Book Reviews

Early Christianity in Contexts: An Exploration across Cultures and Continents.

As William Tabbernee explains in his introduction, Early Christianity in Contexts differs from many surveys of the early church in that it focuses on the use of material evidence “not only to give information about the origins of Christianity in a given location but also to provide a physical and cultural context for the particular kind of Christianity that existed in that location” (6). To achieve this goal, Tabbernee has mustered the expertise of over a dozen contributors, each specializing in a particular region. The goal of each author is to “present the various Christian communities . . . on their own terms and, as much as possible, with their own voice” (7). Spanning the period from the first Christians through the close of Late Antiquity (ca. 30–ca. 640), chapters first describe a region’s pre-Christian culture, especially its religious background, and then describe the region’s particular kind of Christianity through discussion of its inscriptions, church architecture, and many other artifacts.

These essays enrich the traditional portrait of early Christianity in two major ways. First, their geographic scope is broader and their attention to subregions and cities more detailed than most students of the period will have encountered. No mere survey of “East” and “West,” the book explores locations such as Persia, the Caucasus, Central Asia, Axum, and the borders of Roman Britannia, in addition to Roman North Africa, Greece, and Asia Minor. This expanding of the map allows some contributors to challenge the thesis that early Christianity was primarily an urban phenomenon.

Second, while “context” is emphasized in much contemporary scholarship, few have given more than cursory exposure to the role of material culture. Readers may be surprised, for instance, to learn of the significance of burial customs in Georgia and Lower Nubia in discerning the spread of Christianity in those regions. Issues of interpretation are by no means lacking when working with material evidence, as when considering possible Montanist associations of inscriptions throughout Asia Minor. By listing the locations of geographic sees, even texts such as conciliar documents give clues to more than doctrinal disputes. And, of course, the lack of systematic archaeological excavation can greatly hinder knowledge of an area’s Christian history, as in northern Iraq. For those whose study of the early church has been framed mainly by examination of literary evidence, these and many other examples provoke new questions about Christianity’s emergence in specific environments. Each chapter is also supplemented by maps, photographs, and primary-source sidebars.

Tabbernee’s volume will be a vital research companion for scholars of early Christianity at every academic level. Scholars of the history of missions will also discover plentiful material on how the church took root among, and interacted with, an array of cultures—historical data of great contemporary relevance.

—Sarah Patterson White

Sarah Patterson White is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Theological Studies, St. Louis University, St. Louis, Missouri.

To All Nations from All Nations: A History of the Christian Missionary Movement.

It is widely recognized that the centers of Christianity have shifted southward and that the traditional mission sending centers in Europe and North America are experiencing a general decline. This southward shift was noted by missiological historian Andrew Walls before the turn of the millennium. But how did Christianity arrive in Africa? How did it take root in the far East? How did it grow in Latin America?

In answer to these questions and others, Carlos Cardoza-Orlandi and Justo González have produced a commendable volume that covers the centrifugal spread of the Christian faith from Jerusalem in the New Testament period right up to today. In discussing the geographic and chronological organization of this advance, the authors highlight the multidirectional nature of mission. Going beyond a traditional (and colonial) reading of mission history, Cardoza-Orlandi and González recount the expansive growth of Christianity by noting the missionary activity that proceeded from the peripheries rather than only from the traditional ecclesiial and missionary centers. In contrast with earlier mission historians, Cardoza-Orlandi and González’s approach gives more serious consideration to the cultural and religious context wherein Christianity took root. In locating these peripheral centers of growth, Cardoza-Orlandi and González recognize many martyrs and missionaries who would otherwise have been overlooked and forgotten.

In their clear organization of mission history, Cardoza-Orlandi and González have composed a comprehensive chronicle not only of “the expansion of Christianity but also of the history of its own many conversions—of what the church has learned and discovered as its faith becomes incarnate in various times, places, and cultures” (3). They account for shifts in missionary methods in the various contexts and eras. In the closing chapter they underscore the urgent need for the church today to recover a truly biblical perspective on mission that addresses the issues pertinent in our various current contexts. Our perspective on mission must involve dissociating ourselves from mission praxes that are wedded with imperialism, consumerism, hedonism, and all other syncretistic distractions that take the focus away from the task that God has given us. Their blend of historical perception, theological
profundity, and missiological perspicuity makes this an outstanding volume, not only for students of mission history, but also for anyone else who is interested in understanding the expansive growth of Christianity.

