Theodicy, or vindicating God in light of the existence of evil, is a relatively safe philosophical exercise. Actually undergoing suffering inflicted by hostile opponents, however, is excruciating trauma. The former presents a genuine intellectual challenge to faith; the latter brings debilitating pain and anguish. Reports from around the world suggest that more persecution and more martyrdoms have occurred during the past two to three generations than in all previous history. Indications are that the trend will continue or even increase.

Hostility against Mission

Participants in Christian mission are, quite obviously, not the only people who suffer brutal attacks or systematic oppression. Moreover, specifically religious motivations for harming Christ’s servants are often intertwined with or even overshadowed by political, ethnic, economic, social, historical, or other driving factors. Even so, hostile actions against missionaries and others associated with Jesus Christ are proportionally higher than statistical projections would lead one to expect, whether or not those acts have been primarily religiously motivated.

Several of the articles in this issue have been written by representatives of communities of people who have suffered
hostilities because they follow the triune God. The anonymous Poet of Lamentations (as interpreted by Christopher Wright), Duleep de Chickera, Mary Mikhael, and Titus Presler have all lived, led, and served among suffering people of God. Many more articles and community representatives could have been included. What these authors convey carries an authenticity that others of us find difficult to understand, much less explain to other people. Shusaku Endo, renowned twentieth-century Japanese Christian historical novelist, was unusual in his capacity to communicate—without personally having undergone similar explicit oppression—not just sensational gruesomeness, but also the reality of the horrific persecution that Japanese Christians experienced in the early seventeenth century.

In a remarkable way this issue’s testimonies, rendered amid suffering, exude faith that has been both shaken and deepened. The writers’ depth of faith seems to lie in a conviction of God’s reality and presence, even if—or perhaps because—the suffering they have witnessed has unavoidably raised existential questions about God’s goodness and compassion. They present neither simplistic answers nor glib explanations for why hostilities have been directed against their communities, or (with the possible exception of the author of Lamentations) for why God has allowed their suffering to occur.

What provokes such fearsome rage and violence in opponents of Jesus Christ and the Christian mission? Whether we consider visible human beings acting individually or as a mob, or ancestral spirits, fallen angels, or even Satan himself, the hostilities exhibited often beggar description in their sordid destructiveness, complex motives, and mysterious origins. Demonic, God-hating empowerment can seem a trivial or offhand explanation, but it is surely sometimes accurate. We should resist the temptation to settle for simplistic explanations, however, realizing that all of us can unwittingly seek to further our own political, ethnic, and other interests simply by demonizing those who oppose us. Furthermore, those of us who have been shaped by European scientific analysis often cannot adequately sense what is inexplicable to science, that is, what lies outside the reach of science’s analytic methods. We need to listen to the voices of others not so fundamentally shaped by modern science.

We are quick to recognize that heartless cruelty has also been directed against those who are not Christian missionaries or mission servants. And indeed we admit, with shame, that in the past and to this very day, tortures, genocides, and hostilities occur against the backdrop, and sometimes under the unfurled banner, of Christ’s kingdom. No doubt the Christianization processes of European nations contributed to tempting but unhealthy alliances between ecclesiastical, national, economic, and military powers. Consequently, rival Europeans, Middle Eastern peoples, and many Native Americans, Sub-Saharan Africans, and Asians have suffered the hostile consequences of intra-European warfare, medieval Crusades, and modern European migrations.

While such incidents must not be forgotten, this issue of the IBMR focuses on Christian communities and God’s people of mission who suffer hostile attack by those who consciously and explicitly oppose Jesus Christ and Christian mission. Scriptural witness regarding how to respond to such persecution includes instruction to love one’s enemies, honest appeals for divine recompense, and numerous cries of “How long, O Lord?” Christ’s suffering servants have exemplified a range of heroism, sacrifice, apostasy, fear, and pain. Jesus himself perfectly exhibited the endurace of hostile opposition as the Suffering Servant. May the accounts here bring instruction and inspiration for participating in Christian mission in an often hostile world.

—J. Nelson Jennings

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Lamentations: A Book for Today

Christopher J. H. Wright

Lamentations is a book for today. And yet, in a world where the tide of human suffering threatens to overwhelm whatever dikes we put in place to contain it, is there any book of the Bible more neglected?

This neglect of Lamentations is a grievous loss. First, it disrespects the voice of those whose suffering the book so poignantly commemorates. Part of the horror of human suffering is to be unheard, forgotten, and nameless. Lamentations is a summons to remember. Second, though lament is not confined to the book of Lamentations, such neglect deprives the contemporary church of the language of lament.

Third, never to read Lamentations is to miss the challenge and reward of wrestling with the massive theological issues that permeate its poetry. How can the ultimate extremes of suffering be endured alongside faith in the living God, whom we have learned from the Scriptures and in experience to be all-loving and good? Indeed, hope is found right in the structural center of the book (3:21–24). But that affirmation of hope is surrounded on both sides with an unremitting litany of unresolved suffering.

Lamentations in Its Own World

The circumstances that gave rise to this remarkable book were almost certainly the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar in 587 B.C. Of the city and the nation and the house that all bore God’s name, nothing remained except for a small exiled community in Babylon. This was unquestionably the most traumatic moment in the whole history of the Old Testament. Along with the massive human suffering at every level of physical and emotional experience went the devastating undermining of all that they had thought was theologically guaranteed—the Davidic monarchy, the city of Zion, and the very temple of their omnipotent God (or was he?). All were gone. It is out of that unspeakable pain that Lamentations speaks, doing so in poetry of astonishing beauty and intricacy, though soaked in tears.

The Poet. Who is the author? Whose voice speaks in these pain-filled poems? The plain answer is that we do not know, since the book is anonymous, without any name claimed by the author or inserted by an editor in the Hebrew text. Tradition that reaches all the way back to the Septuagint Greek translation (from late second century B.C.) ascribes the book to Jeremiah. There is nothing in the book that could not have been written by Jeremiah. And there is much in the book that certainly sounds like Jeremiah, or has been made to sound like him. But that, of course, is not to claim that it was written by Jeremiah. In the end we have to come back to where we started: whoever wrote this book has chosen not to disclose his or her name, and we need to respect that fact, treating it as possibly intentional. For that reason, I have chosen to refer to the author simply as the Poet.

The poetry. It is well known that great art, great music, and great literature can emerge out of great pain. This does not lessen the reality of the suffering of the artist, composer, or writer, but it points to something creative and redemptive in the human person, made in the image of God, that can bring forth a thing of beauty in the midst of surrounding ugliness, brutality, and evil. Nowhere is this more true than in the book of Lamentations.

Several formal features of the poetry of Lamentations are important to understand. Chapters 1–4 are all acrostic (the verses follow in alphabetic sequence), which keeps us moving on inexorably, unable to pause for too long on any of the scenes. This is a journey through grief, not wallowing in it. Second, the poems share features of both dirges (i.e., funeral songs for the dead, or in response to some terrible calamity) and laments (i.e., songs that appeal to God in the midst of suffering, persecution, or inexplicable violence, with a sense of protest and sometimes with hope and renewed praise). Often such poems use a meter known as qinah. Most Hebrew poetry used a form of meter that tends to balance out the number of stressed syllables in both halves of the lines of poetry (often 3 + 3). Qinah meter shortens the second half, so that it is typically 3 + 2 stresses, creating a kind of limping or moaning effect. This meter is used predominantly throughout Lamentations.

Third, the Poet heightens the dramatic tension of his portrayal of Jerusalem’s suffering by speaking through different “characters,” whose voices interact with each other. There is one voice, however, that we never hear. God does not speak in the whole book of Lamentations. Heaven is silent, which does not necessarily mean that heaven is deaf or blind.

The artistic structure of Lamentations suggests that chapter 3 might be the central focus of the message of the book as a whole. That impression is strengthened by the intensification of the acrostic pattern in that chapter. Right at the center of that chapter—that is, at the apparent center of the book as a whole—come the strongest words of positive hope and theological affirmation that the book can muster (3:31–33, preceded by the famous lines of 3:22–24).

And yet, and yet . . . it is not quite the perfect center, for the Poet has so structured chapters 4 and 5 that they bring the book to a waning, limping end, rather like the qinah meter that dominates the poetry itself. Chapter 4 is acrostic, but it has two-line stanzas, while chapter 5 has twenty-two one-line verses. This gradual shortening of the chapters and stanzas makes the book slowly ebb away, like the lives of those who suffer in its pages.

Lamentations and Suffering

When real suffering happens to whole communities, it should not merely pass unnoticed into historical amnesia (or, even worse, deliberate denial). That remains true even if the suffering comes to an end or achieves some good purpose or is simply replaced by better times.

A voice. A war memorial of stone is a silent witness. It is in the poetry of the First World War that we hear the living voice of
those who served in that conflict, now dead every single one. Likewise the poetry of Lamentations gives voice to those who were rendered voiceless in the vortex of violence. “What can I say for you?” asks the Poet (2:13). His whole book is the answer. Lamentations makes us listen to the voices of the sufferers—in the profusion and confusion of their pain, the bitterness of their protest, their shafts of self-condemnation, their brief flashes of hope and long night of despair, and their plaintive pleading with God just to look and see. If in the midst of these voices there is accusation against God, Lamentations lets us hear that too. This book forces us to listen to every mood that the deepest suffering causes, whether we approve or not. We are called not to judge, but to witness. Not to speak, but to listen.

Confession. Among those moods there is confession of sin. The people of Jerusalem acknowledge that their own rebellion and folly has brought upon them the wrath of God through the agency of their human enemies. Words to that effect are a theological thread running through the book (1:5, 8, 14, 18; 2:1, 14, 17; 3:39, 42; 4:6, 11, 13; 5:16). It is (and we must emphasize this) a confession that is very particular. It connects the specific events of 587 B.C. to the equally specific record of sin and rebellion against YHWH, the covenant God of Israel, that stretched back across the centuries. It is not a theology of suffering and sin to be applied in general to any and all situations where people suffer. On the contrary, it is a theology of judgment governed by the covenant relationship between God and Old Testament Israel.

Two responses to this theological thread in the book seem to take us in wrong directions. One is to dismiss or minimize the idea that the suffering of Jerusalem was God’s punishment for their sin, by calling it, for example, “the conventional explanation of the events.” Kathleen O’Connor considers the Poet to be so shocked by Jerusalem’s suffering that he turns from being accuser (in chapter 1) to being advocate, accusing God instead. God, not Judah, is the real culprit. So the book as a whole then becomes an anti-theodicy—that is, not defending the justice of God’s ways, but accusing God of blatant injustice.

True, there is protest and even accusation against God in Lamentations, but advocates of the view just mentioned seem not to have read Jeremiah or Ezekiel or the story of the late monarchy in Israel and Judah in 2 Kings. That is, do they take seriously the account of the depth and depravity of the nation’s religious apostasy, social disintegration, economic oppression, judicial corruption, criminal violence and bloodshed, and political factions and folly? Every conceivable form of moral and spiritual wickedness was flourishing in a nation that claimed a covenant relationship with the living God and knowledge of his ethical standards.

And do those who see Lamentations as one great accusation of God for acting as if “mad, out of control, swirling about in unbridled destruction” reflect at all on the patience of God? The destruction of 587 B.C. did not happen out of the blue. There had been warning after warning, appeal after appeal—all with the longing on God’s part that the judgment need not fall. In the end, all the warnings were unheeded, and so the disaster happened.

But the other inadequate response to the confession of sin in Lamentations is, at the opposite extreme, to claim that God’s judgment completely explains everything—as though we can read the horrific accounts of all the violence, destruction, and suffering and simply say, “It was all God’s punishment for their sin; they got what they deserved.” But that, surely, is to fail to listen to the agonized voices in the book or to consider what today would be called the “proportionality” of the suffering inflicted on them by Babylon in the “day of God’s anger.” Robin Parry puts the point well:

A protest. The “Why” will not go away, and when it is raised up to God, it emerges as protest. This is a note that we also find in some of the psalms of lament and in the books of Jeremiah and Job. When people with faith in God experience or witness the realities of injustice, oppression, violence, lying, and all the attendant suffering, they cry out to God in protest. Why do such things happen?

It is important to recognize that such protest is not in itself blaming God for doing wrong. Nor, in my view, is it intrinsically sinful. It is faith seeking understanding. If God rules the world, and if God is the God of justice and compassion (as we affirm that he does and is), why does he permit such evil to persist? Such protest, in other words, is not a denial of God’s sovereignty, let alone of God’s existence. Rather it assumes the sovereignty and goodness of God and, on that foundation, is bold to hold up before God the realities of our lives that seem to contradict and undermine that very foundation. Protest to God is also protest for God—that is, it emerges from a passionate concern for God’s name to be vindicated in the midst of all that slanders it. The voice of protest firmly believes that “the Judge of all the earth [will] do right” (Gen. 18:25) but longs for reassurance that ultimately he will indeed do so, unmistakably and visibly.

In the meantime, the struggle goes on, and the protesting questions remain. Lamentations accepts both the sovereignty of God and the righteous wrath of God, which is his justified reaction to persistent, unrepented sin. It recognizes, however, that God’s judgment can operate through the agency of human beings who, in executing God’s judgment at the “street level” of history, are themselves guilty of the most appalling wickedness and cruelty. In the catastrophe of 587 B.C., all of these elements clash together in the conflagration. God is sovereign; God is judge. But even so, “Why, Lord? How long, O Lord?” Significantly, the book ends by putting these things together in adjacent verses. The voice of faith proclaims God’s sovereignty,

You, Lord, reign forever;
your throne endures from generation to generation (5:19).

And then the voice of protest immediately follows, as if to say, “That being so . . .”

Why do you always forget us?
Why do you forsake us so long? (5:20).

God emerges as the ultimately faithful and compassionate one, who, even when he afflicts people in judgment, does not do so “from his heart.” God is the one to whom you bring your anger, pain, and protest. God is also the one to whom you bring your penitence and prayer. And God is the one in whom alone your hope can be ultimately secure, however long it is delayed.

A home and a bottle. There is a very great deal of suffering in our world. Most of it cannot and should not be interpreted in the way Lamentations interprets 587 B.C. Nevertheless, Lamentations can provide a valid response. If the book voices the pain of those who knowingly suffered under the judgment of God,
how much more does it speak for those who suffer for all kinds of other reasons—in inexplicable disasters, as refugees and “collateral damage” in the endless wars of humanity, under persecution for the name of Christ, and many more causes. The book is an authentic portrayal of realities that many in our world today still endure.

Lamentations provides, in Kathleen O’Connor’s apt phrase, “a house for sorrow and a school for compassion.” It provides the safe space, the rooms, in which grief can be expressed to its limits, over and over again, without interruption or denial, even if without comfort as yet.

And tears, we know, are precious to God. God sees and hears those who weep (whether he answers them immediately or not), and he does not forget their tears. There are tears of repentance (5:15–17), tears of loneliness (1:16), tears of sympathy (2:11), tears of supplication (2:18–19). All have their own validity. “We need to acknowledge when the tears of lament are tears of pain, frustration, and anger rather than tears of pious repentance. And we need to recognize the legitimacy of such tears,” for God does.

The book of Lamentations is like a bottle for the tears of the exiles, and by extension for the tears of the world. We know from Deuteronomy 29–32 that beyond judgment lay the promise of future restoration. Above all, in the soaring words of Isaiah 40–55 we hear the clearest answer to Lamentations. At point after point, the grief of Lamentations is comforted and its questions answered.

Lamentations and the Bible

We have indeed read the rest of the Bible, and we must read Lamentations within the embrace of the canon—both the canon of the Old Testament Scriptures, to which it belongs, and the canon of the whole Bible as God’s word. The Bible speaks today just as surely through Lamentations as through any other book in the canon.

From God’s silence to God’s word. God remains silent throughout the book. He allows the other voices to speak till they have said all they want to or can. He does not interrupt, whether to comfort or correct, to explain or excuse. This silence should surely be interpreted positively, not as divine deafness but as divine restraint.

Yet we receive the book as part of the canon of Scripture. God not only allows, but ensures, that this torrential outpouring of human words with all their pain, anger, grief, and questioning should be included within the scrolls of his own word. The irony is that we hear the voice of the voiceless God precisely in and through listening to all the other voices in the book and attending to all they say in the light of all we know. God lets their words become his word within the grand auditorium of Scripture as a whole. That is what it means, doctrinally, to say the book is inspired.

Scripture answers Scripture. God’s silence in the book needs to be understood in such terms, and not as if God had nothing to say. Other Scriptures minister the comfort Israel craved—even if they could not hear it yet. Long ago, Deuteronomy 29–32 had foreseen that beyond judgment lay the promise of future restoration. Above all, in the soaring words of Isaiah 40–55 we hear the clearest answer to Lamentations. At point after point, the grief of Lamentations is comforted and its questions answered.

Time after time the prophet Isaiah’s words reflect and reverse Zion’s laments.

So while we must read Lamentations for itself, giving full attention to its voices of uncomforted pain, we cannot read it as if Isaiah 40–55 had not also been written. We hear it as scriptural truth in and of itself, and we also hear it within the wider truth that the rest of Scripture provides for us.

Scripture tells the whole story. The “wider truth” is the great biblical story from creation to new creation. It is from that story that we know both the background (humanity’s fall into sin and Israel’s rebellion) and the sequel to what confronts us in Lamentations. It is also from that story that we know 587 B.C. was not the end, either of Israel or of God’s purpose through them for the world. The “death” of exile was transformed by God’s sovereign power into the “resurrection” of the return.

Keeping the whole biblical story in mind means that as we sit listening to voices that sound as if the end of the world had come, we know that it had not. The story will go on. For this is God’s story, and it is for all nations and all creation, not just for Old Testament Israel. Nevertheless, Lamentations is there, simply there, in our Bibles. We must not read Lamentations without the rest of the Bible. But equally, we should not read the rest of the Bible without Lamentations.

Lamentations and Christ

That God suffers with his people is a biblical truth that Old Testament Israelites knew, but is there any hint of it in Lamentations? One small hint might be in the tears of 2:11, which the speaker says he pours out “because my people are destroyed.” That phrase is very characteristic of Jeremiah, used interchangeably by the prophet and by God. Do we hear the voice of God hidden behind the tears of the speaker? Consider a remarkable piece of divine emotion in Jeremiah 42:10: God says, “I am sorry for the disaster that I have brought upon you” (NRSV), referring precisely to the devastation of 587 B.C. Rico Villanueva comments that the “sorry” ought not to be understood “in an apologetic sense but in sympathetic sense. . . . God shares with the experience of those who go through disasters and feels what they feel. For us Christians, we know . . . that in Christ the contradiction in God’s saving and judging his people is embraced.”

The most intriguing link between Lamentations and Isaiah 40–55 (which is also a link between Lamentations and Christ) is the extensive verbal parallels between the experience and discourse of “the Man” in Lamentations 3 and the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah, especially in Isaiah 52:13 through 53:12. Both figures suffer terribly, and both suffer explicitly at the hands of God. The difference is that the suffering of the Servant, in contrast to that of “the Man,” is finally seen as innocent (not being punished by God for his own sin), vicarious (bearing the sins of his people), and victorious. For that reason, Christians have readily seen Jesus Christ as the Servant figure (following the lead of Christ himself and the New Testament as they do so). He was “pierced for our transgressions” and “crushed for our iniquities,” because “the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

Who was “the Man,” and who was “the Servant”? In the poetry of Lamentations 3, the Man is the personified people of Judah. He speaks for them, though he also speaks to them. The suffering of the whole people is concentrated, as it were, in the poetic persona of this witness and advocate. In the prophetic texts of Isaiah, the Servant is also the personified people of Israel as a whole. That
Lamentations speaks first for the suffering of "To the Jew first." God suffering at the hands of violent enemies. But we must start answering by identifying ourselves with the victims, the people of Israel, not only by extension the voice of a suffering world, but also redemptively, taking upon himself the whole burden of sin and evil, human and satanic, that underlies that suffering. At the cross, God bore in himself, in the person of his Son, the reality of God's own judgment against sin.

When we connect the death of Christ to the Old Testament, as Paul tells us we should do (for example, in 1 Cor. 15:3), we can see the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. as a portent of the cross (both of them acts of human wickedness that were simultaneously the outpouring of God's judgment), and the return from exile as a portent of the resurrection (and ultimately, in longer prophetic vision, of the new creation). As we read Lamentations again in the light of that connection, the experiences of Lady Zion (especially in Lam. 1) and the Man (in 3:1-18) find multiple echoes in the passion of Christ. When Jesus uttered that awful cry of dereliction wrenched from Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?", at that moment too—as in Lamentations—God refrained from answering. On that occasion, the silence of God spoke the redemption of creation.

Reading Lamentations in the light of Christ does not mean that we simply jump straight to Jesus and make it all speak about the cross, or hastily make it all right in the end because of the resurrection. We must not short-circuit the book like that. We must let it speak for itself, and for those whose voices the Poet brings to our ears. But it does mean that in the sufferings of Jerusalem—both in the sense that they were deserved and to the extent that they were not—we see a glimpse in advance of the sufferings of the One who took on himself not only the identity of Israel but also the sins of the world.

And here, then, is another way in which the silent God of the book is actually speaking within it as part of his word. For in the voices of Lamentations we hear not only the voice of suffering Israel, not only by extension the voice of a suffering world, but also the voice of the suffering divine Son of God, whose death and resurrection bring salvation to both.

Lamentations and the Church

Finally, what message can Lamentations have for the Christian church? We might begin to answer that question by asking where we see ourselves in the book. The traditional and impulsive answer is to identify ourselves with the victims, the people of God suffering at the hands of violent enemies. But we must start from a more uncomfortable perspective.

"To the Jew first." Lamentations spoke first for the suffering of Old Testament Israel at the hands of their enemies. For that reason, it has been read and used liturgically by Jewish people all down the centuries as a response to the long history of such suffering—not only at the hands of the Babylonians and Romans, but tragically also at the hands of people and powers claiming to be Christian. The story of Christian anti-Semitism is one of the darkest stains on the face of the church, and because of the suffering it has caused, it should not be forgotten, any more than Lamentations lets us forget 587 B.C. This perspective makes us read Lamentations and see ourselves among those enemies who inflicted such humiliation and pain on Israel.

"Blessed are the peacemakers." And if acknowledging the church's role as a violent "enemy" rings true to the history of anti-Semitism, Lamentations speaks no less powerfully to all other contexts in which the Christian church has aligned itself, in reality or in its rhetoric, with imperial power, military aggression, colonial greed, and sometimes genocidal violence—from the post-Constantinian Roman Empire, through the Crusades, the conquistadores, slavery, the church's preaching in support of the First World War (on both sides), and even the rhetoric of some churches around the invasion of Iraq. The story of Christian complicity in wars, violence, and bloodshed is another of the scandalous blemishes on the bride of Christ, which only his return will wash away.

It would be hard to claim that Lamentations on its own demands radical pacifism as an ethical ideology, but it certainly reinforces Christ's call to (and blessing upon) peacemaking as a missional responsibility. Anything that Christians, individually or collectively, can do in ministries of reconciliation and conflict resolution to prevent such diabolical barbarity and atrocity surely carries the endorsement of the Prince of Peace.

Lamentations also stands as a critique of the kind of imperial violence represented by Babylon. There is a prophetic stance for the church in perceiving this biblical theme and bearing costly witness to it, including within the political sphere. This too is part of our missional response to the book.

"Weep with those who weep." But we must attend to the primary voices of the book—the suffering victims who cry out in their desolation for God. Who will look and see? Who will come alongside to comfort? The book is a direct address to the reader to fulfill that role or be condemned as a passer-by worse than the priest and Levite in Jesus' parable.

Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look around and see.
Is any suffering like my suffering that was inflicted on me? (1:12)

So the book assigns to us, as Christian readers, the missional task of hearing the voice of the oppressed and persecuted, bearing witness to their suffering, and advocating on their behalf—which is part of the purpose and power of lament. This we must do, as the New Testament instructs us, first of all on behalf of sisters and brothers in Christ who suffer for his name. The catalog of places where such suffering is rampant is too long to fully list here, but it certainly includes Christians in Syria and Iraq, North Africa, Nigeria, Sudan, North Korea, some Central Asian states, and Sri Lanka.

But weeping with those who weep is surely not confined to shedding and sharing tears for Christians who are suffering. Lamentations gives us tears for the world, a world weeping over the millions of deaths by disease—HIV/AIDS, Ebola, malaria, and preventable childhood diseases. A world of grinding poverty and hunger, now even afflicting rich nations because of gross and obscene inequality. A world of mothers grieving over the death...
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of sons and husbands in the wake of rockets and suicide bombs in Israel, or reprisal shelling in Gaza. A world of insane and endemic tribal and ethnic slaughter in South Sudan, D.R. Congo, and even parts of Europe and Eurasia. A world of accelerating creational damage and climate change that threatens the poorest and weakest most. A world in which 2014 was deemed by several agencies to be the worst year ever for children—abused, abducted, raped, mutilated, enslaved, forced into child armies, murdered, and traumatized in mass shootings in schools, from the United States to Nigeria to Pakistan, and driven by war or hunger from their homes in their thousands to wretched refugee camps.

Lamentations not only gives us the language for lament in such a world. Surely it also demands that we use it. For lament appeals beyond the world and its tragic fallowness to the One about whom even Lamentations can say,

You, O LORD, reign forever,
Your throne endures from generation to generation. (5:19)

Lament is missional because it keeps the world before God, and it draws God into the world—with the longing that God should act, and the faith that he ultimately will.

