ENGAGING MISSION: Hospitality, Humility, Hope
Essays in Honor of Jonathan J. Bonk

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On cover: Mary Washing Jesus’ Feet, by Soichi Watanabe, is from For the Least of These: The Art of Soichi Watanabe (New Haven, Conn.: OMSC Publications, 2010), 75; oil on canvas, 7 × 9 in., 2006.

For information of artwork by each of the Overseas Ministries Study Center artists in residence featured in this issue, go to www.omcibmr.org/marketplace/books/art-publications/. A gallery of additional artwork by them is available at www.omsc.org/art-at-omsc/art.shtml
This special issue of the International Bulletin of Missionary Research honors the life and work of Jonathan J. Bonk. Its title reflects the missional witness for which he is well known: hospitality, humility, and hope.

Every life has a beginning. For Jonathan Bonk, it was as the son of Charles and Marion Bonk, born on February 19, 1945, in Wolseley, a small town in southeastern Saskatchewan, Canada. Significantly, each life has a pre-beginning as well; Jon’s paternal grandparents, Jews from Poland, emigrated to the prairies of Canada, where they became ardent Pentecostal followers of Jesus Christ. Jon himself grew up in Ethiopia, where his father was a missionary builder with the Soudan Interior Mission (today SIM). The family moved with some frequency, relocating to wherever the next mission hospital needed to be constructed. Along with his siblings, Jon attended Bingham Academy, the SIM boarding school in Addis Ababa.

Following graduation from high school, Jon furthered his education in Canada, finishing programs in 1966 from Briercrest Bible Institute, in Caronport, Saskatchewan (Dip. Th., pastoral studies emphasis), and in 1968 from Providence College, Otterburne, Manitoba (B.R.E., humanities and biblical languages). From 1970 to 1972 he attended Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois, completing an M.A. in mission studies. In 1979 Jon began a lifelong association with Andrew Walls at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, where in 1984 he earned a Ph.D. in religious studies under Walls’s tutelage.

Before moving to the Overseas Ministries Study Center, Jon served on the faculty of Providence College and Theological Seminary, Otterburne, 1972–74 and 1976–97, as lecturer and then professor of mission studies. Between these two faculty assignments, he and his wife, Jean, worked with SIM to facilitate famine relief in Ethiopia, where he was director of relief and development for Tigré Province. In 1997 Jon accepted an invitation to become associate director of OMSC and associate editor of the IBMR, positions he held until 2000, when he succeeded Gerald H. Anderson as executive director of OMSC and editor of the journal. In July 2013 he retired from these roles and became executive director emeritus of OMSC and a senior contributing editor of the IBMR.

Since September 2012 Jon has been research professor in mission studies at the Boston University School of Theology. Earlier, from September 2006 to December 2012, he was visiting professor of mission and evangelism at Yale Divinity School, located a block and a half from OMSC, and since 2005 has been adjunct professor in the Department of Mission Studies, Presbyterian College and Theological Seminary, Seoul, Korea. He travels widely, lecturing in numerous countries around the world. He has also served as a board member and in an advisory capacity for other ventures.


Family

It is hard to imagine Jonathan Bonk without his wife and partner in hospitality, Jean (born Jeanette Diane Patterson). An accomplished teacher of English as a second language (ESL), hostess, and gardener, Jean fills the space around her with an infectious spirit.
Jon Bonk’s publications are widely respected, but perhaps even more significant has been his role of encouraging others.

Air of cheery welcome and yards wherever she lives with flowers. Married to Jon in 1968, they have two children, Susan Ruth and James Bruce (married to Margaret Ng), and one grandchild, Francis Andrew. The course of their path has been recursive. Jon and Jean have made Winnipeg, Manitoba, their Canadian base, interrupted by stays in Deerfield, Ethiopia, Aberdeen, a sabbatical in New Haven, and then New Haven again for a decade and a half of service at OMSC. Retirement finds them once again in Winnipeg, where they can claim bragging rights that their winters really are colder, longer, and snowier than those experienced in New Haven.

The Bonk family influence, however, extends much, much wider—as the tributes on pages 208–9 testify. The lonely, the weary, the wayfarer, and those spiritually at sea have been “adopted” by the Bonks for shorter or longer periods of time. With Jon and Jean many have found a welcome, a meal, and often a bed, but also a listening ear and counsel in times of discouragement. Out of the same wellspring have come Jon’s unstinting efforts in behalf of immigrants and refugees, the steps he has taken to offer respite to followers of Christ who reside or minister in settings where persecution of Christians meets with official government favor, and his advocacy on behalf of persons the U.S. government has chosen either to exclude or to deport. He has spent long hours interceding on their behalf.

The years Jon and Jean spent at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School were heady times. The Post-American, later to become Sojourners, had just been founded by Jim Wallis, and a renewed Christian consciousness was in ferment. Jon embraced an Anabaptist and a countercultural identity. He would later say that at Trinity he learned what Mennonites believed and decided, “Then I guess I am a Mennonite, because that’s what I believe.” His book The World at War, The Church at Peace: A Biblical Perspective (Kindred Press, 1988) bears the stamp of those convictions, as do many of his dozens of articles and book chapters. An Anabaptist outlook is simply part of what he brings to all his work, whether relationships, mission studies, team leadership, or analysis of social issues.

Jon went on to become an ordained minister of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference of Canada, serving as a minister for thirteen years, first in the Kleefeld Evangelical Mennonite Church, and then in the St. Vital Evangelical Mennonite Church. The Bonks are now members of the Fort Garry Mennonite Fellowship.

Encourager

The significance of Jonathan Bonk’s academic career and scholarship has not been limited to his own direct literary output, which is well known and widely respected. Perhaps even more significant has been his role of encouraging others through his work as a teacher, administrator, editor, consultant, counselor, and lecturer. When students at Providence College faced the quandary of where they should go for their required internship abroad, Jon would challenge them to identify the location and the service role that they saw as the most difficult or demanding for them—and then to go there. Students who accepted the challenge sometimes found themselves staying and serving far beyond the formal academic requirement.

Since 2006 Jon has been a member of the advisory council of the Oxford Studies in World Christianity, a multivolume collaborative publication project chaired by Lamin Sanneh (www.oxfordstudies.org/current.html). As editor of seven books and booklets and of the International Bulletin of Missionary Research, he has cultivated the talents and enlarged the aspirations of numerous budding scholars, as well as attracting contributions from seasoned scholars. When chairing conferences and lectures at the Overseas Ministries Study Center, he always sought to broaden the canvas and refine the conceptual framework within which to consider mission-related issues.

Literary Output


Under his leadership, OMSC in 2011 hosted the first Korean Global Mission Leadership Forum, in which equal numbers of Korean mission leaders and Western mission leaders met to discuss issues of accountability faced by their mission organizations. The format established reciprocity and collegiality. First a Korean mission leader would discuss an issue challenging that person’s organization, followed by a response from a Western leader. Then the roles were reversed, with a Western presenter unfolding an issue confronting his or her mission, followed by a Korean response. The presentations and responses were published simultaneously in Korean and English editions, edited by Bonk, under the title Accountability in Missions: Korean and Global Case Studies (2011).

The same format was followed two years later for KGMLF 2013. The book Family Accountability in Missions: Korean and Western Case Studies, again in Korean and English editions and edited by Bonk, appeared in 2013. This approach to cross-cultural missions consultation has been well received. KGMLF 2015, on the topic of megachurches and missions following a similar format, is scheduled to meet in November 2015, but this time in Korea and hosted by Onnuri Church, Seoul.

Other works for which Jon has served as editor include Between Past and Future: Evangelical Mission Entering the Twenty-First Century (William Carey Library, 2003), Speaking about What We Have Seen and Heard: Evangelism in Global Perspective (OMSC Publications, 2007), and Encyclopedia of Mission and Missionaries (Routledge, 2007).

Major Innovations

Jon has flourished as a missional innovator and a coordinator, enlisting the efforts of others. In 2001 he brought Nalini Jayasuriya to New Haven as OMSC’s first artist in residence. In all, nine
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Engaging Mission

“Engaging mission” carries several senses. One is the matter of engaging the issues embedded in mission and the forces and social currents with which mission has been intertwined historically in informed, critical yet sympathetic, thoughtful, and forward-looking ways. Jon’s description of his interests, some already touched on, indicates the breadth of his outlook: the dynamics of economic inequity in close social proximity, African Christian biography, missiological reference tools, the Gospel and ethics, mission and violence, missiology of interruptions, religion and security issues in Africa, and Christian faith and the common good. To Jon Bonk, mission does not wear just one face; it is multifaceted and calls for the development of thoughtful, informed, and robust frameworks for theological and missiological thought and for missional practice.

Second, engaging mission has an active element. It invites and encourages becoming personally involved. Jon’s missiology of the local enters the field here. Mission is a matter not just of actions carried out in faraway places, but of acting in the manner and attitude of Jesus Christ toward those whom God places in our path, seeing opportunities to welcome strangers and inconvenient persons in Jesus’ name, embracing openings to be the embodiment of Christ to them. Jon is an accomplished storyteller, and he is adroit at narrating accounts of ways that a simple act of hospitality in an out-of-the-way location “here” has had missional reverberations “there” in far corners of the world.

Third, engaging mission has to do with outlook, manner, and mode. Is our missional outreach winsome? Is it attractive to others? Does it allow the Christ to call forth a response from deep within those among whom we live and to whom we speak? Do our lives accord with our profession—or are overpowering words our only recourse? Here, we recall Jon’s affirmation of the power of Christian art to tug latch strings and stir motivations that lie deep within the human heart, which may well be impervious to oft-repeated verbal formulations.

In These Pages

For this special issue of the International Bulletin of Missionary Research honoring the life and work of Jonathan J. Bonk, contributors were asked not so much to interact with Jon’s writings but, writing from the context and setting of their own missional thought and practice, to focus on three facets of his and Jean’s life and ministry that stand out in the minds of the guest editors: hospitality, humility, and hope. Each facet is essential to a healthy mission spirituality.

The section head pages contain paintings by three OMSC artists in residence—Hanna Cheriyian Varghese (175), Nalini Marcia Jayasuriya (203), and Sawai Chinnawong (219; the full-color originals of each of these paintings can be seen in the online edition of the IBMR, www.internationalbulletin.org). The work of a fourth artist in residence, Soichi Watanabe, appears in color on the cover of this issue.

As mission researcher, educator, administrator, and theorist, Jon’s engagement in mission has been exemplary. Now in his seventieth year, Jon stands as an esteemed friend and colleague, mentor and encourager, not only to the guest editors and contributors to this issue, but to countless others as well. It is a pleasure to join in recognizing the contribution that he has made to the study and practice of Christian mission.
Hospitality

The Good Samaritan
Hanna Cheriyan Varghese

Hanna Cheriyan Varghese, Reflections on God’s Redeeming Love (New Haven, Conn.: OMSC Publications, 2009), 55, acrylic on canvas, 20 × 24 in., 2007
Hospitality as a Hallmark of Christian Ministry

Cathy Ross

Hospitality is both an ancient virtue and a prophetic practice, as it crosses boundaries, welcomes all, and involves taking risks. It is also dialogical, as it requires listening and learning. It practices attentiveness and encourages spaciousness. It requires relationship, receiving, community, and change. Our God embodies hospitality in the Trinity. Hospitality is at the heart of God’s reign and is essential for the practice and meaning of the kerygma. Hospitality is an ongoing practice that will be modified and negotiated as we interact and engage with one another.

Recently my attention was drawn again to the story of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38–42). Martha seems such a welcoming hostess—indeed we are told that she “opened her home to him [Jesus]” (v. 38). Then she busies herself with all that needs to be done to provide a hospitable welcome for the guest. The text tells us, however, that “Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made” (v. 40). I have always felt sorry for Martha, but Jesus seems so harsh when she complains that her sister will do just that: experience, listen to, and learn from Christians from various parts of the world. This is important because we are all part of one body. Paul’s body analogy in 1 Corinthians 12 is crucial to understanding what it means to be a world Christian. “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Cor. 12:13). By the Spirit we are united into one body, and by using this body rhetoric, Paul explicitly states that we need one another. Paul defines self-sufficiency as having no need of another and is convinced that this attitude is alien to the body of Christ. Moreover, as Anthony Thistleton elaborates in his superb commentary on 1 Corinthians, this body imagery “explicitly rebukes those who think that they and their ‘superior’ gifts are self-sufficient for the whole body, or that others are scarcely authentic parts of the body, as they themselves are.”

This is exactly what Jean and Jonathan Bonk have practiced over the years—in their own home and hearts, and within the community of the Overseas Ministries Study Center (OMSC), as well as in their various organizations and committee work. Hospitality and attentiveness have been hallmarks of their ministry.

To live attentively to the world in God’s name is our human vocation. This is why we have been made in the image of God. God pays attention to God’s creation, which is obvious by the fact that God created the world and all that is in it, and because of the infinite variety, depths, creativity, and diversity present in creation. God is engaged in, identifies with, and participates in the world. God does not pay attention to just part of the world; God is radically attentive to the whole world, at all times and in all places. The incarnation is clearly the most radical expression of God’s attentiveness—God’s proximity, immanence, presence. We are called to pay attention to the world—to the particular work of people, relationships, culture, economics, religion, sociology, power, land issues, art, literature, and more. Our attentiveness to God’s world, to creation, and to humanity in all its glorious diversity mirrors the attentiveness of God.

Hospitality means paying attention. Importantly, we need to pay attention to the stranger and the gifts that the stranger can bring to us. Paying attention and the gift of attentiveness are worked out so much more easily and fruitfully in community. For me, being a part of the Church Mission Society (CMS) community has helped me enormously. CMS has enabled me, over the years, to pay attention to God’s world in all its beauty and pain. And CMS has helped save me from domesticity and domestication, because the weight of sin pushes us to curve in on ourselves, to self-interest and self-absorption, to consumption, to small and myopic distractions. To be a part of the CMS community has opened up a wider vision of the kingdom of God, a broader and more challenging apprehension of the Gospel, a larger understanding of God’s world, and a renewed vision. I sense that this is what OMSC also offers to us.

Attention

To whom is God calling us to be attentive today? That is, “Who is my neighbor?”—a well-known question put to Jesus that has echoed down the centuries ever since. We must all work out our answers in our own contexts, but one answer I would like to suggest, which applies to all of us, is that we must pay attention to our sisters and brothers in the world church. Again, this is something that OMSC provides—a community where we can do just that: experience, listen to, and learn from Christians from various parts of the world. This is important because we are all part of one body. Paul’s body analogy in 1 Corinthians 12 is crucial to understanding what it means to be a world Christian. “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Cor. 12:13). By the Spirit we are united into one body, and by using this body rhetoric, Paul explicitly states that we need one another. Paul defines self-sufficiency as having no need of another and is convinced that this attitude is alien to the body of Christ. Moreover, as Anthony Thistleton elaborates in his superb commentary on 1 Corinthians, this body imagery “explicitly rebukes those who think that they and their ‘superior’ gifts are self-sufficient for the whole body, or that others are scarcely authentic parts of the body, as they themselves are.”

Paul’s rhetoric pushes for a reversal of a worldly understanding of honor and status. “The lower is made higher, and the higher lower.” In Romans he enjoins us not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought. This admonition should give us pause for thought as long as we are in a world captivated by honor and status, where the church in the West still commands unimaginable resources, prime real estate, and honorific titles and is sometimes co-opted by, or at least colludes with, secular powers.

Consider this challenge from John Mbiti, a Kenyan theologian:

Theologians from the new (or younger) churches have made their pilgrimages to the theological learning of the older churches. We had no alternative. We have eaten theology with you; we have drunk theology with you; we have dreamed theology with you. But it has all been one-sided; it has all been in a sense, your theology. . . . We know you theologically. The question is do you know us theologically? Would you like to know us theologically?

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As Samuel Escobar and Stephen Bevans have commented, all theology is contextual. So we need to create the space to listen to and learn from our brothers and sisters in the Majority World. Today, the Christian world is experiencing greater diversity than it has ever known before, which offers us a new era in theology and in worship. We may be challenged to move in completely new theological directions and encounter new approaches to issues such as the nature of systemic evil, principalities and powers, healings and exorcisms, ancestors, pre-Christian past, the nature of conversion, living with other faiths, the content of worship, attitudes to wealth and possessions, and much more. Such experiences will radically expand our faith, stretch our understanding of Jesus, and challenge our discipleship. But it will not happen unless we are attentive.

Andrew Walls notes that the “rule of the palefaces” is not yet over in Christian scholarship, and Tite Tiénou asserts that we will not happen unless we are attentive.

Church or community is sustained by a way of life that acknowledges that our lives and our ways of knowing are inherently relational, enhanced by our life together. Jean Vanier acknowledged this truth as a result of his experience of founding the L’Arche communities. He writes, “In years to come we are going to need many small communities which will welcome lost and lonely people, offering them a new form of family and sense of belonging.”

In our networked age, it may mean being attentive and practicing community in other ways also. Here is one example. One Advent I was part of an Advent e-community. We were each given a Bible verse or sentence on which to reflect briefly online. We started off with a simple party to explain the concept, and then each day a person posted his or her verse and thoughts. For each of us, it was a marvelous experience. We commented on how it helped us to be more attentive to the Advent season. Some made comments they would never have expressed in face-to-face conversation. Somehow, in this context, the anonymity of the screen helped us to be more open with one another, and...
teaching method for me.” In the ritual of the Eucharist we tend not to realize how hardened I've become until I get out there. And when I see someone mistreating the homeless—a professional—it’s a prophetic voice. It’s the most effective

The best deterrent against crime is not burglar bars or an armed police force but a caring public, aware of the common good, able to be present and attentive to the other.

teaching method for me.” In the ritual of the Eucharist we remind ourselves that we were aliens in need of welcome and rescue. Pohl provides us with an interesting example of wealthy women in the fourth century who chose to make themselves marginal by giving away their riches and status and offering hospitality. “Less marginal to the society than earlier believers, they created marginality and their behavior became exemplary for the larger church. By accepting an ascetic lifestyle and renouncing family, sexuality, wealth, and status these women became liminal.”

Anthropologist Victor Turner associates the most intense forms of community with contexts of liminality, marginality, and inferiority. Liminality, or an in-between space, is where we can become aware of our own vulnerability and marginality. All experiences of in-between-ness may make it easier for us to offer compassion. When one has been a foreigner, an outsider, a migrant—when one has experienced a liminal space—then one appreciates all the more the warmth of welcome, the value of inclusion, the grace of hospitality. Moreover, marginality can allow for role and status reversal more readily, which may make hospitality more easily given and received.

To make oneself vulnerable reminds us that both hospitality and engagement in mission require authentic compassion and genuine love. Somehow these graces are more freely expressed and experienced from a context of poverty, both within and without. Poverty of heart and mind reminds us that we are the needy ones, that our hands are empty until God fills them, that we are in need of grace, forgiveness, healing, and newness of life. Genuine hospitality, as well as genuine engagement in mission, can begin as we realize our own emptiness and our own need for God. As we experience the divine welcome born out of divine compassion, so then we can share this grace and hospitality with others.

Spaciousness

Finally, let us consider hospitality as creating space. The very act of creation is an act of creating space. Originally “the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep” (Gen. 1:2), and gradually God created until “the heavens and the earth,” as well as humanity, “were completed in all their vast array” (Gen. 2:1). God is the Creator God, the Creator of space, both literally and metaphorically. And furthermore, in the divine act of the creation of humanity, this marvelous act of generosity, we have the privilege of participating in this divine nature—this nature that created space and allows for spaciousness. And the divine nature is Trinitarian. God is not a monad but a community of three divine persons. God is also one God. These realities allow not only for relationship but also for unity and diversity.

Henri Nouwen’s definition of hospitality picks up this idea of spaciousness: “Hospitality . . . means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place.” This creating of space may not be an easy task; it may in fact be hard work as we allow others the room to negotiate this space in a hospitable manner. Moreover, we need this space in both our public and our private lives, which interact and shape each another. We need to be able to demonstrate hospitality in both these spheres. Public and private must not be seen as in competition with each other; we must recognize the impact each has on the other. If we heat our homes more than we need to, then we are consuming fossil fuels that might keep someone else warm. If we teach our children to pursue wealth and private gain, we diminish their interest in the public good. We have a choice—to live private lives that either encourage or ignore the public good. As Parker Palmer observes, “There is no way for the public to flourish when most people live private life for its own sake.” The best deterrent against crime is not burglar bars or an armed police force but a caring public, aware of the common good, able to be present and attentive to the other, to create space for the other, to live hospitably in both the public and the private realms. We delude ourselves if we think that private life can be enhanced by retreating from the public sphere.

Theologian Luke Bretherton notes that the early church was a body that encompassed both personal/household and public/political spaces (oikos and polis). This is the church at its best, a space both personal and public where the local church can provide familial caring, nurture, and service, along with wider accountability to the public sphere. A report on recent research by the Church Urban Fund/Theos, “Good Neighbours: How Churches Help Communities Flourish,” elaborates on this topic. It offers a strong argument for the value and worth of “neighborliness,” which local churches can offer as a means of bringing people together in a lonely and individualist society. It argues for valuing the strength and quality of local relationships, suggesting that neighborliness should be defined as offering public value. Neighborliness, or loving our neighbor as ourselves, is at the heart of a hospitable local faith community and promotes loving and flourishing relationships.

Conclusion

Attentiveness, presence, marginality, and spaciousness—these have all been at the heart of Jon and Jean’s ministry as they have attempted to follow Jesus faithfully. May attentiveness to the world church and to presence in our communities be hallmarks of our own discipleship. May God give us the strength
to embrace marginality, and may we live as witnesses to the spaciousness of God. There is space for all to come in; the divine invitation is that whoever believes may have eternal life. The expansiveness of the invitation reminds us of the theme of the Great Banquet, where all are invited, where all may come in, and where, ultimately, we may be surprised at just who is feasting at God’s table. May God grant us the grace to experience in our own lives the truth of Matthew 25:35 (NRSV), “I was a stranger and you welcomed me,” as expressed in the following beautiful Celtic prayer:

I saw a stranger last night. I put food in the eating place, drink in the drinking place, music in the listening place, and in the sacred name of the Triune, he blessed myself and my house and my cattle and my dear ones. And the lark said in her song, “Often, often, often goes the Christ in the stranger’s guise.”


A Time to Say Farewell

It is time to say farewell. I became program director (later associate director) of the Overseas Ministries Study Center in July 2002, upon the retirement of Robert Coote. At the same time I was appointed as associate editor of the INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN OF MISSIONARY RESEARCH. When I retired as associate director in 2011, my role with the IBMR continued, with the title of senior associate editor.

I have had the pleasure of working with a stellar group of colleagues in bringing to press fifty-four issues of the IBMR, as well as several books published by OMSC: Jonathan Bonk and Nelson Jennings, editors and OMSC executive directors; Craig Noll and Rona Johnston Gordon, assistant editors; Lois Baker, proofreader; and Daniel Nicholas, managing editor. Collaborating with each of them has been enriching. The staff of the IBMR’s printer, Ripon Printers, have also been most responsive and helpful to all requests.

In this life, times of transition come to all things. This October issue is the final one with which I will be involved. Rona and Lois also conclude their tenure with this issue. (For the future envisioned for the IBMR, see the statement on page 202 of this issue.)

Thirteen years go by quickly. Preparing the IBMR for the press each quarter—along with other publications—has been demanding, but also engaging and personally satisfying. I am thankful to God for the privilege of serving in this fashion and grateful for the opportunity given me to work alongside these outstanding colleagues and friends. Interacting with contributors and reviewers while reading their manuscripts for publication has been enriching as well. Thank you to each one!

—Dwight P. Baker
Global Friendship as Incarnational Missional Practice

Dana L. Robert

Friendship is a foundational practice in Christian mission. As Donald McGavran expressed succinctly many years ago, human relationships are the “bridges of God” across which the Gospel travels. This statement is at once both obvious and complicated. Because friendship is universally accepted as a positive virtue, it is taken for granted and not typically a subject of theorizing: the longing for deep and consistent relationships remains a core part of being human. At the same time, cross-cultural friendships are notoriously difficult to achieve, especially across unequal power dynamics, gender, and class differences. Friendship carries long-term obligations and hidden assumptions peculiar to the cultures of those who practice it. Committed missionaries know that even after they return from the “field,” their obligations, responsibilities, and privileges toward their mission friends and partners remain with them for life.

Reflection on friendship as missional practice is especially fitting in a tribute for Jonathan Bonk and for Jean Bonk, his lifelong partner in ministry. Jon Bonk’s capacity for friendship with the homeless and care for the foreigner and the stranger is legendary. Under Bonk’s leadership from 1997 to 2013 (he was associate director, 1997–2000; executive director, 2000–2013), the staff of the Overseas Ministries Study Center (OMSC) arranged medical care, schooling for children, recreational and educational opportunities, English classes, holiday celebrations, and warm fellowship for its residents. Around the world, the friends and former residents of OMSC compose an extended family. The Bonks’ commitment to lifelong friendships provides a powerful example for mission practice today.

A chief attraction to mission in the twenty-first century is that it holds out the opportunity to forge relationships across geographic, ethnic, and economic boundaries. To share the Gospel—to follow Jesus and to make him known in places where he is not—remains a perennial motivation for mission. To help others and to save God’s creation are also prominent motives for mission outreach. But for the millennial generation, what I would call “global friendship” is possibly a more compelling motivation for mission than either evangelism or service. Shaped by interconnected technologies, the spirituality of millennials is relational. Self-consciousness that includes connecting quickly with people all over the world shapes contemporary expectations of friendship among Americans, especially, to expect to make friends easily with people, regardless of geographic distance, and regardless of cultural, class, and gender differences.

Given that relationships are foundational for mission and outreach, especially among young people, then what is the meaning of friendship as missional practice? In this article I explore the connection between global friendship and mission in several dimensions. First, global friendship provides opportunities for spiritual formation—for deepening one’s Christian faith through a shifting web of diverse and geographically expansive personal relationships. Second is the idea of global friendship as a vehicle for transformation. Ideally relationships lead to personal and social change—everything from personal fulfillment to local service to saving the planet. A third aspect of global friendship and mission worth exploring is that of incarnational missional practice. In this dimension, friendship is a discipline of “imitating Christ,” a way of being with others in mission as Jesus was. These aspects of friendship as missional practice are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive. All three can be seen in the missional commitments of Jon and Jean Bonk.

Global Friendships as Spiritual Formation

Cross-cultural friendship as missional and spiritual formation has a long history. During the 1920s, North American Protestants participated in what they called “world friendship.” In the wake of World War I, linking with people across national divides was part of promoting world peace. To connect with other peoples unlike oneself both promoted spiritual growth among North Americans and expressed their deep longing for global unity. Travel seminars to other countries, such as Sherwood Eddy’s influential American Seminar, originated in the 1920s. Missionary societies renamed themselves “world friendship” societies and began providing hospitality to international students and bringing foreign mission speakers to the United States. In 1926 Japan missionary Sidney Gulick founded the Committee on World Friendship among Children. Its first project resulted in Americans sending nearly 13,000 friendship dolls to Japan. Japanese children responded by sending to the United States fifty-eight specially prepared Japanese dolls, which toured the country as signs of friendship between nations. Women of the largest Protestant denomination in the country, the Methodists, adopted world friendship as their mission focus for the 1920s. Wrote one mission leader, “World Friendship is a new name for what has been in the hearts of missionary women from the beginning.”

In this context of nurturing global relationships as a valued mission practice, Baptists Margarette and Ida Doane in 1922 founded the “Houses of Fellowship” in Ventnor, New Jersey. The Doane sisters were stalwart supporters of the Woman’s American Baptist Foreign Mission Society and its emphasis on relational mission. A center for missionaries on furlough, the Houses of Fellowship provided a family-like community setting just steps from the ocean. For many missionaries and their
families who returned regularly, the Houses of Fellowship was the only home they knew in the United States. In 1926 Dr. Anna Kugler attributed her physical and psychological recovery from serious illness to the “fellowship” she experienced there. In its first twenty-five years, the Houses of Fellowship hosted over 7,400 people from 106 mission agencies and 97 fields. In 1967 the Houses of Fellowship became the Overseas Ministries Study Center. Despite the name change and its eventual relocation to New Haven, Connecticut, OMSC remains famous for its warm hospitality and the lifelong friendships that are formed there. With the globalization of the worldwide mission force, today international missionary visitors, many from Korea and Burma, make OMSC their home away from home.

For North Americans, what has changed about the idea of mission and friendship from the era of world friendship in the 1920s is that, in the twenty-first century, ordinary Christians expect personally to make global friends. Churches continue to support professional missionaries as their paid transcultural agents. But in addition, local congregations, annual conferences and judicatories, and educational institutions have embraced the concept of the “mission trip” as a personally uplifting educational and/or spiritual experience. Worldwide, a billion tourist visas are issued every year; said another way, annually, one person out of every six travels to another country. Sociologist Robert Wuthnow calculated that by 2005, over 1.6 million U.S. adults were going on mission trips every year, in addition to an unknown number of teenagers. This kind of short-term travel opportunity is something new since the 1980s, because the Internet and cheap airfares have produced the “nomadic” generation.

A chief purpose of modern mission trips is to make global friendships. A posting from the chaplain’s office at Northwestern University has what might be a typical statement: “Alice Millar Chapel and University Christian Ministry co-sponsor spring break service trips abroad each year. These ‘friendship missions’ are undertaken to increase global awareness, to provide an opportunity [for] immersion in a different culture, and to build relationships with brothers and sisters in other countries. In previous years, groups have travelled to Russia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, and Cuba.”

For young people, relationship building through mission trips is seen as a positive good because it increases global awareness. Mission trips to places where people are poor also help middle-class North Americans see the world in a different way. Evidence is ample that a chief result of mission trips is to feed the spiritual lives of those who go on them. While widely available air travel has made the mission trip the spiritual formation of choice for youth ministry nationwide over the past twenty years, the spiritual impulse to go on pilgrimage as a way to encounter God is an ancient practice that cuts across multiple religions. The relationship and bonding among pilgrims from diverse backgrounds—whether Muslim hajjis or medieval European travelers or contemporary followers of the Virgin of Guadalupe—is a key feature of spiritual travel. What is different about the modern mission trip, in distinction from other forms of pilgrimage, is the expectation that participants will form relationships with and will help those whom they visit. While almsgiving has always been a feature of religious pilgrimage, traditionally it has been understood that the purpose of the trip is to help the pilgrim himself or herself to become closer to God.

The desire to connect with others in the name of Jesus Christ and to make friends with them can lead to profound spiritual insights. Through experience of the “other,” friendship recognizes that rich and poor, black and white, Asian and European are fellow children of God, equal in Jesus Christ. But unless the initial desire to make friends is carried through into a long-term self-sacrificial mutual relationship, the chief beneficiary of the friendship mission trip is probably the person who goes on the trip. As with traditional pilgrimages, the anticipation of global friendship through short-term mission travel deepens one’s own spiritual life.

Global Friendships as Pathway to Transformation

A second way that friendship functions as a missional practice is by providing a pathway to transformation—either personal transformation through following Jesus Christ or social transformation. For example, Global Women was founded in 2001 to establish ongoing relationships between young women in the United States and young women in Moldova, Burma, and other places that have a history of Baptist missionary involvement. At first this approach was misunderstood because overseas groups expected to receive project grants as in the past. Instead they got visits from American women and support for indigenous friendship partners on the ground.

The mission of Global Women is stated as follows:

Motivated by the love and mercy of Jesus Christ, Global Women is a nonprofit organization connecting and empowering women to transform our worlds through global friendships as we:

- Investigate the needs of women,
- Involve ourselves and our communities in meeting these needs, and
- Influence leaders to cultivate cultures that value women.

Even though friendship is the motivating spirituality of Global Women, its overall purpose is to use that friendship to meet the needs of women, and to help with social transformation toward values that empower them. Dealing with human trafficking, encouraging microenterprise, and cultivating women’s leadership are specific missional priorities.

Another mission group that emphasizes friendship for transformation is the South African group Petra Institute for Children’s Ministry. Founded in 1989, this mission empowers children for ministry. It “shares God’s desire that the lost and broken children are found and restored to healing Christian families and communities, to join Him in transforming society.” It works with partner organizations and has conducted training sessions in children’s ministry in over sixty-seven countries. Petra Institute staff build capacity for children to make decisions for Christ by teaching the Bible through stories and play, by showing how to establish community and family-like relationships among teachers and children, and by designing contextually and biblically based curricula for children’s
ministry. Its mission of transformation through relationships assumes long-term commitments to children, including working with children who have experienced trauma. Petra Institute strongly believes in a relational rather than an educational approach. We strive to bring children in relationships with their teachers, their friends and ultimately, God.” The philosophy of Petra Institute does not erase the distance between child and adult, so that, strictly speaking, equal “friendship” is not its primary goal. But it uses the power of relationships to lead children into deeper relationships with Christian communities and with God.