Cardoza-Orlandi and González’s work gives concrete emphasis to the multidirectional nature of mission. Theirs is a passionate plea: that whatever the direction might be—centripetal or centrifugal, forward or reverse—mission must be supremely what the church is about: fulfilling the Great Commission, bringing Christ “to all nations, from all nations.” —Andrew Peh

Andrew Peh is the dean of students, Trinity Theological College, Singapore, where he teaches in the area of mission. He graduated from E. Stanley Jones School of World Mission and Evangelism, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky, and serves as a diaconal minister with the Methodist Church in Singapore.

The Future of Evangelical Theology: Soundings from the Asian American Diaspora.


Although the title of the book may be a bit misleading, since the majority of the “soundings” are about the past and the present rather than the future, Amos Yong has molded several previously published articles into a single volume that raises a number of important issues for evangelicals. Race, language, and culture are at the center of this book, which intends to provoke Asian American evangelicals to see with a new clarity what it means to do theology immersed in one’s own distinctive ethnic heritage. Yong’s work is based on his own personal history, as is his thesis that “Asian American experiences and perspectives have much to contribute to the broader evangelical theological discussion” (27). His argument is rooted in his self-description as a 1.5 generation Asian American pent-evangelical (i.e., “Pentecostal-evangelical”) theologian who hopes to remind evangelicals about the significance of the Day of Pentecost and to encourage them to engage in a reconfiguration of the global evangelical theological conversation so as to heed the particularities of various linguistic, cultural and social dynamics” (27).

North American evangelical and world Christian concerns frame the book and help readers understand how Yong’s own life story has been affected by those realities. He addresses decisions made by his parents and others to embrace an evangelical theology which asserted that new life in Christ meant a complete disassociation from past cultural, racial, linguistic, and ethnic identities—a complete capitulation to a particular idea of Christian identity. Yong claims that Asian American evangelicals have embraced a theological outlook that is dominated by a white American evangelical consensus void of diverse perspectives. Asian American evangelicals have, in fact, unwittingly identified with an evangelical culture that has silenced their distinctive voice. They have also, however, arrived at a pivotal moment. Yong argues that they have a choice “to allow nonethic (read: white) Evangelicals to continue to set the theological agenda that minimizes or marginalizes their perspectives, or to assert why the historicity and particularity of the Asian American history and experience” matters for evangelical theology (97).
Yong’s book will challenge readers to reflect on how ethnic identity and Pentecostal theology can contribute to theological dialogue. He asserts that the New Testament has already answered the important questions regarding the role of the Holy Spirit in the redemption of “languages, cultures and traditions for the glory of God” (32). For many, this book could serve as a clarion call for a radical departure from the status quo—a conscious move to embrace a new multicultural hermeneutic and theological discourse liberated from the confines of white American evangelicals but centered in a pneumatology that brings unity to diversity. Yong’s book is vitally important for his perceptive analysis of evangelical theology and for encouraging readers to listen to the diverse theological voices present in world Christianity. Reading Yong should inspire deep reflection on the otherness of being part of world Christianity today.

—Darin D. Lenz

Darin D. Lenz is associate professor of history, Pacific University, Fresno, California.

Capture These Indians for the Lord: Indians, Methodists, and Oklahomans, 1844–1939.


Tash Smith provides a fresh and rich window into Southern Methodist’s Indian missions as Oklahoma came to statehood at the turn of the twentieth century. A finely researched and nicely crafted book, Capture These Indians for the Lord is one of a growing genre of studies focused on particular Christian denominations and their relationships with the Native communities they sought to “civilize and Christianize.” Smith explores nearly one hundred years of mission history and interaction between Southern Methodist Church leaders and the Oklahoma tribes with whom they were engaged during a time of rapid change. In doing so, he sheds light on the prevailing assimilationist attitudes, growing tensions, and growing inability of the Southern Methodist leadership to mold a Native church in its own image.

