With a purpose of doing theology and ministry that is “faithful to both the biblical text and the missional task” (11), Tyra warns traditional evangelicals and those of the so-called missional and emerging churches not to fall into the temptation of overreaction and overcorrection; instead, he challenges all three groups to avoid competing with one another but to be united in their commitment to forging a missional orthodoxy. In his conclusion, Tyra argues for a Christ-centered orthodoxy that enables a theologically authentic encounter with Christ. Such an encounter in turn leads to humble participation in God’s mission guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of mission.

I agree with Tyra that a biblically informed theology can only be missional and that we are to present the Gospel in culturally sensitive ways. Any missional theology should therefore help God’s people to contextualize the Gospel so that those hearing it may experience the reign of God and be able to embody it within their own context. At the same time, as Tyra clearly indicates, the Gospel expressed authentically in a given context should also transform that context. Moreover, in today’s post-Christian and yet postsecular culture, it truly is critical for evangelicals to embrace a “pneumatological realism” and to help those who hunger for God to encounter the Holy Spirit as they interact with the Word.

―Eun Ah Cho

Eun Ah Cho is assistant professor of intercultural studies, Asian Center of Theological Studies and Mission / Asia United Theological University, Seoul, Korea. From 2000 to 2005 she served with her family as a full-time missionary in Kazakhstan.

The World’s Religions in Figures: An Introduction to International Religious Demography.


“Where do they get these numbers?” This was a recurring question during my years as editor of the INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN OF MISSIONARY RESEARCH in response to the “Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission.” Arguably the most widely cited IBMR feature since its first appearance in 1983, the year after David Barrett published his groundbreaking World Christian Encyclopedia (Oxford Univ. Press), the numbers—rounded to the nearest million or thousand—raised eyebrows and skepticism in readers. Although answers to this question are available in the massive two-volume second edition of the World Christian Encyclopedia (2001), few readers have ready access to the tome, and even if they do, explanations of the sources and methods underlying the figures are scattered and not always easy to locate. This book solves that problem, resoundingly.

The four chapters in part 1 survey 1910–2010 global religious populations, regional religious populations, and religious diversity. They then project religious population growth from 2010 to 2050. Part 2 provides a detailed explanation of the data and methods used by the World Christian Database (launched in 2003) and its offspring, the World Religion Database (formally inaugurated in 2008), in five substantial chapters. How do the scholars behind the numbers define religion? Just what is religious demography, and how does it relate to other kinds of demographics? What major sources and collections of data are utilized in generating the religious numbers? How are data analyzed, and how are discrepancies reconciled? And how are dynamic factors such as conversion, migration, and mortality factored into the numbers? Answers to such questions are provided in the five chapters of this section.


The book’s usefulness is enhanced by a fourteen-page glossary of terms (346–59) and a detailed subject index. As one might expect, illustrations abound: 78 tables and 23 figures clarify the book’s content. If skeptics of religious numbers will study this book, they will discover that Todd Johnson and his World Religion Database confreres have moved beyond days of yore when numbers were based on guesses or even face-saving lies. It is a pity, though not surprising, that the volume is so costly. But any library, research center, or scholar either using or trying to explain religious numbers will agree that this book is worth every penny.

―Jonathan J. Bonk

Jonathan J. Bonk, an IBMR senior contributing editor, is executive director emeritus of the Overseas Ministries Study Center and director of the Dictionary of African Christian Biography, at Boston University.

Understanding the Qur’anic Miracle Stories in the Modern Age.


In this book Isra Yazicioglu, assistant professor of theology and religious studies at St. Joseph’s University, Philadelphia, examines how various thinkers have grappled with stories about prophetic miracles. She seeks to understand what their approaches to miracles reveal about their attitude toward the apparent tension between reason and revelation, and about the relevance of Scripture in real life. Yazicioglu discusses how, in dealing with miraculous events described in the Qur’an (and the Bible), some thinkers have chosen reason over revelation and opted for a metaphorical reading of these stories; others have preferred to understand miracles literally, arguing that God’s omnipotence overrides the laws of nature; and still others have seen the two as coexisting and complementing each other.

Part 1 of the book showcases the argument for a literal interpretation of miracle stories made by the famous Muslim theologian al-Ghazali (d. 1111), who maintained that they upheld the contingency of the natural order, urging us to view them as a divine gift. The author then lays out the critique of al-Ghazali offered by Muslim philosopher Ibn Rushd (d. 1198), who argued instead for the primacy of causality in nature as a demonstration of God’s wisdom.