“Therefore I have hope” (Lam. 3:21). We may have sung “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” without any awareness of the surrounding darkness and desolation of the Lamentations text from which it is drawn. But knowing that context, there is no reason not to go on singing it! For its truth is also a truth embedded in Lamentations. There is hope in this book, not just because it is set within the whole Bible story with its redemptive heart and glorious climax, but because the book is saturated with prayer. Even when it is angry, pain-soaked, protesting, grieving, questioning prayer, it is still prayer. And it is prayer addressed to the Lord—the God whose faithfulness, love, and compassion are eternal, and whose anger, though real and terrible, will not last forever.

And in that God, the Poet places his hope while still in the midst of his pain, and calls us to do the same.

Notes

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2. Some scholars regard the book’s date as indeterminate, perhaps composed much later in the exile, even if the event described in the book was the fall of Jerusalem. See, e.g., Iain W. Provan, Lamentations (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 11–15.

3. Except for the reported words of God in 3:57, these have been spoken to the Poet during some previous experience, not directly into the situation portrayed in Lamentations itself. It is also possible that 4:21–22 is intended as a prophetic word from God, shining a brief ray of hope into the darkness.


5. Unless indicated otherwise, Bible quotations throughout are taken from the 2011 edition of the New International Version (NIV).


10. Parry, Lamentations, 202–3 (emphasis original). This takes us to the vexed issue of the nature and origin of evil as such, and whether the Bible ever provides an answer to the question Where and how did evil originate within God’s good creation? I have wrestled with that issue and have come to the conclusion that it does not; see Christopher J. H. Wright, The God I Don’t Understand: Reflections on Tough Questions of Faith (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008).

11. Other than in the broadest possible sense that suffering in this fallen world is primarily the result of human sin and collusion with satanic evil in general. We all share in the sin and guilt of our fallen condition and suffer consequences at many levels. But this is very different from alleging that specific suffering constitutes God’s judgment on specific sins, in individuals or communities. Such simplistic equations are denied by the book of Job and the words of Jesus (Luke 13:1–5; John 9:1–3).

12. O’Connor, Lamentations, 86.


14. O’Connor, Lamentations, 130, referring to Psalm 56, captures the power of tears in a most moving way.

15. Isa. 25:8; 35:10; 65:19; Rev. 21:4.

16. O’Connor, Lamentations, 85–86, captures this divine restraint most sensitively.

17. See Parry’s commentary (Lamentations, 162–68) for a full textual and theological discussion of the relationship between Lamentations and Isaiah 40–55, with supporting bibliography.

18. This raises the thorny question of the date and authorship of Isaiah 40–55. Clearly, if the number of links between Lamentations and Isaiah’s text is taken to require textual dependence of the latter on the former, then the writer of Isaiah 40–55 must have had the book of Lamentations in hand, and so be historically located in the exilic period. Or one has to assume that, by God’s inspiration, the eighth-century prophet Isaiah was enabled to deliver (and perhaps seal up, Isa. 8:16–17) a word for the people living in a future that he foretold and to address the complaints they would make. That is the assumption of the Jewish Midrash on Lamentations: “All the severe prophecies that Jeremiah prophesied against Israel were anticipated and healed by Isaiah” (Lam. Rab. XXVII:i), as quoted by Parry, Lamentations, 162; my italics.

19. “The coming of YHWH to comfort does have implications for how we hear the pain of Lady Zion, for we now know what she did not” (Parry, Lamentations, 168; his emphasis).

20. The precise meaning of niham is difficult to express here. The text is not saying that God regrets what he did in judgment (as if the verse were an apology) or that he “rethought” about it (NIV, ESV) in the sense of changing his mind, for he had not—it had happened. Rather, it likely expresses the grief of God, along with the fact that, now that the worst had happened, God could indeed begin to deal with them differently.


22. These are fully outlined and discussed by Parry, Lamentations, 166–68. They include, for example, walking in darkness (Lam. 3:2; Isa. 50:10); offering to be struck on the cheek (Lam. 3:30; Isa. 50:6); remaining silent (Lam. 3:28; Isa. 53:7); being stricken, pierced, afflicted, and crushed (Lam. 3:1, 13, 19, 33–34; Isa. 53:4–5); being cut off and “buried” (Lam. 3:33–54; Isa. 53:8–9).

23. See Parry, Lamentations, 175–76.


25. Though Daniel Berrigan certainly turns Lamentations into a powerful antiwar tract in his searing exposition of it in the wake of 9/11 and the subsequent bombing of Afghanistan.

Prophetic Ecumenism of Public Witness: Victim-Centered Mission

Duleep de Chickera

A study group I attended in a Colombo suburb included some unsettling comments. We listened grimly as a woman related how she is compelled to hide her Christian identity in order to survive in her village. A man added how he too must minimize his Christian identity if he is to serve his neighborhood. This article surveys the social realities that prompt such disturbing remarks in Sri Lanka today and proposes a paradigm for mission from the perspective of victim theology in these daunting circumstances.

Changing Realities in Interfaith Relations

A worrying trend of religious intolerance has descended on Sri Lanka over the recent past. Those targeted are Christians and Muslims, who are subject to physical violence and hate speech in several parts of the country.

For Christians, it is the newer communities that experience this persecution. Their methods of forthright evangelism and publicly announced healing services come under particular scrutiny and provoke unproven allegations of unethical conversions. The presence and work of Christian groups in predominantly Buddhist and Hindu areas are also contested, indicating signs of religious exclusivity. Occasionally older Christian denominations have faced violent reactions, though this has more to do with local tensions, no doubt now more easily provoked due to the wider climate of intolerance.

The reaction against Muslims centers on cultural as well as economic factors such as halal food requirements, the female dress code, and the method of slaughtering cattle. At times there are allegations of a covert build-up of militant extremism seen as a threat to national security, fueled no doubt by media coverage of global militant Islam. As it is with Christians, the legality of Muslim places of worship is often a focal point of violence.

This violence is mostly generated and aggravated by Buddhist monks who lead mobs and engage in hate speech at highly provocative public meetings and press conferences. At times (Buddhist) government officials have also been known to add to the harassment of minority religions by questioning the use and dress code, and the method of slaughtering cattle. At times there are allegations of a covert build-up of militant extremism seen as a threat to national security, fueled no doubt by media coverage of global militant Islam. As it is with Christians, the legality of Muslim places of worship is often a focal point of violence.

This violence is mostly generated and aggravated by Buddhist monks who lead mobs and engage in hate speech at highly provocative public meetings and press conferences. At times (Buddhist) government officials have also been known to add to the harassment of minority religions by questioning the use and validity of house churches and prayer halls. In a few instances the perpetrators of violence against new Christian communities have been Hindu priests in Tamil Hindu areas and Roman Catholic priests in Roman Catholic areas. The issue here is often the conversion strategies of small Christian groups.

The vast majority of Buddhists, however, do not associate with the current violence, and a few recognized Buddhist leaders have publicly condemned it. This stance is best explained as an ambiguity toward Islam and Christianity. While minority religions are accepted as part of the Sri Lankan polity, there is a suspicion that they have abused their religious freedom to encroach on the freedom of others and that consequently their agendas and attitudes are in need of correction.

The response of the guardians of the law in this culture of intimidation and violence vacillates. They have at times interpreted and applied the law to protect those under threat and hold the perpetrators responsible, but on most occasions they have simply withdrawn from their primary duty, demonstrating helplessness rather than bias. This sense of helplessness on the part of the law-enforcement authorities points to the heart of the current crisis: the breakdown of the rule of law because of the deliberate politicization of the police force for political gain by the current regime. In spite of numerous complaints, the violence continues unabated, adding to the vulnerability of minority religions and the impurity of those who take the law into their own hands.

Victim Theology: Its Dynamic and Its Objective

Victim theology is crafted from Jesus’s option for marginalized victims. These are the little people, referred to as the helpless and harassed, with whom he deliberately shares life (Matt. 9:35–36; Mark 1:16–45, 2:13–17, 3:20, 5:24, 6:34). In doing so, Jesus highlights the plight of excluded humans on the margins of life and draws them into the center of the discourse. The objective of this dynamic is to call those responsible for the humiliation of victims into accountability and change. Since victims know the identity of their oppressors and sense the way to justice in their helplessness and harassment, the victim-centered perspective opens the way to just and inclusive reconciliation, which is what the Gospel is all about. It is only when victims are heard and oppressors repent and turn from their oppressive ways that the latter legitimately enter the discourse and the artificial “center-margin” divide begins to disintegrate. The corrupt tax collector Zacchaeus, for example, is compelled to repent and return his unjust spoils to the victims of his exploitation if he is to be free to return to his proper place in the community. Such change, Jesus declares, is the sign of salvation (Luke 19:1–10).

In circumstances of religious intolerance the church is to steer away from at least three sub-Gospel mission tendencies, regardless of the pressure and the provocation to submit. These are the tendency to withdraw altogether out of fear, to react out of bitterness, and to bypass the opportunity to engage in self-evaluation. It is only then that victim theology promises potential to bring fresh insights, energy, and expressions of witness and mission integral to both the Gospel and social trust.

The victim option of Christ compels the church to draw the victims of religious extremism into the center of the discourse. This is done best when the plight of these victims and the violence and intimidation generated by extremists are brought to bear on the national conscience and the state is held accountable for the erosion of religious freedom and the rule of law. The objective of this intervention is the consolidation of a culture of democratic governance in which freedom and rights for all eradicate both victimization and victims.
Biblical Accountability

Accountability is an important aspect of this dynamic. It is the device that holds regimes responsible for good and just governance and pursues the common good on behalf of all. When abuse, corruption, violence, or incompetence contaminates responsible governance, accountability exposes these trends and calls for explanation. While the task of accountability is dangerous and difficult under authoritarian regimes, human passion for a just social order stimulates an ingenuity that discovers novel ways and means of sustaining pressure on these regimes. 12

Accountability is a biblical concept. It does not originate from the United Nations or any other secular agency, even though these agencies affirm and promote it. Biblical accountability operates at two connected levels: (1) humans holding humans account-
lesson here, however, for these publicly engaged groups is that public witness on behalf of victims can never be selective. It has everything to do with the dignity and equality of all humans, made in God’s image.

Other Contenders

Prophetic ecumenism for public witness will require the church to engage with other contenders who, like the church, are driven by belief or ideology and compete for space in the public arena. Here the stakes are high, and the church will meet with hostility, anger, critique, reaction, indifference, and cynicism, as well as appreciation, goodwill, respect, and solidarity. The call to be salt and light in God’s world cannot, however, be avoided. If the task of the church is to interpret the Gospel in and to the world, attempts to escape the scrutiny of other contenders in the public space will amount to unfaithfulness. The high price paid for public witness in the public space is integrity and the cultivation of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23).

Church as Violator

Victim theology inevitably judges the church. The Buddhist as victim also has a place in the center of the discourse. From here the church, perceived and entrenched in the psyche of the Buddhist victim as historical aggressor, needs to deal with the past through a public apology for the violence committed against Buddhism and Buddhist culture, especially during Western colonial rule, and for a postindependence greed for converts, much of which still prevails. Such an apology is likely to be well received by moderate Buddhists, who, if we can judge from informal conversations, clearly wait for such a sign. Above all, it will establish the credibility of the church as a national community that lives the Gospel of repentance and eventually will consolidate interreligious trust for the common good.

Appropriate Mission

Part of the post-apology manifestation of good intention will include a self-critique of the style of mission that has led to the grievance of the majority religion. This quest, which has been the constant pursuit of postindependence theologians in Sri Lanka, will require a delicate and sensitive balance between national integration and Christian identity, both of which require obedience to Jesus. The continuing discernment of the incarnational method of mission by groups of Christians as being the most appropriate for postindependence Sri Lanka is a helpful option for consideration. It is certainly more honorable than the method of evangelism that pursues speedy conversions. Just as the seed is to fall to the ground and die before it bears fruit, so Christian mission among other living religions in a conflict-ridden society involves engagement and immersion in the common struggles of the people. The way Christians behave and the values they live by in these struggles are to reveal the living Christ, who died and rose so that all may have abundant life. When the Gospel is lived in this manner, fresh opportunities of mission will emerge, and the Gospel will be preached with integrity.

An added asset in the incarnational method of mission is that it prevents the public witness of the churches from becoming sectarian. Since social injustice involves a complex network, restricting the church’s public witness only to Christian or religious issues is unrealistic. The church’s prophetic witness is therefore not to be limited to issues of religious intolerance only when they affect the Christian community. It must stand shoulder to shoulder with current civil society initiatives, and it must widen its focus to address all violations of democratic rights and human dignity, regardless of ethnic, religious, political, or class identity. For this collaboration to be most effective, shared public witness will need to pursue a truly democratic culture in which the rule of law and good governance prevail and within which there will be freedom for all to live and practice their respective religion with dignity. In this collaboration the church and religions are to take note of and learn from the current methods of advocacy and campaigning adopted by civil society. As far as Sri Lanka is concerned, it is public witness and social advocacy from within that will change the current culture of authoritarian impunity and restore fullness of life for all. The biblical neighbor concept based on the biblical concept of social justice endorses this stance theologically and compels the participation of the whole church for the common good.

Conclusion

Throughout its postcolonial life, the South Asian church has learned and relearned that human crises are an invitation to new lessons in witness and mission in the circumstances of poverty, violence, and pluralism. Christ undoubtedly comes to us in a new and daring way in the storm. The hardships of Jerusalem defined the early church’s emerging global mission. The wheat is to bear fruit among the weeds that threaten to choke it. In these metaphors and experiences, mission is reconstructed. Victim theology stands in this tradition. It facilitates the reconstruction of appropriate mission models in situations of conflict, which in turn equip the church to face and transform these social realities.

When viewed in this light, prophetic witness through prophetic ecumenism is the convergence of truth and life that pursues rights, freedom, and liberation for all from all types of violence, injustice, and oppression. It brings together those who are not against the churches. As a spirituality, it emulates the incarnation to eliminate the distinction between the religious and the secular, as well as between the center and the periphery. Above all, it promises to heal the divisions among Christians,

When the Gospel is lived in this manner, fresh opportunities of mission will emerge.

Epilogue

In 2012 the National Council of Churches (NCC) of Sri Lanka celebrated its centenary anniversary. There was much for which to be grateful to God. Among the several highlights of its ecumenical journey, the accompaniment of victims stood out prominently. These included war victims, the oppressed plantation community, the urban poor, victims of religious extremism, and victims of natural disasters.

The chief guest at the public event that commemorated this
important landmark was a person whom many Sri Lankans, including the large numbers represented by the NCC, consider to be the source of numerous violations of human dignity and rights, including religious freedom: the nation’s president. This reversal in values—honoring the oppressor instead of lifting up the concerns of the victims of oppression and disaster—will require a substantial analysis elsewhere, but for now a comment is necessary.

Numerous church persons, including youth leaders, registered their protest by boycotting the event. When decisions to seek the approval of those in power place the violator at the center instead of the victim, the public witness of the church is ridiculed and suffers an immense setback. Most seriously, prophetic ecumenism is silenced. But all is not lost. Questions being asked already indicate that prophets will rise from among the people to embrace victims and hold violators accountable, notwithstanding a leadership that has violated the church’s trust.24

This tragic development has a bearing on the opening story in this article. The vindication of victims rarely comes from the top, and victims who long for liberation, such as the lone woman and lone man in the stories, are to look across and within themselves for life and liberation. However serious the betrayal of human trust may be, Christ—the victim-vindicator ever present among those who groan—is never without courageous and credible witnesses. This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.25

Notes—
1. Paradoxically, strong interfaith collaborations continue to run parallel with these incidents in multireligious Sri Lanka, where Buddhists compose approximately 70 percent of the population, Hindus 13 percent, Muslims and Christians 8 percent each, with a few smaller religions and agnostics making up the remaining 1 percent.
2. See January–March 2013 Report of the National Christian Evangelical Association of Sri Lanka, henceforth NCEASL, and Hate Incidents against Muslims, 2013 (Sri Lanka Secretariat for Muslims), henceforth SFM. While small Christian communities have suffered sporadic intimidation over a longer period, Muslims have been targeted over the past two years or so. Hindus also complain of discrimination and violence, particularly in the more militarized regions. The nature of this conflict is much more politically complex and will not come within the purview of this article.
3. Other than church members, few people make a distinction between the denominations. It is not uncommon for all Christians to be spoken of as (Roman) Catholics, the largest Christian denomination, with which most Sri Lankans are familiar.
4. See NCEASL.
6. For all these points, see NCEASL and SFM.
7. Again, see NCEASL and SFM.
9. Victim theology is the backbone of all liberation theologies.
10. This is the rationale of truth commissions and the thrust of restorative justice.
11. The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, chap. 2, art. 9; chap. 3, arts. 10 and 14 (10). While giving foremost place to Buddhism, these sections affirm the freedom of all Sri Lankans to manifest a religion or belief through worship, observance, practice, and teaching, alone or with others and in private or in public.
12. At present seven methods of advocacy and resistance are practiced by democracy groups in Sri Lanka: (1) the maximizing of all opportunities to speak and teach, (2) the fullest possible use of all that is still left of democratic institutions (esp. the media and the judiciary), (3) the assertion of constitutional freedom and rights, (4) the assertion of the sovereignty of the people, (5) public boycotts, street campaigning, and protests, (6) the exposing of corruption, and (7) the call to accountability.
13. See also the subversive texts such as Matt. 6:24 (the absolute choice between God and mammon, or idols) and Matt. 22:15–22 (regarding paying taxes to Caesar, and calling for primary obedience to God, whose image is stamped on humans).
14. The fourth mark of mission of the Anglican communion—“to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation”—stems from this doctrine.
15. My preference is to speak of the governance of God, for such wording (1) reduces the connotations of triumphalism, (2) implies hand, continuing work, and (3) is more easily understood in the secular world.
16. Some pastors of these churches are now in court seeking redress and have begun to recognize the importance of public witness and advocacy.
17. Sections of the Sri Lankan church, particularly Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and Methodists, have a long and rich tradition of engagement in public witness. A recent example is the submissions made by the Anglican Church to the presidential commission on reconciliation after the war. See Duleep de Chickera in his appendix to Powder Anew (Colombo: Diocese of Colombo, 2013).
18. The pastoral behavior of Christians in postwar refugee camps prompted some Hindus to attend worship in Anglican churches after resettlement around 2010. The churches decided that all would be welcome but not instructed and baptized unless they were strong and secure enough to say no. If they subsequently insisted on converting to Christ, the church would respond appropriately.
19. If it does, it could well turn into another protracted minority-majority conflict on the lines of the ethnic crisis. Given the world representation of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, such a conflict has potential to become a global issue.
20. See n. 13.
21. Several church leaders present in Busan in 2013 at the Tenth Assembly of the World Council of Churches publicly identified international intervention as a way to resolve the current crisis in Sri Lankan governance. Dependence on external forces, however, reduces whatever energy can and must be generated internally.
22. This vision inspired persons like William Carey, William Wilberforce, Archbishops William Temple and Oscar Romero, Martin Luther King Jr., Bishop Tutu, and others to work for social justice. The names of hundreds of lesser-known contemporary prophets from the Global South, including Sri Lanka, could be added to this list.
23. The incarnation, in which God becomes one with human flesh, has removed this distinction forever (see John 1:14).
24. Violators of human dignity and rights win converts through enticement. Religious leaders are not immune to this trap. When they—whether Buddhist or Christian—succumb to this temptation, the result is either visible collaboration with the violator or a demonstration of public affinity with the violator. In the people’s perception there is little difference between primary and secondary violators. They both disregard and humiliate victims.
The Syrian War and the Christians of the Middle East

Mary Mikhal

The so-called Arab Spring that emerged in 2010–11 looked quite different by the year 2013. It was a prolonged season, extending far beyond a spring in duration. While spring as a season brings beauty and hope for new life, the Arab Spring has been a dark and stormy one. Instead of the blooming of flowers and hope for renewal, all we have witnessed is violence, killing, destruction, and chaos. While I focus here on the Syrian situation and how the Christian community is being affected, I first give some background on aspects of the Middle East situation that may have caused this spring to be so different from the hopefulness of the natural spring.

We must understand that the story of the Middle East is not only a story of people now in struggle but also a story of geography and its history. I write here—not as a historian, but as a participant on the ground—about facts as they are known to common citizens living in the Middle East, people who are very conscious of the issues that affect their lives.

Geographically, the Middle East is the connecting point between the East and the West. Ancient powers sought control of the Middle East so they could have easy access to both East and West. The Middle East has always been an area of diverse ethnicities and religions, and more recently, also of extreme disparities of wealth, especially after the discovery of oil. No wonder every power in modern days has coveted control of it, in part or entirely. The history of this area thus has been shaped by its geography, especially by what the land contains.

Politically, in 1948 Israel was established—or as many would say, “planted” like a foreign plant in Palestine. In general, Israel seeks to affirm control of the geography, with strong religious claims based on ancient history. In this process, millions of Palestinians lost their home country and became refugees. They have been living in camps in neighboring countries as humans of a forgotten class, yet they still hold on to the keys of their homes, wanting to return as soon as possible—or so they thought. A further issue has been all the oppression and discrimination against those who stayed. The result has been that, ever since the establishment of the State of Israel, the entire Middle East has been in tension. At times this tension has risen to the point of violence and war.

In such a situation of tension, of conflict and violence, and of fear that the outbreak of war will lead to the occupation of land and to loss of power, the race to acquire arms became paramount. This goal in turn promoted the rise of dictatorial regimes on all sides. Even countries that claim to be democracies and to respect human rights have been encouraging dictators to rise up and have sustained them in power for long periods. In this way, the concepts of freedom, justice, and human rights have all been pushed aside. When countries are in a state of conflict, war, and fear, all that matters is power and control of the race for armaments. Although Middle Eastern countries largely share related languages and similar cultures, in fact each one deals with different influences and pressures and has its own ideology. The region is a mosaic, not a monolith.

This, I believe, is a fair description of the situation until 2010, when the Arab Spring began in Tunisia. In 2011 it spread to Libya and Egypt. Regrettably, these countries continue to struggle with the storms brought by their “springs,” and the future remains under a big question mark, something unknown.

The Case of Syria

I turn here to focus on Syria and the situation of its Christian community. Syria in fact has a history, a geography, and a culture that go back for thousands of years. Syria is also a country containing many ethnic and religious communities, all sharing this common history and a similar way of life.

While Islam as a religion is characteristic of all Arab countries, Syria has been considered a secular country that respects all religions. One article in the Syrian constitution declares that Islam must be the religion of the president of the republic, but all other rules and regulations are defined without mention of religious orientation.

It is legitimate to refer to Syria as the cradle of Christianity, for Christianity had its beginnings in Palestine, which, as part of the Levant, is considered a part of greater Syria. And the followers of Jesus were first called Christians in Antioch, which was then a Syrian city. Archaeology, the many ancient Christian sites, and Damascus, with its place in the life of the apostle Paul, all witness to the fact that the roots of Syria’s present-day Christians go back over two thousand years.

While Syria never claimed to have full democracy or perfect social justice, people lived side by side in peace. They enjoyed security and relative freedom. Syria provided free education and hospitalization and many services that everyone could afford. The Christian community thus felt safe and secure, and it went about its own business, enjoying what all others enjoyed. Religion was never used as an instrument for coloring people’s identity or for separating communities. Christians felt that they belonged to Syria—past, present, and future. This was the situation until the Arab Spring began.

The Syrian Spring

The Arab Spring reached Syria in mid-March 2011, beginning with a high school in a town near the border with Jordan. Some

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students wrote on a wall the slogan that was then appearing in other countries of the Arab Spring: 

Ash-sha’b yurid islāmat an-nizām ("The people demand the removal of the regime").

Regrettably, the town’s authorities overreacted and treated the students harshly. Their response caused the students’ parents to go into the streets, demonstrating and objecting to the treatment the students had received. They demanded reform, change, and more freedom. Demonstrations were repeated every Friday after midday prayers in mosques and then began to spread from city to city. At first all seemed peaceful and legal. Requests for change, reform, end of corruption, social justice, and freedom were demands that the majority of Syri ans could support. Then a new request was added: to overthrow the regime.

Suddenly, side by side with the demonstrations, counter-demonstrations in support of the regime emerged. Little by little, violence began to appear and then escalated to the point that people were stunned. Stories circulated of criminal acts, such as beheadings and dismemberment, with corpses and body parts found thrown into rivers.

The Syrian Spring thus took a surprising direction, different from that of other countries. As in no other country, slogans such as “Syria is the land of the Prophet!” or “Syria is the land of jihad” filled the air. These slogans used by the groups doing the fighting were directed against Christians and other minorities. Institutions such as schools and governmental centers were destroyed, and the country’s water, electricity, and fuel infrastructure all came under attack. Violence and violence and more violence was all there was.

Indeed, the Syrian Spring has become a human tragedy. It has afflicted the country as a calamity of unprecedented proportion. We will certainly never know the number of those who were displaced internally, were kidnapped for ransom (many of whom were executed), or in many other ways lost their lives. Beyond such human loss was the destruction wreaked on the history, culture, and ways of life of the Syrian people, all of which created fear and caused many to flee their homes. Total disruption and chaos engulfed virtually the whole country.

A most distinctive feature of the violence was—and is—the presence of fighters from outside Syria. Groups have been identified from eighty-three countries. Some of them do not speak Arabic and have no idea what the Syrian people need or want. One fact is indisputable: the demonstration that began with the students was taken out of the hands of the Syrian people. Institutions such as schools and governmental centers were destroyed, and the country’s water, electricity, and fuel infrastructure all came under attack. Violence and violence and more violence was all there was.

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What of the Christian Community?