Like a number of other similar narratives, Smith’s story reveals a Native people whose social and religious identity, while in flux, enabled them to create “their own religious space” (192) within the confines of imposed church structures and so to accept conversion on their own terms. Dependent on the use of Native translators and pastors, missionaries struggled to retain control over Indian churches where use of Native languages continued to give a certain amount of autonomy to Native congregations. Indian pastors were not only necessary to provide oversight of a growing flock of Native converts but also were able to make Christian conversion a seamless process for their people by connecting biblical principles with “already established Native practices” (67). Drawing on church records, Smith highlights the ministry of Native pastors such as Choctaw Willis Folsom, who exhorted his people to seasons of deep and personal, even secret, prayer, over which white missionaries had little control. Likewise, protracted camp meetings, encouraged by the missionaries, became a traditional form for community gatherings in which religious meetings played only a part, albeit a substantial part. Folsom and his colleagues were thus able to indigenize Christian faith while providing a “third alternative” (193) to outright acceptance or rejection of Southern Methodism.

Following the 1889 land run that led to statehood in 1907, Southern Methodist focus shifted to the white Oklahomans moving by droves into the area. This shift resulted in growing indifference toward and segregation of Indian churches, giving them even greater autonomy. Smith is persuasive in his argument that Native pastors used the structures of the Southern Methodist Church to support their own understanding and practice of Christian faith, creating an enduring legacy of Methodist American Indians.

—Bonnie Sue Lewis

Bonnie Sue Lewis is associate professor of mission and Native American Christianity, University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa.


Michael W. Goheen divides Introducing Christian Mission Today into three main sections: (1) biblical theology of missions, (2) historical reflections, and (3) current issues and contemporary developments. Goheen notes in his introduction that the paradigm for mission has shifted from being Western to being global, from political expansion to transformation, and from using the Bible to authenticate a preconceived view of missions to deriving mission from the Bible (15–32). This shift has shaped the writing of this book and informed its consciousness of the global perspective in the domain of missions and mission theology.

In part 1, in a departure from a simply historical discussion of the biblical foundation of missions, Goheen focuses on understanding the Bible itself as a mission story that is universal, centripetal, and eschatological (48). This story is translatable to every context and generation (68–69). Calling attention to the inseparability of the Bible mission story and theology in discussion of missions enables Goheen to provide a robust reflection on the interrelatedness of several theological concerns such as Scripture, eschatology, soteriology, Christology, ecclesiology, and pneumatology. The perspective he offers responds to the challenge of “sacralization and secularization” (81–113).

Regarding mission history, he notes that from Bible times to the present, contexts have always shaped missions. Paradigms he identifies include church, kingdom, enlightenment, ecumenical engagement, and global Christianity. The paradigm of global Christianity is current today, which offers opportunity for Christians all around the world to air their views and to listen to others as well (117–224).

Within current mission issues, Goheen addresses the redefinition of missions in chapter 6, “Holistic Mission: Witness in Life, Word and Deed.” He also notes the centrality of a form of contextualization that in each of the world’s settings is faithful to the Bible and free from ethnocentrism and relativism, as well as from syncretism and irrelevance. Rejecting the notion of a “trans-cultural theology” that is “universally true for all cultures” (264–94), he affirms the translatability of the Gospel into every culture as something crucial that enables ownership of the faith by all peoples. He raises other issues that require critical attention, including partnerships, holistic ministry, and “supporting national mis-
Don’t Throw the Book at Them: Communicating the Christian Message to People Who Don’t Read.


While often overlooked, Jesus’ strategy for making disciples did not include writing a book or even requiring his followers to read one. Harry Box’s volume takes Jesus’ strategy seriously, providing a valuable introduction to the legitimacy of oral communication systems and the implementation of oral strategies within missions. The author’s contagious enthusiasm permeates his writing; the time has clearly come to leverage oral communication methods for transformation within communities that value the spoken word.

Box’s premise challenges the status quo of many mission strategies: “If we want to communicate the Christian message to people who do not read, then a literacy based strategy is probably not the best way to go” (xiv). His model for reconceptualizing missional communication strategy is none other than Jesus’ own approach. Instead of using a literate method that would have been accessible only to the educated elite, Jesus followed the first-century rabbinic tradition of oral pedagogy. Furthermore, Jesus’ oral communication techniques ensured that everyone could not only learn but also then reteach what was learned (55–56).