Part 2 discusses the attitude toward miracles found in the thought of two Western thinkers, David Hume (d. 1776) and Charles Peirce (d. 1914). Yazicioglu points out the contradiction between Hume’s idea that natural order can be breached and his contention that miracle stories should be rejected based on past
Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible. 2nd ed.


Christians at the Border helps the majority culture and Hispanics think about and respond to the subject of immigration, particularly that of undocumented Hispanics, as biblically informed Christians. This edition updates readers on sociological data on immigration and expands on the biblical foundations for how Christians should relate to immigrants, refugees, sojourners, and strangers—those in exile. As the son of a Guatemalan mother and an American father who grew up in a bicultural and bilingual household, Carroll stands between the Hispanic culture and the U.S. majority culture. Since Carroll is also a biblical scholar and the immigration spokesperson for the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, he is certainly qualified to speak on this issue.

The book argues that Christians must take a biblical stand in the national debate about undocumented immigration. Everyone, including undocumented Hispanic migrants, is made in God’s image and is therefore valuable. Hospitality and openness to foreigners is a Christian virtue. The Christian church of the majority culture should treat the “least of these” as Jesus did, with hospitality and kindness. Although undocumented immigration is “illegal,” Christians should be guided by a higher set of laws as citizens of God’s kingdom.

Some readers may criticize the book for focusing just on Hispanic immigration and addressing only the majority culture and Hispanics, ignoring all those who fall outside of those two categories. In response, Carroll would likely say that his argument applies for all believers, no matter their nationality, legal status, or ethnicity. All Christians should be biblically informed on the issue of immigration and emulate Jesus, who embraced and showed compassion to “the other.”

—Rebecca Y. Kim

Rebecca Y. Kim is associate professor of sociology at Pepperdine University, Malibu, California. She is the author of God’s New Whiz Kids: Second-Generation Korean American Evangelicals on Campus (NYU Press, 2006) and The Spirit Moves West: Korean Missionaries in America (Oxford Univ. Press, forthcoming).

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Lost Enlightenment: Central Asia’s Golden Age from the Arab Conquest to Tamerlane.


Over the past two decades, world historians have challenged Eurocentric notions of progress by drawing attention to earlier periods when non-European societies flourished in manufacturing and trade. These works tend to omit any extensive discussion of scientific achievements, which appear to remain part of an exceptional story of European modernity. Lost Enlightenment describes in painstaking detail a culture of scientific inquiry that Central Asians had nurtured many centuries before Europe’s Age of Reason. From 750 to 1150, Central Asian society stood “at the forefront of intellectual life and culture globally” (521). The author’s vivid accounts of the scientific advances made by men such as Abu Rayhan al-Biruni (973–1048) and Ibn Sina (980–1037), along with many others, corrects not only our presentist perception of Afghan society as economically backward and Talibanized but also our tendency to limit achievements of Islamic societies to those centered in the Arab world, for instance, in medival Baghdad. The main personalities presented in Frederick Starr’s work are non-Arab scientists (mostly of Iranian or Turkic stock) who happened to write in Arabic, the lingua franca of both cultural and intellectual interchange throughout the Islamic world (16). Their achievements were remarkably interdisciplinary, crossing the terrain of what we now call astronomy, philosophy, mathematics, physics, and medicine. Starr devotes considerable space to addressing the “why” and “how” questions associated with Central Asia’s enlightenment and decline. Intercultural contacts generated by trade, religious pluralism, state backing, and the habit of conserving past knowledge all catalyzed innovation. As for the decline, Starr treads more cautiously. Whereas medieval Central Asians struck a healthy balance between openness to the outside world and a vibrant local society, later Islamic empires seem to have lost that balance and were more focused on aesthetic than scientific achievement (523). The book is remarkably well researched and well written. It will make a valuable resource for those interested in the history of science, Central Asian history, and medieval cross-cultural encounters.

—Chandra Mallampalli

Chandra Mallampalli is professor of history, Westmont College, Santa Barbara, California. His books include Christians and Public Life in Colonial South India (RoutledgeCurzon, 2004) and Race, Religion, and Law in Colonial India (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011).

Embracing Epistemic Humility: Confronting Triumphalism in Three Abrahamic Religions.


The Torah, the Gospel, and the Quran: Three Books, Two Cities, One Tale.