Friendship as pathway to transformation has limitations when it involves a one-sided expectation that Westerners can change other persons or social systems without being changed themselves. Yet mutuality through friendship assumes that as people enter into relationships with each other, both sides will be changed by the encounter. Ministries like Global Women and Petra Institute reflect a postcolonial, global networking approach to mission, in which mutual transformation through relationships is not a by-product of mission, but part of its raison d’être.

Some might question social transformation as a goal of friendship. Yet if friendship does not expect transformation, it runs the danger of being selfish—of gaining personal spiritual satisfaction on the backs of the poor. In the early 1960s the great missionary Trevor Huddleston addressed the All African Conference of Churches. Huddleston was well known as having supported the community of Sophiatown, as it was forcibly relocated under racist apartheid laws. He wrote, “Yes” our fears . . . to say even though we know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you love me. . . . To say “Yes” to God. A love that says “even though I do not know you, even though you live thousands of miles away, you are my friend. And I care about you.”

Global Friendships as Incarnational Mission Practice

A third framework for global friendship in relation to mission is that of incarnational mission practice. Followers of Jesus Christ seek to be in mission in the way of Jesus Christ. Through the incarnation, God became human in the person of Jesus. And Jesus’ ministry was one based on friendship, whose purpose was to build a fellowship that witnessed to the kingdom of God.

Friendship, fellowship, and following Christ are inseparable. The Gospel of John reports that, as he faced death, Jesus commanded his followers to love each other. “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you” (15:13–14). The unity of fellowship among Jesus and his friends and followers witnessed to God’s love. And so Jesus prayed in John 17:21–23, “As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. . . . I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

Jesus’ final prayers before his death outlined the clear connection between friendship and mission. The self-sacrificial and mutual love of fellowship is what draws people to God. Jesus called this the “new commandment”—that his disciples love each other, just as he loved them (John 13:34). In following Christ, the friends of Jesus conform themselves to his discipline and to his example of love for the sake of the other.

When Jesus talked about friendship, he focused on fellowship and community. For him, friendship was not an isolated incident of individual self-fulfillment, but the foundation of loving fellowship. The implications of biblical friendship give special resonance to many church-based mission practices. For example, missions directed toward children focus on creating a loving community for them that cares for them in ways their dysfunctional families cannot. Friendship missions reach out to the homeless and integrate them into loving communities. In Panama, a Latin American evangelical mission called Jesús Amigo (i.e., Jesus friend) works with gang leaders. These kinds of friendship missions try to heal broken lives, one at a time. As they construct authentic loving fellowships, they confront false ones of lies, violence, and abuse. Radical discipleship starts with friendship with real persons. This relational mission in the way of Jesus, as shown in the Gospel of John, is a necessary witness to the kingdom of God in a world of violence and division. Friendship is not “random acts of kindness”; rather, it involves systematic kingdom-based practices that require respect, compassion, humility, sharing, giving, and receiving.

In a world torn by ethnic conflict, friendship in the way of Jesus is a powerful witness to church and kingdom. In a world church torn by theological and organizational divisions, friendship functions as a bridge to ecumenism. As long-term mission partners well know, incarnational global friendships take a long time to develop, and they carry risks and responsibilities. Given the growing hostility toward Christians in some parts of the Islamic world, it is the only kind of friendship that can be practiced among Muslims, for example. Patient, loving friendship is often the only way to show the love of Jesus in situations of hostility. Roland Miller, who worked for a quarter century in India and founded a mission to Muslims called the Malabar Mission Society, expressed this idea beautifully when he wrote,
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Conclusion

As a contemporary missional practice, global friendships cut across geographies and cultures. Globally conscious and interconnected through electronic media, the millennial generation is particularly drawn to friendship as a way of being in mission. Global friendships promote a spirituality of world unity that forms their participants. These relationships can lead to personal and social transformation. But at its best, global friendship cannot be reduced to a technique or a strategy or a resource for self-fulfillment. At its deepest, global friendship is an incarnational mission practice. Friendship in the way of Jesus creates communities that point toward the kingdom of God. The reason to engage in mission through friendship is to follow the way of Jesus Christ, who loved his friends so much that he laid down his life for them.

Notes

1. An earlier version of this article was presented as part of the Augsburger Lectures at Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, Virginia, May 19–20, 2013. For preliminary historical reflections on this subject, see Dana L. Robert, “Cross-Cultural Friendship in the Creation of Twentieth-Century World Christianity,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 35, no. 2 (2011): 100–107.


9. Ibid., 10.


13. The term “nomadic generation” comes from David Kinnaman, president of the Barna Group, and refers to the spiritual rootlessness of millennials. “One of the characteristics of Millennial life has become the image of the traveler. They want to wander the world, both in real life and in digital ways. They want to feel untethered. There is a trend among young adults of delaying the pressures of adult life as long as possible; they want to embrace a lifestyle of risk, exploration and unscripted moments. At the same time, they want to be loyal to their peers.” See www.barna.org/barna-update/teens-nextgen/612-three-spiritual-journeys-of-millennials#.VN-wX8bDicM.


16. See www.globalwomenngo.org/who-we-are.


22. Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence*, 75.

23. Churches, congregations, conferences, and dioceses have adopted friendship as a positive missional value. See, for example, Diocese of Erie, www.eriecrod.org/missions4.asp.


Once a Stranger, Always a Stranger? Immigration, Assimilation, and the Book of Ruth

M. Daniel Carroll R.

This article explores a particular dimension of immigration, the adaptation of first-generation immigrants into the host culture, in dialogue with a biblical narrative about an immigrant woman, Ruth. I appeal to recent assimilation theory and apply its insights to a close reading of the canonical book. This reading explores how it might resonate with the way contemporary immigrants navigate the challenges of living in a new context.

Several caveats are in order. First, my concerns lie largely with Latino/a immigration into the United States. This is due to my personal background (I am half-Guatemalan) and experience living in Guatemala and working with Latino/a immigrants. Second, much research on immigrant integration into the host country explores the experiences of second- and third-generation descendants of immigrants. My primary contacts, though, are with recently arrived Spanish-speaking immigrants and their children. This limitation fits nicely with the Ruth narrative.

Assimilation Theory

For this immigration reading of this narrative I employ assimilation theory. This theory came under suspicion for a time because of pejorative connotations of the term “assimilation,” which to some communicated attitudes of superiority, an ideal of conformity to the majority culture, and the loss of identity. Assimilation theory, however, has experienced a revival in recent years, and scholars are exploring diverse dimensions of these cultural dynamics. Specifically, I employ what is called New Assimilation Theory, which is associated with Richard Alba and Victor Nee. They are aware of weaknesses of earlier iterations of the theory, such as suggestions of ethnocentrism and the inevitability of assimilation. Alba and Nee define assimilation as “the decline of an ethnic distinction and its corollary cultural and social differences. ‘Decline’ means in this context that a difference attenuates in salience.” In their construct, assimilation is not inescapable; it is incremental, cumulative, and variable in terms of its time frame, circumstances, and history. It is also a mutual process, where the host culture is modified in the interaction with newcomers. Other important topics related to assimilation theory, which I will not explore, include transnationalism, the changing conceptions of citizenship, the relevance of social class, residential patterns, and the impact of economic globalization both here and abroad.

Mechanisms of the Assimilation Process

Several mechanisms serve as causal factors in the assimilation process. These work in combination and at differing tempos. Alba and Nee classify these as either “proximate” (those within personal and larger relational fields) or “distal” (at the macro level). Immigrants are not passive observers or victims in relationship to these mechanisms. The authors mention three clusters of mechanisms:

- **Purposive action.** Immigrants make choices and devise strategies to assimilate to the degree they desire or are able, weighing potential risks and benefits. Success necessitates that immigrants acquire appropriate sociocultural competencies that decrease the distance between themselves and the host culture and that facilitate the implementation of their efforts.

- **Networks and forms of human capital.** Networks, such as extended family, friends, and others of similar ethnicity, make the accommodation process easier. These are sources of orientation and basic information; they serve as safety nets for immediate needs, provide contacts for jobs, and help with initial housing.

- **Institutional mechanisms.** These are the more formal institutions and regulations of a society. They may play a large role in whether immigrants assimilate or remain segregated (and to what extent), with all of the sociocultural and legal implications associated with this status. The relationship between the proximate and distal mechanisms can be reciprocal. As immigrants are incorporated into their new context, rules change, and negative attitudes shift; institutional realities are modified, and opportunities for immigrants may increase.

Boundaries and Ethnicity

Assimilation impacts formal and informal ethnic distinctions for both the outsider and the host culture. Alba and Nee, for example, espouse a constructionist view of ethnicity. They distinguish between boundary crossing (“someone moves from one group to another without any change to the boundary itself”), boundary blurring (“the clarity of the social distinction involved has become clouded”), and boundary shifting (“involves the relocation of a boundary so that populations once situated on one side are now included on the other”).

Ruth: A Tale of Assimilation and Acceptance?

This section offers a reading of Ruth from the perspective of assimilation theory. I do not presume that assimilation processes in the ancient world were exactly as they are today, but I do assume commonalities based on a shared humanity. These echoes may generate a fresh appreciation of this biblical narrative and its relevance for immigrants and their communities.

Mechanisms of the Assimilation Process

**Purposive action.** One thing that becomes readily apparent from an assimilationist reading of the Book of Ruth is the ambiguities in character, plot, and dialogue. These are expected in cultural negotiations across borders. Life in a new land is complicated, and the obstacles that one must overcome require nuancing...
Words and balancing personal motives in the effort to survive and succeed. One must be proactive, and Ruth certainly is, as her strategies to integrate into Bethlehem make clear. Years before she had married an immigrant from Judah (1:4–5); now she herself is the immigrant.  

1. The decision to follow Naomi (1:14–18). Many have taken Ruth’s declaration in 1:15–18 as a determination to forsake her ethnic background and to convert to the God of Israel (her possible conversion was an important topic of discussion among rabbinc commentators). This is possible, but might not these be the words of a woman reluctant to return to her kin? Burdened with the stigma of having married an immigrant from Judah and with questions about not having borne any children (was she sterile?), could she find a new husband among her own people? Could not her rejection of Naomi’s advice to return home be instead a decision to say and do whatever was necessary to make a new life for herself in Judah? Is hers a show of loyalty to her mother-in-law, or is it a determined overstatement for the sake of her future? Is it a combination of both impulses?  

On Naomi’s side, why does she tell her daughters-in-law three times to “return” (1:8, 11, 12) and repeat that verb one more time to Ruth, once Orpah leaves them (1:15)? Why does Naomi not respond to Ruth’s audacious statement? Does she welcome Ruth’s company? Is she suspicious of Ruth’s motives? Does her bitterness include anything and anyone Moabite (she had lost her husband and sons in Moab)?  

2. The decision to work in the fields (2:2–3). After the return to Bethlehem, Ruth asks for permission to work in the fields. The wording implies that she knows the gleaning laws. She is doing what it takes to survive. It was the time of the barley harvest (1:22), and to do nothing was to go hungry. Her initiative quickly pays off. She finds a place to glean, and the field in which she is working belongs to a kinsman.  

3. The self-deprecating language in the exchange with Boaz (2:8–13). As in the case of many immigrants, her hard work is noticed by others (2:7; the meaning of the verse is contested). Boaz inquires of her and engages her in dialogue. What is puzzling is her self-ascription as a nokriyya, the not-so-nice label for a foreigner (2:10). Is this an acknowledgment of the long-standing enmity between Moab and Judah? Her status as a member of Naomi’s household and her participation in the gleaning would lead to the expectation that she classify herself as a ger, a “resident alien.” Does she use the other label out of a sense of vulnerability? As perhaps the only foreigner in a field of Bethlehemites, did she feel very much like the outsider (the foreman calls her “the Moabitess”; 2:6)? Was it her accent, skin color, dress, demeanor? Had she been shunned? Had the young men been acting inappropriately?  

Her choice of label also might be calculated: it could be self-effacing, designed to win greater sympathy. She couples this word with falling prostrate before Boaz. This exaggerated respect wins her the appreciation of the onlookers and plays to the self-worth of this important landowner. Note her subsequent humble response to him as “lord”; she is but his “servant” (2:13).  

This immigrant is learning the cultural cues of her new context to attain her desired end: food, rest, and, with a little luck, continued support for herself and Naomi. Some suggest that there is a bit of flirtation on her part as well. If this is correct, it is further evidence of using whatever means are at hand to gain favor in a foreign land.  

4. The exchange with Naomi after the return from the fields (2:17–22). There are subtle differences between what was communicated in the exchange with Boaz and what Ruth reports to Naomi. Ruth says she had been working among the men (2:21). What is she doing with her words? Is this an innocent slip of the tongue, or is she manipulating Naomi? Ruth “accepts” Naomi’s advice to work among the women, something Boaz had told her and she already was doing (2:8–9). By bringing Naomi food and sharing the news, Ruth wins her mother-in-law’s commendation and gives her hope. At home the impression is that she is the submissive daughter-in-law to the woman who, when they first arrived, may have not been so kindly disposed to her. Ruth’s immigrant strategy has to prosper both with Naomi and in the fields.  

5. The actions at the threshing floor (chapter 3). Much is made of the ambiguities of this scene. The first issue is that Ruth does not follow all of Naomi’s advice at the threshing floor, even though she states that she will and the text reports that she did (3:1–6). Instead of waiting for what Boaz will instruct her to do, she tells him of his obligations as a kinsman-redeemer (3:9). Again, Ruth takes things into her own hands.  

What is the meaning of the phrases “uncover his feet and lie down” (3:4, 7) and “spread your cloak over your servant” (3:9)? Are these symbolic gestures of modesty without sexual intent, or euphemistic descriptions of a sexual advance? Either way, Ruth once more takes a risk. If things go wrong, there will be embarrassment and shame, with any prospect of acceptance in Bethlehem irredeemably lost (and what would this mean for Naomi)?  

She calls herself simply “Ruth,” without the label “Moabitess,” and twice repeats “your maidservant” (3:9). Is it that she wants to be seen as a person with a name without the ethnic label, even though she recognizes her social place? As in the harvest fields and her first experience with Boaz, this immigrant is largely in control of events. As before, her report to Naomi differs from what happened. She puts words into Boaz’s mouth and includes Naomi in the benefits of his largesse (3:16–18).  

Networks and forms of human capital. Ruth must plot a course within the networks she encounters to facilitate assimilation. She needs these networks to accept her and help her, if her new life is to be a success.  

1. The family of Naomi. By marrying one of Naomi’s sons, Ruth entered that family’s network. In chapter 1 she decides to remain in this network. Now, she moves to the new setting of Naomi’s hometown. The start of that experience is not encouraging. Naomi does not answer her declaration, and when they arrive and are greeted by the women of the town, she does not introduce Ruth (1:19–22). Was Ruth noticed by the other women? Was she ignored because of her Moabitite ethnicity? Was Naomi embarrassed to have a Moabitie daughter-in-law in light of the negative portrayals of the Moabites in Israel’s traditions? That homecoming must have been an awkward moment for Ruth.

Was Naomi embarrassed to have a Moabite daughter-in-law in light of the negative portrayals of the Moabites in Israel’s traditions?
In time, the tone of Naomi’s words changes, and her faith is renewed. Based on what she is told, Naomi believes that Ruth is acting on her behalf and following her directions. Yet, the reality is another! In chapter 4 again Naomi is silent, when the women tell her how she should feel toward this Moabite immigrant because of the love that Ruth has for her and the fact that, through her daughter-in-law, she has another “redeemer,” a grandson. This little one will take care of Naomi in her old age, they say (4:14–17). Maybe Naomi’s taking the child onto her lap is an acknowledgment of the truth of what these women have told her.

2. The women of Bethlehem. This is a world that Ruth will need to enter if she is to become part of the rhythms of life of the town. At her first encounter this group overlooks her. Though she is the widow of one of Naomi’s sons, she is still one of “them,” not one of “us.” Ruth, however, gains a reputation through her hard work and actions. By the end, Ruth has won over this network.

3. Two other networks are the workers in Boaz’s fields and the elders. In both cases, what they say reflects respect for Ruth. The workers are witnesses to her untiring work (2:6–7); the elders at the gate call for God’s blessings upon this new family and link Ruth to Rachel and Leah, other notable women who came from outside Israel (4:11–12).

It is noteworthy that these three groups never refer to Ruth by name. She is the “Moabitess” (2:6), “the woman” (4:11), “this young woman” (4:12), and “your daughter-in-law” (4:15). In other words, Ruth is among them and appreciated by them, but still not of them. Even so, she has come a long way since the “whole town” had greeted Naomi upon their return (1:19). Naomi demonstrates tenderness to her at times, calling her “my daughter” (2:2, 22; 3:1, 16, 18). To Boaz she will move from being a poor woman of interest, whom he values, to being his wife, but she remains—at least in public—“Ruth the Moabitess” (4:5, 10; though in private conversation, “my daughter,” 3:10).

Institutional mechanisms. The third and final set of mechanisms is institutional. In the Book of Ruth, these are of both an informal and a formal nature. By informal is meant that the characters participate within a cultural-legal framework without any ceremonial accruements. This is the case of the gleaning laws. Ruth apparently is aware of this law and goes out to the fields to harvest. This institutional mechanism assists her integration, even as it meets the physical needs of the two widows.

Two other legal issues that surface in the book—the redemption of the property of a relative and (possibly) levirate marriage to provide an heir for a deceased kinsman—are more formal in nature. These are handled publicly at the gate of the town, and the pronouncement of a blessing is given in traditional language (4:1–12). These two rulings are testimony before the community that Ruth has legal standing; she is now within the line of a Bethlehemite family, with rights to a specific parcel of land, and she stands within their genealogical history.

Boundaries and Ethnicity

Is there evidence that the boundary lines between the Bethlehmites of Judah and this Moabite immigrant are in any way impacted? Several items imply a positive answer.

1. Note the way in which the narrative and its characters refer to Ruth. The label “Ruth the Moabitess” is used throughout by the townsfolk, even Boaz (1:22; 2:2; 4:5, 10), but Naomi and Boaz also call her “my daughter.” Even though boundary markers are still in place within the story, the spirit of the ethnic labeling has shifted. The narrator on two occasions refers to her simply as “Ruth” (2:8; 4:13; yet 1:22; 2:2, 21). In the narrator’s view, Ruth has lost her ethnic label as a “foreigner.”

2. The characters in the narrative affect the boundary as well. Boaz, a significant person in the community, praises Ruth (2:11–12; cf. 3:10–14) and offers her aid and protection in the hearing of the workers (2:8–9, 15; cf. 3:15). He demonstrates commitment to Naomi and Ruth at the gate in the exchange regarding the family land (4:1–10). All of this would have had an impact on attitudes. The people connect Ruth to the traditions of several women of Israel, and not to the stories of Israel’s past encounters with Moabite women (4:11).

3. The experience of Obed, the son of this mixed marriage, will be different from Ruth’s (4:13–17). He is embraced (literally) by his grandmother and is named by the townswomen. Ruth’s assimilation strategies have paved the way for a different life for her son.

4. The book also places this narrative within the much larger context of the genealogy of David (4:18–22). This connection, unknown to the characters, is directed at the reader and further underscores that Ruth “belongs.” She is the ancestress of Israel’s greatest king. Perhaps because David had not forgotten his ancestral roots in Moab, he takes his parents there to protect them when he flees from Saul (1 Sam. 22:3–4).

5. Whatever this narrative’s relationship to other passages dealing with Moabites, at least in the world of this book, ethnic boundaries have changed. Ruth has done more than simply cross boundaries that remain unaffected. The progressive acceptance of this outsider suggests that ethnic boundaries were blurred and eventually shifted, at least in this small town.

Additional Issues for Future Reflection

At least two other items affecting assimilation that are dealt with in the literature deserve more study but are beyond our purview. One is the role of religion. It is interesting to note that, even though Ruth makes a profoundly religious confession in chapter 1, nowhere does she mention the God of Israel by name.

Ruth is among them and appreciated by them, but still not of them.

Naomi does (1:20–21), as do Boaz (2:12; 3:10–13) and the people of Bethlehem (4:11–12, 14). One might ask, How deeply was Ruth invested in her new cultural setting? Were her actions focused on survival and acceptance, without the impulse of faith? How much of her Moabite background and memory did she retain?

Another topic is the role of intermarriage in ethnic assimilation. In the narrative the intermarriage of the Israelite Boaz and the Moabite Ruth is not an issue. Perhaps this is due to the importance that it will have later for someone from that town: David.

Conclusion

This essay offers a brief reading of the Book of Ruth through the lens of assimilation theory. The theory’s notion of three sets of mechanisms and their effects on ethnic boundaries find parallels in this account of the assimilation of a Moabite immigrant into Bethlehem. And this biblical story opens a window into the processes of immigrant assimilation today.
I have found that this approach has the pastoral value of allowing present-day Latino/a immigrants to find their own story in the text. The challenges they face in terms of their identity and status are well documented in anthropological and sociological research and are laid bare in the wrenching stories of Latino/a fiction. The obstacles to overcome are similar: physical and economic survival, ethnic acceptance, cultural competence, and legal awareness.

The more of Ruth also are familiar: hard work and loyalty, coupled with creative (even risky) action. It is a tale of a process, perhaps never completed for Ruth but with a brighter promise for her son. Who knows whether today’s immigrants are part of a larger, significant trajectory of which they are totally unaware?

For people who are the product of ethnic intermarriage—in my case, the son of an immigrant mother and a native-born father—we have heard the stories of that parent who worked so hard for us to feel at home here while not losing our other cultural identity (for me, my guatemalidad). We are Obed. Said another way: Ruth still lives among us.

Notes

It is a pleasure to offer this article in honor of Jonathan Bonk, a missionary statesman and scholar with a heart for refugees and immigrants. I count it a privilege to call him a friend.


4. Some prefer terms such as integration, accommodation, acculturation, or adaptation.


8. Ibid., 131.

9. The gleaning laws are found in Lev. 19:10; 23:22; Deut. 24:19–22.


Migration, Diaspora Mission, and Religious Others in World Christianity: An African Perspective

J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu

In this article we celebrate Jonathan Bonk and his passion for hospitality. Jon has long demonstrated a conscious concern for the marginalized religious and ethnic other as part of Christian mission. When in 2012 I was a senior resident scholar at the Overseas Ministries Study Center and there encountered an Iraqi refugee family that he had hosted, immediately the Gospel story of the Good Samaritan came to mind (Luke 10:25–37). I celebrate Jon’s mission efforts here by reflecting on African diaspora churches, which is part of immigrant Christian mission activity in the North. This is an issue to which Jon gave some attention as editor of the IBMR, especially through a 2003 essay by Jehu H. Hanciles.1 African immigrant Christianity is part of the story of world Christianity. The churches and Christian communities concerned are manifestations of the much-talked-about shift in the demographic center of the Christian faith from North to South. “The era of Western Christianity has passed within our lifetimes,” says Philip Jenkins, and “the day of the Southern churches is dawning.”2 African immigrant Christianity in the Global North, although too often held in low esteem or dismissed as mere social safety nets for despondent strugglers in foreign lands, powerfully illustrates the renewal of Christianity as a non-Western religion. For some “ Levites” and “priests” in our time African diaspora Christianity, despite the renewal abundantly evident in it, has become a new religious other, for it is culturally different, theologically fundamental, and even aggressive, and it seeks to reverse the old paradigms of mission in which Christianity was considered essentially a white man’s religion.

The primary question motivating this article is, What does the presence of African Christians living their faith outside their historic geographic boundaries say about the changing face of world Christianity generally? In particular, what does it say to their Western compatriots? For many such immigrants—coming from Africa, Latin America, and Asia—their Christian faith has been fundamentally empowering and affirming in spiritual, social, and economic ways. Thus for Wonsuk Ma, a Pentecostal missionary from the Philippines currently serving as executive director of the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, a non-Western institution in the U.K., it is the turn of the churches in the Global South to revive the Western church. The role of the diaspora in the midst of the secular West, Ma notes, is therefore critically important.3 Immigrant churches have been defined in terms of their ethnic identities and their provision of religiosocial spaces as safety nets for foreigners in alien lands. Many, like the man in Jesus’ parable who fell among robbers, are wounded through the harsh realities of economic life in Africa and oppressive immigration conditions and are looking for some warm embrace from brothers and sisters in the West. But do they find it? Even further, we can ask, Is this “immigrant Christianity” considered authentic? Is it in fact a significant part of world Christianity?

Immigrant Christians as Religious Others

The significance of the new type of Christianity, as I will argue, lies in the perception of its bearers that the North needs Jesus Christ, who is nothing other than “the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Unlike Old Testament Israel, which for the most part refused to live out their covenant with Yahweh within their depressing exilic conditions, African diaspora Christians, many viewing their communities as the new Israel, are convinced of the relevance of prayerfully living out the Gospel under difficult circumstances. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, they seek to sing the songs of the Lord in foreign lands. Sadly, Western Christians have often viewed African immigrant churches as religious others, in some instances even lumping them together with non-Christian religious traditions. These attitudes occur because, as Jenkins notes, a number of radical writers still link Christianity with Western imperialism and do not recognize the ways in which Christianity has been transformed through African hands.⁴ The otherness of these African Christians in the eyes of some of their Western compatriots stems from the stubborn refusal in Western thinking to recognize the collapse of European missionary hegemony. Part of the modern West manifests a certain inability to come to terms with the fact that South Korean missionaries, for example, now dominate Christian activity across the world.

One study concludes that the massive presence of Korean missionaries in world Christianity “highlights the unique set of gifts which immigrant Christian communities can exercise not only in their ‘home’ ... churches and missionary initiatives, but more importantly in global mission leadership.”⁵ It does not mean that Western Christianity ceases to matter in global mission. At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, with the emergence of African Initiated Churches, the Western missionary Christianity of colonial Africa ceased to reflect world Christianity. The type of Christianity we consider below looks different from its “missionary original” because Africans, against the backdrop of indigenous interpretations of Scripture and relgiocultural experience, privilege the pneumatic over the cerebral in living out their faith. Jenkins notes: “These models have been far more enthusiastic, much more centrally concerned with the immediate workings of the supernatural, through prophecy, visions, ecstatic utterances, and healing. In fact, they have differed so widely from the cooler Northern norms as to arouse suspicion that these enthusiastic Africans... are essentially reviving the pagan practices of traditional society.”⁶

As Christianity becomes increasingly non-Western, it is likely to be transformed through its immersion in the prevailing cultures of African societies.⁷ In African religious traditions, what is ultimately real is the spiritual. Through the pneumatic forms of Christianity lived and expressed by African diaspora Christians, we can discern what ordinary Africans consider critical to the faith: Jesus Christ is Lord, and by the power of the Spirit, he intervenes...
Migrant Christianity as the New Religious Other

In many parts of Europe, as we have noted, the typical African immigrant church is a religious other professing a variant of Christianity that is considered biblically suspicious and theologically deficient. Claudia Währisch-Oblau discusses how immigrant congregations with historic links to German missions, for example, were expected to function under German church leadership and work within the German church’s ecclesial structures. She notes how African immigrant Christianity in Germany has mostly been perceived as foreign and transient, a minority phenomenon that might need some protection and support, but nothing that would have an impact on majority Christianity. Contrary to these assumptions, many immigrant churches and their leaders, she writes, have come to define themselves as missionaries who are “planning to reach out not only to their own nationals, but to German society as a whole” in a bid to bring revival to “dead” German churches. The type of diaspora Christianity discussed here has been the subject of some important studies within the last two decades.

The point is that African immigrants are revealing new paradigms in Christian mission that “raise the prospect of a revitalized Christian presence on European soil.” In response to aspersions that these communities are simply ethnic enclaves for people seeking to better their economic fortunes, it is important to point out that vulnerability has always been an important factor in Christian mission. The Incarnation remains the strongest lesson in this direction. Immigrant churches with their ethnic compositions and informal, expressive, and “noisy” services may not be attractive to secular-minded Westerners, but the witness of presence is also important, even if that turns out to be the only contribution that these so-called religious others make to world Christianity. The immigrant churches have in almost all cases remained firmly within the limits of what may be considered authentic Christian traditions. “Far from inventing some new African or Korean religions that derive from local cultures,” Jenkins further writes, “the rising churches usually preach a strong and even pristine Christian message.” While the lordship of Jesus Christ could be said to constitute the basis of all Christianity, the expression of this foundation varies across cultures precisely because cultures and peoples differ.

Speaking from the perspective of African diaspora Christianity and its encounter with secularizing Western countries, I am aware that the decline of public Christianity has not necessarily seen the exclusion of spirituality from private spheres. Not only are many non-Christian new religious movements emerging within Western communities, but the media, especially the Internet and the social media, facilitate the practice of new forms of spirituality. In the midst of these developments, non-Western forms of Christianity have gained prominence, which clearly teaches us that God is still active in history, working his purposes out in Jesus Christ as Lord. God may perhaps be doing this by using the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, the weak things to shame the strong, and the lowly things of this world—the despised things and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him (see 1 Cor. 1:27–29).

Apostolic Body in Diaspora

People move and migrate for various reasons. They respond to the movement of capital and resources or to their perceptions of opportunities for better living conditions available elsewhere. Migration takes place as transnational economic corporations and organizations of intellectual, social, and political life grow in number and require more transnational personnel to operate and serve. The critical motivation in all these movements is survival. For many Africans, migration occurs because fields are dry, crops have failed, or they are facing one form of persecution or another. Whatever the reason for migration, for many Africans the process of moving involves—from beginning to end—important religious dimensions, including rituals of facilitation, breakthrough, and survival. For example, it is not uncommon for prayer centers in Ghana and Nigeria to receive potential migrants, who come with their passports for prayer and anointing as they apply for visas or, if already secured, for protection and success on the journey. Some of these journeys have been fatal as African migrants perish in boats capsizing on the Mediterranean Sea, as recent news reports consistently bring to the world’s attention. Statistics indicate that relatively few people make it to the so-called “promised lands” of Europe and North America. These perilous journeys reveal the level of desperation with its attendant vulnerability when it comes to the desire to migrate in search of better lives. For ordinary Africans the original intention to migrate may not even be religious, but it is important that faith and spirituality are important in the lives of these migrants and they carry those with them everywhere.

These desperate and vulnerable people are those who constitute the religious communities that we are calling Christian churches in the diaspora. “We are God’s apostles to Europe” is how one Ghanaian explained her presence as a Christian in an alien land after one church service in Amsterdam. Migration has offered them opportunities to see firsthand what has happened to Christianity in the land of the missionaries, and they feel challenged to do something about the situation. Many of these “apostles” may be undocumented, but the dynamism of their faith overcomes the troubles that they often experience as illegal aliens. Their circumstances lead inevitably to a certain amount of ethnic bonding and creation of boundaries, and indeed they have been charged with “ghettoizing” religion. Nevertheless, one should not think that mission and witness are peripheral to the lives of African diaspora Christian communities.

There is much prayer in these diaspora churches for personal concerns—particularly for proper documentation, employment, health, family, and deliverance from witches seeking to thwart endeavors away from home. There is also prayer, however, that God will deliver Europe from the claws of the devil, who, according to Peter, prowls around like a lion looking for someone to devour (1 Pet. 5:8). In John 10:10 Jesus describes the devil as one who comes only to “steal and kill and destroy,” activities that in contemporary immigrant religious thought are expressed through
secularization, gay/lesbian ordinations, and the public promotion of what may be considered morally wrong and detestable in the eyes of African Christian communities. I have sat through African immigrant revival meetings in Amsterdam, Hamburg, Columbus (Ohio), and Chicago in which intense prayers have been uttered for the Lord to open the eyes of the West that it may return to him as Lord. “The battle is spiritual,” one prayer leader proclaimed, and “we must fight it in the power of the Spirit.”

Migration, Mission, and Diaspora in Biblical Contexts

There may be other reasons for the establishment of immigrant churches by non-Westerners living in the developed West, but the conviction that secularization is the devil’s way of stealing, killing, and destroying Christianity in Europe and the West is a strong motivation for the evangelistic activities of diaspora churches in these locations. In a sense, Christian mission is now being interpreted through African biblical lenses. In his article “The Diaspora Factor in Christian History,” Andrew Walls helpfully draws attention to the biblical precedents of migration history. The experience of exile and wandering in the desert in search of a homeland proved to be the setting for the people of God in the Judeo-Christian tradition to receive the promise and fulfillment of God’s care and protection and his love and grace for all peoples.