Two central motifs emerge. First, oral communication systems are not inferior or merely illustrative for sharing the Gospel. Therefore it follows that, for an oral, event-oriented people group, oral methods resembling their favored communication style will be the most effective for enabling that group to understand the message of salvation. This approach requires that cross-cultural communicators be willing to set aside their typically literate orientations and openly seek to understand and implement “local” oral paradigms and techniques.
Second, Box argues that oral methods are actually the most effective way to train Christian leaders within oral communities. This view is contrary to the usual Western theological education paradigm, which associates leadership development with formal, literacy-oriented practices. It is worth noting that Box does not ignore the pervasiveness of the printed word but rather associates leadership development with theological education paradigm, which underscores that worship and mission are inseparably and integrally related. She states that “worship and mission are considered. Her passion is to see that “well-crafted worship reflects a gospel vision, an understanding that God is at work in the world” (229).

Wilkey organizes Worship and Culture in relationship to the work of the Lutheran World Federation and its three historic statements on worship and culture. Part 1 draws on and revisits the 1993 Cartigny Statement on biblical and historical foundations under the heading “Worship and Culture in Dialogue.” Part 2 draws on and revisits the 1996 Nairobi Statement under the heading “Unity in Cultural Diversity.” Part 3 draws on and revisits the 1998 Chicago Statement under the heading “Baptism, Rites of Passage, and Culture.”

While there are many insightful and helpful essays in this volume, the two essays by Gordon Lathrop—pastor, writer, teacher, and leader in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States and beyond—are extremely helpful. The first one, “Every Foreign Country a Homeland, Every Homeland a Foreign Country: On Worship and Culture,” gives shape to the subtitle of the book. It sets forth a great framework for understanding the other essays. The second one, “Reenvisioning the Shape of the Liturgy: A Framework for Contextualization,” serves as a great summary of much of the work in this volume.

The combination of these two books provides an important foundation for integrating worship and mission today. Missional Worship explores the vital concept that worship and mission must be held together at all times with deeper exploration of how the components of corporate worship form and shape that vision. Worship and Culture then builds on this framework with its in-depth look through varied lenses at how mission advances into the varied places in which the Gospel takes root around the world. The 1996 Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture with its insights into worship that is “transcultural, contextual, counter-cultural, and cross-cultural” ties these two books together extremely well.
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Dr. Longchar is professor and dean for extension and the Doctor of Ministry program of the Senate Centre for Extension and Pastoral Theological Research (SCEPTR), a division of the Senate of Serampore College (University), Kolkata, India. SCEPTR 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.
Toward an African Church in Mozambique: Kamba Simango and the Protestant Community in Manica and Sofala, 1892–1945.


The fruit of the author’s long career in both church and academia, Toward an African Church in Mozambique is a carefully constructed exploration of the life of the evangelical Protestant community in the Manica and Sofala region of Mozambique. Leon Spencer began this project as an archivist at Talladega College, where he acquired the papers of Fred Bunker, who, beginning in 1891, served in the region under the auspices of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. In these papers, Spencer discovered an extensive correspondence between Bunker and the African men who would be his longtime partners in the work of the church, especially Kamba Simango, a Ndau Christian whose remarkable educational achievements in the United States between 1914 and 1922 brought him into contact with Melville Herskovits and numerous other intellectuals. In these exchanges, Spencer recognized a unique opportunity to address the paucity of African voices that has existed in far too much of the literature about communities of African Christians birthed out of missionary movements.

The book’s resulting narrative goes a long way toward addressing that lack. Spencer’s gleanings from the Bunker collection have been richly supplemented with numerous other archival collections, including those of the Swiss Mission and the South African General Mission, all meticulously detailed in his many footnotes. Spencer divides the narrative into two sections, the first focused on missionary activity and the second on the work of African Protestants to continue the life of their Christian communities once missionary efforts had largely faltered. Although the two sections generally cover the same span of time, they provide quite distinct perspectives. In the first section we read much, for example, about the intersection of missionary activity with the policies of the colonial Portuguese government, especially after the Salazar regime began promoting its vision of a unified national project in the 1930s, which left little room for English-speaking Protestant missionaries in its colonies. The second section focuses mostly on the activities of the two African evangelical organizations that emerged in the region as missionary influence waned, the Associação Evangélica and the Grêmio Negrolíbrio, on the motives of and tensions among their mostly Ndau leadership, and on the reasons for their eventual dissolution in 1944 at the hands of the Portuguese authorities. Though Kamba Simango is central to the story, as the title suggests, other lesser known but clearly influential Ndau evangelists also come to the fore, such as Tapera Nkomo and Bede Simango. With each of them, Spencer admirably highlights both their achievements and their limitations as they wrestled with the formation of a Christian community within their own context. In this way, Spencer has made a significant contribution to our understanding of the making of African churches.