What about the present and future of the Christian community? This community clearly feels the pain of the country, one it has loved and where its history and traditions are deeply rooted. Like all other Syrian communities, the Christian community has lost its sense of security. More specifically, in all the areas controlled by ISIS, slogans against the Christians are circulated. Accusations that all Christians are supporting the regime makes their fate one with that of the regime, namely, death. In areas controlled by ISIS, especially along the borders of Iraq and Turkey, Christians have been forced to leave. They have been given three choices: convert to Islam, leave, or be killed. In other areas Christians were told that if they stayed, they would have to pay jizyah, that is, a special “protection” tax. Also, they would not be allowed to rebuild their destroyed churches or to show any signs or symbols that might indicate their religion. Many Christians, quite naturally, have left those areas for safer areas either within Syria or in neighboring countries, mostly in Lebanon. Others have immigrated to other countries, probably never to come back.

Since their safety cannot be guaranteed, Syrian Christians have been leaving the country and thus are experiencing the loss of a future. Already Christians of the Middle East, particularly from Iraq, Palestine, and Egypt, as well as Syria, have been seeking refuge in other countries so as to secure a good future for their children. In January 2014 Cyril S. Bustros, a Lebanese Catholic bishop, metropolitan of Beirut and Jbeil, addressed a group of representatives of churches in the United States and Europe. In his remarks, he quoted a journalist to the effect that “two thousand years after the birth of Jesus, across the entire Middle East, Christianity is under assault more than at any time in the past century, prompting some to speculate that one of the world’s three great religions could vanish entirely from the region within a generation or two.” He added, citing the same source, “From Iraq, which has lost half of its Christians over the past decade, to Egypt, which saw the worst spate of anti-Christian violence in 700 years this summer, to Syria, where Jihadists are killing Christians and burying them in mass graves, the followers of Jesus face violence and vitriol as well as declining churches and ecumenical divides. Christians now make up 5 percent of the population of the Middle East, down from 20 percent a century ago.”

Seen in the light of the Arab Spring, it may seem that Christians in the Middle East have no future there. But we cannot ignore or forget that the future lies in the hands of God, who created all the seasons. The church in fact is built on the Rock of Ages, “and the powers of death shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18 RSV).

Indeed churches, councils of churches, and seminaries are all concerned, and they continue to speak out in seminars, public lectures, and conferences, all addressing the same topic. This is probably the healthiest time to nurture faith and keep hope. The church must maintain a clear focus by staying involved in witnessing to the love of God. It must keep serving the needy, feeding the hungry, healing the sick, and spreading hope, even in hopeless situations. The church must keep examining itself in the light of the Word of God. Our future surely is in the hands of God, who is the God of history—past, present, and future. Indeed, the Christian community will continue to have a future with God in the Middle East and everywhere else in the world.

Note

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A Toll on the Soul: Costs of Persecution among Pakistan’s Christians

Titus Presler

Pakistan’s establishment at Partition in 1947 as a haven for South Asia’s Muslims made it the first modern state to be created on the basis of religion, and within the country there is debate about what Muslim sanctuary meant and what it should mean today for Muslim identity and for religious freedom. Some see founding father Muhammad Ali Jinnah as envisioning a liberal state guided by Islam but affirming religious pluralism, while others interpret him and the idea of Pakistan in more partisan Muslim terms. The country’s official name did not include “Islamic Republic” until the Constitution of 1956, and Islam was not designated the state religion until the Constitution of 1973, which is currently in force with various amendments.

On one hand, the Constitution promises religious freedom: “Subject to law, public order and morality: (a) every citizen shall have the right to profess, practice and propagate his religion” (Article 20a). On the other hand, it stipulates: “All existing laws shall be brought in conformity with the Injunctions of Islam as laid down in the Quran and Sunnah... and no law shall be enacted which is repugnant to such Injunctions” (Article 227). Yet, as the Taliban and various religious parties complain in their advocacy of Sharia law beyond its expansion in the 1980s and 1990s, Pakistan’s legal code continues to be modeled mainly on British common law. The Council of Islamic Ideology, established by the Constitution to effect Islamic law, makes recommendations periodically—for instance, that the age of consent for the marriage of girls be removed—but they are routinely ignored by the National Assembly, and the broad framework of Pakistan’s federal legal code is unlikely to change drastically. The continuing force of the Hudood Ordinances, however, imposed in 1979 against adultery, and of the blasphemy laws, strengthened in the 1980s, demonstrates how difficult it is to mitigate or remove Islamizing laws once they are enacted. In sum, there is room for ambiguity and maneuver within the parameters of what is understood as Islamic identity and religious freedom in Pakistan, but the current trend is toward Muslim hegemony.

There is tragic irony here. Pakistan was founded because Muslims feared for their future as a minority, albeit a very large minority, in what would be a Hindu-majority India. Today, 96 percent of Pakistan’s 200 million people are Muslims, with the Christian, Hindu, and Sikh minorities relatively small. Yet, rather than being hospitable to religious minorities who in both size and intention pose little threat, the prevailing ethos is to marginalize, restrict, and threaten them. A common feature of a minority mentality in any situation is paranoia that magnifies a sense of threat beyond what reality can verify. Pakistan’s Muslims achieved their majority almost seventy years ago, but it may be decades before they feel secure in the knowledge that it actually happened.

The intensifying persecution of religious minorities in Pakistan today is well known, and some instances have been publicized internationally: riots in Gojra, Punjab, in 2009 that killed eight Christians and burned forty homes; the 2010 death sentence decreed for Asia Bibi, a Christian woman laborer accused of blasphemy; the 2011 assassinations of Salman Taseer, the Muslim governor of Punjab Province, and Shabzah Bhatti, a Roman Catholic who was the first federal minister for Minority Religious Affairs, both of them for opposing the blasphemy laws; the 2012 burning of St. Paul’s Church in Mardan in Khyber Pakhunkhwa Province; blasphemy accusations in 2012 against Rimsha Masih, a mentally handicapped girl in Islamabad; the March 2013 Badami Bagh riots in Lahore that destroyed 175 Christian homes; the catastrophic suicide bombing at All Saints’ Church in Peshawar in September 2013, when 119 Christians were killed and 145 were wounded; and the November 2014 incineration of a Christian couple in a brick kiln after they were accused of burning pages of the Qur’an. Less well known are forced conversions to Islam of Hindu women kidnapped for marriage, especially in Sindh Province. In February 2014 the Pakistani Taliban threatened the entire Kalash people, a polytheistic group in mountainous Chitral who claim descent from Alexander the Great, with death if they would not convert to Islam. Persecution extends to marginalized Muslim groups as well: Ahmadis were declared non-Muslims in 1974, and vicious attacks on Shiites have increased in recent years.

The liberal English-language press in Pakistan expresses outrage and despair at such events, as do millions of moderate Pakistanis in private, but apprehension about the retribution that can be visited on human-rights defenders means that the momentum continues to be on the side of extremists. The June 2014 debate about pages that Facebook blocked at the demand of the Pakistani government is illustrative: left-wing pages and a rock band critical of the Taliban were blocked, but sites advocating extremist violence were left standing by the government’s fear of right-wing backlash.

On a global basis, discussion of religious conflict, including persecution, is sometimes criticized as misrepresenting complex social phenomena as religious. Such conflicts, it is said, are really political, economic, and ethnic in motivation and aim, and religion is simply being used as a pretext for such ends. Several responses are in order. First, all social phenomena are complex and must be analyzed case by case. The fact that a particular conflict may have political, economic, and ethnic dimensions does not delegitimize inclusion of religion as a factor in the analysis, whether the instances are ancient, medieval, or contemporary. Second, the tendency to discount religious motivation today reflects twentieth-century Euro-American academic and cultural assumptions about the marginalization of religion amidst the inevitability of secularization. Not only have such assumptions always been inapplicable in most of the world, but the
twenty-first century is demonstrating that they are outmoded in the religious dynamics of Europe and North America as well. Third, virtually all social conflicts concern distribution of power among groups and thus are inherently political. It is just as possible for power to be contested between groups defined by religious affiliation as it is for groups defined by economic or ethnic interest. Indeed, even if analysis concludes that in a particular case religion is being used cynically to accomplish other ends, that very analysis demonstrates the power of religious mobilization. In short, religion is an independent variable in social dynamics, as are ethnicity, economics, and politics, and not simply a passive and dependent variable.

These considerations bear directly on Pakistan today. The country’s drift toward religious extremism is commonly dated from the Islamization initiatives of President Zia ul-Haq (1977–88), whose motives appear to have been a mix of conservative piety, a desire to counter Soviet domination in Afghanistan, and a drive to counter the perennial rival India. These initiatives had the effect of legitimizing jihad as a modern form of warfare through sponsorship of mujahedeen. Intensified Muslim loyalty has resulted at the popular level in the form of the rising profile of madrasas, religious parties, Islamic legislation, and the view that the true Pakistan is a Muslim Pakistan. The common association of the West with Christianity has meant that the U.S.-led war against the Taliban in Afghanistan and the unpopular CIA-led drone strikes in Waziristan reinforced anti-Christian views, but it did not create them. Socioeconomically, the lower-caste origins of many Pakistani Christians have for generations contributed to their societal marginalization, and particular outbreaks of violence have sometimes included a desire to seize their neighborhoods. Attributing apparently religious conflicts in Pakistan only to geopolitical or economic factors, however, would be, if anything, more reductionist that insisting that the conflicts are only or purely religious. Religious chauvinism is the major factor in discrimination and violence against religious minorities in Pakistan. As such, it constitutes religious persecution.a

The cost among Pakistan’s Christians is considerable. To the Corinthians the apostle Paul wrote movingly: “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus” (2 Cor. 4:8–10). Overall, the Pakistani Christian community can echo those words with conviction. Yet Paul was writing in a defiant and even counterfactual mood, for he sometimes did despair, and he sometimes did feel crushed. Likewise Pakistani Christians are wounded, not whole. There is a toll on the soul. From the perspective of service as principal of Edwards College in Peshawar, I explore this toll narratively under several headings.

Disfiguring Normalization of Persecution

One afternoon in November 2012 at Edwardes College a number of Christian faculty members, both men and women, met with me to discuss how to deal with misbehavior among some Christian students. As we discussed details and approaches, it became clear that the faculty members were concerned about the image of Christianity that misbehaving students were conveying to Muslims in this church college, where 90 percent of the 105 faculty and 92 percent of the 2,800 students were Muslim. They felt that Muslims sought reasons to disparage Christians, and they wished to reduce the grounds for such opprobrium.

When I commented that the Christians in general were under pressure from discrimination and persecution on an ongoing basis, one longtime professor replied, “Is the situation of Christians in Pakistan worse than in other countries? I feel it is all right. Things are quiet.” I responded, “I’m amazed that you say that. St. Paul’s Church in Mardan was burned during the Day of Love for the Prophet on September 21, a young girl in Islamabad has been arrested for supposedly committing blasphemy, and several years ago Christians lost their lives in anti-Christian rioting, and yet you say things are all right. I think it is simply that you have gotten used to a terrible situation. Things are all right only so long as you do not talk about religion with anyone.” A young lecturer responded: “Yes, we have gotten used to it, but that works. I have had Muslim friends, and we can be quite close, but we are careful not to talk much about religion. I had a Muslim friend at the university, she is still my friend, and we do not talk about religion, or we talk about it only superficially. And that is all right. That works for us.”

As we were talking, the azan, the call to prayer, was broadcast from the public address system of the nearby mosque. Noting that in recent weeks the volume seemed to have been gradually turned up, I said: “As we sit here talking about interreligious relations, we’re hearing the call to prayer from the mosque. If your home were right across the street from that mosque, you and I both know that if you were to request that the volume be turned down, you would be taking your life in your hands.” They agreed. I then told them about a visit I had made to the home of a member of the college support staff. After dinner we had prayed and sung hymns with harmonium and tabla accompaniment. The family told me that, on two previous occasions when they were worshipping inside their home, bricks were thrown through the window as their Muslim neighbors objected to their singing. They could not protest or even mention it beyond their family, for that would have led to a movement against them, maybe even violence.

“My point,” I said to the group of Christian faculty, “is that you have gotten used to a terrible situation. I admire your imper turbability, but it is important that you realize that it is a terrible situation. If you take it as normal in the sense of nothing out of the ordinary, you are likely to collude in your own oppression. I’m certainly not suggesting that you protest in some overt way that will incite violence against yourselves, but I do suggest that you recognize it for what it is: oppression and persecution. You will then be in a better position to take advantage of opportunities that may arise to improve the situation. You will also be better able to draw strength from your faith in the triune God, who has been with the Christian community ever since its beginning in times of oppression and persecution.” I recalled to them how in earlier chapel services we had felt resonances between stories in the Book of Acts and the ongoing suffering of Christians in Pakistan today. “Those are not strange far-off stories,” I said, “for they prefigure the experience of your own community.”

In Pakistan, Christians in general are under pressure from discrimination and persecution on an ongoing basis.

April 2015
Internalization of Blame and Shame

My experience of being beaten by agents of the military Intelligence Services Intelligence (ISI) in Peshawar in February 2014 helped me empathize with the minimization verging on denial that the just-quoted conversation with Christian faculty exhibited.7 One immediate response I had to the personal violence was to realize anew that Christians and other religious minorities in Pakistan had been experiencing such abuse throughout their lives, and so my first prayer was one of solidarity as we drove on to Islamabad, where I had been taking refuge from threats in Peshawar.

Another initial response, however, was silence. Peshawar bishop Humphrey Sarfaraz Peters had been in Islamabad and was on his way back to Peshawar when we contacted him about the beating, so he returned to the capital, where he met with us at my Muslim host’s home. I found it difficult to discuss the incident, so my host told the story. Even allowing for shock, there was a deeper tide of withdrawal at work within me. Similarly, I could not bring myself to share the news with my family back in the United States for twenty-four hours.

In beating me, accusing me, tearing up my visa, and threatening me with death, the ISI agents had treated me as trash. They heaped blame and shame on me. Cognitively, I knew it all to be false. Emotionally, though, some part of me was asking: “Does this happening to me mean that they’re right? I must have done something wrong to deserve this. I must be to blame. Maybe I am trash. I feel deeply shamed.” As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things” (1 Cor. 4:13).

Such internalization of blame and shame is widely noted as common among victims of other types of abuse, especially domestic violence and sexual exploitation and violence, and it is not surprising that it features in the persecuted psyche. My experience of internalizing blame and shame became an additional dimension of empathy with Pakistani Christians, sharing not only their abuse but also a particular internal response to such abuse.

Mutual Blame among Persecuted Christians

The bombing at All Saints’ Church in Peshawar on September 22, 2013, was the deadliest attack on Christians in the history of Pakistan. There were many heartrending responses to the event. Local Muslims rushed to help move the wounded to hospitals, and others helped dig the many graves that were needed. Christians demonstrating around the country were often joined by Muslims. Government officials visited and promised assistance funds. There was an outpouring of concern and donations from communities around the world. Korean Christians visited and planned to build a peace center at All Saints’ Church. Some promises have not been fulfilled, but at least the catastrophe received appropriate concern.

The relief effort for victims, however, soon was plagued by unfounded accusations of corruption and malfeasance, which prompted an anguished plea from Mano Rumalshah, bishop emeritus of Peshawar:

Noteworthy

Announcing

An international and interdisciplinary conference entitled “James Legge: Missions to China and the Origins of Sinology” will be held at the University of Edinburgh, June 11–13, 2015. Hosted by the University of Edinburgh’s Centre for the Study of World Christianity, in collaboration with the Scottish Centre for Chinese Studies, the conference marks the bicentennial of the birth of Scottish missionary-scholar James Legge, who undertook the translation of Chinese texts into English and Christian texts into Chinese. Keynote public lectures during the conference will be given by Lauren Pister (Hong Kong Baptist University) and Yang Hulin (Renmin University of China), looking at James Legge from Western and Chinese perspectives respectively. For further information, see www.oswc.div.ed.ac.uk/events-and-projects/legge-2015.

The Andrew Walls Centre for the Study of African and Asian Christianity, Liverpool Hope University, Liverpool, England, and the Chair for Early and Global Church History at Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich, Germany, will jointly host an international conference, “Missionary and Indigenous-Christian Journals and the Making of Transcontinental Networks,” to be held July 3–5, 2015, at Hope Park Campus, Liverpool Hope University. For details, e-mail Daniel Jeyaraj (jeyarad@hope.ac.uk).

The Eclesiastical History Society will hold two conferences in the United Kingdom on the theme “Translating Christianity: Word, Image, Sound, and Object in the Circulation of the Sacred from the Birth of Christ until the Present Day.” Among topics the conferences will address is mission, which the organizers describe as “the greatest campaign of cultural translation (and description) ever undertaken.” The first event will take place July 28–30, 2015, at the University of York, with a second daylong conference planned for London on January 16, 2016. For further details, including the call for papers (the deadline for the July conference is April 15), the full list of proposed topics, and details of bursaries available to graduate students, see www.history.ac.uk/ehsoc/conferences.

With “Controversies in Christian Mission” as its focus, the annual meeting of the Evangelical Missiological Society (EMS) will be held September 18–20, 2015, at the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics, Dallas, Texas. Topics covered will range widely across contemporary concerns in mission, such as money and mission, Bible translation, and gender and sexuality. Proposals for papers are due by May 1; they should be submitted via www.surveymonkey.com/r/EMS2015. To attend, register by August 1. For further information, go to www.emsweb.org or e-mail rpriest@tiu.edu.

Registration opened in March for Mission Leaders Conference 2015: Upward, to be held September 24–26, 2015, in Orlando, Florida. This learning and networking event will address mission leadership issues surrounding the themes of diversity, legacy, complexity, and adversity. For information, see the Missio Nexus website http://mission nexus.org/meeting/mission-leaders-conference-2015-upward/.

Meeting at Maryknoll Mission Institute, Ossining, New York, the American Society of Missiology–Eastern Fellowship of Professors of Mission will address the topic...
It is sad that some people spread false rumors and played a blame game on the local Bishop [Humphrey Sarfaraz Peters]. It was so hurtful that some foreign NGOs published a photograph of our Diocesan Bishop with a caption of “Corrupt.” It is abominable, unethical, and disgusting for people sitting thousands of miles away to make such judgments on hearsay without ever appreciating the reality of such a complicated situation. Unfortunately, except for a few exceptions, even our Pakistani Christian expatriates make similar assumptions. I wish they would be more mindful of the reality of these situations, rather than making sweeping statements about the corruption and incompetence of the church in Pakistan.

Thus, while one community response amid persecution is mutual solidarity, another community response is mutual recrimination. Blame displacement may be at work as the pressure of internalized blame and shame results in blaming and shaming one’s fellow Christians: “Maybe I’m not responsible for the affliction being visited on our community, but maybe some of my fellow Christians are. Yes, I’m sure it’s our leaders: they’re the ones bringing disrepute to our community, they’re the ones responsible for this suffering.” Members of the persecuted community become divided and thereby become complicit in their own oppression and marginalization.

Caricatures of the Majority Community

Christians and Muslims work amicably together in many contexts in Pakistan, such as in schools, hospitals, businesses, and the civil service. Active under the surface, however, is historic discrimination and marginalization, which has resulted in 80 percent of Christians being confined to menial jobs with little prospect for advancement for themselves or their children. In many Christians, this history and the consequent resentment prompt views of Muslim belief and practice that foresee possibilities of fruitful dialogue. Many find it difficult to inquire into the nature of Muslims’ faith in Allah or to consider the possibility that Christians and Muslims share insights into the nature of God. They do not share the enthusiasm that Christians in other parts of the world have for building understanding with Muslims on the basis of a shared heritage in Abraham, for they experience their Abrahamic counterparts as hegemonic about Islam and disparaging about Christian faith. Thus the relationship between Allah and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is not explored, nor the relationship between Allah and the one whom Jesus called Father. Christians’ views of Muslim devotion can similarly be dismissive. Attention to the five daily times of prayer is critiqued as purely nominal. It is true that most Pakistani Muslims do not know the Arabic used in worship at the mosque, but some Christians use that as a basis for questioning the authenticity of Muslim spirituality.

Christian denominational leaders, however, participate prominently in interfaith consultative sessions, such as health care, women’s rights, and religious discrimination. Educated Pakistani Christians tend to have knowledgeable and nuanced views of Islam. Among youth, a federal rule requires that students in all educational institutions study Islam or take another religion before graduation.

“Christian Mission in the Context of Global Pentecostalism,” November 6–7, 2015. Registration deadline is October 23. For further information, contact Rodney Petersen, petersenrodney1@gmail.com.

Personalia

Died. Charles W. Forman, 97, Presbyterian mission scholar, author, teacher, and ecumenical statesman, November 23, 2014, in New Haven, Connecticut. The son and grandson of Presbyterian missionaries, Forman was born in India, where he also served as a missionary on the faculty of North India United Theological College in Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, from 1945 to 1950. In 1953 he became the successor to Kenneth Scott Latourette as professor of missions at Yale Divinity School, a position he held until his retirement in 1987. He was chairman of the Theological Education Fund of the World Council of Churches (1965–71), chairman of the Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations of the Presbyterian Church (1965–71), chairman of the Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia (1970–89), president of the American Society of Missiology (1981–82), and a trustee of the Overseas Ministries Study Center (1978–2000). He was also active for many years in peacemaking and anti-poverty efforts and assistance to refugee families. Forman’s article “My Pilgrimage in Mission” was published in the IBMR in January 1994. The last piece he wrote for publication, “The Legacy of Charles W. Forman,” on his grandfather, the founder of Forman Christian College in Lahore, Pakistan, also appeared in the IBMR, in October 2014.


Died. Lothar Schreiner, 90, German Lutheran missionary, teacher, and author, January 1, 2015, in Wuppertal, Germany. After theological studies in Tübingen, Münster, and Oxford, he earned a doctorate from the University of Zurich and taught at the theological seminary of the Protestant Batak Church HKBP in Pematang Siantar, Northern Sumatra, Indonesia, from 1956 to 1965. Returning to Germany, he was the first professor for missiology, ecumenics, and history of religions at the Kirchliche Hochschule in Wuppertal, from 1974 to 1990, with special interests in mission theology, the ecumenical movement, Christian-Muslim encounter in Europe, and Christian churches in China. His book Adat and the Gospel: The Relevance of the Customary Law for the Church and Mission with the Batak in Northern Sumatra (1972) was influential among Indonesian scholars, especially Batak theologians. His article “The Legacy of Ingwer Ludwig Nommensen” was published in the April 2000 IBMR.
an alternative course in civics. Many Christian students at the intermediate and baccalaureate levels choose and do well in the Islamic course, despite syllabi that sometimes explicitly disparage other religions. By taking this step, they are becoming a cadre of young Christians equipped for fruitful interfaith relations. The Christian Study Center in Rawalpindi brings members of all religions together for consultations and conferences designed to foster interaction and understanding. Faith Friends in Peshawar is one of a number of small and generally academically oriented groups in the country that similarly foster dialogue. On an international basis, the U.S.-Pakistan Inter-Religious Consortium has since 2012 periodically brought together Muslims, Jews, and Christians from the United States and Pakistan for consultation and exploration of shared initiatives.

Many in the pews, however, are relatively untouched by such initiatives and remain fearful and suspicious. Polarization is an understandable reflex in an environment of long-standing and severe oppression. It is also tragic in precluding possibilities for dialogue that could build bridges of mutual respect, understanding, and acceptance. Thereby the religious isolation of the majority of Pakistani Christians intensifies over time.

Demoralizing Lower Numbers and Emigration

The point is obvious but it requires mention: persecution adversely affects church attendance and numerical membership. Before the September 2013 attack, All Saints’ Church in Peshawar was a large and energetic congregation with a Sunday attendance of 300 to 400 representing all age groups equally, the music robust, and fellowship life strong. Good Friday attendance was about 1,000, with the church packed to the altar rail and the courtyard filled with people on folding chairs. The pre-dawn Easter jaloose, or procession, through the streets of the old city of Peshawar drew 2,000–4,000 Christians who in word and song proclaimed their faith in a risen Lord. As an ecumenical event the Easter procession still drew 2,000 people in 2014, but the All Saints’ congregation itself is struggling. The 119 killed in the 2013 bomb blast were a substantial portion of the membership, some of the wounded continue homebound, and some are too traumatized to return. Typical attendance at All Saints’ now is 80 to 100, a shadow of the former congregation.

After the All Saints’ blast a fresh wave of Christians sought to leave the country. Uneducated Pakistanis have no realistic chance of securing visas, so emigration draws young professionals and middle-class families who see no future for their children in Pakistan, and many of these already have relatives in the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, or Australia. Recent instances include three faculty and staff families from Edwardes College, and one clergy family who emigrated to the United Kingdom after the driver of their school’s minibus was discovered plotting to deliver their young daughter to the Taliban for ransom. The exit of educated and gifted Christians who could exercise leadership weakens and demoralizes the Christian community as a whole and threatens its already fragile financial viability.

The exodus of indigenous Christians from the Arab world, most recently from Iraq, is well known, and a similar phenomenon may accelerate among the more mobile in Pakistan. Overall, however, not only have Christians increased numerically in Pakistan over the decades but their proportion of the total population has been inching upward. In 1951 Hindus constituted 1.7 percent of the population and Christians 1.4 percent, but by 1981 Christians had become the largest religious minority: 1.56 percent to Hindus’ 1.52 percent. In 2000 Christians numbered 3.85 million and constituted 2.5 percent of the total population, compared with 1.2 percent for Hindus; 7.45 million Christians, at 2.8 percent, are predicted for 2025. Although Christians continue to be a small minority, it may be that their proportional increase accounts partly for the increased pressure they face. It remains to be seen how intensified persecution will affect future growth.