Jesus Christ was an outcast in his own country, yet in him, as Paul affirmed, “There is no longer Jew or Greek . . . slave or free . . . male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). Exile and wandering in the desert became paradigmatic experiences, from which the religious fellowship of Christ understands itself as transcending political and other borders. “Embedded in such religious traditions are the values of love, compassion and hospitality, and care for orphans and widows, strangers and exiles.” If we take all the stories together, Walls points out, we have examples of almost every known form of migration, both voluntary and involuntary. I appreciate his lucid summary of migration as both punitive and redemptive:

Migration often stands for dispossession, loss of patrimony or habitat. Adam loses Eden; Cain loses the security of the group. Israel loses the land, kingdom, and temple. In all these cases, migration is punitive, the result of wrongdoing, leading to dislocation and deprivation.

But there is another style of migration that is redemptive rather than punitive. Abraham is not expelled from his Mesopotamian city: he is divinely called out of it, with the promise of another land for his descendants.

Walls continues his discussion of the theme in the New Testament.

In the New Testament it is still Abraham, the perennial migrant, who becomes the exemplar of Christian faith and the pointer to Christian identity (Rom. 4). In the Epistle to the Hebrews, Abraham heads the list of those who died in faith without attaining the well-founded city prepared for them (Heb. 11:8–10). Christians in that letter are described in terms applicable to migrant workers, seeking that better future that migrants typically desire for their children. Other New Testament writers use the figure of the diaspora, that institutionalized migration whereby so many Jews lived outside the promised land, to portray normal Christian experience to the world (Phil. 3:20). One even describes Christians as “refugees” (I Pet. 1:1; 2:11 GNB).

In the same article, Walls argues that in many places migration forwarded the spread of Christianity. To that end, the Acts of the Apostles shows how Barnabas and Paul ministered in Jewish communities with “a fringe of interested Gentiles” (see Acts 13–14). That is, migration and mission have been related since biblical times.

Diaspora Mission and Incarnation

Mission means the announcement or transmission and confession of faith, and to that end the church is called to continue the ministry of Jesus Christ in the world. Hendrik Kraemer mentions the incarnation as the epitome of Christian mission, referring to the mission of the church as a reflection of “divine extravertness.” For Kraemer, the church in its missionary work expresses its constant looking toward “the ends of the earth” and “the end of time.” Mission interpreted through an incarnation model is evident in the IBMR essay by Hanciles, who notes that the version of the Great Commission recorded in Matthew 28:18–20 is unlikely to retain its primacy in the growing non-Western missionary movement. Those involved in diaspora mission as immigrants simply do not possess the same economic and technological privileges that the Western mission agencies did when they worked in Africa. Non-Western diaspora missionaries are working from the periphery. In contrast to their Western forbears, as Hanciles notes, this mission “comes not from the centers of political power and economic wealth but from the periphery.”

The model of mission that fits the diaspora initiatives is thus the Johannine version—“as the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21)—with its implications of humble service and vulnerability, because it follows the incarnation principle: “Christ’s life and ministry included the travail of a refugee, the pain of uprootedness, and the alienation that comes with being a stranger. Even the emptying of status to take on the form of a servant has its parallels in the migrant experience.”

Immigrants are now beginning to have a significant place in Western Christian history. Immigrants are now beginning to have a significant place in Western Christian history. Walls is no doubt correct that, at least in some areas of the West, “Christianity will be associated increasingly with immigrants.” It must not surprise us, then, that a high level of internationalism has crept into the missionary agenda of the contemporary African Pentecostal/charismatic movement. According to one qualitative study, African immigrants in the United States are making a significant social and cultural impact, especially through the proliferation of religious communities, doing so despite their modest numbers. Let us remember, however, that the primary motivation for the establishment of religious communities goes beyond the sociocultural function of reproducing ethnic enclaves in foreign lands. The question of diaspora Israel “How could we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?” (Ps. 137:4) has been rephrased in the hearts of contemporary African immigrant Christians, who are seeing possibilities rather than impossibilities in mission.
Rethinking Mission through the Diaspora Challenge

The New Testament has much to say about dealing with the other, especially the marginalized, the stranger, and the vulnerable. The parable of the Good Samaritan is a useful example, for it shows risk-taking and going the extra mile in order to accommodate the needs of a stranger. We also need to note that the point of Peter’s vision in Acts 10 right before his encounter with Cornelius was to prepare him to embrace Gentile converts, among whom the Holy Spirit was also active. The Spirit of God is a Spirit of inclusion; only by the experience of the Spirit can Gentiles come to inherit the blessing of Abraham (Gal. 3:14).

The incarnation shows redemption through humble con-
descension and identification with the other. When, through the incarnation, divinity was translated into humanity, God in Christ as the second Adam fully and completely identified with fallen human nature in order to redeem it. God disempowered himself that he might empower his people in the course of mission. The migration of Joseph, Mary, and the baby Jesus, Walls notes, “locates the Jesus story within a movement that spans history, of people desiring a better life or escaping the threat of death.”

Throughout the New Testament, it is within such diaspora conditions that the Gospel takes root. Similarly, we eagerly expect that, as Christianity moves from the South to the North through migration, we shall discern in it the move of God empowering the weak to fulfill his purposes among the strong.

Notes
4. Jenkins, Next Christendom, 163.
6. Jenkins, Next Christendom, 134.
7. Ibid., 7, 9.
11. Ibid., 122, 135.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 4.
19. Ibid., 150.

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Hospitality as a Life Stance in Mission: Elements from Catholic Mission Experience in the Twentieth Century

Angelyn Dries

Through Jonathan Bonk’s gracious invitation, I became a senior mission scholar in residence at the Overseas Ministries Study Center in spring 2008. Little did I realize what the semester would hold in addition to research, a public lecture, and the weeklong seminar I gave as part of my residency. In April I broke my leg and had a slow recovery of many weeks at OMSC. As I considered the myriad professional interactions Jon Bonk and I have had over twenty-five years and the themes of this Festschrift, I immediately recalled the diverse expressions of hospitality from Jon and Jean Bonk, the OMSC staff, and residents as my physical mobility expanded that semester. The English word “hospitality” derives from the Latin hospes (a host/hostess, a guest-friend), as do hospitality, hospitable, hospital, and hospice. Missionaries have learned from experience the many cultural expressions of hospitality around the world. Through a brief consideration of three such experiences of Catholic missionaries from the twentieth century, I will draw out some underlying dispositions of hospitality in relation to mission.

H. A. Reinhold and the Apostle of the Sea

The first story is that of German-born Hans Ansgar Reinhold (1897–1968), who joined the German army in 1914, was wounded in action, and then was assigned to translating French and English codes as a member of army intelligence. After the war, while a student at the University of Freiburg, he read The Spirit of the Liturgy, by Romano Guardini, which became a crossroads in his life, for in it he glimpsed Christianity as a living experience. He met the liturgist Dom Odo Casel at Maria Laach Monastery, a noted center for liturgical renewal since the late 1910s. There Reinhold experienced missa recitata, or “dialogue Masses,” as they were called, which involved full participation of the people in song and responses during the Eucharistic celebration, rather than their passive presence as onlookers of what was “going on” at the altar. His liturgical experience and the consequent social dimensions of living the liturgy shaped the rest of his life and mission.

Four years after his ordination in 1925, Reinhold was appointed port chaplain of Bremerhaven, “the ugliest of cities,” he remarked—“a stark unoriginal industrial city of unbelievable drabness and functional utilitarianism.” He was then named port chaplain in Hamburg and became cofounder of the International Apostolate of the Sea, an organization of port and sea chaplains and others who ministered to men of the sea. But a mission perspective that entwined liturgy and social action toward and among seamen who labored on cargo, cruise, or fishing ships brought him exile. At the 1934 International Congress of the Apostolate of the Sea that he organized in Germany, he refused to open the gathering with the required salute to Hitler and the accompanying song. On April 30, 1935, five Gestapo agents came to his office and forced him to sign the receipt of a decree that, he wrote, “banished me from all contacts with the sea and her men, ‘according to Section I of the law of the Reich President for the protection of people and state.’ [I] had to leave the coast that very afternoon.” After three years of peripatetic exile in Europe and the United States, he was named port chaplain in Seattle, Washington.

During his college years Reinhold had worked aboard cruise ships and had observed the divided “worlds” of the higher and lower decks and in the ship’s hold. As a chaplain in two German ports, he witnessed firsthand the difficulties of a sailor’s life. Mariners were a commodity while on shore to be exploited by prostitutes, vendors, innkeepers, pub owners, and other entrapers, who sought sailors’ hard-earned wages. The men of the sea, gone from their home for lengthy periods of time, were not members of land-based parishes nor were they even on the parish horizon. Not all sailors, of course, were practicing Catholics or any other kind of Christian. The few Christians Reinhold observed coming to the dock to tend to the sailors often perceived the men to be “poor boys,” who needed protection from those entrappers. From Reinhold’s perspective their form of Christian “mission” made “seamen as a group appear as heathens.”

This approach toward sailors, Reinhold thought, demeaned the men. He abhorred the “petting and nursing attitude” adopted by ministers to sailors. He critiqued social activities in the form of clubs provided by Christian groups, many of which, he said, “look like asylums for the destitute,” with “dances, card parties, and second rate musical events.” He deplored preachers who had no interest in the “social strife” of the men: sailors’ working conditions, the impact of sailors’ lives on families, the increase in mechanization on ships and consequent layoffs, and the lack of hospital care and sick benefits. International Congresses of the Apostolate of the Sea addressed the social realities that were inhospitable for sailors and, at the same time, promoted the spiritual welfare of the Catholic men.

Reinhold envisioned the mission to and among sailors as a “traveler’s aid for grown-up men” based on the principles of Catholic Action: “all that is manly, active, courageous and altruistic in seamen should be appealed to.” Not only should Catholic clubs in ports be places of beauty, cleanliness, and hospitality, they should also be places where adult seamen actively participated in liturgy (missa recitata), with full liturgical participation spilling over into all areas of their lives. Sailors involved in Catholic Action aimed to effect change in their environment, working to make conditions more hospitable and just for living and working.

Anna Dengel: Hospitals, Healing, and Just Relationships

The second story is that of Anna Dengel (1892–1980), born in the Tyrolean town of Steeg, Austria. When she read mission literature from the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary at work in St. Catherine’s Hospital, Rawalpindi, then in India, Dengel drew...
inspiration for her life’s work: namely, to alleviate the suffering of women who had little or no access to health care because of Islamic and Hindu cultural and religious strictures. After obtaining her medical credentials with honor at Cork University in 1919, Dengel labored at St. Catherine’s until 1924, when she found herself completely exhausted. Being the only mission doctor who was a layperson, she had little social companionship, because the rules of the Sisters’ community at the time prescribed limited social interaction with others when the Sisters were not working in the hospital.

During a retreat in Europe, Dengel formed a resolution to found a congregation of women religious devoted to medical missions, something without precedent for Roman Catholics. On the contrary, according to church law, women religious were not to perform surgery, and specifically they could not practice obstetrics. Yet many medical problems of childbirth, infant mortality, and unsafe obstetrical practices affected women. Dengel was convinced of the need to work among Indian women, so in 1925 she, Dr. Joanna Lyons, and two registered nurses began the Pious Society of Medical Missionaries. Eleven years later, seeing the magnificent work the women accomplished, and after lobbying by several individuals and groups over the previous decades, the Vatican gave approval to the women to form the first Roman Catholic congregation of women to work as physicians, surgeons, and obstetricians. By 1967 the Medical Mission Sisters had grown to over 700 Sisters who worked in forty countries. In turn, the Sisters trained local women for medical practice in India, various countries in Africa, and elsewhere.

Dengel’s Mission to Samaritans (1945) laid out the relationship she saw between mission and medical care. Healing or tending to illness certainly could be seen as a “ministry of compassion,’ which supported the home as the beginning of social transformation,” as Dana Robert has noted about the work of many women missionaries. But Dengel’s perspective expressed an understanding that medical practice was also an act of restitution, a “debt, which we, the white race, owe to the peoples subjected and exploited by our Forefathers.” Missionaries were like the Good Samaritan in the Gospel, though with modern means at their disposal. They provided not simply unguents, a place to recover, and expert medical care, but equally as important, women were made to feel at home and were valued in the hospital. A concern was that experiences such as these could make the healed women feel “in debt” to those who helped them. Dengel warned the Sisters that the works of mercy should be performed, even though conversions would not result. “The people must never get the idea that conversion and baptism are necessary to reward your devoted care.”

Between 1927 and 1945 Dengel edited Medical Missionary, the journal she inaugurated, which featured stories about the health of women across the world; actions being taken to address conditions women faced in their homes or from their culture that endangered women’s health. Mother Dengel and the Medical Mission Sisters in India were pioneers in reducing infant and maternity mortality and in lowering the death rate from devastating disease and from malnutrition. In the process, the life expectancy for women was raised in India. The Medical Missionary exemplified Dengel’s view that medical missions conjoined medicine, science, and social analysis with prayer, liturgy, and charity.

Dengel’s identification with suffering women linked the charity of Jesus with an infrastructure for social justice and a welcome to all. “Relieving suffering in the spirit of Christ means serving Him personally. . . . It brings tidings of peace, breaking down religious prejudice and race hatred. It is a way of bringing together under one friendly roof all classes, all colors and creeds.” Thus hospitality, which allowed for changed relationships toward the “other,” was a witness to God’s gratuitous love and embodied a living relationship between health, spirituality, and political realities.

It would be from Anna Dengel that Mother Teresa of Calcutta learned how to take care of poor and sick persons.

Hospitability in the Weihsien Internment Camp, Shandong, China

The third story is that of the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, St. Francis, Wisconsin, one of many women religious communities in the United States who sent Sisters to China in the 1920s. The congregation went to the Northern Province of Shandong (Shantung) in 1929, with their initial mission to teach in a “school for virgins,” that is, young ladies who, upon completion of their courses in catechetics, would assist priests in evangelization at various mission stations. Beginning in 1931 several Chinese women sought admission to the Sisters’ congregation. (In 1947, when the Sisters had to leave China, twenty-five Chinese Sisters of St. Francis came to the United States with them.)

During World War II, the Japanese created a Civilian Assembly Camp, a euphemism for the Weihsien Internment Camp, located at a former Presbyterian mission, to keep civilians from Allied countries in northern China. The camp of about 1,900 people was under the guard of the Japanese Consulate Authority. Japanese officials sent seven Sisters of St. Francis to

Missionaries were like the Good Samaritan in the Gospel, though with modern means at their disposal.
Hospitality is about relationships. The stories convey some type of reciprocity, of change, and of mutual learning.

us at all times. Here all nationalities and all denominations are represented, so our living together under present circumstances has broken down a great deal of prejudice on all sides. With many it has been their first contact with priests or Sisters. And, one might add, the camp was the first significant contact the Sisters had with other Christian groups, Jews, or Muslims.

Sister Servatia Berg observed, “In getting to know people of other faiths, we had to admire many things. I especially revered the Anglicans for keeping their ‘quiet hour’ as they called it, each morning before roll call.” Presbyterian missionary John David Hayes, whom Sister Servatia characterized as “a genial person and one to whom you could speak openly,” asked for her St. Andrew Missal, which contained Mass prayers and Scripture readings for Sunday Masses. “When he returned [the missal], he deplored the Latin translation. I had never realized before that they were so poor, as the translation had been done in Belgium. He also told me that on that Sunday he used the missal in his services, reading the Collects of the day. We thought that made a certain bond of union with his services and our Masses earlier in the church.” Sister Servatia empathized with another minister, British Anglican Thomas Scott, who was a bishop. “It must have been difficult for him as far as his congregation was concerned because the Low and High Episcopalians had to worship together and often their views did not coincide, as I learned working with the women [washing] the vegetables.”

Internees enjoyed lectures on a variety of topics. “The Life of a Trappist,” presented by a monk in the camp, was so popular, “was so popular,” Sister Servatia remarked, “that Catholics had a hard time getting into the room.” One evening Fr. Raymond de Jaegher (1905–80) spoke on “The Life of Father Vincent Lebbe,” a friend who in the early 1900s advocated strongly for an indigenous rather than European clergy in China. The Sisters discovered they were the only Catholics present at the lecture. A young lady, a Miss Brayne, from the China Inland Mission, was in attendance. Father DeJaegher had given her a Bible, and she came at night to inquire about Catholic life. The Sisters met her in the camp’s library, where she read Catholic books while they read the Protestant books. A few months later, the young lady was baptized in the Sisters’ room and received her first Communion the following day.

The camp was liberated by the Duck Mission Team, seven paratroopers under direction of the Office of Strategic Services of the American Army, on August 15, 1945. The Sisters of St. Francis left the camp on September 25, 1945, and returned to their mission in Hungkailou to rejoin their Chinese Sisters.

Hospitality as a Life Stance in Mission

What do these three brief accounts in very different circumstances have in common? While Christians value hospitality, the Catholic experience in these cases combined several attitudes, or dispositions. Hospitality encompassed more than specific acts: adequate quarters for seamen, clean sheets for hospital patients, or perusal of books from other religious traditions. First, hospitality meant noticing and paying attention to people and to their situation, even when the missionary seemed at a cultural or linguistic disadvantage. Second, hospitality resulted in the “other” being received and drew people to fuller participation on many levels of life. Third, the three stories show people being brought together—often around food or around a livelihood, that is, around that which enabled people to provide for their families and others. Hospitality is about relationships. The stories convey some type of reciprocity, of change, and of mutual learning. Fourth, hospitality draws upon an experience of God’s abundant love and the wealth of the Christian tradition. It is not a matter of one or another practice but the “fleshing out” of that love in consequences for social justice. At times, missionaries themselves need hospitality when they suffer their own impoverishment or they feel their usefulness is diminished in some way. Yes, Jesus washed the feet of his apostles, but Mary of Bethany washed his feet (John 12:1–8).

With the story of Abraham and Sarah as a backdrop, when they entertained three guests with generous food, drink, and rituals of Middle Eastern hospitality—and in the process learned that Sarah would have a child when the guests returned the next year (Gen. 18:1–15)—the Letter to the Hebrews reminds Christians: “Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels. Be mindful of prisoners as if sharing their imprisonment, and of the ill-treated as of yourselves, for you also are in the body” (Heb. 13:1–3 NABRE). One could say, then, that hospitality is a life stance conveyed in various ways but always about relationships and always about the abundance of God’s love enfleshed. This was something of what I experienced with Jon and Jean Bonk at OMSC.

Notes

1. This seeming reversal of the meaning of hospitality over the centuries is apparently also found in the Talmud (ushpiz, an innkeeper); in the medieval Aramaic of the Zohar, ushpiy came to mean a guest. See “Hospitalable Origins,” Philologos, November 26, 2001, at http://forward.com/author/philologos/?p=52.


Noteworthy

Announcing

The United States Catholic China Bureau, since 2011 located in Berkeley, California, will hold its 2015 biennial conference, entitled “The Catholic Church in China: Respecting the Past, Understanding the Present, Envisioning Future Relationships,” October 9–11, at Mercy Center, Burlingame, California. Keynote lectures will be delivered by Rob Carbonneau (USCCB director) and Bernard Chien-Chiu Li (Fu Jen University, Taipei). For further information, see www.uscatholicchina.org/2015conference, or e-mail director@uscatholicchina.org.

Personalia

Appointed. Jesse Zink, as director of the Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide (formerly the Henry Martyn Centre) for two years, beginning September 2015. The previous director, Emma Wild-Wood, has been seconded to the World Christianities lectureship in the Divinity Faculty of Cambridge University. Zink served as a missionary in Mthatha, South Africa, and is the author of Backpacking through the Anglican Communion: A Search for Unity (Morehouse, 2014). A research and teaching center, the Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide welcomes scholars who require a research base in Cambridge. For information, see www.martynmission.cam.ac.uk/.

Died. Siga Arles, 65, Indian missiologist and founder of the Centre for Contemporary Christianity, June 5, 2015, in Bangalore, India, of a heart attack. Arles received a B.Sc. from Mysore University in 1970 and, subsequently, M.A.R. and M.Div. degrees from Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky, and a Ph.D., in 1990, from the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. A visiting professor at various institutions in India and North America, Arles was professor of missiology and vice-principal at Serampore College, West Bengal, India, and registrar of the North India Institute of Post-Graduate Theological Studies, Kolkata, India. He had recently overseen the establishment of CfCC’s academic, degree-granting wing. Arles’s publications include Missiological Education: An Indian Exploration (2006).


Died. Willem Saayman, 73, professor emeritus of missiology at the University of South Africa, anti-apartheid theologian, missionary, and author, May 16, 2015, in Pretoria, South Africa. Following a first degree at the University of the Free State, received in 1963, Saayman taught in high schools in the 1960s. He subsequently studied missiology at the University of Stellenbosch and was ordained a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church in November 1973. He then served in Namibia, first at Rundu, and later at the Orumana Theological School in the Kaokoveld, where he developed his passion for a theology of justice expressed through a prophetic church responding to social challenges. For two decades, until his retirement in 1998, he was professor of missiology at the University of South Africa, Pretoria, where from 1992 to 1997 he was also head of the Department of Missiology. In 1985 Saayman was one of the signatories of the Kairos Document, a challenge to the church to oppose the apartheid regime’s use of Christianity to justify oppression. His publications include Christian Mission in South Africa: Political and Ecumenical (1991) and, with J. N. J. Kritzinger, David J. Bosch: Prophetic Integrity, Cruciform Praxis (2011).
“At the Table Their Eyes Were Opened”: Mission as Renouncing Power and Being Hosted by the Stranger

Ruth Padilla DeBorst

H eavy. Their feet drag, borne down by the burden of disappointment. The whole thing has been nothing but a failure. They had held such high hopes. . . . Just days before, their master had entered the city triumphantly and been joyfully acclaimed as king. Finally the Messiah was going to free his people from the Romans and establish his kingdom! But it had all ended in public shame, in the basest humiliation. That morning the women had brought the cowed disciples some astounding news—they claimed some men at the grave had announced that their master was no longer dead. But who could believe women, who are so prone to fantasize?

Dead, Jesus was dead! Their dreams had been dashed against the hard rocks of reality. How could they have been so misled? Perhaps they should have believed the Sanhedrin, who insisted that the true Messiah, the king of the Jews, could never come from so insignificant a place as Galilee. Logically, the king of the Jews would come from Jerusalem, where had sat the kings of old, where the temple still stood, where the power of God rested. And when he came, the Anointed One would surely surround himself with the right people, the young and beautiful, the successful and bright, the learned and promising—not with losers, lepers, laborers, traitors, foreigners, and women of ill repute. Besides, the Savior of Israel would most definitely not end his days as a common criminal at the hands of pagan soldiers!

What is there left to do now? Leave Jerusalem and failure behind. Get away and hide in anonymity. Grateful they should be for getting away unscathed. That was pretty risky business, and once again. Thousands press into overcrowded cities and refugee camps. Hope is smothered. The fruit of the fields can’t be for getting away unscathed. That was pretty risky business, and crucifixions do not take place every day! “Are you a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?” they blurt out in amazement. “What things?” he asked. “About Jesus of Nazareth,” they reply, still baffled at his ignorance. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.” With heavy hearts, they now review the events for the stranger who has joined their plodding walk.

“Official Stories”

They are suddenly startled out of their account when their unknown traveling companion cuts in, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!” Their reaction is natural, “How dare this stranger insult us? What does he know about us! Foolish he called us. Slow. Blind . . . !” And truly blinded they are. They are unable to recognize Jesus because they are blindfolded by an ideology of power wrapped up in religiosity. Disregarding history and Scripture, the religious establishment has defined “Messiah” according to the interests of the powerful classes in ways that leave untouched their connivance with the injustices of the Roman Empire and its lackeys. The ruling Pax Romana, imposed by military and economic might, moved people at will in order to secure its borders. So ingrained in the disciples is the power paradigm that they have ears only for the “official story.” They remain deaf to the testimony of the women and blind to the presence of the risen Christ, just as they had been unable to grasp Jesus’ repeated announcements of his coming death.

World history is plagued by “official stories” of state and religious power bundled together into shameful and blinding packages. In the case of Latin America, sixteenth-century conquistadores with sword and cross in hand stained the soil with blood, raped women and land, built lavish, ornate churches on the broken backs of indigenous men and women, and forced them to move to inhospitable regions. Since then, our region has been familiar with versions of Christianity that rubber-stamp
oppressive regimes that sow death and push thousands upon thousands of people into hopeless wandering in search of home. “Evangelical” presidents in the 1980s and 1990s in Guatemala, purportedly heralds of morality, discipline, and nationalism, were responsible for the torture and massacre of entire villages. Most Christians silently tolerated or offered outright support to the repressive military dictatorship in Argentina in the mid-1970s. Te Deum’s were held annually in Chile celebrating “the other September 11,” the bloody coup of Augusto Pinochet in 1973, although during his dictatorship, thousands were tortured, murdered, and made to disappear. Through it all, the supposedly democratic and “Christian” United States overtly and covertly staged coups and funded death squads, drug lords, and dictators. Controversial and contradictory information is available regarding the intentional support and complicity of conservative mission agencies in bolstering murderous anti-Marxist campaigns in Latin America. But what is undeniable is that the combination of U.S. political power, right-wing Christian phobia toward anything perceived as socialist, and powerful economic interests has proven a lethal force that has contributed to the unstoppable wave of immigrants and refugees pouring over the U.S. border.

U.S. supremacy in the region still involves military funding and significant political pressure. But the iron hand on our region is felt most pressingly today through globalization capitalism and the imposition of so-called Free Trade Agreements. While U.S. farmers are being paid for dumping their crops, Central American farmers, unable to sell theirs, watch their corn rot because prices have bottomed out thanks to the surplus shipped from the United States. While U.S. consumers dispose of clothes outdated by the latest fashion, Central Americans slave away in sweatshops with no labor laws to protect them. While capital is free to travel, invested and divested at will and for the benefit of big business, only wealthy people with documents of the empire are truly free to come and go. The other millions are deprived of hope, doomed to a life of poverty, and free only to risk drowning in oceans, dehydrating in deserts, or becoming rejected nobodies in the wealthy North. Through all this, Jonathan Bonk’s words are prescient: “Once confidently hailed as a ‘Christian’ nation, [the United States] has revealed itself to be neither Christian nor civilized—merely self-righteous and powerful.”

Followers of Jesus today may well acknowledge that the United States is by no means a Christian nation, but they may still assume that Christian mission flows from the haves to the have-nots of the world. Again in Bonk’s words: “Imbedded deep within the Western Christian psyche is the notion that missions will naturally and most effectively proceed from the political, military, and economically powerful centers to those dominated or impoverished.” Such a paradigm blinds its uncritical proponents—as it did the two on the way to Emmaus—to God’s preferred mode of action.

Gospel Power

“Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” the stranger continued. Suffering? What a strange concept! We were thinking of victory over our enemies, of the kingdom restored to the glory of King David’s day, of finally proving to the world that we are the chosen people! Suffering?!

“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.” Jesus walked Cleopas and his wife through the history of the Jewish people, pointing out how, time and time again, God works not out of power, but out of weakness. Younger siblings like Abel, Jacob, and David are upheld instead of the expected elder ones. Foreigners are portrayed as heroes, while the sins of prestigious national religious leaders are made public. Women, those second-class citizens such as Deborah, assume leadership in situations in which men have failed. The entire story of God’s gracious action in history is marked by baffling reversals.

In the climax of God’s restorative action, the Grand Liberator comes as a vulnerable stranger into an unwelcoming world (John 1:11). The son of a young country girl and, for all anyone could tell, a simple carpenter, in the backwoods province of Judea, far from the religious establishment of Jerusalem and further yet from the imperial seat in Rome, a fleeing refugee child, an itinerant teacher with no home to call his own, no social security or life insurance, Jesus lived the life of the poor. He walked the dusty roads and hung out with “nobodies.” He touched the untouchables and affirmed that they too had a right to live. True, he did tear the masks off the gatekeepers of his day, wresting power from those who clung to it so tightly. But he did so not with big armies, nor with the backing of wealthy supporters. Instead, “he took up our pain and bore our suffering. . . . He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth” (Isa. 53:4, 7). Not in the least a mismanaged plan or a failure of execution, the humiliation, the surrender, the piercing pain, the dark aloneness—in sum, the cross itself—was God’s chosen mode of action all along.

Had not Jesus’ greatest temptation been that of carrying out his assigned work, doing all he had been called to do, delivering all the right messages about life and relations, doing his mission—but without the cross? Had he not had to flee at times when people were ready to crown him, lest he succumb to the lure of power? Might not a drive toward expediency, efficiency, and productivity have challenged his humble, itinerant life among the poor and the marginalized? Imagine how many more people would have heard his message if he had preached it from the high priest’s seat or decreed its obedience from Rome! How much more quickly his teaching would have spread if he had gained the favor of rulers and wealthy lords! How much pain he could have spared himself if only he had compromised on some minor points, made his demands more palatable, and worked within the system! Had his soul not cried out in the garden, “Is there no other way?” Could not God’s purposes be accomplished without the awful suffering?

Tempted in similar fashion, many Christians in Latin America place their trust in size and in the power of connections and public opinion. The race is on for the biggest building, the farthest-reaching radio, and the record number of members. Power is derived from association, so with the motto “We are children of the King,” many mover-and-shaker, up-and-coming Christians scramble to mix with the governing elites and establish business connections that will favor church interests. Power is also projected through images and public relations. Under the
most utter need? He was abandoned by all, alone and ridiculed. No power in numbers. Surrounding himself as he had with the nobodies of society, he had no chance of deriving power from his social alliances. To make matters worse, he demonstrated no concern whatsoever for people’s assessment of his actions, associations, and teachings. Far from impressing with pleasantries, he often confronted and called to task precisely the people he recognized as a Lord who wielded none of those weapons? Few were his followers—and who stood with him in his moment of suffering. The days of being persecuted or excluded for the faith are buried in the past, when non-Catholics were a minority with no voice in the makings of our countries.

With vision hindered by these dazzling illusions, many Christians today are as blinded as the early disciples were. How could they recognize a Lord who wielded none of those weapons? Few were his followers—and who stood with him in his moment of suffering.

**Meeting Christ is a profoundly missional experience. Communion with Jesus inevitably engages his followers in God’s work in the world.**

**Around the Table**

Emmaus is now just ahead. The conversation must wind down. “As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, ‘Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.’” This invitation would not be uncommon; the roads were yet more dangerous at night. “So he went in to stay with them.” Customary and expected hospitality among Jews in those days included sharing bread, no matter how late the hour. And good manners would involve offering an unbroken loaf to the guest. But yet another reversal occurs, with a sudden flashback to a previous meal in an upper room. The couple is hosting, this is their home; however, “when he was at the table with them, [their guest] took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them.” The hosts are hosted! And then, after opening their home to this utter stranger, they are converted: instantly “their eyes were opened and they recognized him.” The blinders of tradition, misused expectation, and religious ideology are ripped from their dazed eyes, and they are now able to see the true Messiah! Bread broken and shared after a long day’s walk; a body broken and given away for the sake of others; a Son who holds nothing back but submits in love to his Father’s will and so furthers God’s restorative purposes in the world.

“Ah, Master!” Thoughts and words all a jumble with relief and excitement, “We must call our neighbors. We must celebrate our reunion! We must...” But Jesus “disappeared from their sight.” They have much to debrief: “Were not our hearts burn-
Yet more, he explains who they are and what they are all about: “You are witnesses of these things.” Witnesses, martyrs, people called to give themselves away in life and death as he had, for the sake of God’s kingdom and God’s justice. But they need not fear: the Spirit will come upon them and grant them power. Power to follow in his footsteps. Power to suffer, to endure the unavoidable dissatisfaction caused by the “unright-ness” of our world and still walk in hope. Power to avoid the worldly paradigm of riches, honor, and pride, and thus be freed to recognize Christ in the stranger along the road of life.7

In Jerusalem and Beyond

Several current challenges derive from the encounter of the disciples with the living Christ, the stranger at their table. And in relation to each of these, the life and ministry of Jonathan Bonk have made significant contributions.

Walking away from Jerusalem. In order to truly encounter Jesus in others, his followers need to walk away from “Jerusalem” and its blinding pretensions to power. Removing from their imagination the ruling presumption that effective ministry depends on economic, military, and political power is not simple. Bonk calls the church to recognize Jesus’ incarnation not merely as theologically descriptive but as strategically prescriptive: “Christ’s mission in Christ’s way must always begin, proceed, and end with the great renunciation.” And he prophetically warns:

“Unless we come to see our Western World through the eyes of Jesus and the writers of our scriptures, we will continue to excuse the personal and collective covetousness and greed that have made us “great,” and above the locked door to the heart of the richest church the world has ever seen will be written—in splendid gilt lettering—the word “ICHABOD.” And her Savior will remain on the outside (Rev. 3:17–20).”8

Consistent with his teaching, Bonk not only led the Overseas Ministries Study Center (OMSC) in extending a welcome to refugees and people under duress, but he and his wife, Jean, have also personally “adopted” entire families at significant personal cost, renouncing comfort and rest, even in the later years of their life.