Lifetimes of eclectic experiences have enabled both authors to challenge long-held exclusive theological opinions. Donald Borchert, professor emeritus of philosophy at Ohio University, Athens, Ohio, encourages his readers to recognize the need to embrace a humility that counters the tendency toward arrogance and triumphalism, which only antagonize people of other faiths. In effect, much of his work revolves around the question of how finite human beings can make definitive statements about the nature and ways of an infinite God. This book is a clearly written introduction to issues from the philosophy of religion, but it is done in such a way as to encourage an understanding that we must revise our view of the “other,” seeing others not as competitors but rather as colleagues in the search for the better world that is God’s and thus affirming the need for witness to faith, not denying it.

Anton Wessels, professor emeritus of religion at the Free University in Amsterdam, takes us along the same road, suggesting that Jews, Christians, and Muslims must read their Scriptures together and not against each other. To do so is not simply to engage in the comparison of texts, but to see how together they may influence our common life in our own time. Like Borchert, he questions the overconfidence and pride that emerge out of some interpretations of Scripture. Wessels takes up the theme of the two city types that dominate texts in the Scriptures. In one city, injustice and corruption dominate; in the second, God rules. Throughout the book runs a critical prophetic tale that moves on to the One City on a Hill, whose inhabitants may be descended from Abraham, though that relationship may not in itself make them believers; rather, “only those who believe are Abraham’s descendants” (54). Both books speak to our age and time and deserve wide readership.

—John Parry

John Parry, erstwhile presbyter of the Church of Bangladesh, now serves as a minister of the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom. Until his recent retirement he taught world faiths and world church studies at the Partnership for Theological Education, in Manchester, England.

The J. H. Bavinck Reader.


The J. H. Bavinck Reader introduces a generation of non-Dutch speakers to Johan Herman Bavinck, a missionary statesman whose writings continue to shape the debates of present-day Reformed missions thinking.

The book is divided into a substantial introduction plus three sections. The introduction (1–92) consists of an extensive overview of Bavinck’s life by his biographer, Paul Visser, outlining his distinguished career as a missionary in Java and teacher and theologian in Kampen and Amsterdam.
The three sections provide selections from Bavinck’s writings. The first section deals with the uniqueness of the Christian faith in relation to other faiths, outlining Bavinck’s respectful but profoundly biblical understanding of the nature of the Christian proclamation. The second and longest section deals with the domain of religious consciousness, with a careful tracing of its decline in the Western world. The third section contains the result of Bavinck’s study and interpretation of mysticism and religious experience in the Javanese context.

John Bolt, James Bratt, and Paul Visser have judiciously selected material that displays Bavinck’s commitment to biblical thought allied to careful scholarship. These qualities shape the profound insight that he brings to Reformed missiology. His contribution to ongoing debates concerning the uniqueness of the Christian message in a pluralistic world and his investigation into the universal nature of religious consciousness explored in the light of general revelation display the continued value of this brilliant and passionate missionary thinker.

In the skillful translation provided by James Yong, Bavinck is shown to be a missionary theologian of the stature of Hendrik Kraemer, one to whom we should listen carefully. Readers will benefit greatly from this welcome volume in the theology of mission.

—Robert M. Norris

Robert M. Norris is senior pastor of Fourth Presbyterian Church, Bethesda, Maryland.


Kelly and Michèle O’Donnell have made significant contributions to the mission movement through their publications on member care for missionaries. Beginning with their joint volume Helping Missionaries Grow (1988), followed by Kelly’s Missionary Care (1992) and Doing Member Care Well (2002), among other publications, they continue to benefit all who work in cross-cultural contexts. Crossing Sectors for Serving Humanity is the second of a projected three-volume series under the title Global Member Care, all published by William Carey Library. The first was The Pearls and Perils of Good Practice (2011); the third volume, Good Practice for/from All Peoples, is in preparation.

Crossing Sectors for Serving Humanity seeks to encourage willingness to learn from other “sectors,” as well as to serve those who work in other types of cross-cultural humanitarian service. The introduction states, “The goal is to encourage us all to ‘broaden our experiential boundaries’: to take advantage of the wealth of opportunities for connecting and contributing to various international sectors on behalf of the diversity of remarkable people who serve in mission/aid as well as on behalf of humanity itself” (xix).

Having served as consulting psychologists to a variety of organizations, the O’Donnells have broad experience in the four sectors the book addresses. Their premise is that the humanitarian, human health, and human resource sec-
tors are to be fruitful sources of learning for those who serve in the fourth sector: mission/aid. To this end they have compiled thirty-five articles presenting key lessons from current research and policy development. Each article is followed with sources for further study; the Kindle version provides Internet links to the resources listed.