Discouragement over Government Encroachment

In the 1970s the government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto nationalized banks, industries, and a number of church schools and colleges. Some of the nationalized church institutions have been irrecoverable, and that has been disheartening for Christians. Yet two Presbyterian institutions, the Christian Training Institute in Sialkot and Forman Christian College in Lahore, were denationalized in 1998 and 2003, and two Roman Catholic colleges in Karachi were denationalized in 2005, all these after protracted legal and political struggles. Thus the earlier shock of nationalization was followed by some encouraging institutional recovery in the 2000s.

The years 2013 and 2014 featured a fresh institutional reversal as the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial government usurped the right of the Church of Pakistan (the ecumenical body formed in 1970 from the union of Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists, and Presbyterians) to manage its one remaining tertiary educational institution, Edwardes College in Peshawar. In addition to being an anachronistic echo of the now discredited nationalization drive, the provincial government’s move to take over Edwardes College discouraged Christians nationwide. The Pakistan Constitution is clear: “Every religious denomination and every sect thereof shall have the right to establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions” (Article 20b). Edwardes was founded by the Church Missionary Society on a religious foundation in 1900, and CMS devolved management to the indigenous church in 1940 and handed over the property in 1956. The current church-state conflict arose over the charter that the church sought in order for the college to attain degree-awarding status. Would the government have a majority on the Board of Governors, with the provincial governor as chancellor? Or, as stipulated by the federal government’s own Model Charter for Private Universities, would the sponsoring body, namely the church, have the majority, with the bishop as chancellor? The Diocese of Peshawar uncompromised on a number of secondary issues, but it rightly believed it could not relinquish these essentials. With no legal or constitutional basis for its position, the government resorted to sending ISI agents to threaten and attack church representatives and their supporters, both Muslim and Christian. While the church continues the legal and political struggle, Christians are asking: If in 2014 a provincial government can boldly seize control of a long-standing and prestigious church institution, what does this portend for the future of Christian institutions in Pakistan?

The perseverance of Pakistan’s Christians amid persecution is powerful and inspiring, but the toll on their soul is grievous. They need and deserve the solidarity of the worldwide Christian community.
Church-State Relations in China: Three Case Studies

Peter Tze Ming Ng

The book A New History of Christianity in China, by Daniel Bays, was published in 2012. What is new in this book is not merely a China-centered approach or simply using more Chinese resources but the reading of Chinese history from a new perspective. It brings to mind a comment by Jessie Lutz, who noted that “the history of Protestant Christianity in China is being rewritten from a new perspective, this time with greater attention to the Chinese side of the story.” Bays has given due attention to the Chinese side of the story, the development of indigenous movements in China, and especially the parts played by Chinese Christians such as Yu Guozhen, Watchman Nee (Ni Tuosheng), Jing Dianying, and Wang Mingdao. Bays proposes that these leaders and the Chinese Christians themselves will finally become the sole “owners” of the Chinese church.

In this article I focus on the theme of church-state relations in China, examining three cases from different periods in Chinese history. First, however, I review key features of Chinese Christianity since 1949.

Chinese Christianity since 1949

In the years after 1949 the attitude of the Chinese Communist government toward religion, and particularly toward Protestant Christianity, has been complex and changing. When the Communists began to rule Mainland China in 1949, Christianity was labeled as superstitious, unscientific, subjective, and contrary to the progressive, materialistic, and scientific doctrines of Marxism and Communism. Christian churches suffered much since the 1950s. Protestant denominations were abolished in 1958, and all church worship was forbidden in 1966. In 1979, however, to everyone’s great surprise, the churches were allowed to reopen. And then the issuance in 1982 of Document 19 (“Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during our Country’s Socialist Period”) represented a radical change in government policy—in fact, the beginning of the gaige kaifang (“reform and opening up”) era in China.

Beginning in the 1980s, China witnessed a phenomenal surge of interest in Christianity among Chinese young people and intellectuals. According to official statistics, by 1999 there were 10 million Protestants, rising to 15 million in 2003. By 2013, the Protestant population had grown to 23 million. These figures, however, do not include the number of Christians in house churches and in other groups who have not registered with the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM). In its December 2011 report, the Pew Research Center estimated that there were 58 million Christians in China. Since foreign missionaries were expelled from China in the early 1950s, the growth of Chinese Protestants has been phenomenal indeed—on the order of sixtyfold! China now has the third highest number of Protestants in all the world.

In 1993 the government announced a new policy governing church-state relations. Somewhat surprisingly, it spoke in terms of fostering a working relationship between the two sides, a xiang shi ying (“mutually accommodating relationship”) between the officially registered churches and the Communist government. Despite attempts to oversee and control religious activities in China, the government’s policy on religion had become actually positive; it was moving toward a more open attitude to religion. In a speech at the National United Front Work Conference held on November 7, 1993, President Jiang Zemin enunciated “three sentences for carrying out religious work well”:

- to be persistent, comprehensively and correctly, in implementing the Party’s policy on religion
- to strengthen control of religious affairs in accordance with the law
- to guide positively the mutual adaptation of religion and socialist society
It was the first time a top Chinese official had mentioned a policy of “mutual adaptation of religion and socialist society.” This was a very significant move, for it began to give religion more recognition in the socialist society of China. Instead of attempts to eliminate religion altogether, as in the old days, or mere tolerance over a thirty-year period, now the talk was of religion being accepted as a permanent entity, provided it could be adapted to socialist society.² Now, with the support of the Communist government, the TSPM and the officially registered churches could secure their legitimate and official status. The government in turn looks to the official churches to ensure that Christians continue as good citizens and work together with the government to build a more hexie shehui (“harmonious society”) in China. Outside scholars might continue to accuse the Communist government of being oppressive, and critics might fault the officially registered churches for “selling their souls” to cooperate with the government and urge serious Christians to turn to the so-called underground churches.¹⁰ Others, however, have noticed that the Communist government was in fact showing increasing tolerance and that the official churches were finding legitimate ways to cooperate with the Communist government in order to survive under its rule.¹¹ But were Chinese Christians themselves forced to cooperate with the government, or were they willing partners in what had so far been a very repressive environment?

Three Cases in Contemporary China

A look at three church-state scenarios in China will provide insight into local situations and allow us to see how Chinese Christians have interpreted these events.

Mu’en Tang (Moore Memorial Church), Shanghai. Mu’en Tang has a special place in Chinese history. It was built in 1886 by the American Methodist Episcopal Church South as the Central Methodist Church in Shanghai, later renamed Moore Memorial Church in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Lysander Royster Moore, who had given a large donation for the refurbishing of the church. Moore Memorial Church soon became a very important Christian church in Shanghai.¹² It was the church of the Soong family, which included the father, Charlie Soong, a local pastor, and three sisters: Nancy Eling Soong, Rosamond Ching-ling, and Mayling. The church had a close relationship with the political leaders of Republican China, including Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek.

In 1930 Jiang Chang-chuan (Z. T. Kaung), pastor of Moore Memorial Church, baptized Chiang Kai-shek, the second president of Republican China. Jiang, ordained bishop in 1941, played a leading role in guiding the church to join anti-imperialist movements and, in cooperation with the government, being one of the first to sign the Christian Manifesto in 1950. He was also among the first to join the wide-scale accusation campaigns in China, which began in 1951, by publicly denouncing Methodist missionaries Sidney Anderson and Ralph Ward and his fellow bishop Chen Wen yuan. Jiang was definitely a Christian, a Protestant pastor, and a Methodist bishop. How could a bishop do such things to his close friends and his colleagues in Christ? Certainly Jiang loved the church and was trying to find ways for the church to survive in China. Should he follow what Paul said and “be subject to the governing authorities” (Rom. 13:1)? Or should he follow the example of Peter, who said that “we must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29)? Jiang’s choice was one of compromises, with a willingness to work cooperatively with the Communist government.¹³ Other Christians made different choices, such as refusing to join the TSPM and joining underground or unregistered house churches.

Bishop Jiang might have thought he was choosing the best way to protect the church. He could not have foreseen, however, that even more oppression was yet to come. In September 1958 all Protestant denominations in China were abolished, and so-called united worship began at Moore Memorial Church. The church had to give up all Methodist connections, and its name was changed to Mu’en Tang (“bathe together in God’s grace church”; though the English name remained Moore Memorial Church). This phrase is related to gongmu zhi’en, namely, that all Christians, regardless of their denominations and theologies, can take bath together in God’s grace. But then in 1966 the Cultural Revolution began in China, and all churches, including Mu’en Tang, were closed. There was no choice; all religious activities had to go underground. Even though Mu’en Tang had been cooperative with the government, it was not spared all the restrictions and difficulties. Christians in China dared not express their faith in public and could only wait for the day when the situation might be changed.

Then, after twenty years of being cut off from its Methodist roots, Mu’en Tang was chosen as the first Protestant church in Shanghai to be reopened after the Cultural Revolution. Its first service was on Sunday, September 2, 1979. The church experienced phenomenal growth in the 1980s and subsequently has played a central role in the resurgence of the church in China. For instance, the church has been visited by many prominent church figures from overseas, including world-famous evangelists Billy Graham and Luis Palau, and by Rowan Williams, then archbishop of Canterbury. It also hosted services for World Women’s Prayer Day and World Prayers for Peace, as well as graduation ceremonies for the East China Theological Seminary, Shanghai.

Many of its pastors and church members became church leaders at both local and national levels. Pastor Sun Yanli, who had been in charge of the united worship when it was started in 1958, was appointed president of the East China Theological Seminary when it was reopened in 1985. Sun was also made bishop in 1988 and served until his death in 1995, at the age of eighty-one. Hua Yaozong, who was pastor-in-charge of Mu’en Tang from 1998 to 2004, succeeded Pastor Sun as president of the East China Theological Seminary in 1989. In 1997 Hua was also appointed as a member of the standing committee of the China Christian Council. Two of the church’s elders became leaders of the TSPM. Shou Jingzhen was appointed the head of Shanghai TSPM in 1997, and in 2007 Fu Xianwei was made the national chairman of the TSPM. It is amazing to see Mu’en Tang now a renowned church playing such a prominent role at the center stage of Chinese Christianity.

Protestant Churches in Wenzhou. Wenzhou is home to as many as 750,000 Protestant Christians, and its province, Zhejiang, counts more than 2,000 registered churches. Wenzhou itself has more than 1,000 large churches. Interestingly, in 1958, the beginning of the Mao era, the city was chosen as a model of a religionless zone (“a religionless zone”). After the reopening of China thirty years later, however, a phenomenal growth of Christianity occurred in Wenzhou; it was reported that more than 500 churches were built during the decade of the 1980s.¹⁴ The flourishing of Wenzhou Christianity has continued, and today the city is known as the Jerusalem of the East. It has developed its own model of church, with major implications for a new understanding of Chinese Christianity.
Scholars have often politicized the issue of religious freedom in China by speaking in terms of a domination-resistance model, a binary construct of state domination and church resistance. The case of Wenzhou, however, reveals a different kind of church-state relationship. Wenzhou Christianity is characterized by the rise of an entrepreneurial class called “boss Christians.” According to Nan-lai Cao, these Christians are “economically powerful, politically connected, moralizing Christian entrepreneurs.”

These Christian bosses have run their businesses very successfully; one could say they have been blessed by God. And they have gained much respect and recognition from government officials for their rising economic power and their contribution to society by paying their taxes and by maintaining guanxi (“a good relationship”) with the cadres.

These Christian bosses have also developed a new church model in Wenzhou. For instance, they run their own factories and enterprises and, at the same time, build local churches. Some enterprises are even named after biblical names, such as the Jianan [Canaan] Shoe Factory, the Boteli [Bethel] Button Factory, the Yisila [Ezra] Bookstore, and the Mijia [Micah] Valve Factory. There is also the Canaan Technology Group, also known as the Shenli (lit. “God power”) Group. Several have built a church within their factories, conducting services every morning, Sunday services, and weekly Bible study groups for the workers, most of whom are immigrants from other cities and live in the factory compound. Sometimes they invite local pastors to preach; sometimes the Christian factory owners themselves give the sermons. These religious activities are explicitly made part of the companies’ training programs, which are aimed at purifying the minds and raising the quality and morality of the workers. As one Christian boss said, he wanted “to create a Christianity-based moral culture” and “to let God’s Word govern the factory.”

The Christian bosses also seek to demonstrate the superiority of Christian morality in China by presenting Christian culture as “modern, progressive, and productive” and by showing that “being Christian means being good.” They believe that Christian morality has a much higher standard than the values of socialism.

The case of Shou Wang Church shows that Chinese Christians, especially intellectuals in Beijing, are aware of their civil rights and are not hesitant to challenge the illegal restriction of these rights. This approach serves to promote the development of civil society and facilitate a new style of church-state relationship in China. The church’s challenge was reasonable and measured, but it was not acceptable to Chinese authorities, who viewed the church as being in opposition to government policy. Though the church suffered disruption and many of its members were arrested, they were not tortured but were released rather quickly.

The Legacy of Chinese Christianity

These three case studies represent three different types of church-state relationship in China. In the Shanghai case, Mu’en Tang closely adhered to government policy and became an official three-self church. The Wenzhou churches maintained good relations with the government and were able to express their own style of Christian life. The Shou Wang Church in Beijing moved a step further in challenging government policy by testing their right of religious freedom. The three cases illustrate that the relationship between Christian churches and the Chinese Communist government is not simply one of oversight and control. There is indeed a great variety of models for church-state relationships being developed in China, and both the local and the central governments are cautiously adapting to the new situations, especially the emergence of young Chinese Christians such as the Christian bosses and entrepreneurs in Wenzhou and the professors and lawyers in Beijing. These Chinese Christians have become actors in the interest of the
Chinese party-state. Their existence has become a symbol of China’s modern transformation. It is still too early to tell, however, whether these various forms of Christian practice will ultimately have an impact on Chinese government policy on religions and on the growth and development of Christian churches as a whole in China.  

Mark Mullins, a scholar in Japan, wrote a book with the somewhat strange title Christianity Made in Japan. The author presents a good example of how world Christianity takes shape in a particular national context. It has, so to speak, become localized in Japan, as it earlier became localized as so-called Western Christianity in Europe and in America. Now in the case of “Christianity Made in China,” we see that world Christianity has become a Christianity with Chinese socialist characteristics, as our examination of these three case studies in church-state relations reveals.

Notes
3. Regarding these topics, Bays remarked, “In almost all cases, the relevant historical materials concerning these organizations and individuals are in Chinese. That is one reason why they have often been overlooked by historians of Christianity in China, who have tended to remain fixed on the foreign missionary presence and the English-language materials that document it’ (Daniel Bays, ed., Christianity in China: The Eighteenth Century to the Present [Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1996], 309–10).
7. The countries with the largest number of Protestants are the United States (159 million), Nigeria (59 million), China (58 million), United Kingdom (38 million), South Africa (36 million), and Germany (28 million), www.pewforum.org/files/2011/12/Christianity-fullreport-web.pdf, see pp. 79–84.
9. For discussion, see Ng, “From Ideological Marxism to Moderate Pragmatism.”
10. Jonathan Chao (Zhao Tian’en), director of the Chinese Church Research Center in Hong Kong, holds this view. See his “TPM Preaches Harmony but Breathes Threats,” China Prayer Letter, no. 22 (1982).
11. For instance, Philip Wickeri, who has worked closely with the China Christian Council and the Amity Foundation, holds this position. See his Seeking the Common Ground: Protestant Christianity, the Three-Self Movement, and China’s United Front (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988).
13. Richard Bush has commented that Jiang was “giving thoughtful leadership in a time of tumultuous change” (see his article “China: Resistant to Change—Ever Changing,” New World Outlook, May/June 1996, p. 39).
16. Ibid., 33–35.
17. Ibid., 33, 65.
18. Ibid., 65–68.
21. Two more recent events should be noted here. In December 2012 a petition signed by seventy-one Chinese academics and lawyers called upon the government to implement the provisions of the Chinese constitution regarding freedom of speech, of assembly, of publication, and of religion, as well as the freedom to demonstrate. In October 2013 a group of Chinese intellectuals organized a scholarly conference in England that published what has been known as the Oxford Consensus 2013.

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Faith in the Face of Empire: The Bible through Palestinian Eyes—A Review Essay

Judith Mendelsohn Rood

Mitri Raheb—president, Dar al-Kalima (The House of the Word) University College in Bethlehem; president, Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land; and senior pastor, Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem—is a well-known Palestinian Christian leader. His new book, Faith in the Face of Empire, represents an impressively integrated effort to combine secular and sacred history, structured by a robust geostrategic political analysis, intended to help Palestinian Christians understand their calling in the midst of suffering. Raheb writes as a Palestinian Christian for Palestinian Christians, but the book’s availability in English allows others to enter the conversation. Jewish readers, unfamiliar with the contemporary Christian artistic tradition of portraying Christ as a member of a particular racial, political, or ethnic community, may be offended by the image of a Palestinian Christ on the book’s cover. This picture, however, provides a good indication of Raheb’s message.

The book is divided into nine chapters, with an epilogue. Raheb states that the book’s aim is “to lay the groundwork for a genuine Palestinian Christian narrative that is politically relevant and theologically creative” (6). The volume introduces a new understanding of the biblical narrative and of the mission of Jesus, in which the Palestinian context today serves as a hermeneutical key to understanding the original context and content of the Bible. Palestinian Christians are themselves, after all, an important continuum from biblical times to the present, whose narrative sheds a unique light on the biblical story (6–7). Raheb rightly calls for a “dynamic understanding of history.” He adds, “That is why I love these words in the first Epistle of John, ‘It is not yet made manifest what we shall be’ (1 Jn 3:2), which tell us that with our current identity we are not at the end; we are still in process (20).” He reminds us that the Bible is “not a book of history but a single . . . story. It is not interested in revealing ‘what was then’ but ‘what it meant’”—not only for the people of Palestine, but for all of us (20–21).

The first two chapters of the book are historiographical, utilizing the concept of “La Longue Durée” (9) to frame biblical and postbiblical history, both sacred and secular. Raheb explores various perspectives on how to understand the troubled history of the Middle East and the formation of Palestinian identity. In chapter 1 he identifies three developments that led to the loss of Palestinian memory and history: “ecclesial amnesia” on the part of the imperial church, which “made it impossible to recognize the anti-imperial dimension of the Bible” and led to the Bible’s “depoliticization” through the use of allegory and topology; “religious amnesia” resulting from Islamization; and “political amnesia,” which he explains as resulting from the “influx of Jewish immigrants into Palestine in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries” that forced “the native people of Palestine to erase their biblical memory because it was perceived as a kind of divine legitimation aimed at colonizing their land” (15). He asserts that because of “the establishment of a state with a biblical name—Israel—on their homeland, Palestinians had to disconnect from their roots” and thereby “lost their long-term memory” (15).

Raheb attacks the myth of a “Judeo-Christian tradition” and the “creative type of hardline evangelical Christian” (24) that, together with the Arab and Western powers, have shaped the dominant culture responsible for the Palestinian plight (26–27). Postcolonial theory and Edward Said’s Orientalism provide the platform for the Palestinian liberation theology’s rejection of Jewish nationalism (27–29). The rejection of the idea that “the modern state of Israel [stands] in some continuity to biblical Israel” is the basis for the Palestinian Christian resistance movement (35). This, in turn, has made it easier for some secular Palestinian nationalists to support Hamas (which, as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, has its own Nazi pedigree) as an ally, even as a horrific jihad is emptying whole regions—including Gaza—of Christians. With the rise of ISIS, West Bank Christians have begun to admit the Islamist threat to their future on the West Bank. The Hamas Charter asserts that “all Palestine is waqf (endowed or mortmain property belonging to the Muslim umma)—a claim that means that churches, and their considerable properties, currently owned by the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox Churches in Palestine, would come under Muslim control, as they have throughout Syria and Iraq wherever ISIS has conquered.

In chapter 3 Raheb introduces his concept of the geopolitics of the Middle East, and then, in chapters 4 and 5, meshes Palestinian history and the history of empire into a framework for understanding the contemporary conflict. He endorses the 2009 Kairos Palestine document, which declares, “The military occupation of our land is a sin against God and humanity, and . . . any theology that legitimizes the occupation is far from Christian teachings” (41). Zionism, in this view, is simply “the last chapter in Western colonialism” (47).

The sixth chapter is directed specifically to a community struggling “to find a faithful response to various and recurring empires” (11). In it, Raheb exhorts his community to recognize that God is with them in their suffering. He discusses five responses to injustice: fighting back, legalism, accommodation, collaboration, and “retreat” (by which I think he means “retreat”) (73–81). He calls upon Israelis and Palestinians to recognize the failure of their respective state-building projects and turn to God, who came to defeat geopolitics and succeeded (89). He writes, “Because, without God, Palestine would have
continued as a land at the periphery. Yet because God chose to reveal himself in this land, it became central to history” (89). Indeed, God transformed “the battlefield into holy land… . Because it was made sacred, people discern a calling in remaining here. They are willing to bear the unbearable, and they are capable of putting up with all the unholy wars of mankind because this is the land of the heavenly King” (91).

The seventh chapter is a meditation on Palestinian suffering and a biblical response in the face of imperialism. Here Raheb uncritically repeats the Palestinian trope that equates the Roman occupation of Judea, Samaria, and Galilee with Israeli sovereignty and policies in the West Bank and Gaza, writing that God “comes into the Middle East to defeat the geo-politics of the region” (5). The eighth chapter focuses on Jesus and his mission “to liberate his people by restoring among them a sense of community and by empowering them to become ambassadors of the new kingdom” as resistance to empire, followed by the ninth and concluding chapter “The Spirit,” with a section “Culture of Life,” which drives Raheb’s ministry in the Holy Land (5, 6, 122). In the epilogue Raheb focuses on imagination and hope as the wellsprings for “creative resistance” (120).

Empire. Raheb’s concept of “Empire” places his thought squarely into the anticolonialist narrative that delegitimizes Jewish nationalism as nothing but a subset of Western imperialism. He deploys the contested terminology of “occupation” throughout the book without acknowledging it as a function of the ongoing state of war between the Palestinians and Israel, a symptom of the unredeemed nature of our world. Sadly, Raheb’s ambitious study is fatally flawed by a supersessionist view of the Jewish people, who seem, in his account, to disappear into history with the coming of Christ. This is particularly unfortunate because Raheb, the most prominent Palestinian Lutheran leader, could have embedded his work in the post-Shoah theology of Vatican II and, especially, the position of the Lutheran Church, both of which have upheld the unique ethnicity of the Jewish people, inside and outside the church.

The creation of an Aryan Christ led German evangelicals to support the expulsion of Jewish Christians from their pews in Germany during the 1930s without protest (with the notable exception of the Confessing Church, known to us primarily because of the death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the most prominent member of that small dissenting group). After the Shoah, Lutherans repudiated Luther’s repugnant anti-Jewish polemics, which the Nazis used to justify the Final Solution. Raheb makes no mention of these developments in Lutheran theology in his book, but they undergird his strong argument for the continuity of the whole Bible, both Old and New Testaments. My challenge to him is to take this promising dimension of his work into conversation with Messianic believers.

For the Jewish and Gentile believers living in the land, “the coming of the Messiah in Jesus… . brought a pivotal change. Christians need no longer wait for direct divine intervention, who understands that to use the very term “Palestinian” to describe Jesus is political, not historical. Jesus was a Galilean Jew. When the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in a.d. 70 they used the term “Palestine” as a term designed to strip the area of its Jewish identity, and to displace it into a region of the Roman Empire.” (89) Raheb’s book is for Palestinian Christians, but it speaks powerfully to Jewish believers, too. Yet Raheb does not see the importance of his insights for the redemption of the Jewish people, and for critically engaging with other Palestinian theologians. Neo-Marcionism is alive and well in the guise of Palestinian liberation theology, which posits that resistance to Israel is an act of faith (100). Palestinian evangelicals subscribing to liberation theology, most notably Naim Ateek of Sabeel, like Marcion, unapologetically call for the removal of the Old Testament and Hebraisms from the Bible because of the challenges they present for Palestinian believers. Raheb does not agree with that hermeneutical approach and provides a strong corrective to it. He begins his book by stating, “Jesus was a Middle Eastern Palestinian Jew” (1). That statement, however, also contains the root of the problem for the Jewish believer, who understands that to use the very term “Palestinian” to describe Jesus is political, not historical. Jesus was a Galilean Jew. When the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in a.d. 70 they used the term “Palestine” as a term designed to strip the area of its associations with Jewish sovereignty.

In this book, Raheb’s analysis assumes that God no longer has a purpose or plan for the Jewish nation, subsuming the remaining Jewish people of Roman Palestine into the Am Haaretz (The People of the Land) (12) in a discussion drawing on Jewish and Arab perspectives. He refutes the idea that some Palestinians have adopted that asserts their identity with the Canaanites or the Arabs (13). Indeed, he affirms the idea expressed by Zionists Ben-Gurion and Ben-Zvi that “Palestinians today stand in historic continuity with biblical Israel” (13, 18–19). Early Zionists saw the non-Jewish inhabitants of Palestine, if they saw them at all, as distant kin. They did not expect to make “the natives of the land” into “strangers in order to make room for an invented people to occupy the land” (38). Instead, they hoped, naively, that the Jewish return would bless the land and its people. But Raheb does not see this, nor does he account for the reasons that this dream faded. Unlike Jesus, “who invested his time in creating an inclusive community” (103), Raheb has a vision that does not include the persecuted and hated Jewish people.