Listening to all the Scriptures and embracing suffering instead of consumption. Until we engage with the whole biblical story and see the action of the triune God from creation to re-creation, we will envision only caricatures of Jesus, and we will remain unable to recognize or be hosted by him. Understanding God’s purposes and action throughout history is prerequisite to discerning our place at our particular historical juncture.

Particularly challenging are the biblical injunctions against the love of money. Bonk pointedly warns, “Personal affluence in the context of poverty raises legitimate doubts concerning a missionary’s willingness to obey and ability to teach the whole counsel of God regarding mammon.” He lays out the options clearly: when confronted with biblical teaching that challenges our love of money, Christians can ignore the issue altogether, engage in self-justification, or repent and be converted.9

Anxiously striving to secure immunity against all threat, people and nations build ever higher walls and run the risk of becoming the monsters they fear. Seeking to avoid pain and to hush all stirring of conscience, people easily get wrapped up in a whirlwind of consumption, shopping in order not to drop, consuming even one another in order not to feel for one another and risk suffering the pain of their common broken-ness. In this avoidance, it is easy to coast along, oblivious to the suffering of millions at the hand of the few. Following the Servant King, in contrast, involves willingness to own the impact of our choices and embrace suffering for the sake of others. Bonk elaborates on the implications of this attitude for Christian mission:

For the affluent Western Christian mission, grappling with its economic power at the theological level will mean subjecting all personal, family, ecclesiastical, and strategic plans, policies, practices, or considerations, to these three questions: (1) Does it reflect the Incarnation, or is it essentially self-serving? (2) Is the cross both the message and the method, or is self-pres-ervation the bottom line? (3) Are people more impressed by its stability and strength or by its weakness? The answer to each of these questions will determine the “Christian-ness” of both the missions and the missionaries of the Western churches.10

Bonk’s teaching, publishing, and participation in global theological and missiological discussions have all con-tributed to reminding Christians around the world of the ethical demands of Jesus’ way revealed through the whole span of Scripture.

Practicing radical hospitality. Bonk describes OMSC as “a place of radical hospitality, where we receive people who do not fit in other places.”11 His teaching and life point to what it means to welcome in our midst, to listen to, and to learn from those whose voices are muted by the cranking machinery of our militaristic and consumerist society. Their stories are often hidden, disavowed as marginal and insignificant, yet are desperately needed. Those who have been deafened by power and calloused by privilege need to hear the Good News of the living and reigning Christ brought by people like the women in the resurrection account.

Hope was restored to Cleopas and his wife by the stranger at their table. As long, however, as our hearts, homes, and bor-ders remain closed to those whom “progress”—not Jesus—has left behind, we will continue to be blinded to Christ’s pres-ence among us and to what it means to follow him. Nothing short of repentance and continuous conversion is called for at each level: individual, family, agency, educational institution, and church. Faithfulness to Jesus as the only Lord over all we are and have demands a move toward simpler lifestyles, reconsideration of our definition of need, jubilee practices of celebratory redistribution and creation care, and responsible advocacy for justice in the public realm.

In order to truly encounter Jesus in others, his followers need to walk away from “Jerusalem” and its blinding pretensions to power.
Returning to “Jerusalem.” If the first step necessary for the disciples is away from Jerusalem and the mirages of power it represents, their encounter with Jesus now sends them back to Jerusalem with a new vision and new purpose. Their renewed faith cannot be hidden away in private anonymity. It must engage with the powers and confront them through the might of the Holy Spirit, who builds and gifts a new community of equals, with interdependent relationships of mutual respect regardless of social status, ethnocultural background, or gender. “By what power or what name do you do this?” (Acts 4:7) comes the prompt censure of the Jewish leaders, jealous and threatened by the appeal of the new community. The mere existence of this radically hospitable community is subversive, because it dares to challenge the patterned, ordered system that generates and feeds on prejudice, discrimination, and injustice.

Notes
1. See Luke 24:9–49, the biblical narrative on which this article is based; quotations from Scripture throughout the article are from the NIV, with some paraphrasing.
2. This article draws mostly on the author’s native Latin American context, though examples abound in other regions. Carlos Fuentes, The Buried Mirror: Reflections on Spain and the New World (New York: Mariner Books, 1999), provides a comprehensive overview.
4. Ibid., 72.
10. Ibid., 121.

INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN OF MISSIONARY RESEARCH: Looking Ahead

Transition is in the air at the Overseas Ministries Study Center as we approach the centennial of our founding in 1922. With a decreasing financial base, but with a continued commitment to engage in God’s mission in the world, we are making some changes. On a reduced budget, we will continue the high quality of our residence program for missionaries and church workers who come from all over the world for rest, spiritual renewal, and intellectual stimulation. We continue to offer a strong study program of stimulating seminars. And we will continue publishing the International Bulletin of Missionary Research, though at a significantly reduced cost to OMSC.

J. Nelson Jennings’s services as executive director of OMSC and editor of the IBMR concluded in May 2015. With gratitude for his years of service to OMSC and the IBMR, we wish him all the best as he moves on to the next phase of his life and ministry. As the Board of Trustees begins envisioning the years ahead, a search for the next executive director and editor of the IBMR is under way.

Meanwhile, the Board called on Darrell Whiteman, who served thirteen years as editor of Missiology: An International Review, to be interim editor. Daniel Nicholas continues to serve as IBMR managing editor.

Beginning with the January 2016 issue and commencing with volume 40, the production and marketing of the IBMR will be handled by SAGE Publications, a family-owned company that has long-standing partnerships with over 300 learned societies and academic institutions around the world. SAGE publishes other missiological and theological journals including Missiology, Transformation, Theology Today, Expository Times, and the United Bible Society’s The Bible Translator.

We are excited about this new partnership between OMSC and SAGE that will make the IBMR even more widely known and still affordable. For further information, see www.internationalbulletin.org. We wish to assure subscribers, authors, and others that the IBMR will continue its presentation of thoughtful, clearly written, and relevant articles and reviews. Its future is bright and promising as we reflect on God’s mission in the past and continue to take our place in supporting God’s mission in the future.

Darrell L. Whiteman is interim editor of the International Bulletin of Missionary Research and secretary of the Overseas Ministries Study Center’s Board of Trustees as well as chair of its program development committee.

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Managing editor’s note: The statement above was written after the print edition went to press and is intended to replace the statement carried on page 202 of the print edition.
Humility

Ruth and Naomi

Nalini Marcia Jayasuriya

Nalini Marcia Jayasuriya, A Time for My Singing: Witness of a Life (New Haven, Conn.: OMSC Publications, 2004), 34

Ruth and Naomi
Nalini Marcia Jayasuriya
The Dictionary of African Christian Biography and the Story of Ethiopian Christianity

Michèle Miller Sigg

An arresting scene took place one day in the late 1920s in the Hosanna Shoa area of southern Ethiopia, involving Hakalla Amale, a young woman probably not even twenty years old. "While Hakalla was pregnant with her second son, the persecution increased. The village elders came to her home, forced her outside, and demanded that she deny Christ, threatening to curse her if she refused."1

This story of Hakalla Amale from the Dictionary of African Christian Biography (DACB), an online database documenting the history of African Christianity, is the only known historical record of one of the foremothers of the Kale Heywet Church (KHC or Word of Life Evangelical Church). KHC grew out of an indigenous people’s movement from seeds sown by Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) missionaries starting in 1928. One of the youngest Christian churches in Ethiopia, KHC is a relative latecomer in the long history of Christianity there. KHC is currently the second largest Christian denomination in Ethiopia after the Orthodox Church (40.1 percent), with believers numbering around 7.6 million or 8.7 percent of the population.2

Many stories like that of Hakalla Amale, stories that recount the courage and faithful perseverance of twentieth-century Protestant African evangelists, have been circulating for decades in the oral culture of local believers and missionaries in Ethiopia. They serve an essential function of building up and strengthening the Christian community by providing a source of instruction and comfort in times of adversity. Ten years after Hakalla’s ordeal, times of trial began for the few early amanyoch (believers), or yesu mana (followers of Jesus), in Ethiopia. When the Italians invaded the country in 1937, they expelled the missionaries and submitted local evangelical Christians to severe persecution. Under duress, the local leadership of the amanyoch developed contextualized teaching and appropriated the Bible in ways that were relevant to the culture, confronting issues for which the missionaries had been ill-equipped. These issues included the power of evil spirits and supernatural healing through the Holy Spirit. The missionaries returned in 1943 to find that, in their absence, the number of believers had swelled to tens of thousands, in spite of the persecution.3

Focus of the DACB

Stories of believers who were steadfast in their faith helped the Ethiopian Christian community to persevere in hope during this difficult period. But as time wore on and these extraordinary Christians died, their memory faded and eventually was in danger of being lost. To lose these stories would be tragic; not only local Christians but also the rest of the global Christian community would be impoverished if this chapter of African history went silent. The Dictionary of African Christian Biography was designed as a means to retrieve such disappearing strands of African Christian history, preserving these accounts by documenting the biographies of "the major creative and innovative local figures most vitally involved”—a history that is “virtually absent from the standard scholarly reference works.”4 Born out of a deep respect for the ancient history of African Christianity, as well as for its astounding contemporary vitality, the goal of the DACB is to serve as a sort of “gallery of saints” that provides the insight and perspective of Africans into their own Christian history. Here the intended meaning of the term “saint” is that used by Paul in his greeting to the Romans: “To all God’s beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints” (Rom. 1:7).

The choice to make the DACB primarily a database of biographies rather than a collection of histories places the emphasis on the importance of remembering the particular African men and women who were the apostles of the Gospel. In the past, traditional historical accounts or missionary reports written by Westerners often failed to include the evangelist or catechist who may have been instrumental in the conversion of an entire village or area, as was Hakalla Amale. It also emphasizes the narrative aspect of history which is more in harmony with an African worldview and less given to interpretive theories.

The DACB collects biographies from a variety of sources, including published volumes. By providing resources online in this way, it is possible to fill gaps in the historical record for those who have little or no access to these volumes in distant or foreign libraries. For example, in the early years of the twenty-first century, the DACB was granted permission to republish entries from The Dictionary of Ethiopian Biography, vol. 1, From Early Times to the End of the Zagwé Dynasty, c. 1270 a.d. (1975), edited by Belaynesh Michael, S. Chojnacki, and Richard Pankhurst at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa. As a result, dozens of entries on the ancient figures of Ethiopian Christianity joined the DACB’s expanding online collection of biographies, making it possible to weave together many rich strands of this ancient history. The biographical material, written by Ethiopian scholars, provides not only historical content but also, and perhaps more importantly, an Ethiopian lens through which the narrative of Ethiopian Christianity unfolds. The importance of this perspective must not be underestimated. As Andrew Walls poignantly argues: “African Christian history is . . . distorted by attempts to make it an appendage of a ‘general’ church history, which is really a form of European clan history.”5 The mission of the DACB is to provide an open-source platform for the biographical accounts of African writers that will, to a modest degree, rectify this distorted perspective. In this way, the DACB contributes to establishing African Christian history as an integral and essential component of world Christian history.

Within African Christian history, the Ethiopian chapter holds a place of honor because, in the words of Walls, “the significance of Ethiopia for all African Christians, as symbol of Africa indigenously, primordially Christian, and as symbol of a Christian tradition completely independent of the West, has been seized all over the continent, as the countless churches and societies all

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Michèle Miller Sigg has worked closely with Jonathan Bonk as project manager of the Dictionary of African Christian Biography (www.dacb.org) since 2000. She is currently a Ph.D. student in Mission and World Christianity at Boston University School of Theology’s Center for Global Christianity and Mission, which is now home to the U.S. office of the DACB (www.bu.edu/cgcm/digital-projects/). —dacb@bu.edu
over the continent that take ‘Ethiopian’ as part of their title bear witness.” In the absence of other resources, the DACB biographies provided by the Institute of Ethiopian Studies can serve to help reconstruct Ethiopia’s ancient and venerable Christian history up to the thirteenth century. After this point other sources must be culled, some from other published volumes, some from oral history researchers on the ground in Ethiopia. These researchers, who may be university instructors, graduate students, missionaries, scholars, or simply relatives, are central to the success of the DACB because they are the ones who have access to the oral histories and local sources necessary to write the biographies of African evangelists.7

The Long History of Ethiopian Christianity

Acts 8:26–40 recounts the story of the unnamed eunuch,8 the treasurer of Queen Candace, baptized by Philip on the road to Gaza.9 Candace is the traditional title of the queen of Meroë, a Nubian realm bordering the upper Nile (in southern Sudan, west of present day Ethiopia). This account is the earliest reference to Christianity making its way into the interior of Africa. While the eunuch may have been the first missionary to that region, the tradition of the Orthodox Church dates the actual birth of Christianity in Ethiopia to the fourth century.

**Old Testament roots.** The fact that this eunuch was in Jerusalem highlights an even more ancient connection between Ethiopia and Jesus’ homeland. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church in fact owes a great debt to ancient Jewish roots. In 1 Kings 10 we read about the visit of the queen of Sheba to Solomon’s royal court. According to Ethiopian church tradition, the queen, named Makeda,9 gave birth to a son sired by King Solomon during her visit. This son, who would eventually take the throne as Menelik I, later returned to Jerusalem to visit his father. According to one version of this account, the eldest sons of the nobles of Israel accompanied him back to Ethiopia, bringing with them the original Ark of the Covenant. After the country was Christianized in the fourth century, every Ethiopian Orthodox church kept a symbol of this treasure on its premises in the form of an oblong box.

**Early Christians.** In the fourth century, Christianity was introduced into Aksum, a powerful kingdom that dominated northern Ethiopia up until the twelfth century. Two young Syrian boys, Frumentius10 and his brother Aedesius,11 who had arrived on a ship from Tyre, became servants in the royal court of King ‘Ézana.12 Frumentius rose to prominence within the government and constructed churches for the Roman merchants traveling through the country. He later traveled to Alexandria to request a bishop for Ethiopia. Athanasius, the patriarch at the time, consecrated Frumentius as bishop and sent him back to Aksum.

**Medieval figures.** In the late fifth and early sixth centuries, nine learned monks arrived in Ethiopia fleeing persecution against Monophysites that followed the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451). These nine saints13 led a movement of revitalization in the church and translated the New Testament into Ge’ez.9 The leader of the nine, Zā-Mika’ēl,14 founded the monastery of Dābrā Damo and attracted a large following of monks. Around this time, Yarēd15 was the first to compose music for the Ethiopian church—music, he said, that came to him directly from God. His collection of hymns, Māzgāba Deqwa (Treasury of Hymns), is still used today.

Contemporary in time with events relating to the Nine Saints, Ethiopian hagiographic tradition tells of a large number of unnamed saints called the Sadqan* (“The Righteous Ones”), who came to Ethiopia from somewhere in the Roman Empire. Burning with missionary zeal, they are said to have ministered in many small groups in the areas of Bur or Mätära, Bārāknāhā, and Berahto in Eritrea, Bētā Mek’eya near Agamé, Mānquraweya (in Ğām bądź) and Hawzén in Tegré. The local pagan populations persecuted them violently, to the point of exterminating most of them, in spite of the armed intervention of Emperor Kālēb* on their behalf.

In the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, Lalibāla*, emperor of the Zāgīw dynasty, constructed eleven monolithic churches hewn out of solid rock in Wallo Province, on the site of his capital. He had received a vision of these churches as a boy. During his reign, he put into practice the principles of voluntary poverty and charity he had learned as a hermit in the Tigray mountains.

Abba Estifanos* (1380–ca. 1450) led a short-lived revival movement within the church in the fifteenth century called the Stephanite movement. As a young man, while pursuing studies to serve in the church, he went on several religious pilgrimages in an earnest search for salvation and peace for his soul. He became a monk at the Qoyetsa monastery led by Abba Samuel but still could find no peace. Finally, through the teachings of Abba Gebre Nazrawi, a famous Orthodox priest, he developed a Pauline understanding of the way of salvation and received a miraculous revelation of the Holy Spirit. He and his followers designed a plan to evangelize the country, but this initiative, as well as the unconventional religious behavior of his disciples, drew the attention of the authorities, and they were soon accused of heresy. Persecution followed. Emperor Zara Ya’iqob* exiled the Stephanites and threw Estifanos into prison, where he languished for seven months before dying. His influence was such that, even after his death, the Stephanites continued to be persecuted until they were virtually eliminated.

**Under duress, the local leadership of the amanyoch developed contextualized teaching and appropriated the Bible in ways that were relevant to the culture.**

Catholic and Protestant missionaries. In the mid-sixteenth century, Ethiopian rulers called on the Portuguese military to help aid Se’ela Krestos* rid their country of Muslim invaders who were devastating their churches and wreaking havoc in the north of the country. The Portuguese obliged, bringing with them Jesuit missionaries in 1555. During this period, called the “Jesuit Interlude,” Emperor Susneyos* (ca. 1571–1632), influenced by his brother Se’ela Krestos (d.1536), converted to Roman Catholicism in 1620. Susneyos proclaimed Catholicism the official religion of Ethiopia in 1622, unleashing a decade of unrest and uprisings. A measure of peace was restored to the country a decade later when he agreed to restore the Orthodox faith, at the urging of his son Fasilidas.* Susneyos died a broken-hearted but devout Catholic.

The renewal thread in Orthodox Christianity picks up again in...
Raised by missionaries, he received his formal missionary training in Switzerland. Argawi ministered for over fifty years in Ethiopia, including several years among the Falashas. He distributed Bibles and religious literature as part of his work, and in his later years he worked with pioneer missionary Johann Martin Flad of the Basel Mission on the translation of the New Testament into Amharic.

In the 1920s an indigenous prophet by the name of Esa Lalé* (ca. 1888–ca.1925) began preaching a message of renewal and liberation to his compatriots, the Omotic peoples of southern Ethiopia. He preached to crowds who gathered around him in the fields, teaching them to worship only Tosa, the creator God, and to forsake their fetishes and any other form of worship, divination, or magic. He instructed the father of each household to lead his family in prayer every Sunday by dipping his fingers in honey and flicking it toward the sky, saying, “You are the creator of all, Tosa, have mercy upon us. We offer this which is the best we have to you.” Esa also taught the people to cultivate peaceful relationships among themselves and in the community. So grateful were the people to find freedom in Esa’s message that they gave him the name Lalé, which means “the one who releases freedom.” Recognized by some as a John the Baptist figure, he prepared the way for the coming of the Gospel preached by SIM missionaries, who arrived in the region in 1928.10

Hakalla Amale’s Story

Having briefly surveyed Ethiopian Christian history up to this point, we can now return to our original story of Hakalla Amale. As her conversion can be dated to the mid-1920s, it is possible that, somewhere along the way, SIM missionaries played a role in the spread of the Gospel to her village. This is Hakalla’s history as it is presented in the DACB:

Hakalla Amale (c. 1905 to 1991) was the first woman to be converted in the Kambatta Hadiya area. She is remembered for her strength in enduring persecution in the early days of the church.

She was born in Kaburbaya, Ballessa, Hosanna Shoa, Ethiopia, to Amale Kassamo (father) and Faysse Lamonko (mother) and spoke the Hadiya language. She became the third wife of Ato Jate Malegu who kidnapped her and forced her to marry him. His first two wives had given him only daughters and he trusted that Hakalla would give him sons. In fact, she bore him three sons, Assefa, Estefanos, and Eshetu.

Hakalla first heard the gospel from her uncle’s son, Shigute Dadda, and came to faith in Christ at the age of eighteen, the same year she gave birth to her first son. She learned to read the Bible—a very rare achievement even for men at that time. Her family on both sides tried to force her husband to divorce her because of her faith, but he refused because she had given him a son. Hakalla was beaten with hippopotamus leather and forced to chew that same leather as a sign that she would deny the faith. But she would not deny Christ. In the late evenings, her brother and Shigute visited her to pray and strengthen her faith.

While Hakalla was pregnant with her second son, the persecution increased. The village elders came to her home, forced her outside, and demanded that she deny Christ, threatening to curse her if she refused. On that particular day she was preparing a traditional medicine which people believed made labour and delivery easier. In their presence, she drank the medicine in the name of Christ. The men then cursed her. Hakalla was willing to die rather than deny Christ. Later that day, she gave birth to a healthy second son and the people saw that the power of Christ had overcome the curse. Hakalla was then ordered not to communicate with her neighbors at all. In spite of this the number of believers kept growing. When her relative, Ato Aba Gole believed, his conversion eased the persecution. Later, her husband believed. Hakalla witnessed in her own village and often walked or traveled by horseback to distant villages to witness and preach.

Hakalla is known for her strong witness in her family which led her husband, children, and grandchildren to Christ. She was the first woman to serve when the Dubanco church was established. A strong advocate of women’s literacy, Hakalla traveled to Lemu, Kambatta, Shone, Sike, Wolayta, and visited many congregations even as far away as Ambo and Addis Ababa to teach women to read. She was a strong support when the women’s group was organized and she was invited to join the Women’s General Assembly at the national level to give her testimony. She was also the only woman with strong enough faith and determination to be allowed to enter prisons. She served Christian prisoners by traveling long distances to take them fresh food. She was also a model of hospitality and entertained many Christian guests and students, as well as some of her persecutors. Even in her old age she led the women’s prayer group in the local church. She wrote a song: “Lord Jesus, my heart is longing to be with you” (“Wedante Yesus hoi libey sinifal”).

In her eighty-fifth year, she told her children one day that she felt ill. Two days later she passed away.11

Role of the DACB

This biography of Hakalla Amale, which contains few historical details and draws its information from only three oral history sources, belongs to the new historiography of African (and world) Christianity to which the DACB project is contributing in a modest way as a first-generation repository of biographies. The sources of this new historiography include not only the traditional documentary and archival sources that may be available only in colonial or missionary repositories in the West, but also the oral histories and eyewitness accounts of local Africans. The focus is not on “church history” or “the church as institution” but on the full range of Christian expression in a global landscape, where the taxonomy of denominations is no longer adequate to describe the recent explosion of independent churches. This historiography eschews a “top-down view of God in history, to take in the landscape of an emergent world Christianity with its roots among workers, peasants, refugees, immigrants and the rural underclass.”12 The subjects of these stories—those unofficial agents, such as catechists, teachers, nurses, exhorters,
evangelists, and translators, who took the responsibility for church planting”—are mostly ignored in the traditional annals of Christian history, despite being the pillars of the African church.13 The DACB authors who write their stories come from many walks of life, and in some cases their academic pedigree is only that they know how important it is to remember the contribution their biographical subject has made to the birth and growth of African Christianity. For many contributors, the work they accomplished in this way was a labor of love offered sacrificially in honor of their ancestors in the faith.

With 282 biographies as of July 2015, the Ethiopia index has the third largest collection of biographies (after Nigeria and South Africa) in the DACB database, but it is a mere trifle in the continent’s extraordinary historical legacy. Even this collection is dwarfed by the vast numbers of exemplary African Christians whose stories remain untold. If we are to believe the new “ecclesiastical maps,” African Christianity clearly holds a leading role to play in global Christianity. The center of gravity of global Christianity, now located somewhere near Timbuktu, Mali, and steadily making its way toward the heart of Africa, testifies to African Christianity’s astounding growth in the twentieth century:14

The task of the DACB is daunting. If the historical record is patchy, sometimes inaccurate, hagiographic, or inadequately documented, it is because of the nature of the DACB: a first-generation memory bank of Christians who labored for the Gospel in Africa. Growing up as a missionary child in Ethiopia, DACB creator and project director Jon Bonk knew many of these extraordinary Ethiopian evangelists who suffered beatings, imprisonment, and sometimes death for the sake of Christ. In February 2000 Jon formally launched the DACB on African soil, in Addis Ababa.15 The DACB project is one way to keep alive the memory of these African saints, of whom the world is not worthy, not just for African Christians, but for the encouragement of believers all over the world.

In describing the mission of the DACB, Jon Bonk loves to remind his listeners that some memory, however imperfect, is better than no memory at all. We are indeed grateful for this humble, yet scholarly, labor of love—a selfless legacy of Christian witness for the whole world.

Notes

6. Ibid., 12.
7. Contributors to the DACB include persons such as Dirshaye Merberu, retired professor from Addis Ababa University and 2005–6 Project Luke Fellow, who wrote the story of Abba Estifanos (Abba means “Father”). Paul and Lila Balisky, retired missionaries with SIM International in Addis Ababa and former members of the DACB Advisory Council, supervised student research work and wrote several accounts themselves. From 1999 to 2011 the Project Luke scholarship provided scholarships for Africans to write biographies for the DACB while in residence at the Overseas Ministries Study Center in New Haven, Connecticut.
8. Names with asterisks are entries in the DACB and can be freely accessed using the indexes or online search function.
9. The Nine Saints were Abba ’Afse, Abba ’Aléf, Abba Gäríma, Abba Guba, Abba Liqanos, Abba Pántääwuon, Abba Sähma, Abba Yäm’ata, and Abba Zä-Mika’el ’Arágawi. Brief biographies of each are in the DACB.
10. This narrative is an example of how the DACB might be a resource to gather together the strands of ancient and recent history, albeit imperfectly and with many gaps.
13. Ibid., 94.
14. The “ecclesiastical maps” metaphor belongs to Jon Bonk, note 4 above. See “Christianity’s Center of Gravity, A.D. 33–2100,” in Atlas of Global Christianity, 1910–2010, ed. Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2009), 52–53. The statistical center of gravity is defined as “the geographic point at which there are equal numbers of Christians to the north, south, east and west.”
15. Thank you to Paul and Lila Balisky, who provided this detail and other valuable information.
Three Tributes to Jonathan and Jean Bonk

How the Bonks Prepared Me for Intercultural Ministry

L
ttle did I know some eleven years ago, when I arrived at Yale Divinity School and later moved to the Overseas Ministries Study Center with my family, that I would be called to serve as a pastor in a Euro-American Baptist Church in New England. Likewise, little did I know that meeting Jonathan Bonk was the beginning of my preparation for pastoral ministry in a multicultural setting.

Jonathan Bonk’s sensitivity to and respect for diverse cultural realities, his openness and appreciation for the smallest personal details, had a huge impact on my life. He is a catalyst for connecting across generations and cultures. His gift of profound pastoral care, whether in big or small ways, has been deeply ingrained in me—whether picking me up for church every Sunday, inviting me to his and Jean’s home for meals and fellowship, the two of them taking our family to the beach, visiting us at our apartment, and loving our son and daughter dearly. He did all these things with love and compassion; how worth emulating it is!

Today, I am the pastor of a Euro-American Baptist Church, and we are striving to build a multicultural and multiracial faith community. We are being enriched by our committed members from the Republic of Congo, Ivory Coast, Panama, Cambodia, Myanmar, Cameroon, and India. We are also host to three faith communities: two Cambodian churches and a Burmese church. On the last Sunday of every five-Sunday month, all four churches worship together in different languages, followed by an international meal on the church lawn. Here we experience the beauty of the diversity of God’s creation and the power of God’s love working as we envision a habitus where all beings live in peace and flourish. Our neighbors call us “the people who eat together.”

Ministry Lessons Learned from Aṣiwaaju (front-runner, leader) Jonathan J. Bonk

Watching Jonathan Bonk’s life encouraged me to believe in the possibility of making intergenerational and intercultural connections. In several important ways, he taught me:

• to be constantly mindful of our commonalities as humans, of our cultural differences, and to respect individual uniqueness;
• to be deeply attentive to the kenotic moments in our lives, considering each moment a reminder of God’s continuous acts of self-giving, pulling us repeatedly to the heart of the Gospel;
• to feel God’s presence in the myriad experiences in the ordinariness of our lives and be deeply involved in them, recognizing God’s working in the various cultures and ethnicities, finding with amazement the beauty and worth of the “other”; only in this transformational moment do we see clearly God’s view of inclusivity, creativity, and redemption in our daily living;
• to appreciate all people, whether they may come or go, or as we grow together, making a sincere effort to tread the paths they have taken—emotional, social, economic, historical, cultural, and religious—and to listen to their stories and be able to say, “I get it now!”; and
• to always remember: I came from somewhere.

Jonathan and his wife, Jean, have taught me many lessons over the years, two of which I mention here. First, he demonstrated to me through words and deeds that our baptism into the Christian faith is a sacrament of radical equality. It does not matter whether we are from the East or from the West, from the North or South; we belong to God and to each other in a global community. He confirmed those of us from the Majority World and assisted me in particular to realize that God has created only one world. Second, Jon and Jean taught me that our humanity is incomplete if we are not humbled by the mysteries of God’s universality and particularity. That is, we cannot be complete as human beings created in God’s image unless we understand that God loves Africans, Asians, Australians, Europeans, and Americans equally. This is a mystery, and it is profoundly embodied in the lives and work of Jonathan and Jean Bonk. This was my epiphany at OMSC, and it has dominated my research projects, writing, speeches, and perceptions of the world.

The Yoruba people in Nigeria often give a name to their leaders, a practice that has no exact equivalent in English. I call Jonathan Bonk Aṣiwaaju—front-runner and natural leader. He is the epitome of integrity, confidence, and humility, and I will always be grateful to God that our paths crossed at Edinburgh that July over twenty-five years ago.

Atula Jamir
Pastor, Calvary Baptist Church
Lowell, Massachusetts

Caleb O. Oladipo
Duke K. McCall Professor of Christian Mission and World Christianity
Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond (Virginia)
Beyond My Wildest Imagination: God’s Blessings to Me through Jon and Jean Bonk

In 2008 I arrived in New Haven, Connecticut, with a sense of deep personal sadness, hopelessness, loneliness, and emptiness. I had no sense of home, but Jonathan Bonk opened the door for me at the Overseas Ministries Study Center, and Jean Bonk welcomed me into their home.

At that point, I had no idea whom to trust or with whom I could talk, when and where I might get advice and help, but Jon told me about the theology of interruption, and his office became a place for me to seek advice about my desire to study theology, my fear to go back to China, and my hopelessness regarding the future. For the first time, I had someone to whom I could bring all the emotional, cultural, political, relational, religious, and academic challenges I was facing.

Despite my personal fears and the limitations of my English, Jean frequently allowed her kitchen to become my refuge, where I received not only emotional rest and spiritual understanding but also cultural lessons and recipes. Jean also took me to different coffee shops for women’s talk together.

Jon and Jean helped me not only in these external issues but also in the deep human need hidden in my heart—the need for love. Through them, God not only gave me a large Christian family at OMSC but also granted me a Christian marriage.

More than three years ago, I left OMSC with abundant blessings from the Bonks, with renewed confidence to plant myself in a new place, where God could guide me to find my roots in this world, where I could restart my service, where I could look forward to the future. I can never repay them for what they have given to me. I pray that God may pour out his endless blessings on them!

Ruth Pickens
Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania

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In 2001 then-executive director Jonathan J. Bonk launched an OMSC Artist in Residence program, a visionary endeavor that enriched the Christian ministry and art communities in New Haven for a decade and made a bold statement about the place of sacred art in the Christian world mission. We invite you to view our online art gallery (www.omsc.org/art-at-omsc/art.shtml) and purchase an OMSC Publications art book as a Christmas present.

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Overseas Ministries Study Center

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To be a researcher requires humility. Because researchers usually work behind the scenes, people who crave the spotlight have difficulty being good researchers. The same is true for mission researchers. Their role is absolutely essential in fostering and maturing a missionary movement, but the researcher needs to deny the human desire for immediate recognition and encouragement from others—or for immediate implementation of research-based recommendations.

This article deals with five significant facets of mission research as experienced within a Majority World mission movement: (1) the role of a mission researcher in the development of the Korean missionary movement, (2) empirical research as incarnational, (3) the significance of humility in integrating various disciplines, (4) the need to update the methodology of mission research, and (5) future prospects for mission research. In addressing these issues, I draw on my experience as a mission researcher over the past twenty-five years.

A Mission Researcher of Korean Missions

When I began my work as a mission researcher in 1990, I realized that it would be a ministry behind the scenes. People around me knew that I was about to become a missionary, but they did not understand much about the role of a missionary engaged in full-time research. It was not easy for NamSeoul Presbyterian Church (my home church) and several other churches to decide to support my ministry. Their commitment, however, led to the founding of the Korea Research Institute for Mission (KRIM), of which I am director. KRIM was formed under the umbrella of the Global Missionary Fellowship.

My colleagues and I have been conducting research on Korean mission fields, mission strategies, and mission forces for twenty-five years. Our bulletin publishes information on what is taking place in unreached parts of the world. Our journal introduces and discusses new strategies and theories of mission. Our handbook regularly reports on the progress of the Korean missionary movement, with specific information on Korean missionaries, mission agencies, and mission fields, dealing with emerging issues and concerns. Our forum facilitates missiological reflection and discussion on a regular basis.