—Bill McCoy

Bill McCoy is assistant professor of history, Eastern Nazarene College, Quincy, Massachusetts.


Should context critique, text critique culture, or both? Contextualization and intercultural communication issues persist as information expands. This is the eighth book in Baker Academic’s Encountering Mission series. Colleagues at Wheaton College and Graduate School, the authors apply academic and practical wisdom to the task of communicating information, especially the Gospel, across cultural thresholds.

Four sections, comprising twenty-four chapters, provide the book’s structure. The introduction parallels the word Christian in the subtitle, asserting that humans “are made in the image of the God who reveals ... who has communicated himself to us by revealing himself ... and we are commanded to communicate the message of the good news with others” (1). Without these premises the rest would not make sense in a world arguing for a naturalistic, closed universe and with mounting religious pluralisms that claim to be equally valid. Unique truth is passé in a universalistic world, or so others argue.

Anthropology features strongly in this book, nearly too strongly. At first reading, one may sense imbalance between blended social sciences and missiology. Balance appears in chapters 18–21. The chapter treating discipleship through local rituals is particularly helpful. Historically, some may have misunderstood indigenous rituals, missing their discipling potential. The authors note this error, commenting that preexisting rituals “may be adaptable to church life, such as rituals for conflict resolution, life transitions, and socialization—in other words, rituals important for discipleship” (275). The term adaptable is subject to the communicator’s contextualization convictions, which brings us to the beginning. More biblical-text dominance in spots, and less context dominance in others, would strengthen the book. Overall, however, it is a strong contender for the text lists of seminaries and graduate schools of world mission.

—Keith E. Eitel

Keith E. Eitel is professor of missions and world Christianity, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, and dean of its Key Fish School of Evangelism and Missions.

Renewing Christian Theology: Systematics for a Global Christianity.


A recent visit to the exhibition Rembrandt: The Late Works at the National Gallery in London with its visual analysis of biblical themes put me in a receptive mood for this book in which the interaction between the theologian Amos Yong and
the art critic Jonathan Anderson has clearly encouraged a fruitful synthesis: Yong’s renewal theology as viewed through “Anderson’s eyes.” (See the title and perspective offered by Simon Schama in his book, Rembrandt’s Eyes [Knopf, 1999]).

This is a thoughtful and inspirational book. Thoughtful in its alternative way of approaching theology: using a renewal lens to reorder and reassess traditional theological categories and giving priority to the flow of Christian life, where experience precedes analysis. Inspirational in its format: biblical characters are the starting point for theological discussion in each chapter, ranging from John the Baptist through Judas and “Legion” to “Cornelius the Just.” Throughout, Yong seeks to do justice to biblical, theological, and contextual concerns, and Anderson’s work represents a number of important artistic interpolations. The bibliography ranges far and wide over theological themes and includes regional and global perspectives.

Behind the practical layout lies a deeper framework adopted by the author, namely, the statement of faith of the World Assemblies of God. For Yong, this statement of faith “provides a springboard for renewing Christian theology . . . in global context” (27). Yong draws on two realities: the impact of renewal streams on global Christianity, and the role of spirituality and experience in renewal Christianity. By “starting with the Spirit” (15), he thus reverses the usual order of theological categories. From eschatology, he goes on to the gifts and baptism of the Holy Spirit, sanctification, and the sacraments, and then the church, salvation, creation, the Godhead, and the Scriptures.

This framework, “privileging renewal perspectives” (25), lies at the heart of the book. Such a stance often illuminates themes, as in the chapter on communion (which contrasts pneumatological perspectives from renewal theologians with that of Calvin) or in the chapter on the Scriptures (which sheds light on renewal views of hermeneutics). Occasionally, the ordering of themes seems slightly out of kilter. Consideration of Reformed views of cessationism precedes general discussion of the Holy Spirit, and sometimes there seems to be too much stress on renewal themes—such as the focus on missio Spiritus, particularly in relation to church—but Yong is consistent in developing his stated emphasis.

Global issues are constantly in mind in both the text and the artistic images, where Anderson’s eclectic choice of visual arts themes and his aesthetic erudition complement the textual theological analyses. As a teacher of contextual theology in arts and mission courses, I was encouraged to find a book that engages theologically with artistic themes. The book aims to present “not only a set of concrete proposals but also an example of theological thinking” (352). Overall, Yong’s project succeeds; it has an open-ended quality that theologians and students alike should find stimulating.