Christ at the Checkpoint. On March 7, 2010, Raheb presented a paper at the “Christ at the Checkpoint” conference held at Bethlehem Bible College, which I attended. In the paper he outlined observations that in this book he fleshes out as “a theology from and for a Palestinian context” (2, 32). On sabbatical from Biola University, I wanted to understand the pro-Palestinian evangelical discourse on the Arab-Israel conflict. The following two conferences, held in 2012 and in 2014, were much more controversial than the 2010 meeting. Messianic Jewish press coverage focused on the supersessionist theology of “fulfillment” adopted by the Christ at the Checkpoint theologians—an interpretation that they rightfully understood negates the Jewish claim to a homeland, peoplehood, and identity. This supersessionist theology—which I labeled neo-Marcionism in an article published in 2011—is primarily identified with Wheaton New Testament professor Gary Burge and Anglican Stephan Sizer, who argue that, because Israel is unjust toward Israeli Arabs and Palestinians, it has lost...
divine favor and must be judged by the nations as undeserving of sovereignty over part or all of the Holy Land. Raheb’s book must be understood as one voice in the conversation at the “Christ at the Checkpoint” conferences, which have generated space for concerned believers to share their perspectives at the foot of the cross.

In December 2013 a small group of individuals from Christ at the Checkpoint met together at Palmer Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, where Evangelicals for Social Action convened a conference “Impact Holy Land” to discuss future meetings of Christ at the Checkpoint. Importantly, a number of Messianic Jews accepted the organizer’s invitation to attend the executive session at the beginning of the conference, signaling their willingness to dialogue with their Palestinian brethren. As a result, Messianic Jews have been challenged to voice compassion for Palestinian suffering. This is new, and a reason for hope.

It is in this context that a theology written from the perspective of a Palestinian Christian “living under Israeli occupation” (2) is so important—and in this case, so damning, because it shows that Raheb does not recognize that there is a place for the Jewish people in his homeland. Raheb is right: the Bible could not have been written anywhere but in the Holy Land. The peoples of that land have been entwined forever, impossible to disentangle this side of heaven. Raheb’s radical postcolonial political philosophy, however, leads to the conclusion that the very idea of a Jewish people—and a Jewish homeland—is the product of a racist ideology constructed by modern Zionists purely for political purposes. In a section entitled “New Jewish Voices” Raheb makes good use of radical Jewish criticism of Israel to make this point (32–33). This line of thought includes a corollary that Ashkenazi (European) Jews are not the literal descendants of the Judeans of biblical times, and therefore cannot claim the right to sovereignty in the Jewish homeland (33).

The modern, constructed identities of Palestinian nationalists and Israelis were shaped by their conflict with British colonialism and with each other. Where Raheb and I differ, however, is not merely how we understand ecclesiology and eschatology—but how we treat secular history. Raheb grounds his analysis of the identity of the Jewish people in the problematic thinking of Jewish Israeli Shlomo Sand, author of the controversial book The Invention of the Jewish People (London: Verso, 2009). In this book, Sand peels away layer after layer of Jewish identity and asserts that Jewish identity is a fiction. The book received positive reviews by secular Jewish critics of Israel, especially the late Tony Judt, and was eagerly read by Palestinian intellectuals. The mainstream liberal Jewish press and Israeli leftists, however, found it troubling. Sand’s basic argument relates to the often-heard belief that Ashkenazi Jews are descendants of the Khazars, a Turkish tribe that is said to have converted to Judaism in the Middle Ages. This represents an unacceptable position regarding Jewish identity, one that precludes any hope of reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians. It is impossible to reconcile when the very identity of the other is under attack.

As with Jewish identity, the issue of modern Palestinian identity is contested. Palestinian historian Rashid Khalidi, in his 1998 book Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness, argued that Palestinian identity began to emerge only when the British, like the Romans, called the contested territory in southern Syria (over which they received a mandate from the League of Nations) “Palestine” after its ancient colonizers, the ancient Philistines. History shows that the Palestinian Arabs represent a heterogeneous group of Aramaic, Greek, and Arabic Jews, Christians, and Muslims who, after millennia of intermarriage and conversion, have developed a rich blend of cultures and peoples. Centuries of immigration and emigration have seen eras of depopulation and repopulation, with the introduction of Turkish, Circassian, Bosnian, and other Muslim groups.

British policy transformed identities during the Mandate era as they politicized the Ottoman millet, or organized religious communities—Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Samaritan—living in Mandate Palestine. Modern Palestinian identity was forged by a singular galvanizing event: the Nakba, an Arabic term used by Palestinians to describe “the Catastrophe” of their expulsion and dispossession in 1948 caused by the establishment of the State of Israel. The failure of the Muslim jihad against the Jews during that era led to the defeat of the Muslim political authority that the British had created to balance Zionist power. The Arab and Christian Palestinians who lost their homes and livelihoods as a result of this defeat shifted from an Islamist ideology to a secular one, building upon trends in the rest of the Arab world. Up to the mid-1980s, Palestinian identity was secular. With the failure of the secular liberation movement to defeat Israel, however, the anticolonial jihadism of the Mandate era has reigned, a fact that Raheb does not address in this book.

Raheb is correct when he writes, “The biblical story can best be understood as a response to the geo-political history of the region” (3). It is true that we need the Holy Spirit to help us overcome our historical traumas, to overcome “our victimhood, to assume responsibility, and undergo transformation from the status of objects in world history into subjects, actors, and positive contributors toward a new society” and to attain true freedom (115). Unfortunately, his support of the boycott, divestment, and sanction movement and nonviolent participation in the Palestinian resistance undermines the power of his message beyond its intended audience. Raheb fails to take into account the modern history of the Palestinian national movement and misinterprets Zionism and Israel in God’s sovereign plan. Although promising in so many ways, his theology unfortunately is not one that supports reconciliation. Palestinians must recognize Israeli identity, just as Israelis must recognize Palestinian identity before we can reconcile politically. Such should be the aim of the ekkllesia in our broken and suffering world.

Though many are opposed to the work that Mitri Raheb and I, along with many others, are doing in trying to explain ourselves to one another, I found Faith in the Face of Empire to be a valuable contribution to a necessary conversation. Two ideas that are sticking with me are that the Jewish people have also been the victims of empires and that truly the Palestinians and Israelis share a bond of suffering, patience, and endurance.

Note
According to the most recent questionnaire survey conducted by the Korea Research Institute for Mission (KCRIM) at the end of 2014, there were 20,467 Korean missionaries working in 163 countries through 162 mission agencies. Compared with the figures at the end of 2013, the number of missionaries grew by 1.9 percent. Of the 20,467 missionaries, 10,779 were members of interdenominational mission agencies, 3,930 belonged to denominational agencies, and the remaining 382 missionaries were members of supporting organizations.

The ten countries receiving the most Korean missionaries are, in order, China, United States, India, Japan, Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Turkey, Cambodia, and Russia. Half (50.6 percent) of all Korean missionaries work in these countries. Of the top thirty receiving countries, thirteen are so-called creative-access countries, meaning that overt missionary activities are restricted by the government. Altogether, a little less than half (46.9 percent) of all Korean missionaries serve in forty-seven creative-access countries.

In 2014 there were 304 Korean missionaries (1.5 percent of the total) who returned home, choosing to terminate their field ministry before the expected time. An important reason for such missionary attrition is the overall decline of churches in Korea, which represents a waning support base. The quite different matter of involuntary withdrawal of missionaries from the field is also a critical issue in Korean missions. Many missionaries have had to leave their field because of forced deportation, visa restriction, reentry denial, epidemic diseases, and social unrest, among other reasons.1 The number of missionaries who were forced to withdraw, tallied separately from the cases of attrition, grew from 117 persons (0.6 percent of the total missionaries) in 2012 to 215 persons (1.1 percent of the total) in 2013, and further to 267 persons (1.3 percent of the total) in 2014, for a total of 599 missionaries in the last three years.2 The outcome of involuntary withdrawal differs from that of missionary attrition in that most of the missionaries who have been forced to leave their mission field have eventually sought to enter ministry in a new country of service.

Hee-Joo Yoo and Eun-Mi Kim studied the issue of expulsion, conducting in-depth interviews with seven missionaries. The participants in this study were missionaries who were unable to continue in their chosen country because of visa restriction or reentry denials. The interviewed missionaries had each been involved in cross-cultural ministry for between fifteen and twenty years. The qualitative data was analyzed using Colaizzi’s method to highlight the psychological processes of the missionaries, and the primary purpose was to clarify implications for missionary member care.3 The interviewees were selected from among those who evidenced basic psychological stability in their daily life.

Important theme clusters of the narratives of the missionaries were identified as follows, in chronological order: (1) difficulty in securing the necessary visa extensions and anxiety about being exposed as missionaries; (2) having to leave the country on short notice; (3) feelings of rejection, with regret over lack of spiritual results; (4) consolation from God, with release from the pressure of having to hide their true purpose for being in the country; (5) community care and recovery; (6) personal reflection and acceptance of a new status outside the former country; (7) readjustment and beginning a new lifestyle; (8) extension of identity as missionaries, and (9) eventually sensing the sovereignty of God.

Psychologically the missionaries interviewed were characterized by tension and anxiety before and after their expulsion, which was related to worries about the possible exposure of their missionary identity in their respective countries of service. They initially underwent feelings of rejection and resentment, sorrow at separation from local believers, a sense of loss because of deprivation of ministry bases, and also regret for insufficient fruits of their ministry. But over time, they experienced feelings of relaxation or freedom, reflection, comfort, and acceptance. The missionaries made conscious efforts to interpret their negative experiences positively, trying to adjust their thinking to appreciate the sovereignty of God as they worshipped God, shared with others, and reflected by themselves. They eventually sought to reestablish and extend their missionary identity (now not fixed to a certain country), and considered possibilities of relocation in a new country.

The psychological experiences of the research participants were directly influenced by practical matters relating to housing and readjustment in Korea after their sudden expulsion and relocation to Korea. Insofar as churches were effective in helping their reentry, the missionaries began to experience a sense of consolation and comfort from God. The role of the community of believers was critical in the process, leading to missionaries’ viewing their negative experiences in light of God’s sovereignty.

Missionary kids (MKs) often felt uprooted and homeless, for in leaving their country of residence, they lost friends, neighbors, and everything that was familiar. In ordinary circumstances it is to be expected that MKs will experience reentry shock when they attend Korean schools in what is to them an unfamiliar atmosphere. But in the crisis of unplanned loss of ministry, parents alone cannot address the issue of MK care. Mission agencies need to allocate human resources to support MKs in such cases.

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Phenomenological analysis of the interview data reveals the stress that missionaries undergo while working in creative-access countries, where they need to disguise their missionary identity. After deportation or being unable to reenter their country of ministry, research participants reported a noticeable sense of relaxation or freedom, not surprising, for they no longer had to hide their true identity.

In dealing with missionaries who are prevented from continuing their ministry, member care needs to be proactive and preventive, not just reactive. Seminars on stress management need to be planned for missionaries facing such situations. Policies and regulations for home assignment need to be implemented in such a way that missionaries will have sufficient time for recuperation before their next assignment. Mission agencies also need to offer debriefing opportunities to expelled missionaries, inviting experts who understand the principles and process of crisis debriefing. In some traumatic cases, individual sessions of grief counseling need to begin no later than five or six months after the traumatic event. Debriefers and counselors need to be attentive to the missionaries’ sense of loss, for they have lost their home itself as well as their ministry base.

The apostle Paul warns us in 2 Timothy 3:12: “Yes, and everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (New Living Translation). Persecution may not be a big issue in traditional missionary-sending countries, but it is one of the most significant problems in the mission field. Paul’s exhortation to vulnerable missionaries is, “But you must remain faithful to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you” (2 Tim. 3:14 NLT). Remaining faithful to the cause, regardless of difficulties and hardships, and supporting those undergoing personal disruption are important concerns in Korean missions.

Korean Missions as of December 2014

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<tr>
<th><strong>Missionaries</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>annual growth rate (percentage)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>members of denominational agencies</td>
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<td>members of supporting agencies</td>
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<tr>
<td>sending/supporting</td>
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<tr>
<td>interdenominational/denominational</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>missionaries in the top ten receiving countries (percentage)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(China, United States, India, Japan, Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Turkey, Cambodia, Russia)</td>
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<tr>
<td>number of creative-access countries</td>
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<tr>
<td>missionaries in creative-access countries (percentage)</td>
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<tr>
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<table>
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<th><strong>Unwanted Withdrawal</strong></th>
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<td>2012 persons/percentage</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>2014 persons/percentage</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012–2014 total persons</td>
<td>599</td>
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Notes
1. The term “missionary attrition” covers the case of missionaries who decide to quit and return home prematurely for various reasons; the figures for attrition include missionaries who are recalled by their churches or mission agencies. “Involuntary withdrawal,” in contrast, encompasses every way in which a host country either refuses the continued presence of a missionary (such as by deportation, not renewing a visa, or denying reentry) or has conditions that make continued work in the country impossible (such as epidemics or social unrest). Neither of these categories includes missionaries who retire or who die while serving in the field.

2. The figures shown for missionary attrition and involuntary withdrawal are based on reports received from fifty-three major Korean mission agencies plus estimates of attrition and involuntary withdrawal experienced by the remaining sixty-three smaller mission sending agencies. Using percentages based on the major agencies’ detailed reports, estimates were made for the sixty-three smaller mission agencies. The totals given in the text combine these two figures.

My Pilgrimage in Mission

William R. Burrows

I have always heard that the foundations of faith were laid in childhood, it can be said of me. I was imprinted with an Irish-American Catholic gestalt in its small-town, Midwestern, American variety from my birth in Belle Plaine, Iowa, on November 29, 1942, till I left home on September 3, 1958, to attend the high school seminary of the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD) in East Troy, Wisconsin. From childhood until the revolutions of the 1960s, that gestalt was so enthralling, satisfying, and all-embracing that I mostly just absorbed the magic of it.

The turmoil of the 1960s began for me in the spring of 1963 in the break between the first and second sessions of the Second Vatican Council. On a rainy fall day, Frank Budenholzer, a seminarian in the class below me at Miramar, the Divine Word College Seminary in Duxbury, Massachusetts, that we were attending, showed me a copy of Hans Küng’s The Council, Reform, and Reunion (1961). I read it quickly. Küng painted a picture of a church that needed updating and reform more radical than I had imagined either necessary or possible. I divide my life into before and after that reading.

In its wake, I first became an enthusiastic advocate of aggiornamento. Much later I grew ambivalent about the way aggiornamento was interpreted in the United States to entail modernizing the church in Western cultural terms, as if modernization were itself the goal. As the years went on, I became an advocate of change in the church, but my sense of what was possible and desirable to change was rooted in my Irish Catholic grandparents’ sense of Catholicism as organic and needing to honor the soil it sprang from. As close as my urban-born SVD friends would be in later life, I became convinced that good ideas and scholarship are insufficient to guide reform and renewal in matters religious.

Personal Formation

Where did my pilgrimage in mission start? My father’s family was Protestant and, at least according to legend, may have been in the United States since before the Revolutionary War. By the time Dad (Richard) was born in 1915, his family was no longer a follower of Great-Awakening, frontier Protestantism so much as socially conservative, generic, respectable small-town Protestant Christianity. They were certainly influenced by Masonry’s emphasis on civic virtue more than by denominational loyalty. Dad, I was told by his older brother, Bob, attended no church from early adolescence till he met my mother. Dad’s indifference was no match for Gertrude Kearney’s fierce Irish Catholicism. They were certainly influenced by Masonry’s emphasis on civic virtue more than by denominational loyalty.

Dad, I was told by his older brother, Bob, attended no church from early adolescence till he met my mother. Dad’s indifference was no match for Gertrude Kearney’s fierce Irish Catholicism. Thus Dad became Catholic, and they were married by Mom’s was no match for Gertrude Kearney’s fierce Irish Catholicism.

As far back as I can remember, I wanted to be a priest, and the example of our pastor, Fr. Edward Flynn, clinched the decision. Ordained in Rome in 1916, he always had a sense of the church’s universality and of mission as integral to its life. He was a student at Propaganda Fide’s Urbaniana University in Rome during the reign of Benedict XV, the first pope to write a mission encyclical (Maximum illud, 1919). And when $500 was a lot of money, Father Flynn sent that amount from his personal bank account every year to the SVD, which had a seminary in the Archdiocese of Dubuque training men to be missionaries.

My parents were not overjoyed to have me leave home at fifteen for the minor (high school) seminary, but they loved Frs. Ken Reed and Leo Hotze, vocation directors for the SVD, who visited our home. I remember my always practical Dad saying, “At a minimum, you’ll get a good education, and you can leave whenever you want to.” They dropped me off at the school, and I immediately felt at home. We had a Solemn High Mass of the Holy Spirit to open the school year. I had never before seen a Solemn High Mass, nor had I imagined the power of 160 men and boys (counting the brothers and priests) singing Gregorian Mass VIII with Credo III. My love affair with Gregorian chant began that day and has not diminished in the succeeding decades.

When I look back at my three years in the SVD high school at East Troy and then two years of junior college in Duxbury, Massachusetts, I remember most of all being surrounded by really good guys in a system where students (thanks to the structures put in place by our prefect [dean], Fr. Edward “Spike” Dudink) enforced the rules, kept the house and grounds clean, and were encouraged to take initiatives in areas such as sports (which were at least as important as chapel exercises), hobbies, band, and drama.

Missionary Formation in the SVD

SVD formation was missionary through and through, but the word “miissiology” was never uttered. Reflecting much later on this, I realize that the tradition of Catholic orders was to form you in their missionary charisms by immersion, not theoretically. The real missiological program consisted in deans, teachers, and novice masters helping you understand your personality’s strengths and weaknesses, leading you to commitment to intimacy with Christ as he was imitated in the SVD. You were taught to ask “his mother, Mary, mother of the first missionary, to mold you in his likeness.” Yes, you needed a modicum of intelligence, and study was important. Character, however, was rated much more highly than brains. The reality of missionary life in the SVD was conveyed by stories our teachers told about their classmates and letters from those classmates in places like Ghana, India, Chile, Taiwan, the American South, and New Guinea. Excerpts from their letters were read in the dining room. When a missionary on furlough visited the seminary, he presented a slide lecture.

To be an SVD missionary, it was stressed, you needed to...
cultivate your talents, grow in the spiritual life, and foster a willingness to go where your superiors sent you. That would be a place where the church was not yet planted or, if planted, was not yet able to stand on its own. Why mission? Because the church and its sacraments were the channels of Christ’s saving grace, and without explicit faith in Christ, most non-Christians would not be saved.

At a practical level, superiors listened to what they were told by you and about you by your classmates, teachers, and formation directors. Ideally, higher superiors would take into account your wishes, strengths, and weaknesses before they sent you anywhere. On the whole it worked. The Society, you were constantly told, needed all types of people, and those who were assigned to stay in their home countries in teaching, fund-raising, recruitment, and maintenance were considered missionaries as much as those working in the heat of Africa and New Guinea.

Growing Self-Awareness

My class started novitiate on September 8, 1963, at St. Michael’s Divine Word Seminary in Conesus, New York, fifty kilometers south of Rochester, just a few weeks before the second session of Vatican Council II began. In novitiate, while Vatican Council II was still going on, my classmates and I were told by Fr. John Musinsky, our novice master (who later, 1967–77, would serve as SVD superior general), that we were to be “apostolic religious missionaries, not monks.” Nevertheless, we lived a seminastic life in which conversation was allowed only three hours a day. It was a life, Musinsky said, that promoted self-knowledge and habits of prayer that we would need later. Formation and life in the apostolate, in other words, were still quite distinct.

Equally important in my pilgrimage, the summer before entering novitiate, I spent two months in Mexico with twenty of my college friends on a “mission.” Reflection on that experience was a constant during my novitiate. After an introductory program in Mexico City, we split into teams of three and four. LeRoy Schweiterman, Bill Pappas, and I went to Las Animas, six kilometers northeast of Tepotzotlán, where we each lived with a different family. My home was with la familia Ramírez, complete with a stern paterfamilias, a self-effacing and generous mater familias, a beautiful daughter named María, about my own age, and her older brother Enrique. All twenty of us had studied Spanish together at Miramar, and we had a basic language course led by a young woman from Buffalo, New York, when we arrived in Mexico. Those preparations were completely inadequate, sola familia Ramírez, especially Enrique, and, much delightfully, María, spent many hours helping me learn by asking questions like, “What is the difference between raising corn and pigs here and in Iowa?” And, “Do you really think you can live the rest of your life [I was twenty] without a wife and family?”

El proyecto on which Bill, LeRoy, and I worked with the men of Las Animas had been decided upon by the parish council. We were to help the village men tear down their old adobe church with a decrepit roof, dig foundations for a new brick church, and start pouring a concrete foundation for a new cement block church. We got the roof off and tore down the walls during our two months in Las Animas.

I loved the rhythm of the Spanish of the campesinos with whom we worked. More important, I caught a vision of a way of life where I could be happy living in another culture, if I could master the language and immerse myself in the people’s way of life. But I also realized that it would not be easy for me to do so, because I shied away from situations where I would be a child because I had not yet learned a language. I also became aware of an unyielding introvert component in my personality. My more outgoing companions, LeRoy and Bill, did better than I.

The experience in Las Animas also revealed, unflatteringly, my need to be someone who counted. Forty years later, when I heard Andrew Walls say, “A missionary is someone who lives on terms set by others for the sake of Christ and the Gospel,” I realized that my summer in Las Animas before I entered the novitiate had put exactly the right question front and center. Learning to live humbly on terms set by others, I revealed none of this to my novice master and felt myself drawn to say “Yes” to following Christ as an SVD missionary during the electio of our thirty-day Ignatian Spiritual Exercises.

Clarifying the Vision

During the period between taking my first vows in 1966 and going to Rome to study theology in 1969, I was juggling two visions of my future. The first had me heading to Latin America, encouraged by my Chilean philosophy professor, Luis Manuel Rodríguez, SVD. Under the guidance of Luis, I was reading Spanish translations of Teilhard de Chardin’s The Divine Milieu (“El Medio Divino”) and The Human Phenomenon (“El Fenómeno Humano”), with a view to learning Spanish for studies and eventual work in Latin America. The second vision of my future had me reading St. Thomas Aquinas in Latin and Jacques Maritain in English and French, also with Father Rodríguez, as I sought to understand Aquinas and Maritain on “contemplation as the end of human life” (my senior philosophy B.A. paper). The latter vision drew me to think of becoming a theology teacher who would attempt to build bridges between the vetera of tradition and the nova of thinkers like Alfred North Whitehead, Teilhard de Chardin, and Bernard Lonergan.

After graduation from college in 1966 and before starting theological studies at St. Mary’s Divine Word Seminary in Techny, Illinois, I spent a year teaching high-school-age SVD brother candidates in Conesus. At night I was making my way through one of the most important books I have ever read, Bernard Lonergan’s Insight: A Study of Human Understanding. Lonergan helped me understand the gulf that separated classical, ahistorical Catholic Christian culture from the world of scientific discoveries in evolution, on the one side, and, on the other side, the historical and subjective consciousness that arose in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Grappling with Lonergan led to the decision that, wherever I went in mission, I would go as a theology teacher.

I began theological studies at Techny in 1967. The summer before I arrived, however, a much-loved dean of seminarians was suddenly removed by a provincial superior who thought he was too permissive. The seminarians vigorously disagreed. Two years after the Council closed, Techny was in turmoil. Continuity with the past was lost. Indeed, not a single faculty member who taught there when the Council began in October 1962 was...
still active when I started theology in September of 1967. Techny had joined German and Dutch seminaries in being thought out of control by most SVDs around the world.

In an attempt to find a way through the turmoil, the SVD engaged a clinical psychologist. The confused state of affairs at Techny, however, was such that—in retrospect—it is clear that the problem in the seminary was simply not one that a psychologist and group therapy could solve. In this, Techny and the SVD as a whole were but a large microcosm within a huge, dysfunctional, global, ecclesial macrocosm.

Nevertheless, in a series of weekend sessions of confrontation and disclosure therapy, each involving ten to twelve men, we attempted to transpose our personal problems and those of a dysfunctional church into the level of problems of emotional self-awareness and honesty. Guiding this process was the judgment that we needed to abandon the notion that we could sublimate our psychosocial and sexual needs for intimacy into a celibate life of priestly service and prayer. Yes, we would take the vows, but we learned that emotional intimacy, especially with our SVD confreres, was the sine qua non of fruitful missionary religious life. Truth be told, celibacy did work for countless thousands of priests and religious, and it helped produce men and women of deep love of God and their fellow human beings. To this day, I find most criticisms of celibacy shallow. I have seen it work too often in too many men and women not to believe that God calls many to that way of life and blesses them in it.

What our confrontation-disclosure marathons revealed was that many of us were emotionally stunted and needed to break out of psychological prisons in which we loathed ourselves and repressed our sexual needs and identities. Masturbation, for instance, was considered a mortal sin, and those who engaged in it felt intense shame, all of which was hidden from others. In years not so long gone by, confessors were told to advise masturbators to leave before taking final vows if they could not master the temptation. Same-sex attraction was absolutely forbidden and had to be hidden, since its revelation was cause for dismissal. The marathon encounter sessions lifted the veil covering such realities, and that was all for the good. Because every sexual fantasy or improper sexual action was considered a mortal sin, most of us had never before confided our problems in that area to anyone.

At another level, the seminary was opening the doors to the American cultural Zeitgeist, wherein openness, sincerity, and self-expression trumped values like loyalty, commitment, and tradition. Religion was redefined as righteous action, and the difficulty of multicultural living. Second, although I found myself reacting against the rigidity of Roman theology, I gained an appreciation for the balance, depth, and importance of the magisterium that our Jesuit professors interpreted and defended. Over the years my respect for that magisterium has only grown, although I remain troubled by the way traditions are often passed off as Tradition by the hierarchy. Third, living abroad and getting news about both the Vietnam War and the American civil rights movement from European sources gave me a much deeper appreciation both of the capacity of the United States for self-delusion and of the messiness of efforts to correct its mistakes and live up to its ideals.