Once while on a study leave and pursuing a Ph.D. at a university in New Haven, Connecticut, I was invited to present a research paper at the Overseas Ministries Study Center in New Haven. At the time I had just finished my coursework, and I had heard that Jonathan Bonk had been designated as the next executive director of OMSC. Then in my mid-thirties and still a novice, I found OMSC to be an important model for the conduct of mission research. The INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN OF MISSIONARY RESEARCH inspires me as I continue to edit our journal in Korean, and OMSC’s mission research colloquia and seminars help me as I plan similar programs in Korea.

At a critical point when I was experiencing some burnout, Jon Bonk provided encouragement that lifted my spirits. After learning of my research on the Korean missionary movement, he encouraged me to submit an article to the IBMR. I did so, and it became my first report on the Korean missionary movement, appearing in the January 2003 issue of the IBMR. Several more articles for the IBMR followed, and in 2012 I was invited to become a contributing editor, reporting on the Korean mission movement on a regular basis. This step was an encouragement not only to me personally but also to many other people in the Korean missions community. The Korean Global Mission Leadership Forum, initiated in 2011, was another platform of leadership that came into being under Jon’s leadership. OMSC as a community has shown warm hospitality to me as a mission researcher working behind the scenes for an emerging missionary movement.

Empirical Research as Incarnational

As missiologists, we should not be satisfied to merely rehash speculative theology. Missiology needs to be fully down-to-earth in its approach, addressing human realities incarnationally, while maintaining its essential theological nature.

Within the academy, empirical research provides an example of a down-to-earth approach. Empirical research can be either quantitative or qualitative. Recent research approaches often combine these two research modes, something that is true of the design of my research projects as well. In our missiological research it is critical that we deal significantly with human realities and the phenomena of different societies.

Introducing an empirical approach into research conducted within the Korean mission community was not easy. It called for frequent travel to mission fields, as well as the hard work of preparing appropriate questionnaires. Empirical research required more time and energy than simply writing an article after reading some books. Being dependent on the cooperation of mission leaders and missionaries for carrying out research projects demanded humility. For me it also brought home the recognition that books are often outdated and do not reflect the way human realities change over time—hence the need to interact face-to-face with people.

In studies of a particular religion, it is helpful to distinguish between formal aspects and folk aspects. The former can be studied through analysis of the religion’s doctrinal texts, but folk aspects of a religion are best explored through empirical field studies. To learn how a religion affects daily life, it is necessary to meet and talk with people who practice the religion. Missionaries need to diligently study both these aspects, but too often they neglect serious study of the folk aspects of a religion. To study the formal aspects of a religion, researchers read books written by scholarly authors. But to study the folk aspects of the religion, researchers need to pay attention to what ordinary people say about their religious practice. Even a child or person on the margin of society can be good informants for the researcher.

In conducting a phenomenological study of a religion, an empirical approach requires two-way communication. The
researcher seeks to interpret the data from an emic, or insider’s, viewpoint. Understanding what insiders really believe and practice should precede making any critique of a religion, lest we make premature judgments. Empirical research facilitates mutual understanding and fair interpretation across cultures and religious traditions.

Empirical research does have limitations, since human experience and perception are limited in their scope. In carrying out empirical research, researchers must avoid a dogmatic attitude. Empirical approaches are best seen as instruments or means to be used for in-depth study of phenomena important to world missions. In due course, the findings of empirical research can lead to value judgments formed in light of biblical principles, which is critical for missiological understanding.

Both the data and the conclusions drawn from empirical research are often expressed in numbers, which can clarify what is vague in the world. Theorists of quantitative research tend to emphasize the power of numerical data in terms of measurability. Numbers, however, also have limitations, for many things cannot be quantified or measured with numbers.2 In studies of the Korean missionary movement, can numbers adequately express the sweat and sacrifice of Korean missionaries? Taking a humble perspective and maintaining a balanced understanding of numerical data and the limits of measurability will help researchers to avoid arrogance.

Just as the incarnate Christ had physical limitations while he lived for a certain period of time in one corner of the world, so empirical research in an incarnational mode must work within the boundaries of space and time. Within these boundaries, we must constantly check the validity and reliability of empirical research. This requirement certainly requires a spirit of Christian humility.

Integration as an Expression of Humility

The field of missiology is interdisciplinary, embracing theology, anthropology, education, psychology, history, management, and other disciplines. A single discipline is not sufficient to the task of addressing adequately the complex realities of human life and the dynamics of mission. How to integrate the theories and findings of various disciplines thus becomes an important issue in contemporary missiological studies.

Recognizing both the comprehensiveness of the nature of missiological studies and the limitations of any single discipline, mission researchers need to avoid becoming complacent with having achieved a level of competence in one or more fields. Missiologists need to pursue integration of theories from many different disciplines in their research. Findings from empirical research must be checked against biblical and theological principles. Cultural characteristics can initially be studied either historically or anthropologically, but the bodies of knowledge developed through those disciplines should eventually be integrated theologically. compartmentalized knowledge is not beneficial.4

In the initial stages of an interdisciplinary study, it is necessary to be faithful to the methodology of each discipline. When psychology and anthropology need to be integrated in a scientific study of human phenomena, the whole process needs to carefully follow the methodological framework of both disciplines. Integrating different bodies of theory requires more than double the effort needed in a study pursued solely within one discipline. Fortunately, disciplines share more knowledge of a single topic than is usually imagined. For example, in their efforts to explain the phenomena and mechanisms of human cognition, whether at an individual or a community level, the fields of cognitive psychology and cognitive anthropology have considerable overlap.

It is not possible for a single researcher to become an expert in all the related disciplines of an interdisciplinary study. Smaller or larger teams of experts in the various fields need to work together to complement each other. Cultivation of synergistic teamwork is clearly a need in missiological studies. One of KRIM’s projects researched the type and amount of member care provided for Korean missionaries. In this case, a missiologist, a clinical psychologist, a missionary counselor, a medical doctor, and a medical researcher worked together as a team in conducting the research, including administration of a questionnaire survey and conducting field-based interviews. Overall, the process required more time for research design and data gathering because of the different perspectives members of the team had, but the integrated perspectives were helpful in providing a more holistic understanding of missionaries’ needs.

Integration of different bodies of theory and diverse research findings must revolve around biblical exegesis, especially when the research problem involves theological issues. In this task of integration, biblical exegesis and application are crucial, but the process also needs assistance from linguistics and other human and social sciences. Ultimately, a biblical worldview is the foundation on which we must build our efforts at integration. Checking the integrity of theoretical research findings against a biblical worldview is more important than focusing merely on developing their pragmatic usefulness and applicability.

The task of integration must address the synchronic issue of epistemological variation, as well as the diachronic issue of epistemological shift. Plausibility structures differ from culture to culture; they also vary to some degree depending on the research tradition used. Many research findings based on the instrumentalist perspective found in postmodern epistemology need to be checked and double-checked for their compatibility with a critical realist standpoint.

A significant issue that my experience in multidisciplinary teamwork has brought to light is research ethics. Depending on the subject matter and their home institutions, various researchers—say, an ethnographer and a clinical psychologist—may express or assume quite different views and guidelines. In establishing common ground, researchers need to harmonize, or at least acknowledge, their differences.

Integration in doing missiological research often calls for patience and humility. An attitude of willingness to learn from others with different academic backgrounds is necessary. With today’s rapidly increasing complexity of social groups and human experience, team research with collaboration among researchers is increasingly essential. Theologians and missiologists need to show sensitivity to other academicians working in so-called secular fields.

A humble perspective and a balanced understanding of numerical data and the limits of measurability will help researchers to avoid arrogance.
Updating Research Methodology

Given the strongly interdisciplinary nature of missiology, it is not surprising that its research methodology lags far behind that of other disciplines. Missiology needs to develop a cohesive research methodology that incorporates elements from the research methods of (among others) textual linguistics, statistical and qualitative approaches to empirical research, historiography, and even integration methodology.

The exegesis and application of biblical materials are pertinent to missiological issues, which means that we need to be looking for a missional or missiological reading of biblical texts. Many theologians are inadequately attuned to mission matters and therefore tend to miss much missional content present in the biblical passages they are reading. When one recognizes that mission is the whole point of the biblical revelation, it becomes clear that we must keep world mission in mind when reading any part of Scripture. Sharing this perspective with biblical theologians is a contribution that missiologists can make in dialogue with them.

Quantitatively, missiology needs to increase the methodological rigor of its statistical analyses. A first step toward that end is to use more professionally designed questionnaires. Second, our research designs must be built on samples that are large enough and representative enough to capture the realities found in the research population. Finally, to raise the questionnaire response rate, mission researchers need to cultivate a research-friendly organizational culture among mission agencies and related groups as well as among missionaries in the field.

Qualitative empirical research needs to take into account models of research that have been developed systematically over the years. Instruments used in data gathering must be designed so that they focus specifically on the research questions or hypotheses. When qualitative research approaches are used in combination with quantitative approaches, the question of priority becomes important. Interviews can be scheduled either before or after questionnaire surveys, depending on the intention and purpose of each process.

For suitable mission history to be written, the emerging missionary movements in the Majority World need to maintain their own records and establish archives, along with developing a relevant historiography. As Andrew Walls explains, the transition from a Christendom perspective to a World Christianity perspective is necessary if we are to understand or explain the establishment of missionary movements in the Majority World. Despite the critical importance of historical data in conducting mission research, the preservation of mission records and archives, at least in Korea, is one of the most neglected areas.

Methodologies for the integration of interdisciplinary studies need to be made more rigorous. Results gained by teams of researchers from different fields working together—and accounts of their experience working together as a team—need to be shared more widely. Issues that arise in the process of integrating multiple disciplines need to be identified and discussed at consultations and roundtables. The integration of emic and etic viewpoints needs to be discussed using real cases, because it is much more complex than simply identifying the conceptual distinction between them. We need to recognize that multiple views are possible, in both etic and emic perspectives. Also, the development of Q methodologies and R methodologies holds promise, but the irreducibility of multiple viewpoints calls for humility on the part of the researcher.

Another important challenge facing mission researchers is to develop a research method that is optimal and relevant but that is also simple enough to be adopted by mission agencies and followed by missionaries in the field. It is truly a daunting task to keep abreast of all the cutting edge research methodologies developed in the various fields. Even in a single field—say, cultural anthropology—the research methodologies developed through the years reflect different paradigms, each suggesting its own rigorous procedures and instruments. Unfortunately, many missionaries and mission researchers find such complexities hard to follow. An additional factor is the reality that many intercultural ministry settings do not allow for the application of detailed or systematic research designs developed for use in monocultural or domestic settings.

For mission researchers to remain up-to-date in research methodology requires diligence and humility. Regular monitoring of new publications in the field of research methodology and a long-term perspective are needed if the research methodology of missiology is to advance. About twenty years ago, when I began my doctoral program, I made a commitment to study research methods for the sake of mission research. My purpose was to prepare myself for supervising doctoral dissertations in missiology. Now, having seen some fruit from this effort, I find that I must continue to set aside a portion of my time for that purpose alone. It is a supporting role, but by gaining expertise in research methodology, a mission researcher can enable others, both missionaries themselves and students of missions, to do solid research and can become a sound adviser to them.

Envisioning the Future

In the twenty-first century Christian missions needs more mission research, and thus more mission researchers, to help enlarge our understanding of mission policies, practices, and results. If this significant need is to be met, more encouragement to beginning researchers will be required. Especially we need capable persons in the Majority World who will acquire the training and expertise necessary to conduct research, all the while being willing to work outside of the limelight.

Even in Western countries, the number of researchers and research institutes needs to be increased, but the need in Majority World countries is much greater. Emerging non-Western missionary movements need to be supported with solid missiological research. How to close the gap between the need and the supply is a big question that mission leaders and missiologists must address.

Researchers do not spring up like wildflowers. They need training. Each missionary-sending country and each missionary-receiving country has its own set of specific conditions and issues. The types of research needed will differ; one size does not fit all. Though the local people normally know the ministerial situation better than do outsiders, they need training in research methods. The global mission community needs to join hands with them in working together to meet this significant need.
For the global church, creating networks to connect mission researchers should become a significant agenda item. Researchers need to share their experiences with, listen to, and encourage one another as they cross cultural and organizational boundaries. As they do so, missiological reflection will be deepened and enriched. When a researcher who represents a missionary-receiving country and another researcher who represents a missionary-sending country come together, significant discussions can be expected about the way Christian mission is being carried out.

Multicultural research teams can address issues common to various ministerial contexts. To build up best-practice guidelines for the future, the global mission community needs to accumulate knowledge and expertise in doing missions. An example from psychology of the benefit that can follow if the global community works together to pool expertise would be the rise of attachment theory. First introduced by John Bowlby in the United Kingdom in the late 1950s, attachment theory was developed further through being explored and tested in various societal contexts. Likewise, we need to develop missiological theories and test them in different contexts across cultures and generations.

To envision the future requires faith and hope. To prepare for the future also requires much determined sacrifice. But our decisions to commit ourselves to this immense task do not lead to regret, because God is faithful, and we are confident that he fulfills his will in our lives. To be faithful before God is more important than to be successful in personal achievement. I cannot say that I have achieved much, but I have tried to follow consistently the narrow path laid out for me. Jonathan Bonk has been very clear in showing a spirit of hospitality, encouraging people who, like me, stand in need of such support.

In many countries of the Majority World, the path of mission research will impose greater burdens or obstacles than the path I have walked. In some countries the level of awareness of the need for mission research may be lower than in Korea, so researchers definitely will need a greater investment of assistance, cooperation, and support from others. Though they work behind the scenes most of the time, they need the spotlight of encouragement once in a while. Even as our world continues to become more and more globalized, the researcher’s role is essential if missions are to be done well.

Notes
1. KRIM’s monthly news bulletin is titled Pabalma (Post haste). Its missiological journal, Hyundae Sunkgo (Current mission trends), appears biannually. Beginning in 1990 KRIM assumed responsibility for publishing handbooks, directories, and reports about the Korean missionary movement at regular intervals. Some of these have been print publications, some online only; some are in Korean, others in English. KRIM also hosts a biannual missiological forum, Hankuk Sunkgyohak Forum (Korean missiological forum).
4. Paul Hiebert maintained that integration of knowledge from different disciplines is necessary in order to overcome stratified approaches to understanding human beings. See his Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 41–45, 68.
5. At the time of writing, this research project was in the final stage of data analysis, and completion of the final report was planned for June 2015.
8. Q methodology deals with quantitative means for examining subjective aspects of human experience, whereas R methodology focuses on objective aspects. Questions can be raised about the objective element of the Q methodology, the subjective element in the R methodology, and their integration. See Bruce McKeown and Dan B. Thomas, Q Methodology (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2013), ix–15.

Conclusion
Preachers and lay readers of the Bible rarely focus on Tychicus. He traveled with and for the apostle Paul (Acts 20:4). Though he occasionally ministered to a congregation temporarily on behalf of Timothy and possibly of Titus (2 Tim. 4:12; Titus 3:12), he is not known for pastoring a church as those two are. Paul sent him to the churches at Ephesus and Colosse. Tychicus’s mission was to bring the churches up to date with information on how Paul was doing, and also to encourage church members. Paul introduced him as “a dear brother and a faithful minister in the Lord” (Eph. 6:21) and as “a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant in the Lord” (Col. 4:7). Even though his name is not widely remembered, he is remembered by Paul—and certainly by God.

Mission research calls for people who are willing to deny themselves and to work behind the scenes.

Research does not receive the spotlight of popular attention or the acclaim that the “front” person pastoring a large congregation or spearheading a massive evangelistic rally or even a field missionary may receive. Like the unseen footer or foundation that enables a skyscraper to stand, research can provide information for making wise decisions and informed judgments in recruitment and deployment of mission personnel, in shaping mission policies, and in guiding mission practice.

Mission research calls for people who, though they may also have gifts that would equip them for more public roles, are willing to deny themselves and to work behind the scenes. To work faithfully before God, a coram Deo spirituality is essential. Praise the Lord for the hope, hospitality, and humility for mission research that he has channeled to so many through Jonathan and Jean Bonk!
Humility, Integrity, and Simplicity

Christopher J. H. Wright

It is an honor and joy to be invited to participate in this tribute to Jonathan and Jean Bonk. It has been a personal privilege to be counted among their many, many friends around the world, especially in the global mission community. I got to know them best through many years of annual visits to the Overseas Ministries Study Center, where they were unfailling in the hospitality extended to me, not only while teaching there, but also when I used it as a home away from home for periods of writing. So it was a particular pleasure for me when Jonathan agreed to be a member of the Lausanne Theology Working Group in the years preceding the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in Cape Town, 2010. He contributed to several consultations at which we examined the depths of meaning—biblical, theological, and missional—in the Lausanne slogan “The whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world.” In that way, he contributed indirectly also to the congress itself and to the missiological thinking that eventually found succinct expression in the statement emerging from that congress, the Cape Town Commitment.

Many of us, including Jonathan, were concerned beforehand that the Cape Town Congress should not be merely a time either of celebrating the forward march of evangelical mission endeavors in the past decades or of compiling statistics, strategies, and plans for great efforts in the future. Doubtless celebrating and planning have their place. But we feared that God might not be as pleased with the state of world evangelism as we might be tempted to be pleased with ourselves. We lamented the prevalence of abuses perpetrated in the name of Christ—such as extreme forms of prosperity teachings and the unchristlike lives and behavior of some celebrity leaders. We were suspicious of some of the vaunted statistics of church growth, also the funds that they could generate for all kinds of “ministries,” were essentially “cooked”—unverified and lacking in integrity. We deplored the distorting influence of money and power in relationships between churches and mission agencies across the North-South divide. In short, we were convinced that Cape Town must include an element of self-examination and repentance if it was to be true to the claimed biblical foundations of the evangelical missions community it was bringing together.

This concern was accepted by the leadership of the Lausanne Movement in their planning of the congress program, and one of the six congress themes was defined as “Integrity: Calling the Church of Christ back to Humility, Integrity, and Simplicity.” I was invited to give the plenary address with that title. Knowing that those three words will echo warmly in the hearts of Jonathan and Jean, and that indeed they resonate with their Mennonite roots and personal characters, I offer below an edited and expanded version of what I said on that occasion.

Christopher J. H. Wright, international ministries director for Langham Partnership, was chair of the Lausanne Theology Working Group (2005–11). He was chief architect of the Cape Town Commitment, the statement issued by the Cape Town Congress. His books include The Mission of God (IVP Academic, 2006) and The Mission of God’s People (Zondervan, 2010).

God’s Mission and Ours

Some 4,000 years ago, God launched his global mission with the first Great Commission, given to Abraham, telling him to “Go . . . be a blessing . . . and through you all nations on the earth will be blessed” (Gen. 12:1–3, my translation). That is God’s great mission. That, says Paul in Galatians 3:8–9, is the Gospel that the Scriptures announced in advance to Abraham—that God chooses to bless all the nations on earth! Coming as it did in the world of “bad news” in Genesis 3–11, that is very good news indeed.

How would this worldwide blessing happen? God’s plan was that it should happen by God’s first creating a people, his own people, a people chosen in Abraham, redeemed through Christ, and called to “walk in the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice,” so that God could keep his promise to Abraham and bless all nations through him (Gen. 18:19, my translation). The whole purpose of election is ethical and missional. That is, our very existence as God’s people is founded on God’s intention to bless all peoples. The mission of the church flows from the mission of God. And God’s mission fills the whole of the rest of the Bible. The Cape Town Commitment summarizes both sides of the matter, with abundant biblical echoes:

We are committed to world mission, because it is central to our understanding of God, the Bible, the Church, human history and the ultimate future. The whole Bible reveals the mission of God to bring all things in heaven and earth into unity under Christ, reconciling them through the blood of his cross. In fulfilling his mission, God will transform the creation broken by sin and evil into the new creation in which there is no more sin or curse. God will fulfill his promise to Abraham to bless all nations on the earth, through the gospel of Jesus, the Messiah, the seed of Abraham. God will transform the fractured world of nations that are scattered under the judgment of God into the new humanity that will be redeemed by the blood of Christ from every tribe, nation, tongue and language, and will be gathered to worship our God and Savior. God will destroy the reign of death, corruption and violence when Christ returns to establish his eternal reign of life, justice and peace. Then God, Immanuel, will dwell with us, and the kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he shall reign for ever and ever.

God calls his people to share his mission. The Church from all nations stands in continuity through the Messiah Jesus with God’s people in the Old Testament. With them we have been called through Abraham and commissioned to be a blessing and a light to the nations. With them, we are to be shaped and taught through the law and the prophets to be a community of holiness, compassion and justice in a world of sin and suffering. We have been redeemed through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit to bear witness to what God has done in Christ. The Church exists to worship and glorify God for all eternity and to participate in the transforming mission of God within history. Our mission is wholly derived from God’s mission, addresses the whole of God’s creation, and is grounded at its centre in the redeeming victory of the cross. This is the people to whom we belong, whose faith we confess and whose mission we share.
Obstacles to God’s Mission

But there were, and still are, many things that keep frustrating and hindering that great loving, saving mission of God. Which might we consider to be the greatest of those obstacles to God’s desire for the evangelization of the world? I would suggest that it is not primarily:

- **other religions.** In truth, they are a major challenge, but the Lord knows those who seek him and reveals himself through Christ in surprising ways.
- **persecution.** Persecution is a terrible enemy, but sometimes it purifies and strengthens God’s people.
- **resistant cultures.** God has not left himself without a witness anywhere.

All these things and many more are indeed major challenges. But the overwhelming witness of the Bible itself is that the greatest problem for God in his redemptive mission for the world is God’s own people. What hurts God most, it seems, is not the sin of the world but the failure, disobedience, and rebellion of those whom God has redeemed and called to be his people, his holy, distinctive people.

In the Old Testament, the vast bulk of the words of the prophets were addressed to God’s own people—Israel—and only comparatively few chapters to “oracles against the nations.” By contrast, we tend to spend all our time attacking and complaining about the world and ignoring our own failures.

God’s calling on Old Testament Israel was very clear, as it is for us:

- **God called Israel to be “a light to the nations.”** But according to Ezekiel (5:6; 16:44–52), Israel sank even lower than the surrounding nations, including Sodom and Gomorrah. They were hardly a shining light in that condition!
- **God called Israel to know him, to love and worship him alone, as the one true living God.** But they constantly went after other gods, falling into repeated idolatry. This was a tragic squandering of the greatest privilege and blessing they had—the fact that they were God’s redeemed, covenant people, chosen for the sake of bringing God’s blessing to the rest of the nations. Israel itself was denying and hindering the very mission for which it existed.

Idolatry

The Bible gives us warrant for regarding idolatry as the biggest single obstacle to world mission. God’s mission is to bring all peoples into the blessing of knowing, loving, and worshiping him alone as the one true living God, the Creator and Redeemer of all. That being so, then the greatest threat to that goal is the worship of other gods, false gods, no gods. But the problem, as we see in the Old Testament very clearly, is not just the ignorant idolatry of the foreign nations and their false gods, but rather the idolatry that is rampant among God’s own people. When those to whom God has revealed himself, those whom God has redeemed and bound to himself in covenant relationship—when those people refuse to acknowledge God and “run after other gods,” as the Old Testament puts it, what hope is there for any faithful, life-giving witness among the peoples who do not yet know God in that way?

There are many false gods and idols in the contemporary world that can entice Christian people away from worshipping and serving the living God alone. Three in particular seem especially seductive, just as much for evangelical Christians today as for Israel of old: the idol of power and pride, the idol of popularity and success, and the idol of wealth and greed. The prophets, Jesus, and the apostles all challenge us with powerful, prophetic condemnation of these three destructive idols that can pollute and pervert the mission of God’s people.

The idol of power and pride. It is very easy for people in leadership positions—including those in Christian leadership, in churches, organizations, or mission agencies—to exalt their own status and authority. They grow proud of their position, refuse to submit to the wisdom of accountability, and become impervious to criticism or rebuke.

Isaiah warns that such people face the humbling power of God. “The Lord Almighty has a day in store for all the proud and lofty; for all that is exalted (and they will be humbled) . . . The arrogance of man will be brought low and human pride humbled; the Lord alone will be exalted in that day . . . and the idols will totally disappear” (2:12–18).

Jesus observes that such pride in one’s status and power is characteristic of the way authority is exercised in the fallen, pagan world. But he explicitly told his disciples that it should not be so among them. “Jesus said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. . . . I am among you as one who serves’” (Luke 22:24–27). Tragically, many Christian leaders behave as if Jesus had commended, rather than condemned, the leadership style of the world. Some even make a virtue out of mimicking it.

When the apostle Paul talks about the life that is worthy of our calling in the Gospel, the very first thing he says is this: “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love” (Eph. 4:2). And when the apostle Peter speaks to the elders of the churches he is writing to, he urges them to be “shepherds of God’s flock . . . not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:2–3).

These are just some of the strong biblical warnings against the sin of pride. It is destructive, divisive, and detrimental to effective mission. To be obsessed with our own status in Christian work is sheer disobedience to Christ and the Bible. It destroys the very thing we are trying to accomplish.

We are called back in repentance to humility—the humility of Jesus Christ himself, who said, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart” (Matt. 11:29).
The idol of popularity and success. This idol is close to that of pride, but it particularly manifests itself in obsession with our own performance and the image we can build on the basis of that. We are anxious to prove how well we are doing. We crave good results and impressive statistics. We like the shining lights of being noticed, commended, applauded, and deemed a success. Again, sadly, the same temptations are rife in Christian ministry. Of course, this craving for celebrity will be overlaid with a cosmetic layer of appropriately spiritual terminology—as when people are said to be “mightily used of the Lord,” or when success is called “fruit for the kingdom.” The cult of celebrity, which is such a feature of our idolatrous pagan culture, has infected the church in ways that are damaging to the celebrities themselves and to those who idolize them.

Obsession with these idols leads us into manipulation, dishonesty, distortion, and duplicity. Media hype is common in the secular world, but it amounts to sinful dishonesty when Christians indulge in it. Claims and statistics and stories and testimonies can all be polished and gilded to give the desired impression. Or worse, unverified and misleading statistics can be cited as a means of gaining funds. We tailor the message for whoever will pay for the cloth.

Such behavior is comparable to that of the false prophets in the Old Testament, who claimed to speak the word of God but were really acting in their own self-interest. They claimed to be men of God, but they were giving the people only whatever the people most wanted to hear or see at the time. They were popular and successful (like many today). The people listened to them eagerly, but they were false prophets in the grip of a false god.

Micah describes them thus: “As for the prophets who lead my people astray, they proclaim ‘peace’ if they have something to eat, but prepare to wage war against anyone who refuses to feed them. . . . Yet they look for the Lord’s support and say, ‘Is not the Lord among us? No disaster will come upon us’” (Mic. 3:5, 11).

And Jeremiah agrees: “From the least of the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit. They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace. Are they ashamed of their detestable conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush” (Jer. 6:13–15; see the even more direct criticism in Jer. 23:8–32 and Ezek. 13:1–16). There is no need to blush, they must have thought, like some celebrity leaders today, when you are popular and successful, when you have thousands of followers, when everything you touch turns “mega,” and you have a lifestyle to match. But with all of that, you can still be a false prophet.

Even in the early church, Paul warned against those who “peddle the word of God for profit,” those who “use deception” and “distort the word of God” (2 Cor. 2:17; 4:2). The church in Corinth was dazzled by these “super-apostles,” as he called them. They loved to boast about their credentials, their impressive speaking, their great popularity. They were the kind of leaders the church at Corinth wanted, because when a church has leaders like that, it can feel proud of its own image. Churches like to have popular, famous leaders so that they (the churches) can bask in the reflected glory of their big-name pastors. In that way, the idolatry of success and celebrity can become a vicious circle, a feedback loop of collusion between the self-glorifying ambition of the leader and the self-congratulating boasting of the people who follow him (and it usually is “him”).

Paul’s warning is severe: “Such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve” (2 Cor. 11:13–15).

The seductive power of this idol is very great. But when it generates deception, we must be on our guard. We cannot build the kingdom of the God of truth on foundations of dishonesty. Telling lies about our success or accepting what we know to be very questionable statistics in order to get, or to grant, funding for our projects is nothing short of bowing down to the idol of manipulated success. The pressures are sometimes very great. We can justify all kinds of questionable practices on the grounds of “doing God’s work.” But God’s work cannot be done by using the tools of Satan (that is, lies) to boost the statistics of our own success.

We are called back in repentance to integrity—the integrity of Jesus Christ, who is the Truth and calls us to speak nothing but the truth.

The Cape Town Commitment issued this call:

We call on all church and mission leaders to resist the temptation to be less than totally truthful in presenting our work. We are dishonest when we exaggerate our reports with unsubstantiated statistics, or twist the truth for the sake of gain. We pray for a cleansing wave of honesty and the end of such distortion, manipulation and exaggeration. We call on all who fund spiritual work not to make unrealistic demands for measurable and visible results, beyond the need for proper accountability. Let us strive for a culture of full integrity and transparency. We will choose to walk in the light and truth of God, for the Lord tests the heart and is pleased with integrity.

The idol of wealth and greed. The idolatry of greed infected the religious leaders of Israel too. Micah observed: “Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money” (Mic. 3:11). Isaiah saw a whole culture of greed, accumulation, and covetousness, which is reflected on an even vaster scale in today’s world: “Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land” (Isa. 5:8).

Moses, who rejoiced in the expectation that God would provide abundantly for his people when they got into the Promised Land, also warned against the danger of surplus and surfeit: “When you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (Deut. 8:12–14).

Jesus gave the same stern warning: “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a person’s life does not consist...
in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15, my translation). And neither, he could have added, does a person’s ministry. Yet it seems that some Christians actually rate great leaders and megapastors by how wealthy they are. How far we have strayed from the standards set by Jesus!

We are called back in repentance to simplicity—the simplicity of Jesus himself, and the spirit of generosity, which is the greatest antidote to accumulative greed.

The Temptations of Jesus

It is interesting to notice that Jesus himself faced the same three fundamental temptations.

- The devil offered him power and status over all nations, from a high mountain. Jesus refused it, choosing to worship God alone. Jesus chose the path of humility and obedience.
- The devil suggested he become a popular celebrity by manipulating the admiration of the crowds with a spectacular, death-defying miracle. Jesus recognized the way Satan was twisting Scripture to get him to achieve success. He chose the path of integrity in his trust in God.
- The devil dangled before him the lucrative prospect of abundant food for himself and the hungry masses. Turn stones into bread! Why, you could make a fortune for yourself with such a miracle! But Jesus resisted with the scriptural truth that God could supply bread, but human beings need greater food for life than that. He chose the path of simplicity in dependence on the promises of God.

So Jesus resisted these temptations to give in to the false gods—the idols that Satan easily inhabits. But tragically, it seems that so many Christian leaders (including mission leaders) blatantly fail these tests at precisely the points where Jesus overcame them. They cannot resist the temptations of elevated status, manipulated success, and selfish greed.

The whole church pays the cost of their failure, in the loss of integrity and credibility. What right have we to speak to the world when we are no different from it? Whenever we point a finger of prophetic criticism at the sin of the world, the world tells us, bluntly and rightly, “Clean up your own back yard!” When the church falls into the ways of the world (as the Old Testament again so effectively puts it, “going after the gods of the peoples around you”), then the church itself becomes a scandal, a stumbling block to the mission of God.

The Need for Reformation

In the pre-Reformation church of medieval Europe, we see these same three idols—pride, popularity, and greed—masquerading in the corrupt ecclesiastical system. There were proud and powerful bishops, wielding enormous wealth and political influence. There were highly popular and successful cults of saints and shrines, making all kinds of fraudulent claims about their relics and miracles to manipulate the masses. There were people making enormous wealth from selling indulgences—exploiting the poor with promises of good things in the life to come.

Meanwhile, the ordinary people lived in ignorance of the Bible, which was neither available in their language nor preached from their pulpits. Reformation was the desperate need of the hour. Surely the same desperate need is with us again, five hundred years later. And, I dare to propose, such reformation needs to begin in the worldwide evangelical community. For there are some parts of the so-called evangelical church today where the same three idols are rampant.

- There are self-appointed super-apostles and other mighty and elevated leaders, unaccountable to anybody, popular with thousands of followers, exploiting the flock of Christ, unconcerned for the weak and poor, showing none of the marks of an apostle as described by Paul, and with no resemblance to the crucified Christ. That is nothing less than the idolatry of pride and power.
- There is a craze for “success,” for “results,” to win the largest number in the shortest time. There is obsession with statistics and outcomes, leading to wild claims, unsubstantiated numbers, untrue reports—blatant manipulation and collusion in falsehood, all for the sake of funding, ministry success, and growth. That is the idolatry of success.
- There is the so-called prosperity gospel. Now we should certainly affirm what the Bible says about God’s blessing (including material blessings), about the miraculous power of God’s Spirit and the victory of God over all that crushes and curses human life. But many promoters of this teaching distort the Bible (if they use it at all). They appeal to human greed or exploit human need. They have no place for the Bible’s teaching on repentance, on suffering, and on taking up the cross. They succeed only in enriching themselves and indulging in a consumerist, wealth-flaunting lifestyle that is utterly contrary to the teaching and example of Christ. This is surely the idolatry of greed.