—Warren R. Beattie

Warren R. Beattie is the M.A. program leader and tutor in contextual theology and in arts with mission, All Nations Christian College, Easneye, Hertfordshire, U.K. Previously, he was director for mission research with OMF International in Asia and editor of the journal Mission Round Table.

First the Kingdom of God: Global Voices on Global Mission.


First the Kingdom of God is an impressive collection of sixteen essays by scholars from diverse academic disciplines, confessional backgrounds, and ethnicity. Drawing heavily from the legacy of Peter Kuzmič, the book examines a number of

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theological and practical issues that arise in doing Christian mission in the context of globalization and connectedness. The essays in this volume were taken from a much larger Festschrift for Kuzmić, also titled First the Kingdom of God, published in 2011 by the Evangelical Theological Faculty in Osijek, Croatia.

As Kuzmić noted, the church fulfills its mission by reflecting both the “already” and the “not yet” of the kingdom of God (38). Since this kingdom transcends all cultures, its identity is drawn, not from a single cultural center, but from what John Mbiti has called “centres of universality” (57). Because of this interconnectedness, the kingdom of God requires the mutual interdependence of Christians in working together as kingdom citizens. This principle, which was advocated by the apostles like Peter (Miroslav Volf) and Paul (Daniel Darko), needs to be embraced by both Western (Ruth Padilla DeBorst) and non-Western churches (Hwa Yung). Bruce Nicholls and Gregory Mundis go further by exploring the possibility of achieving a “connectedness” with Muslims in Asian and European contexts. The transcendent nature of the kingdom of God also implies the need to bridge the gap between Christian faith and praxis. This bridging needs to be done in terms of everyday life (Corneliu Constantineanu), as well as in specialized contexts such as education (Barry Corey) and cross-cultural witness (René Padilla).

To do so requires that we be prepared to face challenges both theological (Scott Hafemann and Christopher Wright) and practical (Ronald Sider). The book concludes with Beth Snodderly’s thoughtful reflection on the victory of the kingdom of God through the Lamb’s submission to the will of the Father.

Kuzmić notes Darko, “articulated the vision and exemplified the praxis of the Kingdom of God as transcending denominational, ethnic, and national interests” (2). This excellent volume certainly reflects that understanding by showing “what the reign of Christ looks like” (Snodderly, 269), highlighting both hermeneutics and practical perspectives.

—Meren Jamir

China’s Reforming Churches: Mission, Polity, and Ministry in the Next Christendom.


China’s Reforming Churches, a collection of reports and assessments of the current state of Protestant churches in China, argues that Reformed traditions and Presbyterian polity are increasing in Chinese churches. The articles cover a wide spectrum of interests, ranging from the history of modern China to the phenomenal growth of Chinese Christianity in recent years, and from the development of church polity to the adoption of biblical Presbyterianism in China today. Though we cannot attribute the growth of Christianity solely to Presbyterian or Reformed missions in China, there are indeed links to the work of Reformed traditions in China.

Chinese Christianity has sought ways to survive in its own sociocultural and political context. Of the three types of church polity found in Western Christianity, Presbyterianism, with its rule by elders (vs. Episcopaliansm and Congregational...
ism, which emphasize rule by a bishop or by the people), is more compatible with Chinese society, which emphasizes the father figure. Pentecostalism, with its strong, charismatic leader, is likewise particularly in line with Chinese emphasis on the father. It is thus not surprising that Chinese churches have favored Presbyterianism, for the concept of presbyter resembles the role of a father.

Brent Fulton’s quotation of Martin Jacques is very appropriate: “The great task facing the West over the next century will be to make sense of China—not in our terms but in theirs. We have to understand China as it is and as it has been, not project our own history, culture, institutions and values onto it” (99). C. Y. Cheng, a Chinese delegate at the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, made the same point when he said, “Speaking plainly, we hope to see, in the near future, a united Christian Church without any denominational distinctions. This may seem somewhat peculiar to some of you, but, friends, do not forget to view us from our stand-point, and if you fail to do that, the Chinese will remain always as a mysterious people to you” (World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910 [1910], 8:195).