Living and studying in Rome was a great gift. First, I gained insight into how deeply multicultural the Society of the Divine Word was, which allowed me to experience both the enrichment and the difficulty of multicultural living. Second, although I found myself reacting against the rigidity of Roman theology, I gained an appreciation for the balance, depth, and importance of the magisterium that our Jesuit professors interpreted and defended. Over the years my respect for that magisterium has only grown, although I remain troubled by the way traditions are often passed off as Tradition by the hierarchy. Third, living abroad and getting news about both the Vietnam War and the American civil rights movement from European sources gave me a much deeper appreciation both of the capacity of the United States for self-delusion and of the messiness of efforts to correct its mistakes and live up to its ideals.

Steve and I were ordained on September 5, 1971. We had been assigned, respectively, to the Philippines and Papua New Guinea before ordination. Having finished my degree at the Gregorian in June 1972, I returned home to consecrate a solemn Mass in Belle Plaine, Iowa, at my home parish with the people who had nurtured my faith, although my family had moved from there five years earlier.

Papua New Guinea

Arriving in Papua New Guinea in September 1972, I entered upon the most challenging and rewarding step in my pilgrimage in mission. Given the limits of this article, I will mention few names but will group insights into two interlocking fields. The first is missiological; the second, personal.

I am fundamentally an introvert, but I have an ensemble of extrovert traits that I employ sufficiently well that most people think of me as outgoing. In reality, however, I am constantly mulling over what I have experienced and in need of privacy to recharge my emotional batteries, and in Papua New Guinea (PNG) I found a great deal about which to brood. I spent my first two months teaching a half-semester course in eschatology at Holy Spirit Seminary in Bomana, near Port Moresby, before heading to Wewak, the diocesan headquarters of the SVD’s East Sepik mission. At Wewak on the north coast, Bishop Leo Arkfeld, SVD, assigned me to fill in for Fr. August Knorr, SVD, as parish priest at Sassoya, one of the largest parishes in the diocese. I objected that I was supposed to live and work with an experienced missionary. “Don’t worry,” he said, “that rule was made because some new missionaries have serious problems in their first year or two. I’ve known you for ten years. You’re solid, an Iowan [as was he]. You’ll learn much more on your own.”

So I learned Pidgin (the common creole language on an island with over 800 languages), on the fly in village situations. And I nearly went around the bend. If it had not been for two Australian priests (Pat Gesch and Pat Rasmussen) in Negrin, an hour away by jeep, and Australian Mercy Sisters in Yarapos and Yangoru, I would have gone round that bend. I finished my year...
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at Sassoya and returned to Bomana, convinced that there was deep, genuine faith among the Melanesian peoples, but also that it was far different than most of us “Europeans” understood. I brooded over that and resolved to try to understand the basic structures of that faith as I dialogued with my students. The next four years were an incredible journey.

Among the things I slowly came to realize was that, at Bomana, “we are [as Nick DeGroot, a Dutch-Australian SVD faculty colleague, said one day] spending 75 percent of our energy socializing the students into a celibate-clerical lifestyle; maybe 25 percent of it goes into something pastorally useful.” I brooded over that and began a serious study of the history of ministry in the early centuries. That study ended up in my being invited to give seminars on ordained ministry in several of the dioceses of PNG. Responding to questions, objections, and encouragement on the part of the missionaries of several different orders to keep thinking, I found myself formulating a basic missiological judgment: Since the beginning of the modern missionary movement in the sixteenth century, the Catholic Church has failed to establish a fully self-financing, self-ministering, self-directed local church. Instead, the new churches are in constant need of help from outside.

Departure from the SVD

In 1977, when I returned to the United States to begin doctoral studies at the University of Chicago Divinity School, I wrote several articles for an internal SVD newspaper, Word/LISA. In them, I argued that the SVD was part of a large missionary enterprise that was insisting that local churches adopt structures that grew out of European history and culture rather than allowing them to evolve structures of church life and ministry that were both theologically sound and arising out of Melanesian ways of life. Archbishop Adolf Noser, SVD, read those articles and a book I published in 1980 (New Ministries: The Global Context). He demanded that I be fired. After a long tug-of-war, in which the SVD provincial, Arnold Steffen, and his council defended me in discussions with the bishops, it was finally agreed that if the bishops asked me to resign my teaching position, I would do so. That happened in 1982. I was invited that same year to join the Chicago Province of the SVD and to return to PNG as a theologian-member of the Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Social Service.

To explain why I did not commit to either invitation, I need to turn to what was going on in my internal, personal pilgrimage. I spoke above of my discovery in Mexico in 1963 that I enjoyed being noticed by María Ramírez, our Spanish teacher, and a young woman from Milwaukee. I continued to enjoy the emotions being noticed by María Ramírez, our Spanish teacher, and a young woman from Milwaukee. I continued to enjoy the emotions and that I was too “theological” for secular university departments of religion. Another former SVD, Jack Boberg, opened the door to a job at the American Medical Association. Three years there, working with wonderful colleagues, cleared my head of any lingering ideas that institutional Christianity was at the center of laypeople’s lives. Conclusion

In the fall of 1988 I received a letter asking if I would be interested in applying for a job at Maryknoll’s Orbis Books. I was, and I did. I retired from the position of managing editor there in March 2009. The editors of this journal have asked me to write separately on the view of publications on Christian mission today as seen from behind an editor’s desk. I will therefore pass immediately to three observations that have as their background everything recorded here, as well as what I have learned through my years as an editor and my postretirement reflection and writing.

First, my pilgrimage in mission has brought me to a deep realization that the death of Jesus is the axis around which everything else in Christian life and the mission of the church revolves. Yes, crucifixion is the forerunner of resurrection, but any attempt to circumvent the paradox of the cross short-circuits our understanding of our plight as sinners wandering the earth in the dark unless we die to self to be born anew.

Second, the Spirit of the God and Father of Jesus is active universally. The mission of Christians revolves around making known Jesus as the Christ. That task is, as Pope John Paul II says, the permanent priority of mission. As the Christ, what he reveals is that God is the triune, loving force that saves the reality of universal process, including human beings. That pancosmic process is reality, and Christ names it. Christian life is complete only when it conforms to the pattern of the death and resurrection of Jesus, that is to say, when it is Christomorphic—in the shape of Christ’s life and death, embracing the Father’s promise of new life in the Spirit.

Third, the Gospel’s fundamental good news is the promise that God will treat those who embrace the way of Jesus as God treated Jesus and will transform both humans and creation in the Spirit. For humans, conversion entails abandonment of attempts to justify ourselves. We are born into a world of sin that is continually persisting. And sin is not simply breaking rules, though we break many in the course of a lifetime. We are, in the words of Lonergan, “incapable of sustained development.” The forgiveness of those sins is not merely having due punishment remitted by God. Much more deeply, it involves accepting God’s promise that the death and resurrection of Jesus reveal God’s transforming power at work in us and in the cosmos. And announcing that promise is the core of mission. Embodying trust in the promise is the most important trait a missioner must display.
The Missional Heart of Member Care

Kelly O’Donnell

Remember your church, Lord, to deliver it from all evil and to make it perfect in your love; and gather it, the one that has been sanctified, from the four winds into your kingdom, which you have prepared for it; for yours is the power and the glory forever.

Didache 10:5

Missionary care has made great strides over the past fifty years and is increasingly recognized as a strategic and ethical necessity for mission. Starting in the early 1990s, the term “member care” began to be widely used to identify what was recognized as an emerging international and interdisciplinary field.1 Throughout the development of this field, its missional focus—indeed its heart—was clearly seen in its support of mission personnel themselves, as well as their work.2 Its foundational principles highlighted the biblical admonitions to love one another and, as reflected in the opening prayer above from the first-century church, in the yearning to be made perfect in God’s love.

This article presents a historical journey through several professional publications, organizations, and conferences dealing with the practice of member care.3 Starting in the pre-1960 era and traveling into the mid-2010s, I highlight trends in member care development. This chronology weaves my own commentary around a selection of core quotes from different authors. Knowing our history provides important perspectives for supporting the church’s endeavors to share the Good News and do good works among all peoples.

This survey of materials reflects the initial predominance, in the field of member care, of English-speaking, internationally experienced Americans, often males, and many with mental health care backgrounds. These demographics underwent a large shift starting in the 2000s as member care increasingly globalized into a multidisciplinary, culturally contextualized field. Many outstanding colleagues have contributed to the development of this field, but space here allows for only a sampling.4 These colleagues’ exemplary lives of faith in action and the compelling voices in their writings still speak clearly and powerfully to us today (Heb. 11:4).

Pre-1960s: A Poignant Prelude

In his dissertation, covering the first seventy years of the twentieth century, John Barclay presents a helpful overview of literature related to member care, a field that has been largely terra incognita. The following paragraphs from his dissertation give a feel for the terrain.5

Arthur J. Brown’s classic The Foreign Missionary (1907) was perhaps the first book to look comprehensively at missionary life, covering such topics as missionary motivation, qualifications, language learning, work, and support, as well as various aspects of missionary life, concluding with the missionary’s reward. Interestingly, he devotes a chapter to “the real strain of missionary life” in which he outlines the perils, strains, and stressors in the life of a foreign missionary, including issues facing the family. Apart from Brown’s book, revised in 1932 and 1950, most writing about missionaries was biographical, for example, Deaville Walker’s William Carey: Missionary Pioneer and Statesman (1926) and Norman Grubb’s C. T. Studd: Cricketer and Pioneer (1933).6

One of the earliest works related to member care was a “handbook” written for Church Missionary Society “candidates in waiting” by Georgina Anne Gollock in 1892 (revised in 1907). Mildred Cable and Francesca French wrote Ambassadors for Christ (1935), based on their years of pioneer work in the Gobi desert, with the express intention of giving frank and honest responses to questions from would-be missionaries about “the missionary calling, its demands and its problems, and also regarding the attitude of organized societies toward the missionary applicant” (7). A. T. Houghton’s In Training: A Guide to the Preparation of the Missionary (1946), Amy Carmichael’s God’s Missionary (1957), Douglas Webster’s What Is a Missionary? (1955), and A. T. Houghton’s Preparing to Be a Missionary (1956) tackle issues relating to training for missionary service, but they understandably display a new concern for the changing global context in which mission takes place.7

The need for better health care of missionaries was addressed by Paul Adolph, Missionary Health Manual (1954). Mabel Wil-

Launch of the Global Member Care Task Force, September 1998.

Photograph taken in front of the C. S. Lewis house, near Oxford, U.K.
Exposing this period of member care history, a “pre-era,” reveals poignant writings that describe the challenges and rewards of cross-cultural service. It is a noteworthy prelude to the steady progression of caregivers, concepts, and commitments that were just over the horizon.

1960s and 1970s: Taking Shape

In the 1960s the editors of the Evangelical Missions Quarterly opened the doors to missionary care by including articles on the topic in their initial issues (1964, 1966). Examples include Ralph Odman’s tips for furlough, James P. Satterwhite on coping with stress, and William Smalley’s classic material on the shocks of a new language, unfamiliar culture, and self-discovery. Other indications that missionary care was being taken seriously were the counseling services set up in California by Link Care Center (1965, Stan Lindquist) and Wycliffe Bible Translators (1968, Phil and Barbara Grossman). Two other significant forerunners were Missionary Internship (1954, in Michigan, focusing on missionary preparation) and Narramore Christian Foundation (1958, in California, focusing on psychological resources, including care for ministers and missionaries).

The 1970s were noteworthy for the rising influence of mental health practitioners, women, and people with firsthand experience in mission. People were talking openly and at times passionately about the challenges of mission life. Many writings from the 1970s addressed the areas of missionary preparation, selection/evaluation, field adjustment, longevity, children’s issues, women’s roles, and reentry: in short, how to better support and equip mission personnel.

During the 1980s excitement built that something new and important was happening in missionary care.


Some of the factors that increase the likelihood of emotional difficulties among missionaries may be divided into two broad categories, internal and external. Internal factors are often things that make up the individual’s personality [resentments, parents’ influence, guilt, early life trauma, deprivation, motivation for service]; external factors are things in the environment [culture shock, language, overwhelming work, children/school, medical care]. The latter are often given as causes for the missionary seeking psychiatric help. (193)

1974: Sally Folger Dye, “Decreasing Fatigue and Illness in Field Work,” Missiology 2, no. 1, 79–109. Fatigue and illness often hinder the productive field-work of missionaries, linguists, anthropologists, government workers and others who attempt to live in foreign cultures. Many well-trained workers are forced to leave their fields before achieving their goals. They often feel a deep sense of frustration and a vague sense of guilt for years afterwards. This article attempts to bring research and experience together to create a fresh understanding of common human reactions in a cross-cultural environment. It then suggests specific ways of recognizing and controlling these reactions to prevent fatigue and physical, as well as emotional, illness. (79)

1977: Donald Larson, “Missionary Preparation,” Missiology 5, no. 1, 73–82. Missionaries do not always join the communities in which they reside and in which they seek to minister. Too often, the missionary lives at the margin of the community’s center of activity, reducing [his or her] effectiveness considerably. Many such failures arise because the missionary is simply not ready to identify closely with [the] host community. This article examines [the] reluctance to identify and emphasizes the importance of dealing with this in . . . preparation. (73)

In the 1960s and 1970s people slowly started to shape the topical contours of the future member care field. Caring for mission personnel became intertwined with the passions and practices of mission.

1980s: Front and Center

During the 1980s excitement built that something new and important was happening in missionary care. People were working both independently and together; special gatherings were organized to support mission personnel. Much of this was fomenting in the United States in a professional mental health care context, although not exclusively (e.g., InterHealth, founded in 1989 in London). Missionary children and their education or families were topics of particular emphasis. Key publications, among many, included special issues on mission and mental health in the Journal of Psychology and Theology (1983, 1987) and the Journal of Psychology and Christianity (1983); the books Culture Shock (Myron Loss, 1983), Cross-Cultural Reentry (Clyde Austin, 1986), Honourably Wounded (Marjory Foyle, 1987), and Helping Missionaries Grow (Kelly O’Donnell and Michèle Lewis O’Donnell, 1988); and the compendiums of the International Conferences on Missionary Kids (e.g., Pamela Echerd and Alice Arathoon, 1989). Some examples of key gatherings are Psychological Resources for Frontier Missions (U.S. Center for World Mission, 1982); Mental Health and Missions conferences (1980–current); Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies/Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association Personnel Committee workshops (1970s into the 2000s); the International Conferences on Missionary Kids (Manila, 1984; Quito, 1986; Nairobi, 1989); and Pastors to Missionaries (1989 to the present).


There is a new openness today between the mission agency and those working in the area of mental health. . . . The opening of [the] door came approximately 30 years ago when psychological assessment was initiated in the screening process with missionary candidates. Although it took a few years for
this psychological screening to be accepted, virtually every major mission board now utilizes some form of psychological screening, including psychological tests, in the process of selection. With the growth of counseling courses offered at the seminary campus and the availability of trained pastors and Christian psychologists, mission leaders have recognized the value of the mental health professional. Mission boards have indicated the willingness to use appropriately trained mental health specialists to counsel missionaries who are experiencing some form of emotional stress, psychological depression, psychotic episode, etc. . . . In almost every case where a mental health professional is used by a mission board, the person possesses “secondary” credentials which make him acceptable. (1)


For the past 25 years I have been involved with International Teams in sending groups of missionaries to Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America . . . . When we began back in the early 1960s, we just went to the field and began the work. It wasn’t long before we realized that if teams were going to be effective, they needed to be trained together before going to the field. Merely bringing people together and sending them to the field wasn’t enough. They needed time for in-depth preparation and interpersonal bonding. They came from all kinds of sub-cultures and religious backgrounds, and minor preferences in personal tastes became magnified when living and working in the team situation. So training became the indispensable key to success for building and developing our teams. (254–55)


The history of missions throughout the centuries suggests that each era has determined how learning and scholarship would serve adjunctive and supportive functions in Gospel proclamation. For example, both medicine and education have played important roles in mission strategy and practice for many decades. . . . It should be no surprise that a number of misconceptions and unfortunate practices have caused the Christian public (even more specifically, the more conservative element) to question the value and contributions of Christian behavioral scientists. . . . The involvement of psychology in missions is not altogether new. Daring and creative pioneers in the late 1920s began to use psychological and psychiatric services in the process of selecting missionaries for overseas service (Hunter, 1965). Those initial ventures were harbingers of what has been a slow but growing use of psychological services by missionary agencies (Johnson and Fennel, 1981) and continuing efforts to create effective working relationships between mental health professionals and mission agencies (Johnston, 1983). (269–71)

This foundational decade was marked by missionary care’s increased visibility, influence, acceptance, credibility, competency, and cooperation. People explored issues and developed resources for mission workers’ adjustment and growth and brought crucial matters into the limelight.

1990s: Connecting and Contributing Broadly

The 1990s saw the term “member care” being widely used to describe an emerging field with a growing body of research, practitioners, materials, models, and concepts. Many noteworthy books related to member care were written by authors from diverse backgrounds, including pastors, psychologists, trainers, mission leaders, and physicians. Most were still being produced, however, by people from the Global North. Representative works include *Serving as Senders* (Neal Pirollo, 1991), *Missionary Care* (Kelly O’Donnell, ed., 1992), *Too Soon to Quit* (Lareau Lindquist, 1994), *Good Health, Good Travel* (Ted Lankester, 1995), *On Being a Missionary* (Thomas Hale, 1995), *Raising Resilient MKs* (Joyce Bowers, ed., 1998), *Thriving in Another Culture* (Jo Anne Dennett, 1998), *Building Credible Multicultural Teams* (Lianne Roembke, 1998), and *The Third Culture Kid Experience* (David Pollock and Ruth Van Reken, 1999). Also noteworthy were the many articles related to member care found in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, the special issue on member care in the *International Journal of Frontier Missions* (October 1995), and the special issues on psychology and missions in the *Journal of Psychology and Theology* (1993, 1999).

The member care field spread internationally, bringing in colleagues from many regions to share resources and discuss issues such as family adjustment, crisis care, team development, physical health, organizational development, coaching, leadership training, lessons from the past, biblical foundations, and future directions. Four key indications of member care’s international growth were (1) the number of member care consultations held in regions such as the Middle East and North Africa (early 1990s); in Europe, Latin America, and Central Asia (later 1990s); as well as in many individual nations; (2) the establishment of member care ministries such as Tumaini Counselling Centre in Nairobi, and Missionary Upholders Trust in India; (3) the major international study on mission-worker attrition undertaken by the World Evangelical Fellowship and published in the 1997 book *Too Valuable to Lose* (William Taylor, ed.); and (4) the birth in 1998 of the Global Member Care Task Force (MemCa).

Growth of the member care movement in mission was paralleled by development of human resource management in the humanitarian sector. Three noteworthy steps were relevant for member care: the establishment of the Psychosocial Support Program by the International Federation of the Red Cross (Denmark, early 1990s), with its focus on staff as well as survivors of conflicts or calamities; the launch of People in Aid’s *Code of Best Practice for the Management and Support of Aid Personnel* (1997); and the development of special resources such as those in travel health care (e.g., health screening, briefings, checkups) and in crisis/truma care (e.g., training courses in debriefing).


The life of Dorothy Placket Carey [the first wife of pioneer missionary William Carey] comes to us through the pages of history as a sad chapter in the chronicles of modern missions. Her sacrifice of sanity, however, could lose all potential value to us if we fail to see her story as more than just a tragic biography. Her story is also very true, painfully true. In her train have come many others who have suffered from the ravages of mental illness while serving in the modern missionary movement. We have an obligation to learn from lives such as Dorothy Carey’s.
and thereby to reap some of the benefits that can emerge from the costly sacrifice that she made. She would not wish us to merely pity her. Perhaps she would want instead that we benefit from the example of her life so as to help others. (1)

1995: Jeffrey Ellis, “Stephanas: A New Testament Prototype of Member Care,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 12, no. 4, 172–76. A closer look at I Corinthians 16:15–18 will help us in understanding this first-century example of member care in the frontiers and its implications for the modern missions community. . . . There [in Ephesus] during his final missionary journey, Paul became the [beneficiary] of what we now call member care. It is heartening to read Paul’s response, “I rejoiced at their arrival for they refreshed my spirit.” Such “spirit refreshing” ought not to become a lost art. It is as needed today on the frontiers . . . as it was nearly 2000 years ago. Considering the demands and complexities of modern mission to the frontiers, it is needed more so today! (171–74)

1999: M. Elizabeth Hall Lewis and Judith L. Schram, “Psychology and Missions,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 27, no. 2, 83–86. The pioneering efforts of many professionals have provided a foundation for the current trends in mental health and missions. Three such trends are . . . networking and partnering, a focus on prevention, and a mobilizing of resources for crisis intervention. . . . Mental health professionals have had a major impact on the field of missions and are attempting to mobilize their resources toward current missionary needs. However, certain important gaps remain to be filled. Although many could be mentioned and explored (e.g., the need to develop long-term member care teams on the field, the need for cross-cultural applications for mental health resources, the need to focus on the internationalization of member care), we will focus on three of these: the need for more sophisticated ethical standards, the need for further research, and the need to expand the role of mental health professionals in missions beyond member care. (84–86)

In the 1990s member care gained recognition as a field of its own and continued to travel deeply into the heart of mission. The decade became an unprecedented period of reflection, connection, and collaboration.

2000s: Global Faces and Facets

In the 2000s, accelerated expansion characterized the member care field. It became increasingly contextualized by and for sending groups and workers from different countries, and the field became increasingly organized, visible, and inclusive as well. Regional and national affiliations and networks were strengthened and new ones formed. The Global Member Care Resources (also referred to as MemCa) affiliation emerged, quickly becoming a major presence and practical rallying point that helped to link the diversity of people concerned with member care.

Member care–related departments and emphases within sending groups (churches and agencies) grew to be much more common. A member care model featuring the five spheres of master care, self/mutual care, sender care, specialist care, and network care, developed by Dave Pollock and myself in 2001, became influential. Many new practitioners were now working and writing in their own languages and cultural contexts. Member care ministries such as The Well and Cornerstone in Thailand were set up. Three edited volumes provided state of the art information: *Enhancing Missionary Vitality* (John Powell and Joyce Bowers, eds., 2002), *Doing Member Care Well* (Kelly O’Donnell, ed., 2002), and *Worth Keeping* (Rob Hay, ed., 2007). Materials were translated. Organizations and individuals put up websites filled with helpful resources; most are in English but some are in other languages also.

In the midst of this decade’s incredible development, unresolved relational issues in member care and mission and in leadership took their toll. It eventually became apparent that an international fraud was significantly contributing to these issues, wreaking havoc in parts of the evangelical church and mission community. This sad reality was a wake-up call for better governance and steadfast integrity in view of the estimated $39 billion lost each year from “ecclesiastical crime,” as well as the widespread corruption problems in the international humanitarian and health sectors. In spite of that setback, and although clearly lacking in many places, member care grew globally. As a field, it was not primarily dependent on one country, one discipline, or one organization for its continuance.

2000: Beram Kumar, *Member Care Handbook* (Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia). The Church of developing nations, who for a long time has served only as a backdrop to the strong sending churches of the developing nations, is beginning to move to the forefront of missions. . . . Much of the emphasis of this book is on “responsible sending,” the failure of which, we feel, is the greatest cause of missionary failure (attrition). . . . The primary target readership for this handbook are pastors, mission leaders, missionaries, and missionaries-to-be in Malaysia. However, the principles and problems discussed here would apply for most “new sending countries of the two-thirds world.” . . . “Let the shipwreck of others be our beacon of light.” (16–17)

2006: Gladys Mwiti and Alvin Dueck, *Christian Counselling: An African Indigenous Perspective* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library). Africa hobbled into the twenty-first century covered with wounds from genocide in Rwanda, war in Sierra Leone, and ethnic cleansing in Darfur. . . . Chains of corruption mark many governments in Africa, as well as heavy burdens of national debt. . . . Despite the challenges . . . there are new signs of hope . . . whereas Africa has been raped repeatedly and is still being ravaged by external forces, there still remains a resiliency that can serve to rebuild what was broken. . . . Discerning alternatives; rediscovering meaningful symbols, proverbs, rituals, and myths; reclaiming the lost; and legitimizing African experience through Christian faith—these are the tools with which we can rebuild and reclam. These are the vitalities still alive in Africa waiting to be reclaimed so that after remembering the broken, African vitality can be restored. Christian counsellors within the Church in Africa will play a significant role in filling the vacuum and bringing restoring life to the peoples and families of Africa. (13, 17–19)

2008: Bennet Emmanuel, “Missionary Upholders Trust [India],” *Christian Manager*, July, 16–23. An estimated 40,000 missionaries and their family members operate under the umbrella of different mission organisations in India. The sheer number of missionaries and the magnitude of needs in mission organisations have unwittingly created a gap in the care of its members. Some missionaries are fortunate enough to be taken care of by the organisations or other sources, but most of them do not have any form of support. With their meagre resources, most missionaries are unprepared to meet any eventuality in the course of their daily lives. Barring [a] few exceptions, missionaries have had to fend for themselves in other areas of need. This prompted the birth of Missionary Upholders Trust in 1993 . . . [whose] vision statement reads: “As followers of Christ, we care for, share with, and meet some of the
common unmet needs of missionaries, at their affordable cost, working beyond all man-made boundaries, in a spirit of Christian love.” (16)

Member care grew, struggled, and consolidated further around the world. The field welcomed many new global faces and facets into its efforts to support the mission community.