As in the pre-Reformation church, so also today: the ordinary people of God in many churches around the world live in ignorance of the Bible. They have pastors who neither know the Bible themselves nor have the willingness or ability to preach and teach it clearly and faithfully. Reformation, a twenty-first-century reformation, is once again the desperate need. And it needs to start with us.

How, then, should we respond? It seems to me that we need a renewal of Christlike leadership, and we need a return to the Lord himself.

A Renewal of Christlike Leadership

Once again the Cape Town Commitment identifies one dimension of the problem.

The rapid growth of the Church in so many places remains shallow and vulnerable, partly because of the lack of disciplined leaders, and partly because so many use their positions for worldly power, arrogant status or personal enrichment. As a result, God’s people suffer, Christ is dishonored, and gospel mission is undermined. “Leadership training” is the commonly-proposed priority solution. Indeed, leadership training programmes of all kinds have multiplied, but the problem remains, for two probable reasons.

First, training leaders to be godly and Christlike is the wrong way round. Biblically, only those whose lives already display basic qualities of mature discipleship should be
appointed to leadership in the first place. If, today, we are faced with many people in leadership who have scarcely been discipled, then there is no option but to include such basic discipling in their leadership training. Arguably the scale of unChristlike and worldly leadership in the global Church today is glaring evidence of generations of reductionist evangelism, neglected discipling and shallow growth. The answer to leadership failure is not just more leadership training but better discipleship training. Leaders must first be disciples of Christ himself, the good Shepherd who laid down his life for his sheep.

Second, some leadership training programmes focus on packaged knowledge, techniques and skills to the neglect of godly character. By contrast, authentic Christian leaders must be like Christ in having a servant heart, humility, integrity, purity, lack of greed, prayerfulness, dependence on God’s Spirit, and a deep love for people. Furthermore, some leadership training programmes lack specific training in the one key skill that Paul included in his list of qualifications—ability to teach God’s Word to God’s people. Yet Bible teaching is the paramount means of disciple-making and the most serious deficiency in contemporary Church leaders.

A Radical Return to the Lord

We need to take heed to the prophetic word from the prophets and apostles of God, and from the Lord Jesus Christ himself: “Repent, and believe the gospel.” Jesus preached that message and delivered that command, not to pagan unbelievers, Gentile outsiders, people of other faiths, but to those who already claimed to be God’s covenant people. The command to repent comes first to the people of God—in both the Old and the New Testaments.

If we believe in going out to the world in mission, we must first come back to the Lord ourselves. If we want to see change in the world through the Gospel, we must first change our own hearts and our ways (Jer. 7:3–8). If we wish to see the revelation of the living God challenging the false gods of all human cultures and religions, then we must first renounce and repent of the false gods among ourselves in the Christian church.

The call to mission is not only a call that sends us out to make disciples. It also calls us back to the core characteristics of being disciples ourselves, in humility, integrity, and simplicity.

Notes

1. This article is based on the address given on Day five of the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelism, Cape Town, South Africa, October 2010.
3. Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations in this article are taken from the New International Version.
4. Eph. 1:9–10; Col. 1:12; Rev. 21:22.
5. CTC I.10.
8. 1 Tim. 3:1–13; Tit. 1:6–9; 1 Pet. 5:1–3.
9. CTC IID.3.

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Hope

Sawai Chinnawong, *Christ on the Bangkok Road* (New Haven, Conn.: OMSC Publications, 2004), 57; acrylic on canvas, 24 × 35 in., 2003

*Lost Sheep*
Sawai Chinnawong
Patience in the Missional Thought and Practice of the Early Church: The Case of Cyprian of Carthage

Alan Kreider

Why did post–New Testament churches grow? In recent years, scholars have discarded some old answers to that question. Ancient sources will not let us think of a succession of heroic missionaries, successors to Paul; or of missionary preaching in public; or of churches that grew as the product of organized mission campaigns. Nor will these sources let us imagine that it was Christian worship that attractedpagans; the early Christians’ worship services were private, open only to baptized believers. As for evangelism, the Christians talked little about it, and in many settings they seemed to be trying to keep their heads down—to be relatively inconspicuous.

Nevertheless, throughout the church’s first three centuries the churches were growing. The growth was more marked in some places than others, and more rapid at some times than other times; but the overall growth was incontestable. The growth happened despite substantial disincentives: being a Christian was not a way to get ahead professionally or to be acceptable to neighbors. In exceptional cases the cost of conversion could be martyrdom. Why, in this situation of disincentive and lack of organization, did the churches grow? Because of the patience of the early Christians.

Because of patience? Patience is not a word that reflexively comes to mind when we think about the growth of the church in any period of its history. In today’s North America, patience does not have a frisson of excitement; it did not among literate ancient pagans, either. To powerful Romans, patience was for people who were subservient and powerless; patience was a virtue that slaves had of necessity. How surprising to find ancient Christian writers not only praising patience but finding it exciting! According to Tertullian, it was “the highest virtue”; Lactantius saw it as “the greatest of all virtues,” and Origen called patience “the virtue [that is] peculiarly ours.” When around 200 Tertullian wrote the first Christian treatise on a virtue, it was not about one of the classic quartet of manly virtues—prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude; it was about patience, unacceptable patience. And Christian writers took patience seriously—Tertullian in 204, Cyprian in 256, and Augustine in 417 all wrote treatises on it. In contrast, no early Christian writer wrote a treatise on any other virtue—or a treatise on evangelism, for that matter. For the early Christian writers, in churches that were growing, patience was important. To get a glimpse of what patience meant to the Christians and how it fit into their missional growth, we will look at two writings by Cyprian, bishop of Carthage in North Africa: his treatise On the Good of Patience and his catechetical program To Quirinus 3.

But first, let’s review Cyprian’s setting. Cyprian was a new phenomenon in the church in Roman North Africa—an aristocrat (possibly of senatorial family) who in 246 converted to Christianity. During the ten years between his appointment as bishop in 248 and his martyrdom in 258, Cyprian faced huge problems: two waves of empire-wide persecution, a pestilence (the measles?) that killed huge numbers, tensions within the local churches about accommodating to wider societal values and lapsing during the persecutions, and Christians who were angry with the persecutors and wanted to exact revenge. Nevertheless, despite these problems the churches were growing. People, evidently in increasing numbers, applied to become catechumens in preparation for baptism, and the churches adjusted to their growing numbers by shifting their main weekly meeting from meal-based services on Saturday evenings to Eucharistic services on Sunday mornings. For Cyprian, the main problem was not to get the churches to grow numerically; it was to maintain Christian distinctiveness in growing churches, because distinctiveness was basic to the church’s missional approach.

Cyprian’s Case for Patience

Cyprian sketches his approach to mission in On the Good of Patience (256). He begins by reminding his readers of the heart of the church’s approach to mission—that the believers must demonstrate what they believe by the way they live. Christians “are philosophers not in words but in deeds. . . . We know virtues by their practice rather than through boasting of them.” Cyprian quotes a slogan repeated among North African Christians: “We do not speak great things, but we live them.” To understand mission in the North African church, let us imagine Christians’ learning that phrase in catechesis, memorizing it, and repeating it. Cyprian knows that most people will not read what he writes (85–90 percent are illiterate), and most pagans will not listen if Christians attempt to speak. But the lives of Christians and their communities of faith are there for all to see. The truth is made visible in incarnation and demonstrated in action. And according to Cyprian, the truth that is lived is intertwined with patience: “Let us show by spiritual homage the patience that we learn from the heavenly teachings. For that virtue we have in common with God” (3). The Christians’ embodied lives are demonstrations of God’s patient character.

Cyprian reminds his readers of God’s character. “How wonderful and how great is the patience of God!” According to Cyprian, God patiently puts up with the pagan temples, images, and rites. And God is good to all people, including the pagans. From Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, Cyprian cites Matthew 5:45, a favorite North African patience text: “[God] makes the day to rise and the sun to shine equally over the good and evil. When he waters the earth with showers, no one is excluded from his benefits” (4). God is omnidirectionally generous. He is provoked by human offenses and has the power of vengeance, which he one day will exercise, but in patience God provides seasons, fountains, and harvests for everybody. God desires the salvation of all and is at work, patiently playing a long game: “[God] prefers to be long-suffering in his patience, so that, if it is at all possible, the long career of malice at some time may change, and man, however deeply he is infected with the contagion of...
error and crime may be converted to God, even at a late hour" (4). Patience is an attribute of God, so when Christians manifest patience, they are imitating God and collaborating with him.

But what does this mean? According to Cyprian, Jesus shows the meaning of patience in his teaching. Cyprian cites in full the “salutary precepts” that Jesus gave his disciples in the famous Sermon on the Mount passage from Matthew 5:43–48: “Love your enemies . . . so that you may be the children of your Father . . . who makes his sun to rise on the good and evil . . . You therefore will be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (5). When this teaching “shines in our actions,” Cyprian notes, the Christians demonstrate the patience of God that lives in the believers. Having “become like God,” they are different from the pagans (5). According to Cyprian, Jesus not only discusses the meaning of patience in his words, but also demonstrates patience in his actions. So Cyprian gives a summary of Jesus’ deeds, each of which is “marked by an accompanying patience.” From his baptism by his servant, through his washing his disciples’ feet and accepting his betrayer’s kiss, Jesus shows a “wonderful patience.” This, Cyprian notes, is missionally attractive—Jesus “wins the ungrateful by kindness” (6). He suffers torture and goes to the cross in ways that demonstrate “a full and perfect patience” (7). This, says Cyprian, is the way Christians are to live. “He himself is the way of our salvation, so let us follow in the salutary footsteps of Christ.” Cyprian cites I John 2:6: “He who says that he abides in Christ ought himself to walk just as he walked” (9).

We would like Cyprian at this point to discuss at greater length what a patient life in the footsteps of Christ looks like. But in Cyprian’s North African church, detailed practical application may have been the task of the catechists. What Cyprian gives is three areas in which Christians have a distinctive approach because of their patience.

**Patience Produces Distinctiveness**

First, Christians resist temptation and repudiate retaliation. They can resist “the acts of the flesh and body whereby the soul is stove and captured”—adultery, deceit, and homicide—but only when their patience is strong (14). When Christians “have the steadfastness of patience and forbearance,” then they are able to obey the Lord who teaches them not to retaliate: “[You are] not to swear or curse, not to seek again what has been taken away from you, on receiving a blow to offer the other cheek also to your assailant, to forgive your brother who offends you not only seventy times seven times, but all his offences without exception, to love your enemies, to pray for your adversaries and persecutors” (16).

Second, the Christian churches have a distinctive common life. Love is the bond of brotherhood that holds the churches together, and patience is essential if this love is to be durable. Cyprian contends that patience is the “intermediary” that enables Christian communities across time to be united and at peace (15).

Third, Christians face ordinary personal hardships and physical sufferings in a distinctive, patient way. Like everyone else, Christians face illness, which “cannot be endured without the strength of patience.” Patience is also essential when believers face financial reverses, burning fevers, and the loss of loved ones. According to Cyprian, nothing shows the difference between Christians and pagans more than how they respond to these personal sufferings: “In adversities the unjust man complains and blasphemes because of impatience, while the just man is proved by patience” (17). Outsiders look at the Christians and take note.

The 250s were a traumatic decade for the Christians. In *On the Good of Patience*, Cyprian indicates that some Christians were tired, diverted by temptations away from living according to their patient calling (13). Furthermore, “very many” believers, unsettled and angered by the attacks (evidently by neighbors) in recent persecutions, were restive, wanting to take things into their own hands—“to revenge our pain with an angry speed” (21). The desire of Christians to strike back at people who had harassed them worried Cyprian; he devoted one-sixth of his treatise to it. He counters Christian impatience by urging believers to remember the “day of vengeance” (21). Jesus, who was “hidden in humility” in his incarnation, will come again “manifested in power” (23). He, the patient One, will be judge of the persecutors. So Cyprian calls believers in their sufferings and persecutions to keep Jesus’ patient behavior in their minds. Christ is worshipped in heaven; he is patient in deferring the time when he, “the Judge and Avenger,” avenges the people of his church. Until he comes, Christians are not to take vengeance into their own hands, not to “act with impious and shameless haste” by roughing up their neighbors. Instead, believers must “guard the precepts of the Lord,” because their eternal destiny depends on this. On the day of vengeance “the Lord” (Christ) will punish the pagans and persecutors; he will also punish those who disobey “the precepts of the Lord” (24). So disobeying the Lord by enacting vengeance is not only inappropriate, impatient behavior; it is also spiritually toxic, destroying the people who disobey Jesus.

Cyprian is convinced that Christians are not to be in a hurry. They are not to seize control of events. Instead, they are to endure to the end as God changes them into people of “hope and faith” (15). This requires patience: “Patient waiting is necessary that we may obtain what we hope for and believe.” This patience enables them, like God, to be beneficent beyond borders. Cyprian quotes Galatians 6:10, one of his favorite biblical passages: “Let us do good to all people, but especially to those who are of the household of faith” (13).

Patience that does good to all people—this is at the heart of Christian witness. Cyprian waxes lyrical: “With its full-flowing streams [patience] is diffused through many glorious courses.” Cyprian’s list of these courses is long and includes patience that tempers anger, suppresses the violence of pride, extinguishes the fire of dissension, and “guards the blessed integrity of virgins.” And he gives special emphasis to the disciplines that patience gives for the internal reconciliations that are necessary to maintain the Christian communities: “[Patience] teaches us to pardon our offenders quickly; if you yourself should offend, it teaches you to ask pardon often and with perseverance.”

For Cyprian, the main problem was to maintain Christian distinctiveness in growing churches, because distinctiveness was basic to the church’s missionary approach.
short, the way of patience gives Christians and their communities their distinctive character. Patience is “the way of Christ,” and patience is hopeful: “It is this patience which sublimely promotes the growth of hope” (20).

A Missional Theology of Patience

The patience that Cyprian fosters in On the Good of Patience is powerful, but in the early churches it was not unusual. Fifty years earlier Tertullian had articulated many of the same themes in his On Patience; sixty years later in his Divine Institutes Lactantius developed them further. Justin and Origen had also discussed patience in their writings, though less systematically. Looking at these writings synoptically, and bearing in mind Cyprian’s treatise that we have examined, we note themes that constitute a pre-Constantinian missional theology of patience.

- Patience is an expression of God’s character: God is patient and is working inexorably across the centuries to bring the kingdom.
- The incarnation of Jesus Christ is God’s supreme self-disclosure. Jesus, the patient One, in life and teaching demonstrates what patience means and beckons those who follow him to live a lifestyle of patience that participates in God’s mission. This lifestyle involves:
  - being out of control, that is, not being the one in charge; trusting God and not trying to manipulate outcomes;
  - being unhurried, living at the pace given by God, accepting incompleteness and waiting;
  - being unconventional in many areas, especially wealth, sex, and power;
  - being nonviolent, accepting injury without retaliating in kind; violence cannot bring fundamental change;
  - giving religious freedom, repudiating the compulsion of religious beliefs and observances;
  - being hopeful, entrusting the future confidently to God.

These themes grow out of theological affirmations: about God’s patience and God’s way of working historically; and furthermore, about Christ’s incarnation and the normative role of his lifestyle and teachings. We have noted that Cyprian gave special authority to the Sermon on the Mount, which was typical of the early Christian writers. The writers assumed that Jesus meant for his disciples to live what he said in the Sermon and that, when they did so, it transformed their lives. Obedience to Jesus made the Christians distinctive; it gave them ways of living that brought goodness and mercy into unanticipated places; it made them interesting.

It was the Christians’ lives, rather than their arguments, that demonstrated the truth of their doctrines. According to Origen, Christ makes his defense in an incarnate way; the lives of his genuine disciples “cry out the real facts.” Cyprian’s lapidary phrase that we quoted earlier—“We do not speak great things, but we live them”—expressed something that the early Christians knew.

This approach had immense missional impact. Third-century Christians were a minority movement in a competitive religious environment. They believed that they grew numerically when people were attracted to the faith through the interesting behavior of Christian individuals and the peace-filled character of Christian communities. And they knew that the individuals and communities would be distinctive and attractive only if the interested pagans who joined them were taught to be different. The churches needed to have strong programs of catechesis that formed the individual Christians and their churches. In order for conversions to Christ to be genuine, there had to be careful catechesis that was more than a short course that changed people’s ideas; catechesis must be substantial enough and unhurried enough to effect changes in people’s reflexes and lifestyles as well. As we have seen, ancient Greco-Roman intellectuals did not value patience; and the vast majority of the population were nonintellectuals whom narratives and common sense had habituated to be impatient. How could these people change so that they could demonstrate the character of God to the world, so that they could enact in the presence of neighbors what it meant practically that Jesus Christ was Lord, Savior, and teacher?

Catechizing Patience—To Quirinus 3

How to catechize patience was the challenge that Cyprian and the other African church leaders faced. Quirinus was one of these, a catechist who in the late 240s wrote to Cyprian asking for help. What, he asked, were the most important topics that “the religious teaching of our school” should deal with? Cyprian took his request seriously and came up with a list of 120 “heavenly precepts” in a text known as To Quirinus 3. Cyprian was concerned that Quirinus’s mind “might have a wholesome and large compendium nourishing its memory.” So to support each of the 120 precepts, Cyprian quoted biblical texts in full so that Quirinus’s catechumens could memorize them as they prepared for baptism. Memorizing Bible texts, Cyprian was convinced, was essential to help apprentice believers as they changed from a way that was reflexively, conventionally pagan to a way that was reflexively, counterculturally Christian—a way that was patient.

Of the 120 precepts that Cyprian provided, 48 had to do with belief, expressed in terms that ordinary people could comprehend. “That nothing must be preferred to the love of God and of Christ” (To Quirinus 3.18), and “That God is patient to the end that [humans] may repent of our sins and be reformed” (35). Believers, in turn, should be affected by God’s patience—“That our faith concerning those things which are promised ought to be patient” (45)—and above all should express their faith through their lives, which Christ transforms: “the example of living is given to us in Christ” (39).

This example leads believers to behave distinctively toward “Gentiles,” that is, non-Christians: “believers ought not to live like the Gentiles” (34). For example, they should not charge interest on loans (48), not swear oaths to verify weights and
“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
prices (81), and if cheated by outsiders, not litigate (44). And they should be patient—“even our enemies must be loved” because God makes his sun to rise on the good and the evil (49). When Christians receive a wrong, they should maintain patience and leave vengeance to God (106). Christians ought also to behave in characteristic ways toward other believers: they should bear their burdens economically (9), forgive each other (22), speak humbly (5), visit the sick (109), protect orphans and widows (113), not seek “the lust of possessing, and money” (61). This cluster of reflexive behaviors is shaped in catechesis, but also after baptism is shaped by the worship of the Christian community, which forms the believers’ “deeds and works” (26).

There is, however, a curious absence in the 120 precepts that Cyprian provided for Quirinus. Nowhere does Cyprian admonish Christians to engage in missional conversation with outsiders, and he gives no guidance about the means of getting outsiders into the church. Cyprian’s church is growing; there is ample evidence of that. But how can it grow if Cyprian is not interested enough in mission to talk about it?

A Patient Approach to Mission

The answer must be that Cyprian’s entire approach is missional. It is an attempt to equip his church to participate in his kind of mission—patient mission. Cyprian assumes that God is at work, drawing people to himself; that those who find salvation in Christ will live the teachings of Christ; that people who do this will excite interest and attract new people to catechesis and baptism. But all this will happen only if the Christians and their communities are sufficiently attentive to Christ’s teachings to embody alternatives that outsiders find hopeful and worth exploring further. The church gets in danger, Cyprian contends, when it talks too much: precept 96 urges “that we must labor with deeds, not with words”; and precept 103, “that we must abstain from much speaking.” Beyond obeying Christ and embodying obedience in their lives, Christians are to trust God to vindicate God’s mission. Like God, Christians “ought to be patient,” not in a hurry (35, 45).

Cyprian’s patient approach to mission appears distant to us. The short-range changes that rippled out from the fourth-century adherence of Emperor Constantine I to Christianity are documentable: more rapid numerical growth, preoccupation with doctrinally sound Christian speech, conventionalization of the Christians’ lifestyle, a loss of focus on the teachings and way of Jesus, and eventually, inducement and compulsion. Christian history offers many variants of mission, some of which are very remote indeed from the patient methods of Cyprian.

Now and then one finds followers of Jesus who reflexively embody early Christian models. Jon and Jean Bonk are two of them. Christians such as the Bonks are intuitively attuned to patient mission, which is a form of “thinking small.” Of course, they are aware that Cyprian’s model is not to be followed blindly, and that, for example, it is important for Christians today to learn to speak well when they talk about Jesus Christ and his way. But like Cyprian, they know this: that Christians in every era are most likely to be taken seriously when their lives speak, embodying the surprising teachings and life-giving way of Jesus, their Lord and Savior.

Notes

2. We have indicators of the dangers of conversion in third-century catechetical and liturgical texts from Africa (Cyprian, To Quirinus 3.16–18), from Syria (Didascalia Apostolorum 5.6.2), and perhaps also from Rome (Apostolic Tradition 19.2). These sources do not come from a common series of ancient patristic texts.
4. Tertullian, On Patience 1.7; Lactantius, Divine Institutes 6.18.16; Gregory Thaumaturgos, Panegyric on Origen 12.
6. The three treatises are Tertullian, On Patience; Cyprian, On the Good of Patience; and Augustine, On Patience.
10. Cyprian, On the Good of Patience 3. His phrase “non eloquium magna sed vivimus” is identical with that in Minucius Felix’s Octavius 38.6, written in North Africa fifty years earlier.
12. Cyprian here cites what may have been a disciplinary rule of the North African church: “After the reception of the Eucharist the hand is not to be stained with the sword and bloodshed” (On the Good of Patience 14; trans. Louis J. Swift, The Early Fathers on War and Military Service, Message of the Fathers of the Church 19 [Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1983], 48).
13. Lactantius, Divine Institutes 5.19, 22.
14. Justin, Apology 14; 16.1–4; Origen, Contra Celsum 7.55, and Homily on Jeremiah 16.1; 18.5.3.
15. The third Christian treatise on patience—Augustine’s On Patience of 417—adopts an approach quite different from that of its predecessors.
18. Cyprian, To Quirinus 3 preface.
19. To give an impression of the range of texts that Cyprian provides for the catechumens to memorize for each precept, see precept 18 (To Quirinus 3.18), in which he quotes in full Deut. 6:5, Matt. 10:37–38, and Rom. 8:35–37.
An Anthropology of Hope: Africa, Slavery, and Civilization in Nineteenth-Century Mission Thinking

Andrew F. Walls

The word “anthropology” now usually relates to the academic discipline that deals with the study of societies and the human relationships within them, but over a much longer time it has been used in theological discourse to denote the study of humanity in relation to God (or, as it used to be called, “the Doctrine of Man”). “Anthropology” is used here primarily in this older, theological sense, but its later connotations are still relevant. In the period under consideration here, theological aspects of the nature of humanity became part of a wider discourse about the relations between Africans and people of European descent.

The period in question covers the middle decades of the nineteenth century, from the 1830s to the 1870s, a period in which the Atlantic slave trade was officially internationally outlawed, but nevertheless incorrigibly active; when slavery was still a solid reality in many parts of the world and a recent memory in others. Slavery and the slave trade were therefore major elements in European thinking about Africa. The European presence in Africa at the time was not large; colonies were few and small, and outside the far south of Africa, mortality among resident Europeans was high. Until the very end of the period there was little sign of the competition for territory that produced the “Scramble for Africa” that marked the last decades of the century.

The Evangelical-Humanitarian Nexus

Much of the thought about Africa was stimulated by the confluence of Evangelical and humanitarian concerns. These two strands of thought and activity had been interlocked in many spheres; the missionary movement and the movement for the abolition of slavery had grown up together, with constituencies that considerably overlapped. The Evangelical-humanitarian confluence had provided the dynamism for William Wilberforce and his colleagues in their long battle for the abolition of the British slave trade, which they achieved in 1807. It was equally reflected in the work of Wilberforce’s parliamentary successor, Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, a staunch Evangelical and supporter of missions, whose early political career had been devoted to reducing the number of offenses carrying the death penalty, and who had led the campaign that in 1834 brought about the abolition of slavery in the British dominions.1 By the later 1830s Buxton realized that, more than thirty years after the international community had officially abolished the slave trade, more Africans were being transported to slavery in the Americas than in the days when the trade was legal—and this despite the presence of a British naval squadron empowered to intercept ships carrying slaves. Recognizing that moral exhortation alone would not suffice to eliminate a profitable trade, however abhorrent, Buxton sought a just economic policy that would make the slave trade unprofitable and enable African nations to become trading partners within the community of nations on an equitable basis. Agricultural produce, he believed, was a huge and underestimated potential asset to Africa. African nations should be encouraged to develop untapped resources, both economic and human. The ransom for Africa lay in her fertile soil. Buxton wanted the policy of calling for the engagement of African resources to go hand in hand with the progress of Christian missions. It would assist that progress; the slave trade was the enemy of Christianity everywhere, and missions could not flourish where it operated. Missionaries and schoolmasters, the Bible and the plow, would be the means of Africa’s redemption.

This introduces another aspect of Buxton’s vision for Africa: the growth of civilization that would accompany the progress of Christianity and commerce. He pointed out that Africa had once been home to great civilizations. Though violence (much of it directly attributable to the slave trade) now despoiled it, Africa could be home to civilization once more. The concomitant spread of Christianity, commerce, and civilization in Africa, each factor assisting the others, would strangle the slave trade at its source.

These ideas were set out in a book first published in 1839 for a select circulation and, in an enlarged form, for the general public the following year:2 The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy is an early treatise in what we would now call development economics. It is rare for its time in being a full-scale monograph devoted to Africa. It sees the Atlantic slave trade, inflicted on Africa by the West for Western purposes, as the key to understanding the situation of the continent. The slave trade brought endemic warfare and blocked cultural and intellectual advance in Africa, and it also blocked the progress of the Gospel. The first part of the book, devoted to the African slave trade, carries the text “This is a people robbed and spoiled” (Isa. 42:22); the second, setting out Buxton’s remedy for the trade, carries “The desert shall blossom as the rose” (Isa. 35:1).

In many respects Buxton was reviving and expanding in macroeconomic form ideas set out half a century earlier by the founders of the Sierra Leone Company, who had sought to set up in West Africa a working model of a productive, slave-free economy. Sierra Leone had never become the productive agricultural settlement that some had dreamed of in 1792, when 1,131 Christian Africans had been brought from Nova Scotia to settle there;3 but by 1841 it was becoming a moderately prosperous commercial entrepôt, with confiscated slave ships making a considerable contribution to its economy. By that year the acting governor of Sierra Leone and several other leading officials there were of African or Afro-Caribbean origin; and influential policy makers in Britain, advocating disengagement from Africa, were proposing handing over administration to Africans in places where (as in Sierra Leone) commitment was too deep to allow complete withdrawal. Buxton’s “New African Policy” was the reverse of disengagement from Africa; but it was directed essentially, not to imperial expansion, but to stimulating the economies of independent African states, in which Christian influence and
The confluence of Evangelical and humanitarian influences made early missionaries alert to what would now be called human rights abuses.

economic and educational development would continue under African leadership.

Sierra Leone had come into being as a geopolitical entity through the activity of an earlier generation of Evangelical humanitarians, and in many ways it continued to embody their ideals. The descendants of the former slaves from America who had arrived there, via Nova Scotia, in 1792 were by now far outnumbered by “Liberated Africans” from all over West Africa, taken from intercepted slave ships. By the 1840s the colony displayed an African community that was literate and Christian. The confiscated slave ships were no longer routinely bought up by the few European trading firms there, but by Liberated Africans, adopting procedures pioneered in church-related benefit societies; and Liberated Africans were sailing along the West African coast and opening up trade on their own account. Already in 1838 some persons of Yoruba origin had found a way back to their far-off homeland. Their initiative led to Christian missions going to what is now western Nigeria. The English missionary who went to reconnoiter for the missions traveled to Sierra Leone on a ship skippered and crewed by Liberated Africans. Before Buxton’s book was published, Sierra Leone merchants (Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa in origin) were proposing the establishment of a slavery-free trade center at Badagry on the Bight of Benin, indicating their own readiness to commit to this new outpost of Christianity, commerce, and civilization in Africa. It was a Freetown merchant traveling in England who sowed in the mind of Henry Venn, secretary of the Church Missionary Society, the thoughts that led to his policy of self-governing, self-supporting, self-propagating churches.

In 1841 Buxton obtained from the British government a partial endorsement, in the shape of a pilot project: an exploratory expedition would go to the Niger River, taking experts to the Niger the proclamation necessary in Africa, and the fruits that were evident at home could be expected in Africa also. Evidences of African intelligence and capacity, whether from Sierra Leone, from the Caribbean, or from African schoolchildren brought to London, were a regular part of Evangelical polemic against slavery. It was an anthropology of hope.

While slavery was a defining concern for Evangelicals, the confluence of Evangelical and humanitarian influences made early missionaries alert to what would now be called human rights abuses. Buxton chaired a House of Commons Committee on Aboriginal Rights, concerned in particular with land seizures by white settlers. Missionaries were eloquent on cruelties they observed in the places they worked: the burning of widows on the funeral pyres of their husbands in Bengal, the killing of slaves for an important man’s funeral in West Africa, the treatment of

Evangelical Anthropology

The vision of Christianity, commerce, and civilization espoused by Buxton and reflected in the history and life of Sierra Leone had deep roots in early Protestant mission thinking. We have noted the intertwining of Evangelical and humanitarian conviction in the missionary movement and the antislavery movement; and in the missionary movement (though by this time it was attracting a wider constituency) Evangelical influences dominated both in theory and in practice.

Evangelicalism was a statement about culture: an implicit critique of contemporary British Christendom, a nation professing Christian norms and maintaining Christian worship but where those norms were constantly flouted and the implications of Christian doctrine were little understood. Evangelicals stressed three cardinal doctrines in particular, which Wilberforce, who himself wrote a highly popular exposition of Evangelical teaching, called the “distinguishing doctrines of the Gospel”: the nature of original sin, the meaning of Christ’s atonement, and the necessity of holiness of life through the Holy Spirit. Personal response to the Gospel as reflected in these doctrines differentiated “nominal” from “formal” from “real” Christianity. This distinction between real and nominal Christianity built social criticism into Evangelical thought, making Evangelicals social nonconformists, witnesses to the derelictions of contemporary Christendom. Evangelicals did not reject the idea of Christendom; they desired to retain a Christian civil society and saw it as their duty to awaken that nominally Christian society to the implications of the Christianity it professed. But they did not idealize that society and were very conscious of the corruptions of contemporary culture.

The distinguishing doctrines of the Gospel of the Evangelicals posited the universality of human sinfulness and the universal efficacy of Christ’s atonement and called for human response to Christ’s work of redemption, leading to a life of holiness. The careless unregenerate person, therefore, even if a peer of the realm or a clergyman of the established church, was in the same spiritual position as an African pagan or a Hindu idolator—functionally, such people were “heathen.” “You have nothing at present to do in Africa,” wrote John Wesley to a Scottish preacher who desired to be a missionary. “Convert the heathen in Scotland.”

At the same time, all that the Gospel offered in Scotland was equally available in Africa. People of all races stood under the same judgment and were comprehended in the same salvation. A favorite text was “God hath made of one blood all nations of men” (Acts 17:26 KJV). This common origin had an important corollary: just as “all races of men” stood under God’s judgment and were open to Christ’s salvation, so all were open to the fullest development of Christian character and the highest reaches of human attainment. One of the recurrent justifications for African slavery was the proposition that Africans represented an inferior branch of humanity, fit only for servile labor. The Evangelical anthropology of this era had no room for this idea. The factors that called for the proclamation of the Gospel at home made its proclamation necessary in Africa, and the fruits that were evident at home could be expected in Africa also. Evidences of African intelligence and capacity, whether from Sierra Leone, from the Caribbean, or from African schoolchildren brought to London, were a regular part of Evangelical polemic against slavery. It was an anthropology of hope.
the aboriginal Khoi at the Cape. Buxton argued in his book that violent practices, far from being Africa’s natural state, had often been introduced or exacerbated by the slave trade, imposed on Africa by nations claiming to be civilized.