The articles draw on many authors and a wide array of expertise, including persons serving with the United Nations and the World Health Organization, World Vision, and Management Sciences for Health. The material will be of great benefit to persons planning to venture into a sector new to them, and the book could serve well as a textbook for both graduate and undergraduate courses. Many will find in it both a challenge and a resource: a challenge to consider serving outside one’s comfort zone, and a resource for lifelong learning.

—John S. Burch

Van dorpsjongen tot wereldburger
(From village boy to world citizen).
4 vols.

By Jan A. B. Jongeneel. Utrecht: Stichting de Zending van de Protestantse Kerk in Nederland, in collaboration with the Univ. of Utrecht, 2013. Paperback €5 each; €16 for the four-volume set.

These four small monographs (total 211 pages) in Dutch document the career of the eminent missiologist Jan A. B. Jongeneel, who is honorary professor emeritus of missiology at Utrecht University, where he taught for twenty-one years and supervised forty-one Th.D. candidates, following his missionary service in Indonesia.

The first volume begins with a very brief autobiographical sketch of his life and work, followed by a curriculum vitae of his many professional involvements in sequence from his student days until 2012, plus a listing of his publishing activities during each period of his career.

Volume 2 gives an overview of the archive containing hundreds of his personal documents that “are placed in 154 files. In turn these files are stored in 24 archive boxes (precisely 3 meters)” (15), at Utrecht University.

Volume 3 is an exhaustive bibliography (57 pages) of everything he has ever produced—both published and unpublished—in several languages, including even his endorsements on the back cover of books.

Volume 4 was prepared by Jongeneel’s family without his knowledge to include in the series. It contains many photographs of him throughout his career, including two of him at work in his apartment in New Haven, Connecticut, at the Overseas Ministries Study Center, in 1996 and 2001. The pictures add a nice personal touch to the series.

It is quite remarkable that Jongeneel was able to recall, preserve, and organize so many documents, letters, travel reports,
Western Daughters in Eastern Lands: British Missionary Women in Asia.


Rosemary Seton’s book provides a broad overview of the history of British women missionaries in mainland China, India, and Africa between the beginning of the nineteenth century and the mid-twentieth century. The author first explores the women missionaries’ background, motivation, selection, training, and preparation, and then looks at their lives on the mission field. Besides their educational and social backgrounds, other important factors to be considered were the aspiring women missionaries’ physical and mental health, age, and family circumstances.

The Protestant women missionaries who came to Asia faced many difficulties. More important, “The need for more female workers was made known but their deployment was controversial. The presence of single women on the mission field was considered problematic by many until changing mission strategies in the 1870s and 1880s required their being sent out in larger numbers” (23). In a chapter titled “The Structure and Organization of Women’s Missionary Work,” the author highlights the gendered nature of conflict on the mission field. On the one hand, trained single women missionaries helped to relieve the wives of male missionaries from both domestic and vocational roles. On the other hand, many married women missionaries felt “redundant to the missionary enterprise,” and when “differences arose between their husbands and single women, wives invariably took their husbands’ side rather than that of the new-comers, often to the surprise of the latter who had expected gender loyalty” (101).

The introduction of Western education and medical training as well as evangelism by British women missionaries had a revolutionary influence on local women. Seton provides historical case studies from a variety of denominational backgrounds, interdenominational groups such as the China Inland Mission, and the Zenana Bible and Medical Mission.

Seton is familiar with the archives and special collections at the School of Oriental and Africa Studies of the University of London. Along the way she introduces valuable archival materials such as a wide range of missionary society archives, private manuscript collections, memoirs, letters, diaries, and biographies that enrich the interest of the book.

—Agnes Suk-man Pang

Agnes Suk-man Pang is a lecturer in the Department of General Education, School of Humanities, Hang Seng Management College, Hong Kong. Her recent research centers on Protestant higher education and medical women missionaries in modern China.

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—Dr. Miriam Adeney, anthropologist, missiologist, and author of Kingdom Without Borders: The Untold Story of Global Christianity (2009)

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This book is the author’s Ph.D. dissertation, written at the Free University in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. It gives a complex answer to the simple question of why Christianity has not yet succeeded in Japan, examining various factors—worldview, theological, missiological, societal, and political.