2010s: Crucial Directions and Commitments

The current decade has seen the global impact of member care in mission continue. Three noteworthy conferences are examples: two international member care consultations (the first held in Thailand in 2012 and attended by 350 people; the second held in Turkey in February 2015 with 360 participating) and at the regional level, the 2012 Member Care Consultation in India, organized by Missionary Upholders Trust and attended by nearly 200 people, many of whom were senior mission leaders from over seventy-five organizations in India.

Recent publications reveal the wealth of experienced practitioners and consolidated learning in the field: Thriving in Difficult Places (2013), Single Mission: Thriving as a Single Person in Cross-Cultural Ministry (Debbie Hawker and Tim Herbert, eds., 2013), Global Member Care, vol. 1, The Pearls and Perils of Good Practice (Kelly O’Donnell, 2011); vol. 2, Crossing Sectors for Serving Humanity (Kelly O’Donnell and Michèle Lewis O’Donnell, eds., 2013), Member Care in India (J. Manoharan et al., 2012), and Global Servants; Cross-Cultural Humanitarian Heroes (3 vols., Lois Dodds and Laura Mae Gardner, 2011).19

The field’s development is also seen in the extensive library of podcasts on a broad range of member care topics (e.g., Member Care Media); the resource updates from Global Member Care Network, Member Care Associates, and Brigada Today; and the updated model of global member care presented in O’Donnell and Lewis O’Donnell (Crossing Sectors for Serving Humanity, 2013).20 Member care continues to expand into new areas as colleagues from diverse backgrounds are being challenged to pursue “global integration”—thinking and linking more broadly across sectors on behalf of the major challenges facing the world, including the United Nations’ sustainable development goals, vulnerable populations, and least reached peoples.21

Conclusion

I encourage all who have member care responsibilities to consider the following seven directions or crucial commitments as a basis for good practice in our future individual and joint work.

1. We commit to diligently pursue our own journeys of personal and professional growth—to grow deeply as we go broadly.
2. We commit to integrate the inseparable areas of our character (resilient virtue) and competency (relevant skills) with compassion (resonant love).
3. We commit to follow God into new areas of learning and work: crossing sectors, cultures, disciplines, and comfort zones.
4. We commit to embrace our duty to enter difficult settings, including those permeated by conflict, calamity, and corruption, as those in great need are often in places of great risk.
5. We commit to have clear ethical commitments and standards that guide our provision of quality services to a diversity of workers and senders in mission.
6. We commit to develop quality member care workers from all peoples, mutually learning from those who work within their own cultures and those who serve cross-culturally.
7. We commit to base our work upon the trans-everything practice of fervently loving one another—agape. Our love is the ultimate measure of our member care.

The opportunities are vast for the love of God to lead us further into the missional heart of member care, building upon an amazing legacy. Member care will continue to have a positive impact within the mission community and to cross new boundaries of service on behalf of our very needy world. Ad majorem Dei gloriam.

Notes

2. For examples of the missional heart of member care in my writing and in fifty years of member care quotations, click the link at http://membercareassociates.org/?page_id=606; and www.mti.org/purchase.
4. For articles and books related to member care, see www.crossculturalworkers.com; http://membercareassociates.org/?page_id=606; and www.mti.org/purchase.


14. This influential model is described in Kelly O’Donnell, ed., Doing Member Care Well: Perspectives and Practices from around the World (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2002), chap. 1; it can be found online at www.worlddevangelicals.org/resources/source.htm?id=61. For tributes and links to commemorations of the life and work of David Pollock, go to the CORE Member Care Weblog at http://coremembercare.blogspot.com/2014/04/pax-delivering-in-peace-13.html.


16. Links to resources in various languages are available at http://membercareassociates.org/?page_id=43.

17. For information on the Nordic Capital Investments KB fraud—an international, multimillion dollar/euro Ponzi scheme which continues to be confronted—see the PETRA People Network website (https://sites.google.com/site/petrapeople).


“I am excited to be a part of a global-minded community that both equips and learns from current and future mission leaders.”

Dr. Sue Russell
Associate Professor of Mission and Contextual Studies

Asbury Theological Seminary
is committed to historic Christian faith in the Wesleyan tradition in a way which is globally engaged, spiritually formative, and missionally alert!
Gerald McDermott and Harold Netland have written more than a “proposal.” This book offers a remarkably lucid, systematic synthesis of the vexing question of the “theology of religions,” drawing on the biblical witness, the Christian tradition, and a wide range of contemporary scholarship. The authors should be commended for achieving their ambitious goal of presenting an “evangelical Christian framework for thinking about religions and religious others” (3).

Several key themes emerge. As the title of the book conveys, McDermott and Netland posit that a Christian approach to the theology of religions has to proceed from a Trinitarian framework. Second, they argue that religious conceptions of “ultimate reality” differ greatly, even as ethical principles offer surprising common ground. Third, they tend toward a more exclusivist vision of salvation, emphasizing the differences between Christianity and other religions and the evangelical obligation to share the “saving knowledge” of Jesus Christ with others. Fourth, they challenge evangelical Christians to fully incorporate Jesus’ vision of discipleship into their proclamation of the Gospel message. Finally, they argue for the compatibility of dialogue, proclamation, and apologetics in Christian interreligious encounter.

My critiques likely reflect my own Roman Catholic identity. First, I think the authors need to devote more attention to ecclesiology and sacramentality, two issues that have been critical to the historical engagement of the Christian tradition with the religious other. Second, the authors repeatedly return to the theme of “saving knowledge” (107). I question whether this is not an overly rationalist understanding of salvation; one wonders whether children or the mentally handicapped could ever share in such “knowledge.” In this regard, one could hope for a more robust consideration of a Trinitarian vision of “God as Love” (see 1 John 4 or Augustine’s De Trinitate) and its potential implications for a theology of religions.

Throughout the book, McDermott and Netland do a wonderful job of explaining (rather than assuming) core concepts such as evangelical, Trinity, revelation, salvation, culture, and religion. I also appreciate their careful and nuanced explanations of Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic beliefs. Given its exceptional clarity and organization, I would recommend Trinitarian Theology of Religions for upper-level undergraduate or seminar classes on the theology of religions or evangelical systematic theology. As evidenced by the four responses at the end, I also trust that this book will serve as an important contribution to the burgeoning literature concerning the theology of religions. In the closing words of the authors, “may the conversation continue” (322).

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Overturning Tables: Freeing Missions from the Christian-Industrial Complex.


With Overturning Tables, mission strategist Scott Bessenecker wants to start a conversation that will move Protestant missions away from the cultural dominance of the “corporate, culturally white, individualist paradigm” (185). The title refers to the story of Jesus’ passionately challenging the commercial activities in the temple. Similarly, Bessenecker challenges the “missionary corporation,” with its emphasis on money, hierarchical structure, and infinite growth. He addresses the business model, which drives the church, because that “Christian-Industrial Complex” inherently concentrates the power to act and to decide in certain structures and people, in a way that is unbiblical and untenable. Illustrated with examples of practices from around the world, Bessenecker offers fragments of a different vision for mission, such as focusing on prophets instead of profits, and investing in flourishing rather than an unrealistic obsession with continuous (numerical) growth. Every chapter is a balanced interweaving of a critical description of the present situation, a historical assessment, biblical instructions, and inspiring stories of alternative approaches.

The book is well-researched and written in a conversational style, which makes the subject matter accessible both to laypeople and to students of ecclesiology and missions. Nevertheless, the content is challenging as Bessenecker shakes cultural assumptions that are engrained in the fabric of denominations and mission organizations. The issues are not new. Already in 1982 Orlando Costas warned against the encroaching business model of mission theology in Christ outside the Gate. Jonathan Bonk addressed the problem of finances in mission work in Missions and Money: Affluence as a Missionary Problem (1991). Bessenecker’s strength, however, lies in his speaking from experience of how mission is already being done differently, mostly by people from the margins with no power or money. Overturning Tables ignites the imagination of how we can participate in a more just way by upsetting the structures of the commercialization of the Gospel in a business approach. And then the tables are turned on the reader as it becomes clear that the need for reform goes much deeper: we need to live out a “severe and practical love” (180) in working interdependently with people who are not in the mainstream of mission work.

Bessenecker’s book is timely in light of the recent statement from the World Council of Churches “Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes” (Busan, 2013). The ecumenical council confirms that “now people at the margins are claiming their key role as

Book Reviews

A Trinitarian Theology of Religions: An Evangelical Proposal.


Gerald McDermott and Harold Netland posit that a Christian approach to the theology of religions has to proceed from a Trinitarian framework. Second, they argue that religious conceptions of “ultimate reality” differ greatly, even as ethical principles offer surprising common ground. Third, they tend toward a more exclusivist vision of salvation, emphasizing the differences between Christianity and other religions and the evangelical obligation to share the “saving knowledge” of Jesus Christ with others. Fourth, they challenge evangelical Christians to fully incorporate Jesus’ vision of discipleship into their proclamation of the Gospel message. Finally, they argue for the compatibility of dialogue, proclamation, and apologetics in Christian interreligious encounter.

My critiques likely reflect my own Roman Catholic identity. First, I think the authors need to devote more attention to ecclesiology and sacramentality, two issues that have been critical to the historical engagement of the Christian tradition with the religious other. Second, the authors repeatedly return to the theme of “saving knowledge” (107). I question whether this is not an overly rationalist understanding of salvation; one wonders whether children or the mentally handicapped could ever share in such “knowledge.” In this regard, one could hope for a more robust consideration of a Trinitarian vision of “God as Love” (see 1 John 4 or Augustine’s De Trinitate) and its potential implications for a theology of religions.

Throughout the book, McDermott and Netland do a wonderful job of explaining (rather than assuming) core concepts such as evangelical, Trinity, revelation, salvation, culture, and religion. I also appreciate their careful and nuanced explanations of Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic beliefs. Given its exceptional clarity and organization, I would recommend Trinitarian Theology of Religions for upper-level undergraduate or seminar classes on the theology of religions or evangelical systematic theology. As evidenced by the four responses at the end, I also trust that this book will serve as an important contribution to the burgeoning literature concerning the theology of religions. In the closing words of the authors, “may the conversation continue” (322).

J. J. Carney is assistant professor of theology at Creighton University, Omaha, Nebraska.
agents of mission and affirming mission as transformative” (§6). Bessenecker calls them “the experts at the center of God’s kingdom,” and he concludes that “we would be foolish not to invite them to assist us in the process of deconstructing the industrial complex and reconstructing the ancient, lighter form of church and mission” (185). Overturning Tables invites us to envision mission at the level, not of organization, but of ontology and relationship. Who will take up the challenge?

—Francisca Ireland-Verwoerd

Francisca Ireland-Verwoerd is pursuing doctoral studies in theology and art at Boston University.

Communities of Faith in Africa and the African Diaspora: In Honor of Dr. Tite Tiénou, with Additional Essays on World Christianity.


The rich essays of this Festschrift in honor of Tite Tiénou reflect the complex realities of world Christianity—and its global mobility. Originally from Mali, in francophone West Africa, Tiénou emigrated to the United States for education. He has taught in both Africa and the United States and has risen through the ranks to the pinnacle of leadership in theological education. He currently serves as senior vice-president of education, academic dean, and professor of theology of mission at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois. The book’s twenty-five chapters appear in two parts: “Africa and the African Diaspora” and “Other Selected Essays.”

Tiénou’s deanship illustrates an emerging trend in which things are falling into place rather than falling apart in the decentering and recentering of Christianity’s heartland(s). The old center is giving way to new centers or to multiple centers of gravity. As Joel Carpenter notes in the foreword, “American evangelicals are learning to embrace Christianity’s changing location and mission in today’s world” (ix), underscoring the interconnectedness of Africa and the African diaspora. As he aptly summarizes, this Festschrift “gives ample evidence to the changes afoot at Trinity, in North American religion and theology fields more generally, and out in the international networks of evangelical theology and mission studies” (xi).

Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (chap. 2), Elias Bongmba (chap. 4), and Casely Essamuah (chap. 5) provide contrasting examples of the impact of old and new

Fifteen Outstanding Books of 2014 for Mission Studies

The editors of the INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN OF MISSIONARY RESEARCH, after consultation with numerous distinguished scholars from around the world, have selected fifteen books published in 2014 for special recognition of their contribution to mission studies. We commend the authors, editors, and publishers represented here for their contribution to the advancement of scholarship in studies of the Christian mission and world Christianity.

Becker, Judith, and Brian Stanley, eds. Europe as the Other: External Perspectives on European Christianity.

Göttingen, Ger.: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. €64.99 D / €66.90 A / SFr 81.50.


Brocker, Liam Matthew.
The Visitor: André Palmeiro and the Jesuits in Asia.

Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press; Belknap Press. $39.95 / £29.95 / €36.


Chan, Simon.

Dahle, Margunn Serigstad, Lars Dahle, and Knud Jørgensen, eds. The Lausanne Movement: A Range of Perspectives.


Fromont, Cécile.
The Art of Conversion: Christian Visual Culture in the Kingdom of Kongo.

Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press. $45.

Hartch, Todd.
The Rebirth of Latin American Christianity.


Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press. $99.


New York: Oxford Univ. Press. $99 / £64; paperback $29.95 / £19.99.


Nguyen van Thanh, and John M. Prior, eds. God’s People on the Move: Biblical and Global Perspectives on Migration and Mission.


Tan, Jonathan Y.
Christian Mission among the Peoples of Asia.


Yong, Amos.

forms of Christianity in Africa and the African diaspora. Asamoh-Gyadu sees higher education as a key to extending new Pentecostal/evangelical influence in the public sphere, as a deliberate mission agenda for addressing national corruption and failed economic policies, and also as a way for Pentecostals to express their theology of dominion. Bongmba draws on Omega Gospel Ministries in Houston as a case study. He explores the religious impact of African immigration in the United States, along the way illustrating the transnational tendencies of African Christianity. Essamuah identifies differing models of mission through an exploration of Ghanaian Methodists in North America and Europe. He highlights challenges faced in new geocultural contexts, even as various loyalties rooted in homeland communities remain evident. The growing phenomenon of reverse missions and short-term missions are now integral to a full understanding of contemporary mission. The book’s interdisciplinary nature is a major asset, with contributions from the fields of anthropology, missiology, religious studies, church history, world Christianity, theology, intercultural studies, and historical studies. Although all the essays are interesting in their own right, most essays in part 2 (e.g., chap. 19 on Japan and chap. 25 on Asia and Latin America) are rather far afield from the book’s main context. Nonetheless, this book is a must-read for scholars and practitioners interested in the historiography of world Christianity through the narratives of Africa and the African diaspora.

---Afe Adogame

Afe Adogame is associate professor of world Christianity and religious studies at the School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh.

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**Christ and Reconciliation.**


If there is a constructive contemporary theologian firmly rooted in the Western theological tradition and yet open and receptive to global perspectives, especially theological contributions emerging from the Global South, to liberationist movements (e.g., black, feminist, and womanist), and to wrestling with issues raised by postliberal, postcolonial, and interfaith studies, it is Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen. Currently professor of systematic theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, Kärkkäinen is a Finnish Pentecostal-charismatic-ecumenical theologian who has lived and worked in Thailand. Christ and Reconciliation is the first volume of his projected five-volume series entitled “Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralist World.”

Many other recent texts on Christology also take account of global and interreligious perspectives. But they generally tend to operate within Euro-American perspectives that are assumed to be universal or normative and to treat contributions from the diversity of Christian traditions as “contextual” or “cultural” or issue-oriented theologies, often relegated to a chapter toward the end of the book. Kärkkäinen, in contrast, treats these other diverse perspectives as equal partners in dialogue. What emerges in the book is a profound Christology that reflects a genuinely global, ecumenical, inclusive, dialogical, and hospitable vision, integrating biblical, historical, and contemporary thought, as well as the perspectives of various cultures and living faiths.

---J. Paul Rajashekar

J. Paul Rajashekar is professor of systematic theology and former academic dean, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

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**Evangelization in China: Challenges and Prospects.**


Working from his primary research interests in interdisciplinary approaches to the religions and cultures of Asia, Kin Sheung Yan’s purpose is “to analyze the Catholic evangelization of China in light of the teachings of the magisterium” (40). The major strength of the work is its well-balanced analysis (in part 3) of the major challenges and prospects inherent in the task of evangelization in China. Chapters 8 and 9 provide an interdisciplinary analysis through the lenses of culture, history, sociology, and politics, from both secular and ecclesial perspectives. The epilogue brings the work up to the present, citing Pope Francis’s quest “to be a bridge of peace, an instrument of dialogue, and a precursor of hope to the world” (147).

While focused predominantly on the Roman Catholic Church in China (part 2), the work also provides a comprehensive study of Christianity in general in China, both historically and in its contemporary context. A revised and expanded version of Yan’s doctoral dissertation in missiology at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, Evangelization in China fills a wide gap in the available literature about the church in contemporary China. It promises especially to serve as a counterweight to the often unbalanced and out-of-context reporting in the Western media—both secular and religious—on religion in China. In so doing, however, it explicitly addresses the very real difficulties and conflicts between the Catholic Church as an institutional player in the sociopolitical arena—both local and international—and state authorities in the People’s Republic of China.

Yan unpacks many of the puzzling contradictions in the history of Christianity in China, even while offering, in the words of Evelyn and James Whitehead of Loyola University Chicago, “an optimistic vision of how the church might yet prosper in this ancient culture and civilization.” Toward this end, he con-


Wilbert Shenk is senior professor of mission history and contemporary culture in the School of Intercultural Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California. He has been engaged in the practice and teaching of mission and its history for the past sixty years; as a founding member of the American Society of Missiology (ASM), he is well positioned to write its forty-year history.

During the four decades of ASM’s existence, mission studies and missiology have undergone several significant shifts. Not the least of these shifts is the move of mission studies from a nadir in the mid-twentieth century to its resurgence by the end of the century, including the establishment of mission studies degree programs in North America. Shenk argues that ASM’s founding vision contributed to this resurgence: not limiting membership to graduate schools accredited by the American Association of Theological Schools, cultivating an ecumenical (Catholic, mainline Protestant, and evangelical) membership and board, and fostering interdisciplinary scholarship on missions.

Furthermore, just as Western scholars were beginning to give greater attention to the rich historical sources contained in missionary archives, attention to the growth of Christianity outside of the Western world burgeoned. Additional exploration of the dependencies and increasing variances between missiological studies and the rise of the field of “world Christianity” would be of great interest but would take Shenk’s discussion well beyond his intended focus.

This book provides a skeletal history of the ASM by chronicling the broad trajectories and decisions that the society has taken. It sketches briefly how those decisions correspond to larger issues within Christian scholarship and higher education but is largely confined to the internal record of the organization. For an accessible introduction to the development of the ASM and to missiology as an academic discipline, Shenk’s concise history is a clear, helpful starting point.

—Jason Bruner

Jason Bruner is assistant professor of Global Christianity at Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona.

Janet Carroll, MM, a Maryknoll missionary, spent sixteen years in sociopastoral ministry in Taiwan. She has been executive director (1989–2003) and senior scholar (2004–9) of the U.S. Catholic China Bureau and currently is liaison for Maryknoll China Programs.

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Publication of The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement in 2004 (Eerdmans) generated demand for a comprehensive history of that movement. General editors D. Newell Williams, Douglas A. Foster, and Paul M. Blowers, along with managing editor Scott Seay, invited ten historians to join them in three successive writing conferences to document the movement. The result of their collaboration is The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History.

The book begins by rehearsing the previously well-documented historiography of the movement in the United States in chapters 1–5. Chapter 6 documents the movement’s development in the United Kingdom as it emerges out of Baptist traditions and then expands throughout Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Chapter 7 traces its worldwide expansion to the remainder of Europe, as well as Asia, Africa, and South America, in the years 1874–1929. The authors return to North America and the United Kingdom in chapters 8–13 to trace the historical, theological, and institutional developments within the movement from the mid-twentieth century to the early twenty-first century. Chapters 14–17 shift attention back to the global expansion of the Stone-Campbell Movement. These four chapters, along with chapter 7, distinguish this work from any previous efforts. The book concludes in a prophetic tone with chapter 18 and an addendum expressing a new hope for unity within the globally diverse movement.

Despite its global scope in content, the book is in need of a global perspective shift in its sourcing. The writers seem to agree: “Though indigenization is a major theme in these accounts, reflecting the current state of historical research and writing on the Stone-Campbell Movement, the authors of this text relied largely on sources written by missionaries. The writers hope that this first attempt at global history will stimulate the writing of additional indigenous histories” (7). The absence of global voices among the Western contributors to this volume makes it read more like a voices among the Western contributors to this volume makes it read more like a


Trajectories of Religion in Africa is a Festschrift in honor of John Pobee, professor emeritus in the Department of the Study of Religions, University of Ghana, and former provost of the Holy Spirit Cathedral in Ghana. Primarily seeking to focus on topics that reflect Pobee’s “scholastic and ecclesiastical engagements” (16), the book’s twenty-one essays address a number of issues related to religion and its role in African life. Grouped under four main categories—mission, ecumenism, and theological education; religion and public space; religion and culture; and the Bible in Africa—a number of the essays deal more specifically with the relationship of Christianity to African cultures. “Biblical Faith and Culture,” by Hans-Ruedi Weber, for instance, argues for continuous translation and interpretation of the Bible in Africa and new cultures worldwide.

Some essays also explore the importance of theological education and the role of religion in social and political life in Africa. In “God Bless Our Homeland Ghana: Religion and Politics in a Post-Colonial African State,” Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu brilliantly analyzes the symbiotic relationships that exist between religion and politics in Ghana. Other contributors look at issues of gender, religious pluralism, and ecumenical relations worldwide.

The book gives us a good portrait of yet another of Africa’s unsung heroes. Pobee undoubtedly deserves much more recognition than he has so far received. Readers of the book will gain helpful road maps for understanding the life and work of this “living ancestor” (16), as colleagues and friends call him. His pioneering and continuing scholarship on many aspects of theology, religion, and social and political life in Africa, and his great involvement in the ecumenical work of the church, particularly through the World Council of Churches, are reflected in a number of the essays.

Moreover, the book is a welcome addition to the literature on Africa. I heartily recommend it to all who seek a one-volume publication that brings together rich essays on the role of religion in Africa.

—Moses O. Biney

Moses O. Biney is assistant professor of religion and society and research director for the Center for the Study and Practice of Urban Religion, New York Theological Seminary.


This book, a Ph.D. thesis in theology at the University of Birmingham, U.K., is the fourth volume of Palgrave Macmillan’s series Christianities of the World. The book is a most useful introduction to contextual theology in Mainland China in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Chow considers previous dichotomous interpretations of Christian theology during the First Chinese Enlightenment (Fundamentalist/Modernist or Confucian Activist/Daoist Pietist) to be inadequate, and instead posits a trichotomous interpretation that he adapts from church historian Justo González and missiologists Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder.

Type A theology, whose prototype was Tertullian, is “countercultural,” whereas Type B (Origen) is “synthetic,” and Type C (Irenaeus) is “historical,” with emphasis on recapitulation and salvation as theosis, or “divinization.”

Following Vera Schwarz, Chow defines the First Chinese Enlightenment as occurring during the May 4, 1919 movement. Heavily influenced by French Enlightenment individualism, it emphasized “Mr. Science” and “Mr. Democracy” and opposed the feudalism of traditional Chinese culture. Chow describes the Second Chinese Enlightenment as occurring during the post-Mao period...
of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, which emphasized religion, as well as science and democracy, and which re instituted Confucianist themes, culminating in the Harmonious Society.

Chow writes a chapter each on three paradigmatic theologians, which he classifies respectively as types A, B, and C: Watchman Nee, T. C. Chao, and K. H. Ting. Nee was author of The Spiritual Man; Chow also classifies Wang Mingdao and John Sung as type A. The early Chao emphasized “spiritual truth” and the appropriation of Confucianism and love but had a low Christology. Ting became head of the Three-Self Protestant Movement (TSPM) in 1980 and emphasized the “Cosmic Christ,” which he adapted from Teilhard de Chardin.

Chow writes a chapter on theological concerns, and his final chapter emphasizes Byzantine Eastern Orthodoxy, with its synergism and theosis, as a valid alternative to what he considers the divine monergism of Augustinian-Reformed theology. For Chow, this position motivated Protestant missions and is dominant in both the TSPM and the unregistered churches in today’s China. Following the traumas of the Maoist era and the challenges of modernization, the Second Chinese Enlightenment has a greater interest in hamartiology. Chow considers the Eastern Orthodox view of “ancestral sin” as preferable to the Augustinian view of “original sin” and more intelligible to traditional Chinese thought; also he proposes Christian theosis according to the traditional Chinese religious dictum of “Heaven and Humanity in Unity” (Tian ren he yi).

The book is to be recommended as a creative interpretation of Mainland Chinese contextual theology in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It would be a useful introduction to Mainland Chinese theology for non-Chinese undergraduate and graduate students. Disappointingly, however, it overlooks the 800-year Eastern Orthodox Nestorian tradition in China, as well as the Chinese Catholic tradition, Protestant European synergistic theology, and significant Protestant missionaries and indigenous Chinese theologians of the nineteenth century.

—Thomas G. Oey

Thomas G. Oey, currently a guest researcher in global studies at Leipzig University, is the author of numerous articles on Christianity in East Asia.

Reincarnation, Oblivion, or Heaven?: An Exploration from a Christian Perspective.


In Reincarnation, Oblivion, or Heaven? the author seeks a theology of religions that is both biblically authentic and effective within pluralistic contexts. Bose approaches this challenge using a comparative study of beliefs concerning death and the “state after death” found in Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and secular humanism.