Understanding “Civilization”

It is worth considering what Buxton and his fellow Evangelical-humanitarian had in mind when they sought the spread of “civilization.” A useful place to start is a collection of lectures, delivered around the time of Buxton’s untimely death in 1845, and previously delivered to members of the newly formed Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA). The first lecture, delivered by well-known preacher John Stoughton, is entitled “Ancient Rome and Modern London.” In a point by point comparison, Stoughton finds London superior on most counts (architecture is an exception), but he sees the essential difference between ancient Rome and modern London in that the former was a military and the latter is a commercial civilization, where military forces exist not for conquest, but to prevent war and facilitate trade. “London City, and English subjects in general, are looking in the present day, not for armies as the source of their greatness and the objects of their pride, but to the busy thousands who are deepening and spreading the resources of national wealth by their commercial and manufacturing industry.”

The choice of ancient Rome as the basis of comparison by which to highlight essential features of the culture of his own day reflects a historical component in contemporary ideas of civilization. Classical antiquity distinguished between “Greeks,” who shared a certain framework of language, ideas, and ways of living, backed by a recognized body of literature, and “barbarians,” who lacked this framework. Western Europeans knew that they were themselves descended from peoples the Romans called barbarians, but they also saw themselves as the cultural heirs of the Roman Empire; their barbarian ancestors had gone on to absorb Latin culture and in this sense become “Greeks.” Moreover, they had done so in the process of embracing the Christian faith. The inheritance from Greece and Rome that was the font of their philosophy, law, and polity was suffused with Christian influences. Europeans, while heirs of the Greco-Roman world, were heirs of that world converted to Christ; the classical and the Christian influences flow together into European literature and art. All this built up a sense of long heritage and shared cultural treasure, a consciousness not unlike that of “Greeks” in the Roman Empire in Paul’s day. Educational patterns reinforced the connection with classical antiquity: the higher a person’s education, the greater his knowledge of Greek and Latin was likely to be.

But as Stoughton’s lecture shows, contemporary ideas of civilization, while retaining the historical consciousness of long tradition, had moved well beyond it. The Rome/London axis in Stoughton’s argument points to what one may call a scientific and technological component in the understanding of civilization. Contemporary civilization for Stoughton is commercial and industrial, entrepreneurial and inventive; it is not interested in military conquest, but in developments that bring prosperity and comfort. The concept of civilization is in the process of enlargement; modern scientific and technological achievements are being added to the concept of a treasured heritage.

But civilization, whether in its historical or modern dimensions, was not a static attainment; it had a developmental component that was the foundation of intellectual, investigative, literary, and aesthetic activities. All of these required study or exercise, a process of intellectual digging and manuring. And civilization had also a moral component. To this day in common English usage “civilized” behavior implies decency and rectitude. This moral edge to civilization is amply displayed in Buxton, who had no scruples about referring to the white plantation owners in the Caribbean as “barbarians”; their behavior to the slaves was not that of civilized people. Civilized behavior was, by contrast, exhibited by the Christian slaves on their plantations.

The historical, technological, developmental, and moral components in the word “civilization” as Buxton and his contemporaries used it are well illustrated in another lecture given to the YMCA in the series already mentioned. The lecturer was the eminent Wesleyan minister and former missionary the Reverend William Arthur, who took as his theme “The Extent and Moral Statistics of the British Empire.” The lecture argues that the moral direction of the British Empire was not yet clear. Much would depend on the multitudes of emigrants then going to America, Australia, and elsewhere (no doubt his audience included some who were contemplating such a move). The “moral statistics of Empire” would be determined by whether these new emigrants acted in the rapacious and unprincipled manner of many of their predecessors. Would, Arthur asks, “the noble aborigines” of New Zealand be sacrificed on the altar of European vengeance as the Caribs and Incas had been? Or would European settlers and Maori till the soil side by side and kneel together in the same congregations? Would Africa continue to writhe under the miseries of the slave trade, or would “all her people be raised to a state of civilization in which, amidst the nurture of domestic affection, agriculture shall yield her sustenance, commerce bring her refreshments, genius emit her flashes and piety suffuse over all her pure and unfading light.”

It is a passage worth pondering. Civilization, as Arthur understands the word, exalts the family, prospers agriculture, promotes improvements in living standards, encourages intellec-
The earliest pan-African consciousness emanates from this idea of a Christian civilization.

roots in ancient Greece and Rome and its spiritual and moral roots in Christianity, and at this time developing new dimensions through scientific, industrial, and technological progress. The apologists for slavery, denigrators of Africa, argued that this civilization, and certainly its heights, must be beyond the capacities of Africans. To midcentury mission thinking this was wrong and could be proved wrong from missionary experience. Sierra Leone, Africa’s showcase Christian community, had by the 1860s a higher literacy rate and a much higher proportion of the population at school than most European countries. It had grammar schools for boys and girls and a college that in the 1870s was affiliated with an English university and offering degrees. Sierra Leone was sending missionaries to other parts of Africa. Among these were Samuel Adjai Crowther, by 1864 an Anglican bishop and making a deep impression in Britain, and other well-educated clergy. In South Africa, the once broken and despised Khoi were developing agriculture, handicrafts, and light industry in the literate and orderly settlements of Genadendal and Bethelsdorp, while the Reverend Tiyo Soga, a minister with seven years of training in arts and divinity in Scotland, was eloquently defending African rights in Cape newspapers, translating Pilgrim’s Progress into Xhosa, and urging his own people to get education, learn trades, and buy land in order to avoid becoming mere clients of the whites. And Africans in America, notably in the Caribbean, were demonstrating the characteristics thought of in Britain as reflecting Christian civilization. Nothing in all this suggested that the African civilization and the African church that were emerging would look very different from the civilization and the church as they were in Britain—except that the African model might well prove more orderly, more civilized, more literate, more Christian, and more missionary than the European exemplar. Nothing indicated that there might be other routes by which Africa might make its full contribution to humanity and to Christianity than by absorption into the European model. The expectation was that Africans would demonstrate both the graces of redemption and the endowments of humanity by participating in the civilization that was the common heritage of the contemporary Christian community. To deny this participation was to side with the enslavers.

Effects of the Theory of Civilization

We must now consider the effects of this view of civilization in Africa. First, it should be said that although the theory, conceived within Evangelicalism, was shaped by European experience and reflected European history, it was not itself based on race, nor did it begin with assumptions of racial superiority. Just as the distinction between “Greek” and “barbarian” had been cultural, not ethnic, so this idea of civilization, while assuming the superiority of a particular culture, did not tie that culture to race or ethnicity. Indeed, the historical component in the idea of civilization precluded such a view, since it recognized that the nations from which the missionaries came had been barbarian until brought into the pale of Roman civilization at the time of their Christian evangelism. As Buxton put it in 1840: “What we find the African, the Romans found us.”11

Because the developmental and moral aspects were so important in the idea of civilization, it was also recognized that white communities, despite their technological capacity and racial composition, might be fundamentally uncivilized, the Caribbean providing abundant examples. By contrast, it was hoped that the African Christian community of Sierra Leone would become a beacon of civilization, radiating influence across tropical Africa. The civilization theory thus left room for African pride in national identity. This outlook is evidenced in the inscriptions of the Freetown churches, which bear eloquent testimony to the way several generations of “Liberated Africans” and their descendants believed in this ideal, seeing their nationality primarily as African. The earliest pan-African consciousness emanates from this idea of a Christian civilization and its promise of African participation in the cultural discourse of civilized nations.

Again, the idea of civilization allowed for the development of an indigenous church. It is no accident that the theory that mission should produce self-governing, self-supporting, self-propagating churches arose, in both British and American missionary thinking, during the middle period of the century, when churches founded by missions were still relatively small and relatively few. Missionaries were also relatively few, leading to a realization that they should not be tied down to pastoring churches, which was an indigenous, not a missionary, function. This theory of self-governing, self-supporting, self-propagating churches was entirely compatible with the theory that civilization would follow the faithful preaching of the Gospel; competent Christian leaders, lay and ministerial, could be confidently expected to emerge. Henry Venn noted that, as such leadership developed in understanding and expression, the potential for clashes with missionaries would increase—a reason for hastening self-government.15

The theory of civilization also encouraged economic development. No book had more influence on midcentury mission thinking about Africa than Buxton’s The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy. We have seen that the remedy for the slave trade set out there combines economic and religious procedures: the Bible and the plow together will regenerate Africa. Since the continent was suffering from an economic malaise, caused by the slave trade, the remedy must address economic factors, making Africa an equal partner, instead of an exploited victim, in international trade. But the humanitarian agenda and the Evangelical agenda went side by side. Preaching alone would not abolish the slave
trade: economic ills needed economic solutions. But economic measures would not avail without the Gospel.

Armed with such thinking, the early Yoruba mission in what is now western Nigeria developed cotton growing in the 1860s to provide an economic alternative to the export of slaves. Venn persuaded a major donor to provide the mission with cotton-processing machinery and had mechanics from Sierra Leone trained in Britain to work and service the machinery in Africa. He also arranged with a Manchester merchant to import the African cotton into Britain. He pestered missionaries to send him specimens of local seeds and plants, which he would take to Kew Gardens for expert analysis and possible further agricultural development.14

The idea of civilization also gave impetus to African education. The anthropology of hope saw the Christian doctrines of creation and redemption alike requiring that Africans had the same capacities as other humans; education was a field where this equality could be displayed. The desire for self-governing, self-supporting churches added another motive; such churches needed an educated ministry. The grammar schools in Freetown and Lagos and the college at Fourah Bay developed, and promising African leaders were brought to Britain for further education, until some missionaries grew restive at indigenous ministers' receiving more education than they themselves had received.

Nor was the theory of civilization simply an instrument of imperialism; it did not in itself require white overrule in Africa. It emerged before the urge arose among European nations to collect African territory, and when West Africa was thought to be perilous for Europeans. It was embedded in missionary thinking; indeed, in 1837 the secretaries of the three main British mission agencies gave evidence to a House of Commons committee that indeed, in 1837 the secretaries of the three main British mission agencies gave evidence to a House of Commons committee that white settlement had been generally harmful to the rights and welfare of indigenous populations and had impeded Christian evangelization.15 Most of Africa was still under indigenous rule, and missions were looking for the spread of Christianity and civilization across a continent ruled by Africans. Sierra Leone (where, as we have seen, the highest officials in 1841 were all of African origin) seemed to point in that direction. Even the largest and most expansive European colony, the Cape of Good Hope, once reduced its borders by withdrawing from part of Xhosa territory it had recently occupied. Buxton rejoiced at this restoration of what he called "territory we lately stole."16

The Hidden Limitation of the Theory of Civilization

There were thus many positive effects from this midcentury view of civilization mediated through missions and closely allied with Christianity and a rather too innocent belief in the beneficial effects of commerce unsoiled by trading in human beings. But the theory had one huge inbuilt disability. It could affirm the worth of African race and nationality; it could recognize superior African achievements, past and present; but it had no way of giving validity to African cultures in themselves. It measured African attainment by a single universal standard: its capacity, strongly affirmed, to absorb the tradition of civilization deriving from classical antiquity and reaching developed form in contemporary western Europe.

We must recall the experience of missions then available. The most notable responses to the Christian Gospel in the early part of the nineteenth century had been among people who had recently endured deep shared trauma: transportation and slavery in the case of Africans in America, deracination in the case of the Liberated Africans of Sierra Leone, loss of environment and habitat in the case of the Khoi. In each of these instances an African people had seen their original life shattered, leaving some important aspects of their cultural identity beyond recall, creating a need to reconstitute that identity. Christianity, and the materials of European civilization that came with it, served this purpose well. But among peoples who had undergone no such disruption and who were reasonably satisfied with the cultural setting they already had, the response to the Gospel, and to what came with the Gospel, was inevitably different and more selective. The theory of civilization fitted the experience of broken uprooted people who had forged a new coherent identity (with deeper roots in their African past than was always evident to outsiders). It could give dignity and worth where undervalued and maltreated people had been reduced to servility or scavenging. It could inspire Africans who had been despised and abused to emulate and surpass the attainments in which their white oppressors gloried. But the civilization that it could offer had limited appeal to Africans whose dignity was intact, who were reasonably satisfied with the style of life they had, and who were living in integrated, functional societies. To such peoples particular aspects of the "civilization" package might be attractive; they might recognize, for instance, as in Calabar, that reading and writing would be helpful in the palm oil trade, or that putting in windows would enhance the importance of a chief’s residence; but such items could be considered on their merits. There seemed no reason to adopt an entirely new order of society when the existing model was functioning acceptably and certainly nothing to make necessary a whole new system of belief.

Changing Times

Such factors were to provide the background of the story of Christianity in the later part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Over that period African relations with the West changed out of recognition from those of the midcentury era. The development of the European empires and the parceling out of Africa among them shattered the world that Buxton knew. He had dreamed of independent African states as equal partners. By 1900 Sierra Leone, once seen as the beacon light for Christianity and civilization, was just another colony. The missionary movement was developing in ways quite different from the ways it was in the days of Henry Venn. The 1870s saw the beginning, the 1880s and 1890s the outworking, of a movement that brought huge numbers of new missionaries, and missionaries of a new type. No longer was the typical missionary in Africa a pious artisan; a missionary might well be an elite or public-school-educated university graduate. And developments in medicine ensured that they did not die so soon or in such numbers as formerly. African leadership in the church, African agency in missionary work, did not seem as urgent as it did in the 1850s and 1860s, when missionaries were few and it seemed that Europeans could not readily live in the African interior. And Evangelical spirituality was also changing; it was becoming more otherworldly, more concerned with personal holiness and less with social change.
Cotton growing for export and machine maintenance did not seem to have such obvious relation to the Gospel as they had in the days of Buxton and Venn.

The intellectual climate was changing too. Evolutionary ideas had begun to influence ideas of race, religion, and even theology. Instead of the insistence on common humanity that had underlain Evangelical doctrine, the idea arose of races being at different stages of development, from which it was easily deduced that, at least at the present stage of that development, Africans did not have the capacity for leadership, ending thoughts of African diocesan bishops, just as all thought of African governors had disappeared from the political scene. The period in which these changes—political, intellectual, theological, spiritual—took place was to give place to another, in which sub-Saharan Africa has become one of the main theaters of world Christianity. In the many-sided story of how this came about, we should give due recognition and attention to that “day of small things” in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, when Evangelical and humanitarian influences and activities flowed into each other in an anthropology of hope that produced a vision of a transformed Africa, in which the faith of Christ would be a crucial factor. The vision may sometimes have been blurred by superimposed images from western European history—but it was a true vision nonetheless.

Notes
5. William Wilberforce, A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Middle and Higher Classes in This Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity (London, 1787, many editions).
Dr. Jonathan J. Bonk retired July 1, 2013, as executive director of the Overseas Ministries Study Center and editor of the International Bulletin of Missionary Research. Anticipating that leadership transition, the OMSC Board of Trustees in 2012 launched a substantial scholarship initiative—the Jon and Jean Bonk International Fellowship Fund.

The fund enables beleaguered Christian leaders to come to OMSC from challenging situations. Currently OMSC has to turn away many worthy candidates due to lack of funding. The fund will provide friends of the Bonks, OMSC alumni from around the world, and others who have admired their ministries from afar, what has been called “a concrete way of honoring Jon and Jean on the occasion of their retirement.” Jon and Jean wanted to find a way after they retired and returned to Canada to perpetuate their longtime commitment to serving marginalized church leaders and missionaries who live and minister in places where it is extraordinarily difficult and sometimes dangerous to be a follower of Christ.

Christian leaders who face difficult sociopolitical situations are at the heart of OMSC’s ministry. Many such leaders—including administrators, pastors, educators, academics, artists, development workers, and missionaries—have come to OMSC from throughout the world and found rest, perspective, and rejuvenation for reentering their challenging contexts.

Residency for a program year (September to May) costs more money than most Christian leaders could gather, and the lack of funding most encounter presents a significant barrier. To permanently fund the endowed scholarships will require $500,000 each. This will include housing in an OMSC apartment, a stipend for basic needs including food, airfare to and from Connecticut, health insurance required to live for even a few months in the United States, and administrative support.

R. Donald MacDougall, former OMSC board member and treasurer, who is the fund’s honorary chairman, expresses appreciation for Jon and Jean for their service to OMSC, given “with such great energy and distinction.” He acknowledges that the cost for many residents, “while modest, is still beyond their means.” MacDougall retired as vice president of the Towers Perrin management consulting firm.

Pictured above: Past recipients of the Jon and Jean Bonk International Fellowship Fund from Pakistan and India with Jon and Jean.

Read the Jon and Jean Bonk International Fellowship Fund newsletters and view a video online. For details, go to www.omsc.org/bonkfellowship or contact Judy Stebbins, Director of Finance and Housing.

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Jesus and Christology: Mission and the Paradox of God’s Reign

William R. Burrows

As far back as one can go—despite the word “mission,” as we use it today, dating only to the Jesuits in the sixteenth century—the church has felt itself charged with spreading the good news of the Gospel. This charge has been carried out in a multitude of ways. Celtic and Benedictine monks in Britain and northern Europe used different models, which themselves contrast greatly with those used in the spread of Christianity along the Silk Road from Mesopotamia to China. In his “Culture and Coherence in Christian History,” Andrew Walls reminds us of how pluralism is the church that has carried on this mission now for over 2,000 years.1 The unifying theme of Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder’s Meisterwerk is that “constants” in mission interact with quite different historical and cultural “contexts.”2 Nevertheless, I wonder if the radical nature of these insights is sufficiently internalized and appropriated in light of today’s challenges to the notion that the Christian Gospel is, indeed, of universal and vital importance.

For the most part, the Gospel being spread was that which was crystallized by St. Paul and which revolves around the radical nature of God’s action and promise in Christ Jesus. The claim for the universality of that action and promise—as retrieved in our own day in a particularly convincing manner by N. T. Wright—is eschatological: a promise rooted in the several covenants made with Israel from the days of Abraham to those of Moses, David, and the prophets. The Christian covenant as explicated by Paul expresses what occurs in Jesus as the “grafting” of the Gentiles into the life-giving “root” of Israel (Rom. 11:17–36). The Second Vatican Council’s Nostra aetate (Decree on Ecumenism), §4, retrieves that Pauline insight, while insisting on the centrality of the suffering and death of Christ “because of the sins of all human beings, so that all might attain salvation.” The Council goes on to say, “It is the duty of the Church, therefore, in her preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God’s universal love and the source of all grace” (ibid.). The proclamation of this teaching was stressed again in 1990 in Pope John Paul’s encyclical Redemptoris missio (Mission of the Redeemer); On the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate, §44. The theme returns once more in Pope Francis’s 2013 apostolic exhortation Evangelii gaudium (The joy of the Gospel), with an emphasis—citing St. Irenaeus of Lyon—on the eternal “newness of the Gospel”:

With this newness [Christ] is always able to renew our lives and our communities, and even if the Christian message has known periods of darkness and ecclesial weakness, it will never grow old. Jesus can also break through the dull categories with which we would enclose him and he constantly amazes us by his divine creativity. Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world. Every form of authentic evangelization is always “new” (EG, §11).

Identity of the “New”

Can we be more specific about what this “new” element is in a Europe and North America that seem tired of the old? I take it as self-evident that, for some time now, ordinary Christians, missiologists, and church leaders in the Global North—be they Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox—have known that the places to which they are sending missionaries and financial assistance in the Global South are often in better spiritual shape than are the churches in the homelands of traditional missionary societies and church mission boards. Given the rapidity of secularization and the rapid waning of religious observance there, the re-evangelization of the North is more difficult than in the Global South. Why? Not least because of a condition in our spiritual health that Leslie Weatherhead observed with this oft-quoted diagnosis: “The trouble with some of us is that we have been inoculated with small doses of Christianity which keep us from catching the real thing.”4 What “the real thing” is, however, is self-evident neither for those of us who consider ourselves “evangelical” nor for those who consider themselves more “liberal” or “modern.”

Today we are perhaps watching the weakening of the evangelical and Pentecostal church families in the North in the face of challenges that a generation or more ago hollowed out the mainline denominations that over the past century took modernization most seriously as a goal. My own Roman Catholic Church is undergoing the same hollowing out in Europe and North America. Present debates over same-sex marriage, homosexuality, and the plasticity of gender appear to me to be the dynamic equivalent of the Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925.

Ambiguity of Christianity’s “Real Thing”

What the real thing in Christianity is, is not so easy to define in doctrinal language and dangerous when one does so—even when there is strong backing in Scripture and Tradition for making such determinations. My reluctance to define is rooted in a set of interlocking, profoundly scriptural elements that lead me to call the search for such answers in the past a deeply ambiguous exercise. Despite my great reverence for Scripture and the doctrinal formulas of the early ecumenical councils, I advance the notion that the search for adequate Christologies and soteriologies—ones that are valid always and everywhere—needs to take into account the ambiguities and paradoxes intertwined in God’s reign (or kingdom) as we catch glimpses of it in the life of Jesus and in the parables that the four canonical gospels put on his lips. Moreover, I have come to believe that what the historian Paul Johnson says in the following quotation is intrinsic to Christian identity because it is intrinsic to the life, person, and message of Jesus.

The teaching of Jesus is . . . more a series of glimpses or matrices, a collection of insights, rather than a code of doctrine. It invites comment, interpretation, elaboration, and constructive argu-

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ment, and it is the starting point for rival, though compatible, lines of inquiry. It is not a *summa theologica*, or indeed *ethica*, but the basis from which an endless series of *summae* can be assembled. It inaugurates a religion of dialogue, exploration, and experiment. Its radical elements are balanced by conservative qualifications, there is a constant mixture of legalism and antinomianism, and the emphasis repeatedly switches from rigor and militancy to acquiescence and the acceptance of suffering. Some of this variety reflects the genuine bewilderment of the disciples, and the confusion of the evangelical editors to whom their memories descended. But a great deal is essentially part of Jesus’s universalist posture: the wonder is that the personality behind the mission is in no way fragmented but is always integrated and true to character. Jesus contrives to be all things to all men while remaining faithful to himself.5

**A Thought Experiment**

To see how the present reality of Christianity is very much what Johnson says characterized its beginnings, let’s engage in a thought experiment. In it we drop down and sample worship services, homilies, and sermons over the course of a year in a thousand randomly selected local congregations (a goodly percentage of which follow the common lectionary) on a given Sunday in places as widely dispersed as Karachi, Lima, New York, Rome, Guangzhou, São Paulo, Panama City, Lisbon, Capetown, Xi’an, and Nairobi. Let us also select services, homilies, and sermons that take place in villages that surround these megacities. And then let us attempt to discern what is common to them all.

I believe we would find warrant for saying something like what Paul Johnson says has been true from the first years of the Christian movement. Of course, a reader could say that his or her church and its 600,000 members are *alone and truly* the genuine church of Christ and others are false. If that is persuasive to any readers, they need go no further.

While I do not know that Jonathan and Jean Bonk, the persons we honor in the essays in this special number of the International Bulletin of Missionary Research, would agree with what Johnson says or what I make of his insights or will say below, the arc of Jon’s own life illustrates what Johnson is recommending that we consider. Jon’s life trajectory moves from being a child of strongly evangelical missionary parents in Africa to embracing an Anabaptist identity in adulthood, while worshipping, at least occasionally, in the rich liturgical traditions of Anglicanism. And he is very nervous about the centralizing of authority in Roman Catholic popes and bishops. He has never given me an account of his inner journey, but the spirit of Jon and Jean’s household and the way they directed the Overseas Ministries Study Center (including Jon’s incredibly creative way of launching and shepherding the cloud-based *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*) speak loudly of a couple that is more interested in *being* Christian than in arguing over who is most right in *defining* its essence or *defending* dogmas that purport to encapsulate that essence.

**More Fundamental than Boundaries**

In many ways Jon and Jean’s ecumenically orthopraxial life reminds me of something I observed among theological students in Papua New Guinea in the mid-1970s. Whether they were Catholic, Anglican, United Church, or Lutheran, their confessional identity was more a marker of their way of being and of understanding Christianity than a boundary that needed to be defended.

Boundaries do have a role to play, but they are ambiguous and dangerous. As Mary Douglas reminds us, without boundaries societies begin to disintegrate and are in danger of anomie. She notes that, paradoxically, as “disorder spoils pattern; it also provides the materials of pattern.”6 The very rituals that define any given community, Christian or otherwise, constitute a recognition of the dangers of disorder and the human fear of it. Indeed, a social body that has no sense of boundary does not have long to live. Still, the attempt to define Christian doctrine and enforce its boundaries can become an imposition that impedes free expression and necessary development. Over the course of two thousand years, religious dis-order has prompted the defenders of Christian orthodoxy to use power to restore order, and they could not have done so without the consent of the masses. Among the by-products of secularization is that, in the contemporary West, that consent has vanished. No matter how large a religious body may be, no matter how great its internal consent to its doctrines and rules, religiously based rules cannot become civil law.

**Bounded Sets and Fuzzy Sets**

The late Paul Hiebert devoted careful attention to what happens when mission and Christian identity are thought of in terms of a “fuzzy-set” worldview versus a “bounded-set” epistemology.7 I will not go into the richness of Hiebert’s thought, but I do wish to observe that although their chosen boundary markers differ, churches and mission societies in the so-called Global North tend to have both healthy fiscal balance sheets and a bounded-set mentality. By contrast, peoples formed in the traditional cultures of Africa, Asia, and Oceania tend to be more “fuzzy” and to place their emphasis on other aspects of Scripture, aspects that give warrant for expecting God to help them heal illnesses and attain prosperity. Yet both Northern and Southern groups know the many Scriptures that stress that God alone knows the human heart. Likewise both know at some level that we understand the mystery of salvation the way we grasp reality—by looking through a dark glass (1 Cor. 13:12). Many in the Global South can be as insistent as fundamentalists in the North regarding the literal truth of texts such Acts 4:12 (“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved,” NIV) and in the Gospel of John (3:5, 16, 18–19, 36), where God sends the Son to save the world, but woe to those who do not believe in him. We all know these texts, but if they are read in a Kenyan or Sepik River village, questions about whether one’s ancestors are “saved” are what is really important. Africans or Melanesians take their Bible fully seriously, but because they live in a world where the dead are still alive and close, their understanding of such texts will seem fuzzy to a fundamentalist.

Though Hiebert does not resolve such questions; he does observe: “Clearly, we must study our own hidden worldview to see how it biases our understanding of Scripture. By bringing...
our biases to light, we are freed from their subtle control over our thoughts. We can read Scripture with new eyes and let it speak to us in new ways. We can begin to reshape our worldview and make it more biblical.”

Openness to Change

What Hiebert speaks of as becoming “more biblical” can quite correctly include understandings of the world that are open to both paradox and irony. A world of ironclad dogmas derived from biblical verses and distilled into confessions and catechisms (whether large or small, including ones written in Trent, Geneva, Augsburg, Westminster, or Rome) needs to make room for the fact that the preaching of Jesus himself abounded in riddles, ironies, and even paradoxes, which is why I think we are wise to recognize that the unity of the Christian movement and church involves diversity and plurality—including clashes over what “the real thing” is.

We have entered an era in which most “missionary” work is being done in a way that several years ago I characterized by distinguishing between missio inter gentes and missio ad gentes. The distinction is important. The era of modern mission that

began with Jesuit missionary efforts in Asia and Latin America was based on the idea that Europeans would go out “to” the “pagan” nations (i.e., ad gentes) and convert them to Christianity. The era we are in today is one in which, if a sense of mission is to be realistic, local Christians globally (including in the Global North) are going to be engaged in mission with their family members, neighbors, and colleagues in a dazzling array of social locations (i.e., the missionary lives “among” nonbelievers, skeptics, andagnostics; in Latin, inter gentes). The level of missionary and missional ambiguity rises exponentially.

In no small measure, mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic missionary societies have learned from and internalized the many valid insights of historians, anthropologists, and sociologists of religion. They may not accept the validity of everything that critics label as “colonial” or “postcolonial” missionary enterprises aimed at colonizing the minds of villagers and inhabitants of the burgeoning urban centers of the Global South. But they know that much of that critique is accurate. Moreover, the impressive transition, from 1974 to 2015, in leadership of the Lausanne Covenant Movement from North to Global South Christians is an example of a move beyond the colonial-era missionary paradigm. While Lausanne members are heavily engaged in ad gentes mission, their commitment to that and inter gentes work is predicated on the realization that the most effective mission is carried on among one’s own people, which demands new strategies.

Most significantly, leaders have risen up all over that Global South, and their priorities are not those of the North. Indonesia and Korea, to give just two examples, are sending missionaries around the world. As are Kenya and Bolivia. Korean churches, in

The mission of Jesus as well as of his early followers takes its meaning in reference to the “reign” or “kingdom” of God.

fact, are now among the largest “missionary-sending” churches in the world. Of the 6,000 members of the Society of the Divine Word, the Catholic Church’s largest missionary order, 20 percent today are Indonesians.

Decline of Mission from the Global North

Meanwhile among many churches in the North, focused engagement in mission has declined. The list of reasons for this decline of interest in what can be called mission ad extra (i.e., mission beyond the borders of the churches) are many. The Roman Catholic Church is beset by lay-clergy antagonism sparked by priests’ being sexual predators and bishops’ covering up for them. In Protestant denominations conflicts exist between “conservative” and “liberal” members of many churches on gender issues, on how or whether to take sides on political issues, and on whether women should be ordained. These tensions are complicated by differences of opinion on whether Jesus is primarily a teacher, like other great founders of religions, or uniquely the Son of God and Savior of the world, the one in whom one must have faith to be saved—or be damned if one does not. Churches engaged in major feuds over such matters are not likely to be highly interested in bringing the “unchurched” into their fold, whether the unchurched are the baptized who have fallen away or are followers of other religious traditions.

Adding to the realization that something is changing, a 2015 study by the Pew Charitable Trusts of long-range trends estimates that although the world population will grow by 35 percent between now and 2050, followers of Islam will grow by 73 percent in that same period. Meanwhile, Christians will grow by 35 percent, and Hindus by 34 percent. If Pew is right, the Christian share of the world population will keep up with world population growth, while the Muslim share will increase, climbing at double the world’s rate of population growth.

Statistics such as these are debatable and will be debated. Indeed, the estimates of the Center for the Study of World Christianity seem to clash with those of Pew. What is clear is that when the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference adopted John Mott’s call, enunciated in 1900 to “evangelize the world in this generation,” it failed to such a degree that standard interpretations of the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18–20 as a mandate to make all people Christians may need to be rethought—perhaps radically. The impressive collection of work embodied in the many volumes published by the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, as part of the World Missionary Conference’s 2010 centenary commemoration, leave no doubt but that this reassessment is already under way and is being carried out to a very high standard.

Toward Communion in Mission

The Great Commission rests on the New Testament’s teaching that Jesus is, indeed, the Messiah and, uniquely, God’s Son. For the clearest formulation of what the first generations thought that meant, we must return to the teachings of St. Paul, the oldest Scriptures we possess and the ones in which we find the first attempt to express who Jesus is by translating Aramaic and Hebrew concepts into Greek. Expressed concretely, the core issue in regard to Christian mission revolves around the following italicized words of the Great Commission: “go and make disciples [matheteusate] of all nations, baptizing [baptizotes] them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19 NIV).
Those who know me also know that my Christology, soteriology, and missiology are both conservative and orthodox. I identify broadly with the postliberal theology mapped by Yale Divinity School’s George Lindbeck and the insights of the early Paul Ricoeur on the possibility and need to recover a “second naïveté” in the wake of the destruction, wrought by modern criticism, of humanity’s “first naïveté”—that is, an unquestioning dwelling of self and society in worlds mediated by traditions, sacred scriptures, and ideologies. Hence my call for recognition of ambiguity, paradox, and irony. We work with earthen vessels; to believe that they are sufficient to our task of encompassing in full the truths of the Christ, the kingdom, and mission is to dwell in Ricoeur’s first naïveté. Being earthen vessels, our concepts and formulations crack, and containment eludes us. We carry out mission in the midst of ambiguity and under the sign of paradox: already, not yet, a bit of yeast, a mustard seed, a pearl hidden in a field, where no one would think to look for it.

The mission of Jesus as well as of his early followers takes its meaning in reference to what we translate into English as the “reign” or “kingdom” of God (in Greek, the basileia tou theou) and its meaning in reference to what we translate into English as the “not yet” dimensions of God’s relationship to the world are the keys to understanding both the mission of Jesus and that of the church, yet the paradoxes and ironies inherent in the parables open them to widely differing interpretations.