China’s Reforming Churches contributes to the study of Chinese Christianity, especially as it addresses the role of biblical Presbyterianism in China’s Reformed churches today. Presbyterianism indeed is a form of Christianity that has great impact on the development of Chinese churches today, but it is only one of the many traditions that Chinese churches are learning from. As the title of this book suggests, Chinese churches are in the process of “reforming,” though of course they are not yet completely “reformed.” We should realize that Reformed Christianity in China will develop in its own ways, consistent with China’s own sociocultural and political contexts.

—Peter Tze Ming Ng

Peter Tze Ming Ng is professor and chair of Chinese Christianity, China Victory Theological Seminary, Hong Kong, and concurrently is a research fellow in the Centre for the Study of Religion and Chinese Society, Chung Chi College, Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Ubuntu, Migration, and Ministry: Being Human in a Johannesburg Church.


Contemporary research on religion and migration primarily focuses on three topics: the role of religion in immigrant identity and adjustment, the reframing of religious institutions and practices, and religious transnationalism. Amid this landscape, Elina Hankela’s empirical study in social ethics—based on her dissertation research—provides a salient contribution. She explores the meaning of ubuntu in relationships between South African church members and the...
The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism.


The audience is American lay evangelical Christians who trust Baker Books and perhaps have even heard of Mark Noll. To nudge this group toward an encounter with global Christianity is a delicate operation, and Noll nicely finessesthe task. One of their own, he never directly challenges their view of the world, but he injects enough dissonant ideas to encourage self-reflection. For the intended audience, this volume has perfect pitch. If you are not a U.S. citizen or a member of the American evangelical tribe, you might still enjoy looking in on this skillful attempt to raise global awareness in the U.S. evangelical Christian subculture. —A. Cameron Airhart

A. Cameron Airhart is dean of Houghton College Buffalo and is professor of history, Houghton College, Houghton, New York.
lished scholars of Pentecostalism, as well as for novices, for learning about the tensions between the unity and diversity of the Pentecostal tradition. The volume is divided into three main sections—covering historical (three chapters), regional (five chapters), and disciplinary (seven chapters) approaches.

In an insightful introductory chapter, Cecil Robeck and Amos Yong set the stage by illuminating four metathemes of the contested scholarly terrain surrounding global Pentecostalism’s historiography (1–2). First, voices from the United States no longer dominate the writing of Pentecostal history, leading to different interpretations and understandings. Second, greater inclusiveness is given to the term “Pentecostal,” no longer solely defined by baptism in the Holy Spirit as evidenced by speaking in tongues. Third, Pentecostalism has been the focus of other disciplines than simply history—disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and theology. These disciplines involve external observers in analysis of Pentecostalism as well as Pentecostals studying themselves. Fourth, the complexity of the term “Pentecostal” has become so great that no single definition may be possible; one must think of Pentecostal movements with multiple definitions.

These metathemes run throughout the volume and can be seen in the second section of the book—which addresses regional developments within Pentecostalism—particularly in the three chapters on Latin American, African, and Asian Pentecostalism. These three chapters differ from each other, first because of their methodologies: Daniel Ramirez is a cultural historian, Cephas Omenyo is a theologian, and Wonsuk Ma is trained in biblical studies (5). All three scholars, however, deal with theological aspects of Pentecostalism in their respective areas. Ramirez focuses on how labor migration dynamics affect theologies-of-culture discourse. For example, the story of early Mexican Pentecostalism can be rendered in terms of labor migration to the United States—in particular, the return of Mexican labor migrants back to Mexico (122). These transnational flows defined forms of missiology in Mexico (123). Omenyo, among other issues, argues for the inherent “Africanness” of Pentecostalism on that continent. Pentecostalism shares with African traditional society a deepened awareness of warding off Satan, demons, and evil spirits, as well as a focus on healing of spiritual disorders (145–46). Ma’s Asian case study, like that of Omenyo, deals with the indigenous character of Pentecostalism. For example, the Filipino charismatic group El Shaddai exhibits ingenuity in responding to contemporary challenges with openness to indigenous religious resources, where blessed handkerchiefs and tea leaves become instruments of healing (157).

As evidenced by these three chapters from the Global South, Pentecostalism is a complex religious movement, but one that is rapidly expanding. This excellent volume helps us to understand the varied dynamics of this religious movement.

—Adam Mohr

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The Edinburgh Companion to the Bible and the Arts.