Chapter 1 presents an engaging and informative overview of Hindu and Muslim perspectives on death and what follows death. Bose also discusses the modern secular perspective, but this is less satisfying. He seems unaware of the lively speculation about the afterlife occurring in secular contexts. In chapters 2–3 he discusses Christian theologians, European and South Asian, from the modern period, beginning with Bonhoeffer and continuing with Devanandan, Neill, Kraemer, M. M. Thomas, Hick, and Küng, focusing on their views regarding

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death and the afterlife in relation to mission, pluralism, relativism, secularism, and Hinduism. Of particular interest is the critical engagement of John Hick’s pluralism hypothesis, which Bose rejects.

Chapter 4 offers a nuanced discussion of biblical hermeneutics that follows Osborne and Thiselton in proposing a methodology centered on authorial intent, narrative theology, and the primacy of God’s love in the metacritical perspective. Chapters 5–10 contain an enjoyable and interesting study of the ancient world, reconnecting Christians to their surprisingly relevant past. Bose begins by revisiting death and the afterlife in the Christian Old Testament (chaps. 5–6) and New Testament (7–8). Chapters 9–10 present a very interesting study of the Apostolic Fathers and the Apologists. Of particular interest is Bose’s exploration of the ways in which the Fathers and Apologists were in conversation with a world similar to our own, in which many educated and urban people believed in either the transmigration of the soul or the finality of death.

In concluding, Bose imagines a scenario in which he would, in dialogue with others, “sensitively reason to show the pointlessness and inconsistencies of some of these [non-Christian] perspectives” (303). Here, he neatly captures the problem with his book. While his study of the Christian tradition is useful and interesting, he can become dismissive when moving beyond a narrowly defined Christian context. In particular, he mischaracterizes or ignores the exciting challenges that secularism, postmodernism, and globalization pose to the evangelical and missionary Christian traditions. As a study of ancient and modern Christian examples of interfaith dialogue, the book is marvelous. Its own contribution to the theology of religions is less worthy.

—Beth Davies-Stofka

China, Christianity, and the Question of Culture.


In the late 1980s and early 1990s, commentators began to describe post–Cultural Revolution China as experiencing a “Christianity fever.” While largely a reference to the surge in converts to Christianity, a similar fever was occurring among intellectuals who were interested in the academic study of the religion. Yang Huilin, professor of comparative literature and religious studies at Renmin University of China, belongs to the first cohort of Chinese intellectuals to contribute avidly to this field, better known as Sino-Christian studies or Sino-Christian theology. China, Christianity, and the Question of Culture includes fourteen of Yang’s essays in this discourse, divided into three parts.

Part 1, entitled “Christianity and Chinese Culture,” discusses subjects in mission history and world Christianity, such as the role and use of language in missionary universities and in Buddhist-Christian dialogue, and an evaluation of the process of the inculturation or contextualization of Christianity in China. Yang’s essays query the success of efforts to import Christianity into China. In chapter 4 he argues that attempts to accommodate Christianity to China’s moral traditions have inadvertently resulted in an “ethicized” Chinese-language Christianity.
limited by the common ground shared with the Chinese traditions and devoid of broader ethical resources found in the Christian tradition. Chapter 5 continues this discussion on ethics by juxtaposing the pain and suffering of the Cultural Revolution with Auschwitz and then suggesting how the “Christian logic of love and forgiveness” (73), shaped in part by the latter event, can contribute to China’s current context.

While many IBMR readers will be immediately drawn to part 1, I recommend not stopping there. Only when read in context with the rest of the volume do the multiple streams that underlie Yang’s erudite scholarship become fully apparent. Part 2 argues for an interdisciplinary discourse of theology engaging the broader humanities, including subjects in literary theory and in postmodern and Marxist thought. In part 3 Yang uses the interfaith practice of “scriptural reasoning”—as promoted by scholars such as Peter Ochs, David F. Ford, and Daniel W. Hardy—to analyze the cross-cultural engagements of Max Müller, James Legge, and the Chinese Union Version of the Bible.

This book is not for the fainthearted. Yang Huilin’s essays are unconventional for the average Western-trained theologian, pastor, or missionary. Yet it is for this very reason that they are important to read. The volume serves as a fascinating snapshot of the vibrant academic discourse on Christianity in China today and provides provocative insights for researchers in missions and world Christianity.

—Alexander Chow

_Tamil Folk Music as Dalit Liberation Theology._


How have Christian Dalits expressed sociopolitical dissent through reclaimation of Indian folk music? And how has the praxis of folk music facilitated theologically based transformation? Ethnomusicologist Zoe Sherinian addresses these questions in _Tamil Folk Music as Dalit Liberation Theology_, an ethnography written with depth, clarity, and commitment to local production on both musical and epistemic levels. Throughout the book, Sherinian highlights the ways in which Dalits—in the face of systemic marginalization based on casteism, sexism, and classism—have used folk music as an expressive medium for liberation theology. As the author emphatically states, Dalit Christian music is “not only an accompaniment to, or vehicle of theology, but is itself theology” (49).

Most of Sherinian’s ethnographic data is drawn from two visits to Tamil Nadu, in 1993–94 and in 2002. At the core of the narrative stands James Theophilus Appavoo (1940–2005), a theologian, musician, community organizer, and teacher at the forefront of the Christian Dalit folk music movement.

The volume is organized in two parts. In part 1 Sherinian contextualizes Christian folk music production, demonstrating how folk music acquires its subversive meanings within the wider Christian musical milieu (chap. 1), presenting an extensive, five-generation biography of Appavoo’s family (chap. 2), and analyzing the three core tenets of Appavoo’s theology in relation to the work of Emilie Townes, Serene Jones, and bell hooks (chap. 3). Part 2...
focuses on the transmission and reception of Appavoo’s legacy, starting from the community at Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary (chap. 4), continuing into several villages in Tamil Nadu (chap. 5), and culminating in Dalit identification with other marginalized groups globally (chap. 6).

Throughout *Tamil Folk Music*, Sheri- nian rightly highlights the invaluable contributions of Appavoo’s work and legacy. As a self-identifying “activist ethn- nomusicologist,” she clearly echoes Dalit commitment to transformation “at this time, in this world” (xvi). At every juncture of the ethnographic representation- al process she testifies to the social injustices endured by Dalits, portraying not only the *how*, but also the *why* behind Christian Dalit identification. Furthermore, Sher- ianian opens a way to think alongside Jones’s notion of “bounded openness,” which promises to enable a more sustained critical reflection on the contributions and limitations of liberation theology, which seems to rely heavily on the politics of oppositional identity. In other words: Is it not necessary to mobilize both lateral and vertical networks to foster sociopolitical change? All in all, readers interested in South Indian Christian studies, liberation theology, and global race theory will find engagement with Zoe Sheri- nian’s *Tamil Folk Music* richly fulfilling.

—Bo kyung Blenda Im

Bo kyung Blenda Im is a doctoral student in ethno- musicology at the University of Pennsylvania, with interests in Korean Christian music and liturgy.

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The Dema and the Christ: My Engagement and Inner Dialogue with the Cultures and Religions of Melanesia.


Ennio Mantovani, a member of the Roman Catholic Society of the Divine Word, spent forty years in Papua New Guinea, first as a missionary and then as a lecturer. He is distinguished not only by letting his missionary work be guided by a deep understanding of the indig- enous culture and society that he served, but also in allowing that understanding to lead to a personal reexamination of his own Western-oriented theological assumptions. The book is a record of that process. It also has a more ambitious implicit agenda, namely, to contribute to the anthropology of religion at a more general level.

Mantovani begins from the anthropo- logical perspective, presenting the elements of Melanesian religions as he sees them. He groups these into two systems: the first reflecting an earlier hunter-gatherer culture that survives in certain religious symbols and myths, the second reflecting a Neolithic gar- dening culture that persists to recent times. He labels these the “theistic” and “biocosmic” systems respectively. The hunter-gatherers were more dependent on nature’s mercies, and their religious consciousness posited a high God who continually provided for them. The plant- ers were less dependent on nature and more on human planning and coopera- tion. Their religious consciousness took the form of ritual that perpetuated the cycle of fertility, involving death, burial, and rebirth. This view found mythical expression in the form of the “Dema,” a spirit who is willingly killed in order that life may continue. Mantovani witnessed an elaborate pig-killing festival that in his view reenacted the Dema myth (although the name “Dema” was not explicitly invoked). A weakness of this section is that it rests on a rather slender selection of the voluminous anthropological litera- ture on Melanesia, which reveals a much greater variety of myths and rituals than are presented here.

Writing as a missionary in the second half of the book, Mantovani tells how he discovered the presence of God’s love in a variety of cultural symbols, not just in the Bible. Old Testament theism, with its condemnation of idolatry, was, in Man- tovani’s view, a product of Hebrew shep- herds’ living among Canaanite planters. From the Melanesians he learned to accept the role of traditional healers, ancestors, and the special knowledge of women; the death of Christ could be interpreted as a version of the Dema story. The biocosmic perspective also gave him an appreciation of evolution as an alternative to the nar- rative of creation and fall as a symbol of God’s ongoing care.

Although quite repetitious at times, the book presents a powerful and provoca- tive account of one missionary’s spiritual journey and of how Christianity can creatively adapt to its local circumstances.

—David Lindenfeld

David Lindenfeld is professor emeritus of history at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge.

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Global Diasporas and Mission.


Published as a part of the Edinburgh Centenary Series on Christian mission, *Global Diasporas and Mission* is an edited volume that explores global diasporas and their implications for twenty-first- century mission. The book conceptual- izes global diasporas as “a ‘theological form’ that accentuates God’s missionary intention for people on the move and the redemptive acts that go along with it, both domestically and globally” (6). Exploring global diasporas from both ecclesiological and missiological perspec- tives, it includes chapters that address the ethnic-specific concerns of global dias- pora churches, as well as chapters that provide a broad overview of the phenom- enon of global diasporas.

What is most striking about this vol- ume is its diversity. *Global Diasporas and Mission* covers various ethnic groups and regions, such as the Japanese diaspora in Brazil, the South Asian diaspora in the Persian Gulf, the Korean diaspora in the United States, and the African diaspora in Germany. Chapters offering historical and biblical perspectives on migration, diaspora, and mission cover both the Old and the New Testaments. Some chapters rely solely on biblical criticism; others, mostly on descriptive statistics. Some authors are evangelical; others are ecumenical or Catholic. The contributors also vary in ethnic background and country
of residence, and they provide a broad spectrum of missiological and theological perspectives. Definitions and the use of the terms *diaspora* and *migration* also vary across the chapters.

Anyone interested in migration, mission, and global diaspora will find something of interest in the chapters in this volume. The very diversity of the book, however, is a limitation, for no concluding chapter pulls the motley collection of essays together to provide a definitive argument or insight regarding diasporas and mission in the twenty-first century.

The epilogue of the book, however, offers a final charge for Christian leaders that will be hard for readers to ignore. No matter their ethnic or racial background, national Christian leaders and churches, as well as diaspora Christian leaders and churches, are all part of a global church. They must therefore learn to do more than tolerate and coexist with each other. Instead, they should love one another. They are called to be unified in Christ and serve as coworkers and cojourneymen on earth on the way toward the City of God, “where diaspora shall be no more” (265).

—Rebecca Y. Kim

Rebecca Y. Kim is professor of sociology at Pepperdine University, Malibu, California.

**Muslim-Christian Relations Observed: Comparative Studies from Indonesia and the Netherlands.**


*Muslim-Christian Relations Observed,* the outcome of a series of consultations organized by the Indonesian Dutch Consortium on Muslim-Christian Relations, is a valuable recent contribution that juxtaposes Muslim and Christian encounters, discourses, and social realities in two contexts: contemporary Indonesia and the Netherlands. The contributors include scholars and activists, Christian and Muslim, from both countries. Organized into five sections, the book features twenty-three essays, an introduction by the editors, and short introductions to each of the sections. The volume will be of interest to students of Muslim-Christian relations, students of Islam and Christianity in Asia, as well as students of religion in modern Europe, religion and gender, and interreligious dialogue.

Essays in section 1 (“Identity”) present the findings of research on particular Muslim or Christian communities—for

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**Family Accountability in Missions: Korean and Western Case Studies**

This twenty-eight-chapter paperback book presents case studies and responses given at the Korean Global Mission Leadership Forum convened June 11–14, 2013, at the Overseas Ministries Study Center, publisher of the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research.* Jonathan J. Bonk, the forum organizer, is OMSC executive director emeritus and senior mission consultant.

“Accountability is the operative word in this important volume. Every mission agency will need to take a careful look at this volume to help in how they support and care for missionary families. This is a welcome and long overdue book on a topic that is at the heart of the Protestant missionary movement.”

—Scott W. Sunquist, dean, School of Intercultural Studies, professor of world Christianity, Fuller Theological Seminary

Details and ordering information: www.omsc.org/accountability

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**Introducing OMSC’s Senior Mission Scholar in Residence**

**FALL 2015: DR. A. WATI LONGCHAR**

Dr. Longchar is professor and dean for extension and the Doctor of Ministry program of the Senate Centre for Extension and Pastoral Theological Research (SCEPTRE), a division of the Senate of Serampore College (University), Kolkata, India. SCEPTRE was established in 2001 to promote diversified theological education and practice of ministry. A noted researcher of contextualized theology, Dr. Longchar was a joint consultant of ecumenical theological education (2001–07) for the World Council of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia. He is co-editor of *Asian Handbook for Theological Education and Ecumenism* (2013) and author of *Returning to Mother Earth: Christian Witness, Theology, and Theological Education* (2012). He is editor of the Programme for Theology and Cultures in Asia (PTCA) series.
instance, in The Hague or Surakarta. One essay focuses on religious education in Indonesia since 1998 (the beginning of the Reformasi period), and another covers Indonesian student attitudes toward religious plurality. These essays provide a revealing glimpse into the complex factors that shape the religious identities of Muslims and Christians in various contexts. The essays in section 2 (“Religion and State”) look at the differing relationships between religion and politics in Indonesia and in Holland. Of special interest is a discussion of the political involvements of religious groups in Indonesia since 1998, and a discussion of the official statement on Islam published by the Protestant Church in the Netherlands in 2011. The essays in section 3, on gender, consider the roles of women in Indonesia’s Pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), the place of gender studies in Christian theological education in Indonesia, the ways Scripture and custom can be used to oppress women, and the efforts of women in fostering interreligious dialogue in the Netherlands. Several essays in section 4 (“Hermeneutics”) define and illustrate “interreligious reading.” In two notable essays, a Christian author studies a Quranic passage, and a Muslim studies a biblical theme. The volume concludes, in section 5 (“Theology of Dialogue”), with essays on interfaith dialogue, including one on the distinctiveness and potential leadership of Indonesia in the wider Muslim world, another on the relationship between dialogue and mission, and a concluding essay on “dialogue through the arts.”

The strength of Muslim Christian Relations Observed is also its weakness. Though, or perhaps because, it covers a great deal of territory, it has a somewhat uneven feel. Essays in the volume range widely in terms of content and methodology. Some are empirical and descriptive, others are reflections based on the authors’ experiences, and others are oriented toward advocacy. Since the volume as a whole seeks to promote friendly interreligious relations, it tends to neglect important conversion-oriented movements within Islam and Christianity and the kinds of interreligious relations they foster. Finally, the volume’s two-page introduction fails to sufficiently orient the reader to the volume’s contents. Despite these quibbles, Muslim Christian Relations Observed is a valuable contribution, with much to offer scholars and other interested readers.

——Matthew J. Kuiper

Matthew J. Kuiper is a Ph.D. candidate in world religions and world church at the University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana.

Blood and Ink: Ignacio Ellacuría, Jon Sobrino, and the Jesuit Martyrs of the University of Central America.


When the president of the Jesuit University of Central America (UCA) in El Salvador, Fr. Ignacio Ellacuría, SJ, was assassinated in the early hours of November 16, 1989, by a unit of the U.S.-trained Atlacatl Battalion, the order of Colonel Benavides was to leave no witnesses. Thus six other priests, their housekeeper, and her daughter were also killed. One of the six was Fr. Juan Ramon Moreno, beside whose body was found a blood-soaked copy of The Crucified God, by Jürgen Moltmann. The blood and ink on the pages of Moltmann’s classic not only provided the title of Robert

——Matthew J. Kuiper

Matthew J. Kuiper is a Ph.D. candidate in world religions and world church at the University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana.
Lassalle-Klein’s book but also raise the question, How can a Christian university grounded in God’s preferential option for the poor take the “crucified people” of El Salvador down from the cross? The book’s extraordinary depth and detail provide minute puzzle-pieces that document events and atrocities, but they also describe the real-life context in which the Jesuits of UCA taught, analyzed reality, and ministered. Their congregants were thirsty for a theology that spoke to the Salvadoran reality. Lassalle-Klein insightfully describes how UCA decided to do in “its university way” what Msgr. Oscar Romero had done in “his pastoral way” by demanding justice for El Salvador’s poor (185). In 1980, while blessing communion elements during mass, the archbishop was assassinated on the orders of Maj. Roberto D’Aubisson.

Ellacuria’s theology is clearly explained as he deals with the reality of the poor masses; he sees Christ in the witness of Archbishop Romero and massacred peasants. The last sections continue the theological dialogue about how those who suffer can be taken down from the cross to participate in the resurrection of a society where love and justice reign.

Comparing the role of the United States in El Salvador to that of Rome in the time of Christ, this book sees new hope and strength for the masses in the blood of the martyrs. There is great mystery here; Blood and Ink challenges us to be transformed by it.

—Henry Hale Bucher Jr.

Henry Hale Bucher Jr. is chaplain emeritus and associate professor emeritus at Austin College, Sherman, Texas.


In this study, Edward Smither, professor of intercultural studies at Columbia International University, Columbia, South Carolina, offers an overview of the missional practices of early Christians. Noting the relative lack of discussion of this time period within the broader field of missiology, Smither hopes this book, written especially for undergraduates and lower-level graduate students, will invite others to delve more deeply into the Christian past for inspiration when addressing issues that face Christian missions today.

The first two chapters provide an introduction to early Christianity and its spread from A.D. 100 to 750. The remaining six chapters focus on particular aspects that were important for the mission of early Christianity: (chap. 3) the willingness to suffer for the Gospel, (4) the proclamation of the Gospel to nonbelievers, (5) the efforts to translate the Bible, (6) the importance of contextualizing the Gospel in new cultural settings, (7) Christian ministry to the poor and needy, and (8) the role of the local church in fostering community and encouraging conversions. Each chapter includes a set of reflection questions.

Several aspects of Smither’s work could have been improved. First, the study is heavily dependent on earlier overviews of the early Christian period. Very little original discussion of or interaction with primary texts is apparent. Second, Smither’s discussion of certain features of early Christian writings seems to lack critical perspective. For example, when discussing martyrdom literature in chapter 3, he argues that the pains and deaths suffered by the martyrs “surely encouraged sympathy from pagan audiences” (63). A crucial difficulty with this claim is the dearth of accounts of Christian martyrdoms written by pagans. Early Christian accounts of martyrdoms speak at times of a pagan audience’s horror and grief at the sufferings of the Christians, but we should hesitate to take these Christian accounts completely at face value, given the interest of the early Christians in presenting their opponents as sympathetic to the Christian cause.

Despite these shortcomings, Smither’s study is successful insofar as it suggests the wealth of material for the field of missiology found in early Christianity. It is to be hoped that missional efforts increasingly will be inspired by the riches of wisdom found in the Christian past.

—Andrew C. Chronister

Andrew C. Chronister is a doctoral candidate in the department of theological studies at St. Louis University, St. Louis, Missouri.

The Truth Within: A History of Inwardness in Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism.


Why study the history of inwardness among three diverse religions? The answer of Gavin Flood, professor of Hindu studies at Oxford: “The collective subjectivity of the cosmological religions offers a potentially forceful model for human solidarity in the future” (269).

How actually to achieve human solidarity is beyond the scope of this work. That glimmer of purpose, however, is one of many ways this volume prompts attention to the discipline of comparative religions. The Truth Within addresses accusations by postcolonial and postmodern critics that religious comparison originating from Western perspectives has perpetuated the subjugation and oppression of many dissenting voices.

From a sociological and missiological perspective, such criticism is well founded. Flood includes his own critique of Christian missionaries who imposed external ideologies based on etic explanations (251–53), but he offers no critiques of Buddhist or more recent Hindu evangelizing efforts. As a warning to those desiring to follow the missio Dei (not a term used by the author), this book is a reminder that believing one’s own interpretive perspective of the “other,” however well-intended, can lead to disastrous results.

Flood’s first section describes the history of the developmental process of searching for “the truth within” (subjectivity) found as a common thread in the three religions of the title. But why these three faiths were chosen and not others remains a mystery to the reader. Scholars of church history may find it disturbing that the work of many well-known Christian mystics is missing. Those interested in how the pursuit of inner truth grew within Hinduism and the three major branches of Buddhism will find plentiful resources here.

The second section of the book seeks to develop a theory of inwardness. This transcendental process, according to
Flood, is not so much concerned with the truth that is sought as it is with the commonality of purpose: to pursue truth through one’s inward being. The evaluation of our mutual hermeneutic, according to the author, merits our time, study, and continued devotion.

As an evangelical missiologist, I find myself more concerned about where I am headed than in discussing the process of getting there. One thing I appreciated about this work was Flood’s constant insistence that seeking truth through inwardness is not a purely individualistic pursuit in the modern sense. Inwardness and individuality are distinct yet linked, which for Christians could be a lesson in the balance between the personal inner life of the soul and the heart call of our worshipping communities.

Those interested in interreligious dialogue should become familiar with this book and the approach it takes. Others will find it heavy (and expensive!) reading.

—Paul H. de Neui

September 9, 2015
A public reception to welcome the 2015–2016 OMSC international community of residents will be held at 4:00 p.m. All are invited.

September 10–11
U.S. Churches Today.
Rev. Geoffrey A. Little, All Nations Christian Church, New Haven, provides an overview with a guided tour of New Haven and area churches.

September 15, 7:00 p.m.
Public Lecture.
Servant Leadership of Jesus Christ.
Dr. Won Sang Lee, SEED International and Korean Central Presbyterian Church, Centreville, Virginia.

September 16–18
Dr. Won Sang Lee, SEED International and Korean Central Presbyterian Church, Centreville, Virginia, points participants toward spiritually fervent, Christlike service of God and others.

September 21
Korean Pastors Luncheon.
Korean pastors and church missions leaders will attend this annual event.

September 23, 10:00 a.m.
Community Ministries Forum.
Sponsored by OMSC and its Spirituality and Public Affairs Network.

September 24–25
How to Develop Mission and Church Archives.
Ms. Martha Lund Smalley, Yale Divinity School Library, helps missionaries and church leaders identify, organize, and preserve essential records.

September 28, 7:00 p.m.
Public Lecture.
Dr. A. Wati Longchar, OMSC resident senior mission scholar, Senate of Serampore College (University), Kolkata, India.

September 30–October 1
Stress and the Missionary: Seeking a Healthy Response.
Ms. Barbara Hüfner-Kemper, psychotherapist and United Methodist missionary, White Plains, New York, helps participants walk through common experiences of stress. She asks, “What does stress do to the brain and the body and how can we find a healthy response?”

Saturday, October 3, 7:30 p.m.
An inspirational concert to support OMSC
“LIFE ROAD SINGERS”
A professional choir from Hong Kong Korean Mission Church will perform in English and Korean—with their vibrant and distinctly Korean flavor. Held at Yale University’s Battell Chapel.
Details: www.omsc.org/concert.

October 6
Dinner and Mission Lecture.
Special invitation to bivocational pastors, church mission leaders.

October 13–16
Mission Seminar.
Dr. A. Wati Longchar, OMSC resident senior mission scholar, Senate of Serampore College (University), Kolkata, India.

October 20–23
First and Second African Diasporas.
Professor Andrew F. Walls, University of Edinburgh, Liverpool Hope University, and Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture, and Ingrid Reneau Walls, Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture.

October 23, 12:30 p.m.
Mission Research Colloquium.
Professor Andrew F. Walls and Ingrid Reneau Walls will conclude their mission seminar.

October 27, 7:00 p.m.
Public Lecture.

October 29, 10:00 a.m.
Community Ministries Forum.
Sponsored by OMSC and its Spirituality and Public Affairs Network.

November 11–13
Healing the Wounds of Trauma: Help for Ourselves and Others.
Dr. Harriet Hill, Trauma Healing Institute of the American Bible Society, helps participants use Scripture and basic mental health principles to find healing of emotional pain and equips them to help others.

November 17–18
Intercultural Theology.
Dr. Volker Küster, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany, will discuss a reflexive theology that is aware of the fluidity and ambiguity of religious traditions and is thus intercultural.

November 17, 7:00 p.m.
Public Lecture.
Christianity and Art.
Dr. Volker Küster, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany.

December 1–3
The Gospel of Peace in Dynamic Engagement with the Peace of Islam.
Dr. David W. Shenk, Eastern Mennonite Missions, explores the church’s calling to bear witness to the Gospel of peace in its engagement with Muslims, whether in contexts of militancy or in settings of moderation.

December 9, 4:00 p.m.
Christmas Reception.
OMSC’s staff and international community of residents welcome friends, supporters, and others to a festive Christmas celebration. All are invited.

REGISTER: Seminar details, a list of cosponsors, links to register for seminars, and OMSC’s brochure may be found online at www.omsc.org/seminars.

COST: The cost is $100 for each multi-day mission seminar. Public lectures, mission research colloquia, receptions, or similar events are free. Ticket prices and other details about the concert on October 3 will be posted online.

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