The theologian’s “imagination,” in David Kelsey’s terms, of the reality of God’s presence and activity grounds that theologian’s vision of how the Bible is authoritative and orients the case the theologian makes for the church to be in this or that way or to carry on its activities in this or that fashion. Each family of churches (e.g., James’s Jerusalem or Paul’s Antiochian versions of the primitive church; later Greek or Russian Orthodoxy; Lutheran or Reformed Protestantism; Roman or Anglican Catholicism; Anabaptist or Baptist Protestantism; Pentecostal or Charismatic movements) has a certain unity in its vision of God’s presence and activity; but there is also a great deal of disagreement both within each family and between the various families. As we live with—and embrace—that ambiguity, we become, paradoxically, both more deeply rooted and more deeply liberated. Enriched, we are able to enter more fully into mission and into the fellowship of communion with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Notes

3. Among N. T. Wright’s many books, I find the most accessible to be Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church (New York: HarperOne, 2008), and Paul in Fresh Perspective (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005).
4. I have never succeeded in identifying the source of this quotation and would be grateful to be informed.
8. Ibid., 136.
10. The work of the great Jacques Dupuis, SJ, was devoted to identifying what is the core of Christian teaching in regard to “other” religions and clearing space so that Christians could learn to take them seriously and learn from them. See his last book for insight into how both mission and dialogue are intrinsic to genuine Christian living, Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002).
15. The Revised Standard Version translates mathētēsatake and baptizōte with the same words as the NIV, as does the Catholic New American Bible, while the King James Version has “Go . . . and teach.”
17. See David Kelsey, The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 139, 163.
Book Reviews

Atonement, Law, and Justice: The Cross in Historical and Cultural Contexts.


Adonis Vidu, associate professor of theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, Massachusetts, provides a history of the ideas of law and justice in relation to various theories of the atonement. He notes that all theories of the atonement are attempts to make sense of how God deals with the problem of sin in light of his nature as the loving and just God. Vidu masterfully takes us through five periods of church history—patristic, medieval, Reformation, modern, and postmodern—and expounds the views of key theologians in each.

At the descriptive level his approach shows how different theories of the atonement understand and modify the concepts of divine law and justice. But Vidu wants to go beyond the descriptive to ask how “these writers [have] properly described the action of God in Christ” (xv). Given the author’s preference for the penal-substitutionary theory, it is understandable why law and justice serve as the foil for evaluating other theories.

By this criterion the patristic dramatic theory of the atonement appears to fail the test, since its concept of divine justice seems overstretched. As Vidu notes, Gregory of Nyssa’s ransom theory juxtaposes divine goodness, justice, and wisdom in outwitting the devil (22). The fact that the theory is primarily directed at Satan rather than God suggests that it is better understood according to its own logic. Divine wisdom is the key to understanding God’s “deception” of Satan. One is reminded of C. S. Lewis’s The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe, where Aslan, representing divine wisdom, understands a “deeper magic” to which evil is blind. So, it is not the case that God deceived Satan, but that Satan was self-deceived: “Of evil will shall evil mar” (J. R. R. Tolkien).

In the Reformation, especially with Calvin, the penal-substitutionary theory finds its clearest expression. This is the outcome of the Reformation’s dissolution of the continuity of nature and grace under the impact of nominalist philosophy. By seeing divine justice as issuing directly from divine revelation and not as something discoverable from nature supplemented by revelation (as in Aquinas), the Reformers severed the link between law and nature, which was to lead eventually to the view of law as having its own independent status apart from God’s revelation (102).

Vidu’s template serves best his critique of modernity and postmodernity, where politics and law are the main conflicted issues. While modernity presupposes an enduring self whose well-being needs to be protected by some kind of “law,” even if it is only to ensure one’s personal self-fulfillment, postmodernity sees the self as a constructed self—constructed, that is, by powers and systems over which one has no control. One is essentially a victim whose vision is clouded by the “plausibility structure” into which one is unconsciously enculturated. Atonement in the postmodern context cannot be about God’s justification of sinners based on his law and justice, since justice itself is a construct of the powerful.

In both modernity and postmodernity, there is no place for divine action on humanity’s behalf, since, for the former, law itself is divinized (“legal positivism,” 195–96), while in the latter, law is replaced by a “philosophy of alterity,” a purely horizontal concern for the “other” (197).

Vidu’s insightful study shows how atonement theories were influenced by historical developments in politics and law (235). But surely there are other cultural influences besides politics and law. What about the honor/shame (H/S) culture that is increasingly recognized to be a dominant feature of the ancient Near East? It could in fact be argued that the Christus Victor theory and Anselm’s satisfaction theory may be better construed against the backdrop of an H/S culture.

Here, we need to look at The Global Gospel, by Werner Mischke, executive director and vice president of training ministries for Mission ONE. Mischke’s work grows out of an increasingly global awareness that has affected practically all aspects of theological thinking in the last twenty years. Mischke’s book, unlike that of Vidu, is not concerned about atonement theories as such but about how best to communicate the saving work of Christ in the Majority World.

The book is divided into four sections. Section 1 addresses the nature and problem of shame from a sociological perspective. Outside of the modern West, much of the rest of the world is largely shaped by H/S culture, which is also the culture of the biblical world. Citing Paul Hiebert, Mischke points out that Western theology appears universal because it is set forth in abstract, propositional forms as if it were contextless, but in point of fact it is shaped by the Enlightenment view of truth and universal reason (58, 60). The “Four Spiritual Laws” of Cru (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ) exemplifies this Western approach.

Mischke wisely avoids essentializing the East-West divide by recognizing that both shame and guilt exist in every culture, albeit in different degrees and expressions (41, 67). The Gospel deals not only with our guilt but also with “the covering of our shame and the restoration of honor before God” (64). Only in recovering this fuller truth can we effectively proclaim the “total Gospel.”

Section 2 discusses nine H/S dynamics in the Bible. In each, the Gospel redefines and subverts its ancient meaning and significance by exposing its dark side and giving it a new meaning. In this way the New Testament reverses the way H/S was understood. Mischke takes this grand reversal as the central motif of the New Testament (81–204). For example, in the world, honor as a limited good sets the stage for honor competition, as seen between King Saul and David (99). But in the New Testament, the concept of limited good, which leads inevitably to violence, is overturned in Christ, the


Europe Meets China—China Meets Europe evolved from the Ostasien-Institut (East Asia Institute) symposium “The Beginnings of European-Chinese Scientific Exchange in the Seventeenth Century,” held in Bonn in 2012. Speakers at the symposium were requested to focus upon “cultural psychology,” a new and diverse cross-cultural field. The book’s seven chapters, focusing on individuals, add considerable detail to our understanding of Western missionary experience in seventeenth-century China and provide a refreshing encounter with Jesuits other than Matteo Ricci.

Via the issue of accommodation— that is, adapting or adjusting, a matter that was of primary importance to Jesuits in China, working as they were within such a different culture—Isaia Iannacombe introduces us to the scholar Nicolas Trigault, who shockingly hanged himself, despite earlier referring to suicide as “infamous death” (30), and to Johann Schreck-Terrentius, who introduced the first telescope to China and was motivated more by science than by religion. During this period, traveling long distances involved much discomfort both physically and psychologically before China was even encountered. Iannacombe considers Trigault’s state of mind in having to undertake trips that could last twenty months and neatly summarizes the nightmarish experience of traveling from Europe to China as a succession of “typhoons, pirates, shipwrecks, and diseases” (19). The demanding details are graphically conveyed in the footnotes.

Gregory Blue presents the impact of Catholicism on the intellectual Xu Guangqi’s personal worldview, which

—Simon Chan

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required a synthesis of Jesuit religious doctrine with his Confucian cultural legacy. A critic of Buddhism, Xu made contributions to mathematics, astronomy, military affairs, and agriculture—all of which are examined in depth. Blue notes Xu’s “openness of spirit towards cultural artifacts from beyond his own society” (52), while describing him as a tragic rather than romantic figure who protected and aided the “wise men from the west” (65). Hui-Hung Chen’s chapter illustrates the concept of Xu as Jesuit facilitator and demonstrates his Jesuit/Confucian synthesis via the treatise attributed to him on the sacred image in China, Zuowuzhu chuixiang lieshuo (General explanation of the descending portrait of the Creator). Liam Matthey Brockey, with a comprehensive biography and insights into André Palmeiro’s work, introduces us to this Portuguese bureaucratic religious “visitor” to Goa and China, and again, we can only wonder at the physical and psychological stamina of the Jesuits in China. A pragmatic optimist, to what extent did this “agent of empire” (124) focus upon the orthodoxy of the mission, and to what extent on the Chinese people? Chapters by Manjusha Kuruppath, using Dutch resources, and Shu-Jyuan Deiwiks, drawing on secret Manchu manuscripts, discuss, respectively, representations of Johann Adam Schall and of his trial. The latter chapter underlines the importance to Chinese historians of Manchu documentation where no Chinese version exists. Both chapters provide a wealth of detail of great interest to the Ming/Qing scholar. The volume ends with a superb chapter by Claudia Von Collani on the Mandate of Heaven that should be read by every undergraduate student or individual embarking on the study of Chinese history. The information within it is essential for an understanding of the Chinese dynastic system. Von Collani’s account of the clash between emperor and pope in the meetings of Kangxi and the papal legate illustrates the Mandate of Heaven concept succinctly.

—Joelyn Chatterton

The Slain God: Anthropologists and the Christian Faith.


A part of the “science vs. religion” myth is the conviction among conservative Christians that anthropology destroys faith, and conversely among anthropologists that a believer is too biased to conduct useful fieldwork. Timothy Larsen, professor of history at Wheaton College (Illinois), with an academic pedigree from Cambridge and Oxford, exposes both of these myths in an engaging journey from Tylor and Frazier through Evans-Pritchard to Mary Douglas and Victor and Edith Turner. For British social anthropology, Larsen thus takes up the story chapter by chapter from the founder to a living legend.

Larsen digs into the biographies of his subjects, noting, for example, that Tylor was raised as a Quaker but slipped away as his anthropological studies intensified. Larsen argues that Tylor “could not find a way to think anthropologically and as a Christian at the same time” (20), so one of them had to go. Although he shielded his family from his skepticism, in print Tylor became an active debunker of faith, equating “primitive” superstition with Christian beliefs. Though I have stated this in a straightforward way, the story is much more interesting and complex, and needs to be read in full.

Although there were a number of missionary anthropologists in England (e.g., Edwin Smith), no anthropologist who was believer was held in such high regard as E. E. Evans-Pritchard, whose extensive fieldwork and case study method produced classics such as Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande (1937) and Nuer Religion (1956). One could argue that he was able to break new ground in understanding these areas because he himself believed in the supernatural. That is, unlike followers of the tradition that came down from Émile Durkheim, he did not try to reduce these beliefs and practices to their social functions. In this case, instead of being undermined, Christian belief contributed to theoretical advancement in anthropology.

Larsen brings the story to the present with his account of Victor and Edith Turner. In contrast to Tylor and Frazier, who began as Christians and rejected their faith, the Turners began as agnostics and became practicing Catholics. Completing Evans-Pritchard’s trajectory, Victor Turner declared that “religion is not determined by anything other than itself” (189). The Turners’ work on the ritual process was a departure from Max Gluckman’s Manchester School, which took a Marxist view of the process of conflict in society. After their conversion to Catholicism, criticism from the rest of the faculty eventually forced them out. Their work invites us to frame ritual as social drama, full of symbols, moving through stages to construct a new identity. The notions of “liminality” and “communitas” contribute much to our understanding not only of ritual but also of other areas of life. The point, however, is that once again the interplay between their faith and their vocation enhanced both.

Larsen has broken new ground in an area that was overgrown with the weeds of anecdote and myth. The subject has the quality of an “elephant in the room” among both Christians and anthropologists, each of whom seem to feel that the other has nothing to offer. Quite the contrary, Larsen has demonstrated that the two are uneasy siblings, some believers and some skeptics, but siblings nonetheless.

—Michael A. Rynkiewich

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Child, Church, and Compassion: Towards Child Theology in Romania.


The years following the fall of Nicolae Ceaușescu’s dictatorship in Romania were pivotal in influencing the way Western churches understood mission with children. The church’s sudden awareness in the early 1990s of the pitiful state of institutionalized orphans in post-Ceaușescu Romania is one of several nearly simultaneous global phenomena that shifted the church from a primary emphasis on children in poverty to a recognition of the unique needs
of “children at risk” and “children in crisis.” Covering the years 1992–2005, Child, Church, and Compassion is a thorough missiological monograph that documents this shift by studying the dynamics between Western NGOs and Romanian churches working in partnership on behalf of Romanian children separated from their parents. As an American missionary serving in Romania during the latter years of this time, Prevette is well-suited to this task.

The author conducted extensive ethnographic interviews with engaged Western and Romanian practitioners, and in this volume he subjects his findings to historical and theological critique. By this means he shows that, although the collaborative nature of the responses became more integrated and effective over time, the urgency of the situation and the markedly different understandings of what it means to do “holistic mission” made effective partnership difficult. Rather than for partners to aim to always work in lockstep, Prevette concludes that effective partners should embrace tensions when they encounter unexpected differences.

The text notably employs a hermeneutic drawn from the child theology movement, which urges the reconsideration of all of theology with “a child in the midst.” This approach, associated primarily with Keith White and Haddon Willmer, aims to allow the example of children to play a more central role in all theological discourse as a way of taking Jesus seriously when he indicates that children are to be models of the kingdom for adult disciples. Prevette’s analysis employs this type of child-focused thinking when he proposes that one of the keys to working together is for partnering organizations to join with Christ in seeing a “child in the midst” as a means of refocusing their attention on kingdom priorities.

As with many republished dissertations, issue could reasonably be taken with the extended discussion of research methodology, the repetition of information from chapter to chapter, and the tendency to include information not essential to the primary thesis. Nevertheless, the arrival of a new, single-author, scholarly text that takes holistic mission with children seriously is something to be celebrated in its own right. The fact that it makes a unique contribution to wider conversations about holism in mission and international partnerships makes it even more valuable.

—David H. Scott

David H. Scott is assistant professor of intercultural studies and children at risk in the School of Intercultural Studies, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California.

Before and After Muhammad: The First Millennium Refocused.


What is the most helpful and convincing way of distinguishing different periods of history? If the easiest and most obvious way is to think in terms of Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and Modern Times, we are faced with the question: Where does Islam fit in?
Buddhism, Unitarianism, and the Meiji Competition for Universality.


Written by Michel Mohr, a specialist in Japanese Buddhism, this fascinating book looks at Unitarian mission in Japan between 1887 and 1922. It covers from the time Fukuzawa Yûkichi (1835–1901), the founder of Keiô Gijuku University in Tokyo and Japan’s leading intellectual, invited the first American Unitarian missionary, commented, “We need to wake up to the fact that Arab Christian theologians were engaged in serious, public theological dialogue with Muslims in Arabic over a period of several centuries. A forthcoming book by Martin Accad, a Lebanese Protestant Christian scholar, will hopefully help us to learn from that rich experience. Third, if, as Fowden suggests, we live in “a global world in which Islam, after a long eclipse, once more moves closer to the heart of things” (90–91), Christians worldwide are faced with a new kind of challenge: “The Islamic world . . . represents not an economic challenge but something more insidious, a moral and spiritual competitor offering different norms of conduct and a variant vision of man and God unnervingly close—yet at the same time a challenge, as the Qur’an makes explicit—to the values espoused by ‘Judeo-Christian’ civilization” (2). Understanding the significance of the First Millennium may at least help us to face the rest of the twenty-first century.

—Colin Chapman

Colin Chapman, visiting lecturer at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary and former lecturer in Islamic Studies at the Near East School of Theology, both in Beirut, now lives in retirement in Cambridge, U.K.

At one level the book is an excellent, straightforward account based on hitherto untapped archival materials (held at Harvard and also in Japan) about an American mission and its missionaries, previously largely ignored by Western scholars. Mohr makes an important contribution to the historiography of the Western missionary movement in Japan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. On a different level, as Japanese Unitarians were deeply involved in the founding of both Japan’s socialist movement and its trade union movement, this book adds valuable detail about the role of Unitarians in them. At yet another level, this study addresses the transmission of ideas across cultural boundaries and how they became lost, misinterpreted, or transformed in translation.

At first, Unitarianism was seen by the Japanese as the religion of the future, and its spirit could then be described by the phrase “sympathy of religions.” To Japanese intellectuals deeply concerned with the practical uses of religion to help inculcate moral values and loyalty within the Japanese population, Unitarianism was attractive as a specific type of philosophy of religion that was seemingly rational, open to the ideas of other religions, and largely devoid of foreign influence and control. Buddhist representatives (especially those associated with Shinshû Ôtani-ha, whose main temple is Higashi Honganji in Kyoto) and Unitarian followers had considerable interaction, as Mohr expertly shows, which led to intriguing debates about “universalism.” Initially the interactions held out the tantalizing possibility of the construction of a new type of universality that bridged over sectarian, intellectual, and cultural boundaries and allegiances.

The mood began to change, however, as early as 1890. At that time, Clay MacCauley (1843–1925), the key American Unitarian missionary, commented, “We are here not for ‘reciprocity’ [with other religions] as much as to teach the Japanese our Christianity’s theism, and our practical humanitarianism” (25). This statement implied that, while MacCauley supported dialogue with Buddhists, the ambiguous idea of “universal truth” that Unitarian missionaries employed was used to promote their own cultural and ethnocentric agendas. Likewise, Buddhists came to see universality as a newly imported idea that “provided an ideal conceptual tool that various religious traditions could adopt, reformulate, and then claim as their own. This in turn left the concept open to further distortions, in particular for political purposes” (251).

Ultimately, the Unitarian Japan mission came to an end because it became identified with the United States, and as the years passed by, its early intellectual novelty as the religion of the future and its liberal philosophy no longer resonated in Japan. Michel Mohr has written an excellent book.

—Hamish Ion

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Translating Christianities: Nahuatl and Maya Religious Texts.


Translating Christianities: Nahuatl and Maya Religious Texts is part of the Latin American Originals series published by Penn State University Press. The series provides "accessible, affordable editions" of English translations related to colonial Latin America and cross-cultural missional processes there. These texts provide fresh information and perspectives on the very complex story of the conquest and the transmission, reception, and appropriation of the Christian religion in Latin America, particularly the encounters and interplay with Amerindian traditions.

Mark Christiansen presents translations of Nahuatl and Yucatec Mayan Christian texts, along with helpful commentaries on the origins, purposes, and particular linguistic and cultural elements of the texts. He provides contextual and ecclesial factors that shaped the authors (or suspected authors), the church’s theological concerns and tensions in approving or disapproving the texts for proper Christian instruction and formation, and the linguistic and mythological elements in the texts that demonstrate the cross-cultural dynamics involved in the creation and dissemination of these texts. Ultimately, as Christiansen suggests, these texts convey a spectrum of Christian theological representations, "with orthodox native-language religious texts on one end, unorthodox texts on the other, and other Nahuatl and Maya texts somewhere in between” (2).

These texts illustrate the Iberian missiological matrix of theological and cultural Roman Catholicism, on the one hand, within which Christianity was transmitted, and on the other hand, the Mexican (Aztec) and Yucatec Mayan languages and worldviews, within which the Christian religion was received and appropriated. For example, the question of who translated or who wrote a text determined whether materials ranging from sermons to catechetical texts would receive official approval as means for Christian instruction. If the author was Amerindian, the text was considered questionable. If the author was an Iberian friar, the text was usually approved as legitimate—despite the fact that Amerindians had an important role in the translation of all the theological material and that in some cases friars left the work to Amerindian Christians. Also, spatial configurations of center and margins emerge as criteria for the “orthodoxy” of texts. Most of the texts from central Mexico seem to have been acceptable to the church. But in the Yucatán, where authorship was more fluid, the texts were richer in linguistic and mythological exchange and in range between orthodoxy and unorthodox texts.

Most Global South readers will have a feeling of déjà vu, for these texts place in relief our theological wrestling as we try to ground our Christian faith...
with linguistic forms that carry multiple religious meanings. The texts also show the theological variety occasioned by linguistic nuances when Iberian Christian theological and catechetical materials are integrated with Amerindian religious worldviews and mythology—hence, Christiansen’s argument for local Christianities. Christiansen’s Translated Christianities contributes to grounding the thin historical awareness that Latin America was and continues to be a critical region for the study of world Christianity and mission studies.

—Carlos F. Cardoza-Orlandi

Carlos F. Cardoza-Orlandi is professor of global Christianities and mission studies, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas.

Pentecostals, Proselytization, and Anti-Christian Violence in Contemporary India.


Anti-Christian violence does not exist in a vacuum. As suggested by the title of his book, Chad Bauman, associate professor of religion at Butler University, Indianapolis, Indiana, sets out to answer why Pentecostals are targets of anti-Christian violence in contemporary India. Bauman starts by situating Pentecostalism in India within the “polycentric” global Pentecostal movement. Chapter 2 provides a broad historical analysis of Hindu-Christian conflict, going back to the legacy of European colonialism. Despite the colonial misrepresentation of the Christian faith that produced misgivings about missionaries and Christian mission work, Christianity in India—especially Pentecostalism—has experienced steady growth from the mid-1970s on. To stop the growing tide of proselytization, indigenous organizations such as Arya Samaj and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) emerged. Indigenous leaders like Mahatma Gandhi feared that Christian converts would be sympathetic to the colonial power and would bring about disunity in the fight for freedom. Christian conversion, therefore, was seen as being denationalizing.

Drawing upon Bauman’s fieldwork in both North and South India among Christians and Hindus, chapter 3 is the heart of the book, outlining reasons for the disproportionate targeting of Indian Pentecostals. In his search, Bauman attempts to shift the focus away from Indian political and interreligious dynamics and onto the social location of Pentecostals and the nature of Pentecostal faith and belief. In other words, “historical factors, transnational political and religious currents (e.g., colonization, globalization, and the global missionary movement), and intra-Christian tensions, politics, and structures of power” are all factors in the disproportionate anti-Christian violence (178).

Chapter 4 considers the way in which Pentecostal faith healing is changing the conversation on conversion in India. Bauman argues that similarities in the expressions of faith healing in Pentecostalism and in popular Hindu religious beliefs provide Pentecostals with a “new spiritual idiom” that avoids Western expressions of Christianity. In his final chapter, Bauman considers the future of Pentecostalism and concludes, “the Christian missionary movement favors the growth of Pentecostal and Pentecostalised Christianity in India” (130).

Bauman is well informed about anti-Christian violence against Pentecostals in India, and by focusing attention on the ongoing anti-Christian violence in contemporary India, this book provides a great service.

—Geomon George

Geomon George, born in India, lives in the Bronx, New York, teaches at City Seminary of New York, and with his wife co-pastors a church in Norwalk, Connecticut.

The Pioneer Gift: Explorations in Mission.


This superb collection of essays illuminates one of the most important mission problems of our time: As pioneering Christians initiate new forms of mission, how should church hierarchies respond to what may seem to them a challenge to unity and church order? Consisting of twelve short chapters and an extensive index, this book is “a collection of research and reflections arising out of pioneering mission. Several of the papers were first presented at a pioneer research and conversation day at Oxford” (17).

The book cover communicates the whole of the pioneering theme. One sees a shower of spent arrows pointing downward, about to end their flight; but one arrow, upward bound in the opposite direction, has just taken flight. “Pioneers,” writes Jonny Baker, “bring an amazing gift. . . . They see and imagine different possibilities to the way things are now, to business as usual. They are then able to build a pathway to make real what they see or imagine” (1).

Protestant church hierarchies may perceive pioneers as troubling and disorderly. (We envy the Roman Catholics and Anglicans, whose hierarchies are more ready to permit pioneers to organize new mission efforts.) A church member who invites others to initiate a special-interest mission effort will discover a stubborn truth: a governing body must act before its members can form themselves into voluntary societies. Ralph Winter’s article on this subject, “The Two Structures of God’s Redemptive Mission,” is mentioned by one of the contributors. Winter points out that there were two structures in Jewish first-century Palestine—synagogues and mission societies. Both were adapted by first-century Christians. It could be that Luther and Calvin had eyes to see only one New Testament structure, what we call the church. When the Reformers dissolved the Catholic monasteries and retained for church hierarchies the sole authority to initiate mission efforts, an unfortunate 270-year Protestant mission ice age set in. Only with William Carey’s proposal that “a company of serious Christians form themselves into a society” did the Protestant mission era begin in earnest.

The pioneer is like a pawn (both words are derived from the same Latin root) on a chessboard. The pawn is the weakest of all the pieces in the game, but it has one crucial role: typically, it moves first. The work of the Holy Spirit is often set afoot by the least likely persons. Baker and Ross and the other contributors to this book have given us a gift that will inspire other

Please beware of bogus renewal notices. Return addresses on outer envelopes and return envelopes of genuine IBMR renewal notices will go to International Bulletin of Missionary Research, 490 Prospect Street, New Haven, CT, 06511. Please e-mail ibmr@omsc.org or call (203) 624-6672, ext. 309, with any questions.
The product of collaboration among twenty-eight scholars from diverse backgrounds, this excellent book argues that evangelicals do not fail, as is sometimes alleged, to address issues of social justice. In considering theological themes such as nationalism, mission, Christology, and liberation, the contributors mainly employ “postcolonial criticism” as their hermeneutic tool for biblical interpretation (26), stressing the importance of relations between postcolonial theory and ethical praxis. Four themes stand out as the fruit of this stimulating book.

First, postcolonialism sees the Bible as a text of both problem and solution. The problem, for instance, is represented by the ancient traditions of the conquest of Canaan as well as by Babylonian and Roman domination of Israel. Christianity was birthed in just such a colonial context. Consequently, the Bible has been used by Western colonial powers to undergird their imperial designs. For centuries, Western scholarship not only controlled biblical interpretation but also in the process ignored the values of local cultures. Victor Ezigbo and Reggie Williams offer as an example of such hegemonic dominance the treatment of Africans by Western missionaries. In their view, world Christianity is in need of a new postcolonial landscape in which colonizing missionaries and the colonized should “see each other as learners and educators who are willing to teach and to be taught” (97).

Second, the contributors reexamine traditional imperialism through the postcolonial lenses of political oppression, ideological superiority, racism, and sexism, and propose—as a solution—to read against the grain of imperial texts that create centrist agendas. In a postcolonial context, sin is seen more as an immoral act than as a state. Sin is seen as unequal relations between colonizers and colonized. Because colonization of humans by humans is contrary to God’s goal of freedom, the colonizers are the greater sinners while the colonized are innocent in the face of oppression.

Third, the authors agree that postcolonialism takes the margins as the prime site for doing theology and undertaking ethical reflection on the justice of God. Gustavo Gutiérrez’s phrase “God’s option for the poor” became a manifesto for postcolonialism. God stands with the marginalized and creates rights for them—those without rights receive rights. When Christ comes to the margins and, in favor of the margins, resists domination, we discover Christocentric postcolonialism (31).

Fourth, the book addresses postcolonialism and liberationism as partners in praxis against imperial powers (188). The two share mutual goals and both work toward ending domination. Human lordship over the other stands in combat against Christ’s lordship of shalom. The task of Christians is to reveal Christ’s liberating lordship by decolonizing all kinds of pioneers to initiate much-needed mission efforts at such a time as this.

—Robert A. Blincoe


Evangelical Postcolonial Conversations: Global Awakenings in Theology and Praxis.


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— John Davidson
Ph.D. in Intercultural Studies participant
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Study at OMSC with Noted Global Pentecostalism Professor

Prof. Allan H. Anderson, the OMSC SENIOR MISSION SCHOLAR IN RESIDENCE for SPRING 2016 is professor of global Pentecostal studies at the University of Birmingham, England. Born in London and raised in Zimbabwe, he joined the faculty of Selby Oak Colleges in Birmingham in 1995 as director of the Centre for New Religious Movements. Prof. Anderson, whose research interests include Pentecostal history and intercultural theology, is author of To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity (2013). His other books include Spreading Fire: The Missionary Nature of Early Pentecostalism (2007), and An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity (2004, 2013), which was published in Spanish and is being translated into other languages. He is a founder of the European Research Network on Global Pentecostalism.

Details: www.omsc.org/scholars

The Virgin of Guadalupe and the Conversos: Uncovering Hidden Influences from Spain to Mexico.


While doing research in the New York Public Library, Marie-Therese Hernández discovered hundreds of pages handwritten in Mexico City in 1825 by Padre Manuel Espinosa de los Monteros, later archivist of the Basilica of Guadalupe from 1832 to 1838. The manuscript dealt with Monteros’s interpretation of the Virgin of Guadalupe’s apparition and millennialism. Since most of the work focused on the Old Testament, Hernández concluded that the priest’s ideology was more Jewish than Christian. This led her to trace the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe back to its origins in fourteenth-century Spain. In doing so, she claims to have found a long history of coded literature written by judaizantes and conversos (Jews forced to convert to Christianity who secretly remained Jewish, and converts who, although accepting Christianity, also secretly retained some of their Jewish beliefs). She further asserts that these clandestine Jews, some of whom could be found at the highest levels of the church and the Spanish monarchy, adopted the story of the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe as a key component of their belief system in both Spain and its empire. She finds proof of this in the literature she has uncovered, which she claims is coded.

Hernández’s thesis is provocative, but the evidence she presents is mostly based on dubious speculation and questionable historical assertions. In other words, there is little concrete proof to back up her thesis. She likewise finds coded messages where they do not seem to exist. She mentions, for instance, a Spaniard who was referred to as Portuguese, noting that “in the early modern period, the term ‘Portuguese’ was synonymous with Jew” (101). She gives no source to back up this assertion, and even if it were true, it does not follow that if someone is called Portuguese.

—David Thang Moe

David Thang Moe, from Myanmar, is a Ph.D. student at Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky. His area of study focuses on Christian-Buddhist dialogue on suffering and sin.
this is proof positive that he or she is a secret Jew. Indeed, the mere fact that a writer shows uncommon interest in the Old Testament seems proof enough for Hernández to claim that such a person might be a secret Jew.

Hernández’s reading of history is also wanting. She sees, for instance, the Habsburg emperor Charles V as “more of a Jewish/Hebrew (David/Solomon) figure than a Christian” (97). In making her case for his Jewishness, she cites the fact that Charles attacked Rome and took the pope prisoner as something unique and highly significant. She does not seem to realize that history is full of kings, emperors, dukes, and others who sacked Rome and incarcerated the pope of their day. The Sicilian Guiscards’ treatment of Pope Gregory VII and the French king Philip IV’s brutalizing of Pope Boniface VIII come to mind.

Hernández’s book has some value in that it introduces its readers to the writings of some little-known, but important, Spanish and Mexican writers. Nevertheless, the evidence she presents to support her thesis is unconvincing.

—Edward T. Brett

Edward T. Brett is professor emeritus of history, La Roche College, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

The Lausanne Movement: A Range of Perspectives.


In a remarkable collection of thirty-eight essays by more than thirty contributors, this volume describes the three major congresses of the Lausanne movement: Lausanne 1974, Manila 1989, and Cape Town 2010. Collections such as this often present an uneven landscape of diverse views. The essays gathered here, however, manifest an unusual unity and harmony that is very informative and helpful.

Fresh insights appear in the midst of familiar territory throughout the volume. The essays are divided into four major sections: “Introduction,” “Major Concepts,” “Reviewing Cape Town,” and “Critical Reflections and Discussions.” Though the subject is familiar territory, when I opened the text at random, I repeatedly found myself drawn into interesting facts and anecdotes, as well as personal reflections.

The essays are comprehensive. They contain inevitable overlap yet provide helpfully differing perspectives. They are balanced and irenic in their treatment of controversial and sensitive issues, for example, the role of women in the Lausanne Movement; the relations among the World Evangelical Fellowship, Evangelical Alliance, and the Lausanne movement; the Bible, theology, and doctrine; and ecumenism and the World Council of Churches. They see evangelism and social justice as partners, are aware of the underrepresentation of Asian perspectives, and recognize the commanding presence and leadership of John Stott.

Finally, this text is a valuable resource for those who teach history of missions, contextualization, and ecumenism, as well as the theology and practice of mission. Missiologists should be encouraged by the emphasis given to biblical theology, history, church planting, and the necessity of integrating the social sciences.

—John W. Nyquist

John W. Nyquist, professor emeritus of mission and evangelism at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois, was a signer of the Lausanne Covenant in 1974.

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The Public Face of African New Religious Movements in Diaspora: Imagining the Religious “Other.”

Cartledge, Mark J.
The Mediation of the Spirit: Interventions in Practical Theology.

Davis, Charles A.
Making Disciples across Cultures: Missional Principles for a Diverse World.

De Neui, Paul H., ed.
Becoming the People of God: Creating Christ-Centered Communities in Buddhist Asia.

Green, Gene L., Stephen T. Pardue, and K. K. Yeo.
Jesus without Borders: Christology in the Majority World.

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Asia’s Dynamic Local Churches: Serving Dialogue and Mission.

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Effective Discipling in Muslim Communities: Scripture, History, and Seasoned Practices.

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The Catholic Invasion of China: Remaking Chinese Christianity.

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Ms. Martha Lund Smalley, Yale Divinity School Library. $100.

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