The Edinburgh Companion to the Bible and the Arts is a visually engaging book. The front cover design, which is both “highly traditional and pleasantly quirky” (5), immediately captures the imagination and hints at the treasures in store, not least of which are the figures and plates interspersed throughout the text for reference and illustration. The central question posed in the book is not new but is one that continues to be asked: “What is—what should be—the relationship between human creativity and the experience of the divine, the arts and the Word of God?” (11). This volume is a valuable resource for those wrestling with that question today.

This collection of essays “arranged thematically and as far as is practicable along historical lines” (5)—treating topics as diverse as Augustine on beauty, the decorated pages of medieval Bibles and Qurans, the Bible in nineteenth-century stained glass, and the Bible interpreted by hymns—provides fascinating insights from history and merits careful consideration in light of the renewed and exciting interest in the arts in church and mission today.

Stephen Prickett’s introduction is essential reading before launching into the articles. At the outset he cautions that “over-familiarity with such words as the ‘Bible’ and the ‘Arts’ can easily lead to over-simplistic thinking about both” (1). Referring to the “bad name” often linked to religious art, he points out that “bad aesthetics is so often the product of bad theology and vice versa” (5). Both of these themes are considered in many of the essays. While there are essays on the Psalms (for example, “The Case of the Psalms and George Herbert”) and on hymnody (“The Sacred Poetry of Watts and Wesley”), sadly, there are no essays on music because, according to the editor, “music is not best conveyed by words on the printed page” (7). It is truly disappointing that one of the most significant aspects of art forms, one that has been central to Christian worship throughout the ages, is missing.

Whether pondering the chapter “The Gospel of John in Early Christian Art” and why Jesus is so often portrayed as a miracle worker and healer or looking at the architectural design for the rebuilding of Coventry Cathedral as a symbol of a nation’s faith after World War II, I found this unique collection of essays to be worthy of the time invested in study and reflection and recommend it to scholars, patrons, and practitioners today for whom the Bible and the arts are enduring passions.

—Elizabeth W. McGregor

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The Gospel in Culture: Contextualization Issues through Asian Eyes.


Most studies in contextualization have come out of the Western/Northern church, but Melba Maggay addresses this topic from a Filipino perspective. She is an award-winning writer and social anthropologist, current president of the Institute for Studies in Asian Church and Culture (ISACC), and personally involved in development and advocacy for the poor. In this excellent volume she brings together twelve other authors in...
a multidisciplinary study of contextualization, with topics ranging from making the message of the Gospel understandable to the intended audience, to relating biblical truths to cultural symbols, and relating Christian rituals to other religious ceremonies.

The book is divided into three parts: “Christianity in Culture,” five essays that examine some of the ways that mission and church leaders have understood contextualization in the past; “The Text in Context,” four essays that explore the hermeneutical aspects of contextualization; and “The Gospel in Context,” five essays about the communication of the Gospel in a pluralized society. The third section is by far the most practical, examining present-day issues encountered in contextualizing the message of the Gospel, with particular focus on challenges that confront the Philippine church.

In the first part, Maggay’s essay examines contextualization done by the church in a Western context and then focuses on the work of the early missionaries in the Philippines, pointing to specific cognitive differences that need to be recognized (e.g., orality versus linearity). Timoteo Gener studies the missional insights that can be seen in the apostle Paul’s efforts to spread the Gospel among the Gentiles of his day. Athena Gorospe presents a detailed examination of the life, philosophy, hermeneutic, and theology of Origen. The other two essays in this section investigate the historical view of spiritual warfare and the treatment of the humanity of Christ in the Philippines.

The essays in the second part deal more specifically with issues involved in conveying the Scriptures meaningfully. In the third part, contributors discuss the challenge of contextualizing the message within the context of the present-day pluralistic society of the Philippines, that is, confronting cultures that venerate ancestors (David Lim), communicating the Gospel to ethnic minorities (Mona Bias), or working with the Chinese people in the Philippines (Amanda Shao Tan).

Given the subtitle of the book, I was somewhat disappointed to discover that all the essays addressed contextualization issues within the Filipino context, rather than in the broader Asian context. While not particularly suitable for use as a course textbook, the book will definitely be helpful to anyone planning to be involved in church or missions in the Philippines. At the same time, the authors give readers a fresh perspective on the challenges of contextualization, presenting ideas of value to anyone working in a cross-cultural milieu.

—Penelope R. Hall

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