First, Mohammad Hassan Oliai reviews the history of mission in Japan from the early Catholic efforts, followed by a long period of persecution of Christians and then reentry by Protestant missionaries. Next, the author walks through the above-mentioned factors to paint a picture of the Japanese people as being attracted to Christianity as the irresistible force of modernity, but ultimately fearful of it as intrinsically foreign and threatening to their way of life.

Of all these factors, Oliai considers “the worldview factors as well as the political ones most relevant” (216). The Japanese sense of wa, which values harmony of the corporate body above all, stands in sharp conflict with the individualism of the worldview carried by Christians from the West. The colonial ambitions of the West that lie behind its Christian mission have made Japanese resistance even firmer. In fact, Japan politicized its indigenous Shinto religion “in response to a perceived threat from triumphal Western Christianity” (105), resulting in the deadly clash with the West and demise of its own imperial ambitions.

This book is a useful resource for introducing the complex case of Japan in concise form. Any study that attempts to explain Japan, however, must beware of falling into Japanese exceptionalism as a rationalization for its rejection of the Gospel. The author tends to lay the blame mostly on the Western missionaries, but Japan’s guilt in both political and spiritual senses should not be neglected. Also, as Christian mission is being increasingly carried out by non-Western missionaries in Japan and elsewhere, perhaps new answers and hopes will soon begin emerging.

—Sung-Sup Kim

Sung-Sup Kim is assistant professor of theology at Japan Mission Theological Seminary in Tokyo, Japan. He grew up in Japan as a child of Korean missionaries and is currently serving as a pastor of mission at Yohan Tokyo Christ Church.

Orthodox Perspectives on Mission.


The missionary tradition and missionary theology of the Orthodox Church, unknown in Western circles fifty years ago because of historical circumstances and a lack of scholarly study in the field, have been better represented in ecumenical circles from the 1960s onward. Especially through participation in the World Council of Churches, the family of Orthodox Churches (Eastern and Oriental) has had the opportunity to come together to reflect upon and present their understanding of missiology, its relationship with ecclesiology, and its overall connection to ecumenism, both within the Orthodox family and in relation to the larger Christian community.

Orthodox Perspectives on Mission represents the latest piece of this ongoing reflection and development. What makes this volume special, however, is that in its first half the book collects previously published works—considered classics in the field of missiology, ecclesiology, and ecumenism—from some of the most respected theologians and missiologists in the Orthodox world’s recent past and present. This “Orthodox Heritage” section is then combined with the most recent reflections and presentations on these themes arising from the 2010 Edinburgh Conference, along with the 2013 Busan WCC General Assembly.

Petros Vassiliadis, who himself supplies two contributions to the volume, is a worthy editor of this book because of his intimate involvement in this facet of the Orthodox movement over the past decades. He has served as a commissioner for the WCC’s Commission on World Mission and Evangelism and is a professor of New Testament and interfaith dialogue at Aristotle University in Thessaloniki.

For those not familiar with the unique missiological tradition of the Orthodox Church, as well as for those who want to expand and enrich their own understanding of witnessing to our Christian faith to our modern, pluralistic world, this volume will be valuable.

—Luke A. Veronis

Luke A. Veronis, director of the Missions Institute of Orthodox Christianity, Brookline, Massachusetts, served as a missionary in Albania and East Africa for twelve years.

Christianity in a Nutshell.


A mark of maturity is the ability to synthesize a lifetime of reflection with clarity. Avoiding theological and philosophical language, Leonardo Boff in 119 pages poetically and prophetically articulates the essence of Christianity and his sixty books. In sync with modern science, he places God’s “divine dynamism” (9) in creation and liberation in the context of billions of years of the “entire evolutionary process” (118) in which everything is connected.

Chapter 1, “Christianity and Mystery,” develops the foundational assumption: “All is Mystery.” God-Mystery desires to be known, self-communicates, and attracts humankind to know it and respond in “wonder and reverence” (5). Boff explores a new insight, “God is Mystery to us and to Godself.” Thereby, “God’s self-knowing never ends.” It is “entire and full, and at the same time ever open to new fullness” (6). This thread of “newness” and “openness” continues until the “end” with “the new heaven and the new earth . . . culmination of all things in the reign of the Trinity” (119).

For Boff the essence of Christianity is not in doctrines, dogmas, church, or rituals but in communion with the divine persons of the Triune God, who “always act in communion” (22), and with others. The loving actions of Father, Son (human and divine), and Holy Spirit are expounded with creative spiritual insights. The reign of God was the “great dream” that consumed Jesus. The Lord’s Prayer encapsulates the core message of God’s reign: relationship with “Our Father/Mother” and provision of “our bread”—human needs. In the last chapter Boff criticizes the church’s option for power and its neglect of the centrality of the Trinity and of the fact that Jesus
was a “poor and humble Nazarene” (96) and “Suffering Servant and Persecuted Prophet” (60, 97).

This book will inspire secular seekers of spirituality and mature scholars eager to integrate a life of reflection with profound simplicity.

—Sherron K. George

Sherron K. George is a retired Presbyterian Church (USA) regional liaison for South America and former professor of mission and evangelism at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Austin, Texas.

“Frontier,” and “Contextualization” are each the focus of a chapter. Following naturally from the focus on context, the next five chapters (16–20) deal with culture in mission strategy, with an introduction to cultural research and consideration of people-group profiles, communication, receptivity, and need. The final seven chapters (21–27) serve as a practical guide for missions, from start (visioning) to finish (evaluation); they nicely round out this book on mission strategy with sensible advice.

Nearly every chapter contains a sidebar outlining an important topic with questions for personal reflection or group discussion in the classroom and beyond. Not as prevalent but equally valuable are the case studies spread throughout. Overall, this volume is a must-read not only for missionaries and mission strategists but also for church pastors and seminarians.

—Steven S. H. Chang

Steven S. H. Chang is professor of New Testament, Torch Trinity Graduate University, Seoul, Korea.

Developing a Strategy for Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Cultural Introduction.


Developing a Strategy for Missions happily fills a gap in resources for thinking about mission planning and is accessible to missionaries, pastors, and students. Produced by a mission professor and a church pastor (both with field experience), the book serves as a “biblical, historical, and cultural introduction” that admirably covers the broad scope of missionary strategy from definitions to biblical and historical examples to contemporary models and needs to implementation and practical concerns.

The first three chapters consider issues surrounding strategy as an appropriate concept in mission planning, including definitions, crafting of strategies, and addressing objections. The next two chapters delve into the biblical perspective on mission strategy and the missiological principles that arise from biblical foundations. Chapters 6–15 review a wide range of strategic models from mission history, beginning with the apostle Paul and the early church. Strategies from history under the headings “Roman Catholic,” “Pioneer Protestant,” “Faith Missions,” “The American Frontier,” “The Indigenous Mission,” “The Church Growth Movement,” and “Suffering Servant and Persecuted Prophet” (60, 97).


The essays collected in this volume are based on a workshop held in 2010 in Münster, Germany. One of the key words in understanding the book is the term “politics” in the subtitle, though this is defined rather widely in the introduction as “activities pertaining to the acquisition or exercising of power or status of one group or individual over another group or individual through either formal or informal means” (9).

The book’s twelve chapters, plus an introduction, have a broad geographic focus mainly outside the Anglo-Saxon area. Contributions from scholars working in Germany, Poland, Norway, United States, United Kingdom, and New Zealand deal with missionary work from or to Germany, Sweden, Canada, New Zealand, Poland, China, New Guinea, East Africa, and Fiji.

The topics dealt with in the book include children’s missionary periodicals, metropolitan editorial control of missionary contributions, the apparent silence of the subaltern voice, missionary attitudes toward Islam and Judaism, mission and empire, the justification for medical missions, and the use of common tropes such as “the biblical mandate,” “light and darkness,” “barbarism versus civilization,” and “conversion.” With one or two exceptions, such as Albert Wu’s chapter comparing the periodicals of the Berlin Missionary Society and those of the Society of the Divine Word with regard to China (79–96), the chapters deal solely with Protestant missions.

In the final chapter Hanna Acke attempts both to undertake a study of missionary periodicals as a distinct genre (based partly on the work of Tzvetan Todorov) and to sum up some of the common themes of the book. Two points stand out: genres function as “horizons of expectation” for readers as well as “models of writing” for authors (225). In other words, periodicals—missionary or otherwise—tend to conform to certain patterns of layout, use of illustrations, thematic content, ideology, and so forth. This context, in turn, leads readers to expect a certain approach to the topics under discussion.

As is to be expected in such a volume, most chapters are based on the detailed current research of the authors and tend to be narrow in focus, so that with the exception of the introduction and the final summary chapter, there tends to be little commonality among the contributions. Nevertheless, the detailed research that has gone into almost all of the articles makes this a worthwhile study for all with an interest in missionary periodicals. And it may introduce readers to particular contexts and academic approaches with which they may not have been previously acquainted.

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